

North Idaho Working Group Meeting Record

Tuesday, June 21, 2022, from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. PST

In person and on Zoom

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendance

Members: Trevor Anderson, state representative; Commissioner Tim Bertling, Boundary County; Commissioner Jeff Connolly, Bonner County; Tom Dabrowski, non-motorized recreation representative; Hilary Eisen, non-motorized recreation representative; John Finney, motorized recreation; Phil Hough, conservation representative; Tim Koerner, motorized recreation representative; Aaron Lieberman, outfitter & guide representative; Tony McDermott, wildlife representative; Chuck Roady, private landowner representative; Brad Smith, conservation representative

Technical advisors: Jake Garringer, Executive Office of the Governor; Todd Wernex, Idaho Department of Lands; Jessie Berner, Sarah Canepa, Dan Gilfillan, Idaho Panhandle National Forest; Jace Hogg, Office of Governor Brad Little; Marc Kilmer and Dirk Mendive, Office of Congressman Russ Fulcher; Heather Fuller and Christy Johnson-Hughes, US Fish and Wildlife Service

Stakeholders: William Barquin, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho; Adam Gebauer, The Lands Council; Paul Sieracki, citizen-at large; Paul Yelk, citizen-at-large;

Facilitators: Dani Southard and Maisie Powell, The National Forest Foundation

Meeting Objectives

- Review areas of NIWG consensus for over-snow travel in the North Zone of the Panhandle National Forest
- Vote on consensus-based recommendations to put forward in the NIWG report
- Collectively understand the Forest Service's next steps in the NEPA process and the associated timeline
- Identify next steps for NIWG

Decisions

- The group will update the map to reflect the area south of the Clark Fork River as purple.
- Bin items for further work include the Solomon Peak area, the Hanna Flats airstrip, the Stampede Lakes area, and the Lynx Analysis Units in the Upper Pack River.

- There is a consensus vote on the map as presented with the area south of Clark Fork changed to purple, the Solomon peak, Stampede Lakes, and Hanna Flats airstrip areas amended, updates to the upper Pack River lynx interface, and a minority report on the dissenting opinion.
- There will be a meeting to discuss the next steps around the Proposed Action on Wednesday, August 17.

Action Items

- Participants to send Dani May meeting record edits by Tuesday the 28th.
- There needs to be ground truthing of routes near Solomon Mountain and the Stampede Lakes areas.
- To put consensus recommendations into this report, we need the recommendations, clarifications, and minority report by the end of this week.

MEETING RECORD

- Dani Southard reviews the meeting objectives and agenda.
- Participants review the Code of Conduct, specifically the voting procedure. All participants agree to abide by the Code of Conduct.
 - There is a reminder that if a member has a thumbs-down vote, the dissenting member must propose another alternative that might achieve consensus.
- Participants review the May meeting record and note several changes, mostly in spelling errors. Dani asks for edits from the group and will approve the meeting record at a later date.

1. Review consensus user groups' recommendations & vote on suggestions to put forward from NIWG to IPNF

- The interest area group leaders believe they have a consensus map. This group will share the map and then open it up to questions and answers.
- The meeting on June 16th included discussion on Lynx Analysis Units and grizzly bears.
 - The group reviewed basic requirements for bear management units (BMUs). There are some units that don't meet the standard, but should meet the standard by the time the plan is adopted. The core habitat must remain. If BMUs meet standard requirements, it is possible that some areas could be open for OSV travel after April 1st.
 - Lynx Analysis Units have a similar scenario. Areas were closed in the early 2000s. There is language in the plan that allows for closing areas and opening adjacent areas. Further review is needed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the US Forest Service (USFS) to see what analysis units could move.

- Map key:
 - Green is year-round closure (dark green is Forest Plan closure, light green is proposed by this group)
 - Blue is open until April 1st
 - Purple is open
 - Everything that's in color is in the IPNF and is in the NIWG's scope of work
- The area south of the Clark Fork River is not a BMU or a Bears Outside of Recovery Zone (BORZ). It is considered a "may be present area" for bears.
 - The group is comfortable making the area south of the Clark Fork purple, but the USFS will need to make decisions here.
- There is a purple area around Moose Lake. If all the BMUs meet core standards, that area could allow on-trail riding.
- In identifying areas for wildlife (wolverine, lynx, caribou, and grizzly bears), Brad Smith took individual species maps and set aside areas where there was a lot of overlap. There was also consideration to have wildlife spaces in each mountain range.
- The East Fork of Boulder road is open but closed during certain times of the year.
- Game Management Unit 1 is the most productive management unit for wolves.
- The Moose Lake/Tressle area is probably the highest used in Bonner County and is a high-use area for grizzly denning.
 - There is a feeling about being supportive of the ESA, but wanting to be able to celebrate the success of species recovery.
 - The clear path out of this is working on recovery and the standards for recovery. We won't impact this directly by working on an OSV Travel Management Plan.
 - If there are management changes due to grizzly recovery, the group would like to address these closures.
- There isn't much change in the Purcells. There is one light green area for wildlife, and then lots of blue for bear considerations. There is hope to switch what is groomed and what is ungroomed to move space from lynx habitat. Deer and Solomon Creek can be utilized.
- The Solomon Mountain area was flagged. Discussion still needs to happen around this area. The question is if the green boundary could be adjusted to move to blue and incorporate some road areas.
- The experimental forest says you have to be on designated routes. The **Chipma(sp?) Rapids** area has XC ski trails, so is listed as light green. The Hanna Flats ski trails are in a non-motorized area.
 - It would be good to note where the airstrip is to have this opened for a yearly OSV event.
- There are a few areas closed near Priest Lake on the Forest Plan and some recommended additions to the Salmo-Priest Wilderness area. Road 1013 would be open. There are a few other roads that need to be ground-truthed, such as Roads 656 and 1127. The Hughes Meadow area is closed. The Cow Creek area is open until April 1st

and the area near Continental Mine will be added to this with a road to access this area from the East.

- Some of this area is the most important wildlife habitat in the area in terms of numbers of sightings and connectivity.
- Russel Ridge and Russel Mountain borders recommended Wilderness. We would be adding this as off limits to OSV with one designated route for OSV travel up Trout Creek. West Fork Lakes area would also be closed.
- Gunsight and McCormick have a caribou closure. There is a purple area here to be opened with the BMU improvements with a goal of this being open permanently in the future.
- MA1E – Beehive through Gunsight, this was initially closed. The proposal is to have it open until April 1st with grooming up to Harrison Lake.
 - This area and the Selkirk Crest is the most important part for many of the non-motorized folks. They first came to this group with a map proposing to have this area closed to OSV. This was an area of 19,000 acres in the two basins that they were hoping to keep closed. The reason it is important is that this is the only area with a groomed trail to alpine access. The non-motorized community came to an agreement on West Fork. In the spirit of the collaborative, they decided this is something they could live with, although they don't like it. Is it possible to do education with snowmobilers to give backcountry skiers some space to continue to enjoy quiet recreation?
 - West Fork RNA south is closed to OSV use to provide a large area for quiet recreation in the spirit of compromise.
 - Pack River area was closed. There's a guideline that says it should remain closed, however, if you close something that was open, you can open this area.
- There is a question about why we are closing the Stampede Lake areas that have never been closed before. Why is the low elevation closed?
 - Stampede Lake area needs to be ground-truthed.
 - Some of these are big game winter range, so it is not beneficial to disturb these areas.
- This is a USFS travel plan. Thinking about snowmobile opportunities, there are a lot of areas off USFS lands that are open to snowmobile use, as well.
 - There are some restrictions on other lands.
- Recap of bin items/areas:
 - Solomon Mountain area
 - Hanna Flats airstrip is resolved
 - Stampede Lake
 - Upper Pack area for lynx considerations
- Clarification on BMU vs BORZ: BMUs are laid out based on what a breeding female needs for a range to produce cubs. BORZ has to do with road density.

- What happens if bears are delisted? We will not do away with the spaces that helped with recovery, but there may be some shifts.
- Many express the success around working together to compromise. Although everyone may not be happy with all decisions, hopefully this map is something everyone can live with.
- If we deal with the injunction, a third to a half of snowmobile area that has been closed will be open. This plan is working to remove the injunction.
- The NFFs role is to support the group in arriving at a recommendation that everyone can live with. There is an additional process, there needs to be additional input of those who are not in the room. What is the best foot forward for this group that is the best compromise for the process.
 - The remarkable thing here is that there is something in here for every group and it is a good representation of the values represented in the group.
 - There is gratitude for the USFS for allowing this process to happen and gain insight from the users who use the Forest the most.
- What is the recommendation for the Solomon Peak area?
 - Open up the road system. Hopefully we can have a vote that says overall this looks good, but refine some things around Hanna Flats, Stampede Lake, and Solomon.
 - The group will move forward to a vote with the caveat that there is further work for the bin item areas.
- Dani recaps the voting process. Thumbs up is full support. Side is live with the proposal. Down is cannot live with proposal. Thumbs down voters must provide an alternative suggestion. Decisions will be made through consensus. Consensus means a willingness to go along with the decision.
 - Members are voting, agency experts and stakeholders from the public are not voting.
- There is a motion to have consensus on the map as presented with the area south of Clark Fork changed, Solomon peak, Stampede Lakes area, and Hanna Flats airstrip amended, with general ground-truthing on routes, and the upper Pack River lynx interface.
 - Motion was seconded.
 - There was one vote opposed.
 - The dissenting voter says we need to take a more proactive approach to the caribou habitat and the grizzly denning. There is a proposal to not do it carte blank, but shut down areas if there is caribou present or grizzlies with cubs coming out of the den. The participant is also open to abstaining from voting or taking their name of the proposal.
 - Is there an amendment we could make?
 - Protocols say to propose a change. Is it possible to abstain?

- Proposal is that FWS and USFS should take a more proactive approach and do more monitoring to close areas as needed.
 - There is a comment that proactive is a broad term.
 - An option is to note the dissenting opinion in the report and capture these sentiments in a paragraph.
 - Could everyone make the same vote with including this dissenting opinion?
 - The group votes on the amended motion that would include the dissenting option in a minority a minority report highlighting an objection to the landscape-wide wildlife management strategy around closures.
 - The motion passes.

2. Review format for NIWG report; agree on process and timeline for finalizing/submission to the IPNF

- Maisie Powell shares the report format with the group for any recommendations.
- Dani Southard will share the final draft with the group before it goes to the USFS.

3. Forest Service: next steps and NEPA timeline

- What is next now that this group has found areas of agreement?
- The pieces that the USFS will consider when drafting their Proposed Action include NIWG areas of agreement; Forest Plan requirements; laws, policies, and regulations; habitat needs; considerations from nearby Tribes. All of these interests will come together in a Proposed Action.
 - This is the starting point for the USFS. This will go to the public for feedback. The goal is to get this out to the public in early August.
 - The Forest will then move into alternatives and an effects analysis.
- Next, an Environmental Assessment will go out. There will again be time for public comment.
- Then, there will be a draft decision. Again, this goes out to the public and is open to an objection period.
 - Objections will be reviewed by the Regional Office.
- The goal is to have a final decision for June 2023 so the IPNF can implement the Over-Snow Plan.
- Assuming that there are alternative proposals, is there a commitment to the NIWG map being one of the proposals?
 - The Forest Service isn't able to take this as a standalone proposal and use it as our starting point. It is helpful to understand the areas of agreement, but there are other considerations that come into a Proposed Action.
- Everyone is invited to participate and comment throughout the NEPA process.
 - Does the group need to resubmit the proposal during the public comment period?

- No, it will already be in the record, but it is up to the group if they want to resubmit the document.
- The Forest Service doesn't vote. It considers all the comments they receive to figure out the best use for the land.
- It is really important that all members of the public have access to this process. As we move forward, we need to make sure we are sharing information with people equally.
- Specifics are helpful in public comments, whereas blanket statements such as 'I don't agree with this' do not help. It is equally important to hear areas where people agree as it is to hear where people disagree.
- For more questions, contact Sarah Canepa, sarah.canepa@usda.gov

4. Next steps for NIWG

- NFF needs the recommendations, clarifications, and minority report by the end of this week to put it into a consensus recommendation report.
- We aim to have the draft out to the group next week.
- The NFF will then have it to the USFS by July 5th.
- It would be helpful to keep in touch and work together after the Proposed Action. There will be a July 17th meeting to discuss next steps.

Meeting adjourned at 8:18 PM.