

**Panhandle Forest Collaborative
Draft Meeting Record**

Bonner County Administration Building, Sandpoint, ID
January 17, 2017, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Members: Chris Bachman, conservation groups representative; Commissioner Jeff Connolly, County Commissioners representative; Liz Johnson-Gebhardt, community groups representative; Alan Harper, forest industry representative; Phil Hough, community group representative; Brad Smith, conservation groups representative; Kurt Dryoff, conservation groups representative; Laura Wolf, state agency representative

Technical Advisors: Phillip Blundell, Dan Scaife, Erick Walker, USDA Forest Service; Peg Polichio, Jon Songster, Ed Wingert, Idaho Department of Lands; Judy Morbeck, Office of Congressman Raul Labrador; Sid Smith, Office of Senator James Risch; Karen Roetter, Office of Senator Mike Crapo; Greg Becker, NRCS

Visitors: Mike Gaertner, Vertical Earth Bicycle Shop; Mike Boeck, candidate for State Representative, District 1A; Jim Woodward, candidate for State Senate, District 1A.

Facilitators: Ben Irely and Naomi Neal, National Forest Foundation

MEETING OUTCOMES

Action Items

- November meeting record approval vote to be conducted electronically (Ben)
- Disseminate *LA Times* article link (Ben)
- Send around registration info for March 20-21 CDA meeting (Ben)
- Dig out list of people who might be interested in joining collaborative from summer 2015 meeting notes and send to Phil (Ben)
- Phil Hough to draft letter in support of Idaho Parks & Rec Grant Application for Auxor Road (Wellington Road) using template (Ben)
 - Will be disseminated to PFC members and voted on by email (due by 1/26)
- Send get-well cards to Mike Petersen at Lands Council (all)
- Send link to EADM documents out to group (Ben)
- Add the new Priest Lake District Ranger, Felipe Cano, to the contact list (Ben)
- Add Buckskin Saddle & Lightning Creek Road to project updates section of future agendas (Ben)

Bin Items

- Auxor/Wellington Road issue: can barriers be placed at junctions of motorized & non-motorized roads?
- Winter travel plan meetings in February & March
- Once a year, have a meeting of all the collaboratives concerned with the IPNF
- Keep EADM on agenda (Dan Scaife)

Decisions

- The group decided to draft a letter of support to accompany this draft application. Phil Hough will prepare a letter of support on behalf of the collaborative, which will be disseminated and voted on via email.
- Meetings will return to 12:30 - 4:00 on regular basis (but may begin late again on March 14)

MEETING RECORD

1. Greetings & Opening Announcements *(Ben Ireys and Liz Johnson-Gebhardt)*

- Agenda review: members requested that an update on the Tower/Grizzly timber projects be added to the day's agenda.
- Approval of the November 15 meeting record tabled until the notes can be reviewed; approval vote will be conducted online.
- The recent *LA Times* article on ongoing forest collaboration work in Idaho highlighted as a model for forest collaboration.

2. Update on Scotchman Peaks Wilderness proposal *(Phil Hough and Jeff Connolly)*

- A bill introduced in Congress in December 2016 would designate the Scotchman Peaks as a protected wilderness. Since this proposal was announced, Bonner County commissioners have been inundated with public input both in support of and against the establishment of the wilderness area; while most people seem to be in favor of the designation, many stakeholders appear to be feeling left out by the decision process. The commissioners recently voted unanimously to take the community's pulse on the issue via an advisory ballot on the issue in the May primary election. They expect the ballot will demonstrate public support for the wilderness designation.

3. Policy Updates from Legislative Staff *(Sid Smith, Karen Roetter, and Judy Morbeck)*

- Legislators' focus is on avoiding a government shutdown: no updates on specific projects.

4. Updates on the Good Neighbor Authority *(Peg Polichio and Jon Songster)*

- The Idaho state legislature is working to increase the state's capacity to do Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) work and working to increase staffing to ensure the state's ability to complete planned projects. They want to hire eight more people, including four foresters, with dedicated funds independent of unreliable funds from annual state budgeting. They also want approval for greater spending authority in order to put the income they've generated to productive use. Once the program is enhanced in these ways, it can take on more special projects.
- GNA Project Updates: Recent meetings and open houses for the Hanna Flats project have provided forums for sharing the planning and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes with the public. For this project, the current plan is to reduce the acreage of upcoming harvests in response to concerns about sensitive plants and view sheds; this will

be finalized after specialist reports have been submitted and a decision memo is drafted, likely at the end of March. The Jasper II GNA West sale will hopefully go through this spring, and the second site will be sold off in the late summer. The contract for the Black Boulder project is expected in early February, and maps reflecting changes in scope are available now.

5. Updates on Tower/Grizzly Timber Projects

- The Alliance for the Wild Rockies filed a preliminary injunction to stop the Tower/Grizzly timber sale projects in 2016. This was reviewed by the 9th circuit court, which decided that the projects will not be halted and that public involvement in the decision process was sufficient. This ruling has the potential to energize the Forest Service's application of effective post-fire timber salvage approaches.

6. Update on Forest Supervisor Transition

- The Idaho Dept. of Lands & GNA convened a meeting of partners last week to discuss the transition in the Forest Supervisor position on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest (IPNF). They discussed how external partners and county commissions can help support the new supervisor and help with the Forest Service's hiring problems. The new acting supervisor, Holly Jewkes, was handpicked by previous supervisor Mary Farnsworth. Panhandle Forest Collaborative (PFC) members can help by attending upcoming meetings between Jewkes and external partners, and may have the opportunity to help further in the future by sitting on the hiring committee for the permanent replacement.
- There was some discussion of the difficulty of making permanent appointments during the federal hiring freeze; at least fifty positions are currently vacant on the IPNF. As a result of these vacancies, agencies are increasingly reliant on NGO partners. These conversations generated the idea of holding semi-annual general collaborative meetings of all three groups who focus on the IPNF (and neighboring Montana groups) to share information and generate general recommendations to the Forest Service.

7. IPNF Recreation Fee Proposal Brochure *(Ben Irej, Forest Service staff)*

- The purpose of the proposed fees is to bring IPNF more into line with other recreation services and provide funding for infrastructure maintenance. Prices for cabin and lookout rentals would be increased, and fees would be added for some resources that are currently free to access. Members agreed that the current prices are a bargain, and increasing/adding fees to pay for maintenance is the best option if the alternative is to shut off access. 85% of these proposed fees would be retained by local forests. The proposal is currently open for public comment.

8. Updated Group Protocols *(Ben Irej)*

- Collaborative protocols have been updated in accordance with discussion and decisions at the November meeting. Updates include: the addition of quorum requirements, allowance

for members to abstain from voting, new guidelines for expressing reservations about group decisions, protocols for digital voting.

9. Outreach to Expand Membership *(Ben Irey)*

- PFC is interested in expanding its membership and/or increasing public awareness of the collaborative and its activities. Members noted that a short list of potential new members was developed during a 2015 meeting and may be available in meeting records. Possible targets for outreach discussed include the mayor of Clark Fork and Trout Unlimited, and more generally, recreationists, neighbors, and those with demonstrated interest in the group.
- An invitation to a non-member attendee to become a voting member prompted discussion of the group membership rules. Attendees become members after they attend and participate in two consecutive meetings. Group committees can include non-members, so those interested in just one aspect of group activities may prefer to get involved at this level only.

10. Idaho Parks & Rec Grant Application for Auxor/Wellington Road

- The Auxor Road (more commonly known as Wellington Road) has not been maintained to standards in recent years, and while a bridge repair is scheduled for this summer, no other maintenance work is planned. The Forest Service plans to submit a grant application to resurface this road using a technique that would repurpose the material of the existing road surface. The funding decision will be made in late summer 2018, and if their application is approved, the resurfacing work will take place in 2019.
- Improving the road will increase trail access and enhance overall recreational access. Members requested that the improvements include both clearer division between motorized and non-motorized access where the road intersects with Trail #120, and trailhead improvements, such as signage and parking.
- The group decided to draft a letter of support to accompany this draft application. Phil Hough will prepare a letter of support on behalf of the collaborative, which will be disseminated and voted on via email.

11. Project Timelines & Status Updates *(Forest Service Staff)*

- Honey Badger: One field trip has been held thus far. The NEPA process has been begun, but it's on the back burner until the Potter's Wheel project is up and running. Collection of data to inform the scoping process is ongoing, and the public participation will be designed soon. Another field trip may be scheduled this summer. Implementation of the project is slated for ~2021.
- Hughes Creek: Implementation of this project was deferred from last year due to fires, and should begin this summer. The contractor is ready to go, and a temporary bridge is ready to be placed. The project has roughly \$95K in funding already but needs about \$10K more.

Implementation should take about two weeks total and will be intensive; it's only possible to work in-stream for a limited time due to sensitive bull trout habitats, so the project will be timed in late summer to minimize disturbance. Post-project monitoring will begin in September once the project is completed.

- Hanna Flats: Status for this project was discussed earlier, during the GNA updates. A meeting to discuss changes to the Hanna Flats CE is scheduled for Friday, 1/19 at Liz's office.
- Winter travel planning: Both the outgoing and incoming forest supervisors have been briefed on the determined purpose and need for an updated plan. Formal scoping and public comment are scheduled to begin in late September, but seven pre-scoping community meetings will be held in February and March across northern Idaho (with the potential addition of locations in Washington and Montana). A more comprehensive timeline for public participation should be available February 1st. Documentation for public participation and these community meetings is currently being prepared.
- Buckskin Saddle: The PFC's letter of support was appreciated. Field reconnaissance is on hold during the winter months, but the treatment area is being refined in response to the collaborative's input and initial on-the-ground findings. The project is on schedule to meet the decision timeline agreed on at the November meeting: the decision will be ready for USFS supervisor approval by Q2 2020.
- Lightning Creek Road: The final biological opinion from the US Fish & Wildlife Service on the extent of flood damage to trout habitats is expected by the end of this month. Contracts for this and related flood-damage projects should be out for bid in February. The related Boulder Creek Road project is a high priority due to timber sales, so Lightning Creek Road could stay on the back burner until it is complete; Boulder Creek Road construction is set to commence after the spring thaw.

12. Public Comment

- The new Forest Service district ranger, Felipe Cano starts on February 5. He should be invited to future meetings.
- The Forest Service has announced that it will update its EADM/NEPA processes. The proposal can be commented on but little information is currently available; PFC should keep an eye on the process and potentially comment once more information becomes available.

13. Meeting Closeout

- Upcoming meetings: The regular meeting space will be unavailable for the next scheduled meeting on March 14; meeting location TBD (maybe: local library). Meetings will return to regular 12:30 - 4:00 timeslot, barring scheduling issues.
- Announcement: NEPA training will be held February 13-14 (with an advanced-level class on February 15). It is currently slated for Phoenix, but may be moved to Spokane or Coeur d'Alene if there is enough regional interest. Group discounts are available.