ATTENDANCE

Members: Commissioner Jeff Connolly, Bonner County; Mike Gaertner, non-motorized recreation representative; Alan Harper, timber representative; Brad Smith, conservation representative; and Laura Wolf, wildlife representative

Stakeholders: Tom Dabrowski, Idaho Trails Association; Don Holland, community member; Travis Icardo, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers; Erin Mader, Idaho Forest Group; and Paul Sieracki, community member


FIELD TRIP NOTES

Sandpoint Ranger Station

- David Cobb kicked the field trip off with a brief orientation, safety talk, logistics, and introductions.
- The new Sandpoint District Ranger, Jessie Berner, then spoke to the group. Jessie has been with the agency for 20-plus years now. During her entire career she has worked in partnerships and has depended on partnerships. That is how the Forest Service (FS) gets work done.
- The Buckskin Saddle project is in the beginning stages. The FS has not come to any conclusions yet. It is field trips like these that helps the agency understand what the public wants to see.

Stop 1: Johnson Creek Boat Launch

- Since last year’s field trip to Buckskin Saddle, the FS has been collecting data, looking at resources issues, and looking at recreation. For this trip, rather than repeating last year’s itinerary, the FS wants to look at recreation, look at a panoramic view of the Granite drainage, and look at a couple of roadless issues. Based on the feedback the FS has received from the Panhandle Forest Collaborative (PFC) and the public, we will look at old growth and the potential new road construction for this project.
- The field trip will then go on the High Drive road by Summit Camp, stop at a larch stand that was thinned 20-30 years ago, and look at how to keep larch stands healthy.
• The field trip will then have two options: go back to town or continue onto another site. The amount of available time will determine the group’s choice.
• The Buckskin Saddle project area is fifty thousand acres. Within that acreage the FS has identified opportunities for treatments.

Stop 2, proposed trailhead:

• Recreation: the FS is working with user groups to figure out access issues and recreational uses in the project area. The first thing the FS heard about was the need for a developed trailhead tied into the trail system. One option is to use Johnson Creek as the trailhead. One advantage of moving the trailhead to here is that it is the beginning of the trail system.
• A lot of the recreation use is single track motorized use.
• Gold Creek Lodge plays a large role in the use of the trail system locally.
• Delyle Creek is the main trail into this system. The state gave a lot of funding for the trail and would like to see the trail kept intact.
• Trail 26 and the trail up to Pack Saddle need a lot of work.
• Deer Creek Trail has been suggested for removal because it is short and brushed in.
• The FS is trying to have no net gain of trails because of the associated maintenance responsibilities of new trails.
• Another proposal is to create a new, non-motorized trail to Packsaddle. Packsaddle is the highest point on the east side of lake.
• The trails highlighted in blue on the map need the most work.
• The FS needs more input from the Backcountry Horsemen.
  o Discussion: Backcountry Horsemen are always looking for more non-motorized trails. There is currently not much worthy of trailering over here to ride. There would need to be more horseback riding opportunities here to be worth trailering over from town for.
  o Discussion: This is the last stronghold for motorized use. The Forest Plan identifies this area as being good for motorized use.
• The proposal to put a bridge on the Granite Creek Road was developed from input the Forest Service received from collaboration.

Stop 3 Overview of Granite drainage:

• From this spot you can see a large portion of the project area.
• The yellow area on the map is roadless, including the Packsaddle and Schaffer Roadless Areas. The guiding document for roadless area management in Idaho is the Idaho Roadless Rule. That document will inform the FS analysis of potential impacts of project work to these roadless areas and will inform the FS analysis of the roadless characteristics and values that exist in these areas. The FS will then evaluate the proposals through the lense of roadless values.
• A few of the differences between the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule and the Idaho Roadless Rule: in Idaho, roadless areas are broken into management classes. Unfortunately, some of those classes share similar names to the general FS management area classifications. For example the green on the map are roadless areas classified as General Roadless and are classified as General Forest areas under the management area classification within the Forest Plan. An issue with the Idaho Roadless
Rule is that several roadless areas cross state lines around here, so they are partially managed under the 2001 Roadless Rule and partially under the Idaho Roadless Rule.

- Existing conditions for the roadless areas will come out of the Idaho Roadless Rule because it includes the latest survey.
- There is more Regional oversight of roadless areas than of other land types.
- The FS has drawn some preliminary lines on the map for a new Community Wildfire Protection Zone next to the lake, within a roadless area, and with a half-mile buffer. The buffer can go up to one mile, though that does not seem necessary here. This area has one way in and out. The designation of a Community Wildfire Protection Zone is a regional process. While the public will be able to comment on the Community Wildfire Protection Zone as part of the comment process for this project, these areas do not get published separately in the Federal Register.

Discussion: The FS does not want to get too hung up on process here. If anyone has a concern about this Community Wildfire Protection Zone or other aspects of this project, please come by for a visit to discuss the issue.

- The Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) for this project is based on the Bonner County Community Wildfire Protection Plan.
- The vegetation structure and composition that is here now is just one snapshot in time. What was here 100 years ago is different from what is here now and is different from what will be here 100 years into the future. Blister rust, fire suppression, and logging have been big change agents on this landscape. Logging had an effect on the old forest structure.
The Forest Plan guides us to stay out of older, wetter timber stands. From a silviculture perspective, the first order of business on a project like this is to see what the potential for restoration is. The FS does a ‘step down’ analysis to see which action will promote restoration, starting with the least impactful: no action, then burning, then thinning and improvement cuts, then regeneration harvests.

- The road to Kilroy needs lots of work in order for the FS to restore white pine and ponderosa in the area. The opportunity to do work there within the scope of this project could address the fact that the road is in bad shape. It is not in good shape as a daily driver and not in good shape for emergency vehicles. The road will require more than just routine maintenance.
  **Discussion:** This work needs to be done right so that it does not need to be redone in the near future. If the FS wants to modify the standards for cherry stem roads in roadless areas, they will need to take the issue up with the Idaho Roadless Commission. The current standard in the Idaho Roadless Rule has exact boundary or buffer standards for these types of issues.

- Some of the opportunities for treatments would end up with a reduction in elk security because of the reduction in elk hiding cover. It usually takes about ten years for hiding cover to bounce back after treatment. The FS still needs to do the calculations to update the existing elk security conditions.
  **Discussion:** for this area, forage is more important than security. Analysis of elk security is done at the elk management unit scale. These units are adopted from Idaho Fish and Game. The rankings of units for providing elk security are done in collaboration with FS and Idaho Fish and Game. The overall Forest Plan objective is to maintain or improve elk security. The metrics for this goal is to improve security in three elk management units over the entire forest by 30 percent.

- A meeting recently held in Priest River went over the map of potential opportunities for treatment. There are thirteen thousand acres of potential merchantable timber harvest opportunities in the project area. There are approximately two thousand acres of opportunities to do prescribed fire. Pre-commercial thinning opportunities stand at about 1,500 acres. To access all of the potential opportunities for treatment, the FS calculates that 37 miles of new roads, 1.5 miles of temporary roads, and 30 miles of road improvements would be necessary, plus about 100 miles of road maintenance would need to be accomplished. Less than 10 miles of road would be decommissioned if all of the opportunities were treated.
• There is a 100 acres of white bark pine restoration opportunity on the back side of Packsaddle Mountain. There is a big problem with cheatgrass in the power line corridor and the corridor creates a challenge for prescribed burning.
• Flammulated owls have been identified within the project area.

Stop 4

• The best stands of larch on the Sandpoint District are over here. There are several hundred acres of larch that the FS wants to look like this treated stand.
• Larch is the most fire tolerant and least shade tolerant tree in north Idaho. The Forest Service wants these stands to move into an old growth and new recruitment condition.
• Closing comments:
  o  Kim Pierson: I appreciate that the FS is framing this discussion with the public around opportunities, not decisions that have already been made.
  o  Ben Irey will distribute the PFC’s letter regarding Buckskin Saddle to the group.
  o  David Cobb: The next step for the Forest Service’s public engagement process for this project is to have a public meeting in Clark Fork.
  o  Brad Smith: the release of the proposed action would be the next time the PFC would weigh in.