

**Idaho Panhandle Forest Collaborative
Meeting Record**

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

Hotel Ruby, Ponderay, ID

12:30 - 2:30 PM

ATTENDANCE

Members: Commissioner Jeff Connolly, Bonner County; John Finney, motorized recreation representative; Mike Gaertner, non-motorized recreation representative; Alan Harper, timber representative; Phil Hough, community nonprofit representative; Liz Johnson-Gebhardt, community nonprofit representative; Mike Petersen, conservation representative; Brad Smith, conservation representative; Laura Wolf, Idaho Fish and Game

Technical Advisors: Felipe Cano, Dan Scaife, and Erick Walker, USFS; Ed Wingert, Idaho Department of Lands; Erin Mader, Idaho Forest Group

Visitors: Tom Dabrowski, Idaho Trails Association; Carol Kunzeman, Bonner County Commissioner candidate; Bill Love, Trout Unlimited; Kathy Mattor, CSU

Facilitators: Ben Irey and Naomi Neal, National Forest Foundation

MEETING OUTCOMES

Decisions

- November meeting record: approved
- January meeting record: approved
- Vote on whether to sign letter regarding the Tower/Grizzly decision to the 9th circuit: all approved, pending two votes to be submitted electronically.

Action Items

- Ben: send update on CDA EADM meeting.
- Ben: include Bottom Canyon project in future agendas.
- Ben: secure new meeting location for 5/16 meeting.
- Ben: update PFC website.
- Ben: email to members about voting membership protocols.
- All members: contact Kathy Mattor with additional feedback on NFF (optional).
- Mike, Brad, Ben: will be in touch re: finalizing the vote on Tower/Grizzly letter.
- Jeff Connolly: Outreach re: Buckskin Saddle to the city of Clark Fork.
- Bill Love: collaborate with Liz Johnson-Gebhardt to apply for TU grant.
- Forestry Committee: meet about Lower Priest Lake vegetation project (Liz & Felipe to coordinate).
- Laura: coordinate Bottom Canyon pre-harvest photos for records/comparison.

Bin Items

- Ben: find tribal contacts for mailing list.
- Annual meetings of collaboratives to be coordinated.
- Winter travel planning group to consider contacting WEG, CBD, tribes for input.

- Bottom Canyon field trip post-harvest (tentatively: fall 2019).

MEETING RECORD

1. Greetings, introductions, and announcements (Ben Irej)

- Agenda review: no changes to agenda.
- November and January meeting records approved without changes.

2. Updates on the Good Neighbor Authority (Ed Wingert)

- Jasper 2 GNA West sold March 1st. Sale is 3.5M board-feet. Starting bid was \$619,655 and the sale closed at \$1.47M, exceeding expectations. Implementation expected to begin in late 2018 or early 2019; the timber contractor has a number of other timber projects on their books ahead of this one.
- Jasper 2 GNA East has been renamed Hard Rock GNA.
- The Hanna Flats NEPA analysis is in its final stages, and a decision memo should be signed in the next couple of months. Field work is expected to begin this summer and continue through to next summer (2019).
- Funding has been approved for seven new full-time positions to help with GNA program capacity. Still TBD: where they'll be positioned, but priority will be given to areas with the greatest need. Four of the seven positions are for foresters.
- Black Boulder: a bid is currently out for sale prep.

3. Other Updates (Ben Irej & others)

- Question re: Auxor-Wellington Road: Can barriers be placed at junctions between motorized and nonmotorized paths? Either physical barriers or signage will be added; TBD when the area is accessible (in the summer).
- Idaho Forest Restoration Partners/Montana Forest Collaborative Network Workshop
 - Meeting to be held next week on Tuesday and Wednesday in Couer d'Alene resort. An additional Thursday workshop will also be added, regarding the ongoing Forest Service EADM change effort (in addition to a discussion on the topic as part of Tuesday/Wednesday proceedings). The agenda for the meeting is up on the website. Ben will send out a follow-up note on the EADM workshop.
- Environmental Analysis and Decision Making (EADM) change effort
 - The USFS is updating its EADM processes in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness, in part as a response to lessons learned from EADM policies at other federal agencies. Roundtable discussions with agency partners are

occurring in each USFS region in order to collect feedback on how the agency can best revise its rules. The overall update process will likely take 2-3 years.

- New Forest Supervisor
 - New Supervisor Jeanie Higgins comes from the Washington office, where she is currently working on the NFS side of the agency, leading work to update and reform forest products program. She has previous Forest Supervisor experience in CA, NM, NV, and elsewhere in the west. She has a very positive attitude toward collaboratives like PFC and has extensive NEPA experience. She will overlap with acting supervisor Holly Jukes beginning in mid-May, at which point she will begin making rounds to meet with collaboratives, counties, and other groups. She may be able to attend the May PFC meeting if her schedule allows; will otherwise attend the July meeting.
- Recent transitional meetings for Holly Jukes and Mary Farnsworth were attended by PFC representatives. There is interest in holding an annual meeting with agency staff and all the various collaborative groups. Peg Polichio could be good point person on this.
- Colorado State University evaluation of NFF
 - The aim of this evaluation is to find out how different NFF resources (e.g., facilitation, grants, mentoring, workshops) result in impacts on the ground, which resources are most helpful, and what can be improved. A feedback session with PFC members occurred before this meeting; more are scheduled in MT and ID, and others have already been held in WA. The outcomes of this evaluation will help NFF to provide future support for similar programs. CSU evaluator Kathy Mattor is happy to talk with anyone else who would like to give feedback on NFF.

4. Membership expansion (Ben Irely & Phil Hough)

- Backcountry Hunters & Anglers has been sent a request to send a representative to PFC meetings. We're light on sportsmen's groups representation. They will be added to our mailing list and hopefully attend the next meeting.
- Discussion of potential member organizations: Trout Unlimited, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Bonner County Sportsmen's group (may have too small a capacity for collaborative attendance), Forum for Wildlife Management, Wild Turkey Federation. Representatives from all groups will be added to the PFC mailing list.
- Would be good to get tribal representation on the collaborative.

5. Kaniksu Winter Travel Planning (Ben Irely)

- A successful focus group/informational meeting held a couple of weeks ago, with many organizations represented and USFS present in an advisory capacity. The goal of the meeting was to identify areas of agreement, dispute, and possible compromise. Information on

caribou and grizzly issues, and on the status of the injunction, was shared at this meeting. There is no hard timeline for when the focus group needs to be finished working through this process. Eventually, the USFS will use lessons from these meetings to help with the project scoping process, which should help to avoid contentions and problems during the NEPA process.

- Further meetings are scheduled to be held in the Sandpoint Ranger District conference room on April 12th, 1-3pm, and on May 17th, 1-3pm (or later).
- So far, everything seems to be on track to meet the June 2020 for a finalized winter travel plan laid out in the forest plan (and required for the lifting of the injunction).
- The Kalispell tribe plans a caribou feeding program for this winter, and thus should be included in the focus group effort. It may also be wise to include lawsuit plaintiffs (e.g., Defenders of Wildlife, Wild Earth Guardians, Center for Biological Diversity) as it may help to prevent against future legal challenges.

6. Tower/Grizzly case dismissed (Lawson Fite)

- The 9th circuit court issued this decision as an unpublished memorandum disposition, which is helpful but not considered a binding precedent moving forward. The legal team responsible for securing the dismissal would like stakeholders to sign a letter to the 9th circuit arguing that this decision could set an important precedent and the court should thus publish it. This would be beneficial to PFC and would provide guidance on regulations moving forward. Ponderay and Bonner counties are both interested in signing onto the letter.
- Issues that could be precedent-setting:
 - Challengers of the project argued that a draft EA must be circulated for public comment, which would hobble rapidly-moving projects if it were the case: the court ruled against this reading of the law.
 - The court's decision acknowledges that this was an appropriate use of Emergency Situation Determination (ESD) regulation and that the USFS applies 2012-13 ESD regulations correctly.
 - The Tower/Grizzly project's plans for dealing with post-fire landscapes were evaluated skeptically and held up under scrutiny.
- A decision from PFC on whether to sign on to this letter is needed by Monday morning (3/19). All members voted in favor of signing the letter, with two abstentions, which will run it past their home organizations and submit votes via email in time to meet the deadline.

7. Project Status Updates (USFS staff)

- Buckskin Saddle
 - Initial treatment area polygons should be ready for mapping within 3 weeks. It looks like it will be a heavy year for specialist data-gathering & proposals regarding specialized restoration areas and habitat support. A recreation specialist is currently working with the Bonner County Trail Mix Committee to identify desirable re-routes and new routes, and will also work with PFC. Once all this is pulled together, a proposed action will be put out to the public for comment, tentatively at the end of summer or early fall. Further analysis will be conducted in summer 2019, with an anticipated decision in early 2020. It is not yet known which form of EA will be conducted. The Granite Creek fish and game facility will be likely used as a field camp in order to minimize travel costs and needs during the intensive study period, during which time there may be opportunities for PFC engagement.
 - Comments:
 - Membership expansion efforts have been undertaken specifically with this project in mind. In such a large area, there are a lot of different use interests to prioritize.
 - The idea behind the Trail Mix working group is to bring stakeholders together to identify areas of needed improvements and gather suggestions. This group may be interested in joining PFC field trips.
 - There is an opportunity for new loop trails to be included in plans.
 - PFC may want to reach out to the city of Clark Fork about the planning work.
- Hanna Flats
 - A decision memo should be signed in late May, likely by the new Forest Supervisor. This is a categorical exclusion (CE) project for insects and disease, covering a ~6,800-acre area near Priest Lake/airstrip. Multiple public input meetings have been held about the project.
 - GNA is looking to hire temporary employees to help with this project, particularly retired foresters with the experience to help with complex project planning work (in addition to the new FTE positions mentioned earlier). Ideally, GNA will be able to self-sustain and provide continual funding for these positions.
- Honey Badger

- No major updates; the project is on hold due to demands of scoping and NEPA work on the Potter's Wheel project and capacity issues caused by vacant district staff positions. Public outreach prior to scoping is to be planned; scoping will begin in late fall or winter.
- Hughes Creek
 - Efforts to restore Hughes meadow will include re-establishment of an original channel using the "encouragement" technique; the result will be a complex of ponds in the area. The meadow will be rehydrated and the spread of invasive reed grass will be stopped, and hopefully eradicated.
 - NEPA has been completed and implementation is planned for this summer, barring fire. The project is under contract with PCFC.
 - A small team meeting is scheduled for 3/22 to get Kevin Davis (taking over for Jill Cobb) up to speed. The panhandle chapter of TU met with Jill a year ago about possibilities for TU to partner with this project, and they have ~\$1K in funding through their Embrace-A-Stream grant program available to support it, as well as possible volunteer coordination for implementation and monitoring. Bill Love will collaborate with Liz on applying for this TU grant money.
- Lightning Creek Road
 - A contract is out for bids, funded through the Western Federal Lands and Highways Administration, which has also completed NEPA.
 - This project includes Boulder Creek drainage damage.
 - Hopefully a notice to proceed with construction will be issued June 1st.
 - USFS is looking to get Environmental Compliance work done to add a second, similar project (2017 damage) into this contract. The current plan is for all work to be completed this construction season. Hopefully there will be no additional damage from rapid snowmelt runoff this year.
 - Four box culverts on 419/Lightning Creek Road were blown out in 2006 and replaced at that time. Current scope is to replace preexisting conditions: there isn't funding to do upgrades. Some survey/design work on how to improve drainage will be done in 2019 and will hopefully lead to funding to upgrade the drainage. The Rattle Creek bridge is to be raised which is a small upgrade; hopefully minor design tweaks will make bridge improvements sufficient to withstand future damage.
- Priest Lake Ranger District
 - The district wants additional vegetation management on Priest Lake, tentatively to be called the Lower Priest project. The design process for this project is still in

its early stages and PFC support would be welcomed. The Forestry Committee will meet to discuss open questions on the project plan and then present to the full group. More substantive agency information should be available for this committee in about two weeks.

- Question: status on Wellington Creek bridge?
 - This will be repaired as part of the Lightning Creek work. The roads manager put in for grant funding through Idaho Parks & Recreation for repair work on Wellington Creek road from the bridge up to the saddle. The road has not received maintenance funding in years. A new process will be used to grind and press road onsite, requiring fewer outside materials to be brought in. It will remain a Level 2 road (but will become more user friendly).
- Request for update on Bottom Canyon
 - A contract for timber sale is in the works. There was a hiccup with the geologic study and a planned route may need to be relocated. Funding in 2019 will support this project. Next steps include survey and design work for crossings. The road is to be located as far out of the floodplain as is possible.
 - A contract for the timber sale aspect of the project is in development right now, slated for sale in the first quarter of 2019. It will be up to the contractor as to when to begin implementation.
 - PFC members would like to capture pre/post harvest photos and make a post-harvest visit field trip.
 - The 206 reroute is separate from rest of contract as it is on a different timeline. There may be a need to request additional capital improvement funds for this part of the project.

8. Meeting Closeout (Ben Ire)

- Upcoming meeting schedule
 - May meeting: 5/16; suggestions offered for potential locations.
 - Discussion of possibility of inviting other collaborative groups to join PFC field trips in the summer.
- We need to update the PFC website in order to provide background resources.
- Round Robin feedback on meeting:
 - Positive feedback on facilitation efficiency; bigger meeting room needed; great snacks and camaraderie.

- Reminder of voting membership protocols: those who attend two meetings gain voting status.

Meeting adjourned at 2:22 PM.