

PANHANDLE FOREST COLLABORATIVE (PFC) MEETING RECORD

Wednesday, January 20, 2020 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. PDT

<https://www.nationalforests.org/collaboration-resources/panhandle-forest-collaborative>

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendance

Members: Commissioner Jeff Connolly, Bonner County; Tom Dabrowski, recreation group representative; Kurt Dryoff, conservation group representative; John Finney, motorized recreation representative; Alan Harper, timber representative; Phil Hough, community non-profit representative; Liz Johnson-Gebhardt, community non-profit representative; Mike Petersen, conservation group representative; Brad Smith, conservation group representative; Laura Wolf, wildlife representative.

Technical advisors: Bart George and Mike Lithgow, Kalispel Tribe; Bree Whitehead, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS); Marc Kilmer, Office of Congressman Russ Fulcher; Stefany Bales, Jake Garringer, Office of Governor Brad Little; Office of Senator Jim Risch; Karen Roetter and Mitch Silvers, Office of Senator Mike Crapo; Jessie Berner, Phillip Blundell, Felipe Cano, Michelle Caviness, Heather Fuller, Jeanne Higgins, Jeff Lau, Dan Scaife, Idaho Panhandle National Forest (IPNF); and Brittany Morlin, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Stakeholders: Lyndsie Halcro, Bonner County Parks and Waterways; Paul Sieracki, community member; Bob Smathers, Idaho Farm Bureau; Jace Hogg, Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation; Derek Antonelli, Idaho Native Plant Society; Erin Plue, Trout Unlimited; and Ellen Yost, Wild Idaho Rising Tide.

Facilitators: Ben Irely and Andrew Hursh, National Forest Foundation.

Action Items

- Next meeting is Wednesday, March 17, from 1 – 3 pm PST on Zoom.
- The Forestry Committee may wish to prepare a letter on Scattered Lands to submit soon, before the comment period ends on February 8. Liz will make a draft, send it to the committee, and then distribute to the larger group.
- New [regulations](#) for consultation between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management re: threatened and endangered species are open for comment through February 11.
- Add John Finney to the recurring recreation update.

Bin Items

- Schedule a field trip to the Pritchard Creek Project this summer.

MEETING RECORD

Welcome/Introductory Comments

The group approved the November meeting record.

Funding Update

- The Co-chairs are engaged in efforts to seek out funding sources for future PFC facilitation. One option may be an Innovia/Equinox grant. Information about their funding cycle is forthcoming. Idaho Department of Lands may also be a source through Good Neighbor Authority funds and has provided information on their funding guidelines.
- Members and stakeholders are encouraged to speak up if they know of any other potential sources of funding for facilitation.

Policy Updates

- Governor Little's state of the state address included some relevant highlights, such as recommendations for \$20 million in fire suppression funds, \$450,000 for Shared Stewardship, and \$900,000 for Good Neighbor Authority. The governor highlighted Building Idaho's Future package and Shared Stewardship in his address.

Recreation Update

- Idaho Trails Association has been working on its 2021 schedule, identifying 17 projects on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest so far, out of about 45 state-wide.
- Friends of Scotchman Peaks has entered its winter recreation season; 13 hikes are on the schedule. Two full hikes have gone out already, and one departs this weekend. Next summer is in the planning stages, including preliminary plans for 7 or 8 days of projects on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest and 7 or 8 on the Kootenai as well.
- Winter grooming is in full swing at all the various snowmobile trailheads.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Partners Program

- Brittany Morlin from USFWS shared a presentation about the agency's Partners Program. In past PFC meetings, the idea has arisen to consider this program as a means of working on grizzly bear conflict prevention with private landowners. This might be possible, but typically, the Partners money goes to on-the-ground habitat restoration projects.
- The slides from Brittany's presentation are available at this link.

Project Updates:

Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Initiative and Shared Stewardship

- The project that IPNF submitted to the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership last fall was not selected. However, it was a good draft to build on for fiscal

year 2022 and feedback from the Washington office will inform what to tweak/improve. Sometime in next couple months, expect updates on that feedback and a timeline and game plan for the next proposal. By the time the 2022 proposal is submitted, three of the projects in the first proposal (Buckskin, Scattered Lands, and Honey Badger) will have decisions in place and thus be more immediately implementable and attractive for funding.

Scattered Lands

- A public meeting is being held on this project tomorrow, Jan. 21, via Zoom.
- The Forestry Committee may wish to prepare a letter on this project to submit soon, before the comment period ends on February 8. Liz will make a draft, send it to the committee, then distribute to the larger group.

Buckskin Saddle

The Forest is working on final language for the decision for this project, and it should be out soon.

Chloride Gold

This summer will see the rest of the field survey work. A proposed action is expected this coming fall. A shout out to the agency's specialists for pulling off the complicated logistics of the field work this year with the pandemic.

Rosie Cedar

The project generally continues as discussed at the November's meeting.

Honey Badger

It will likely be February when a draft final proposed action is issued for Honey Badger.

Bottom Canyon

The project generally continues as related in November's meeting.

Kaniksu Community Project

- The Forestry Subcommittee meets next week to discuss timelines for this project and the option of having a third-party facilitator for public meetings.
- Note that the Priest River Experimental Forest part of the Kaniksu Project is going to be separated out. Felipe Cano can keep the group updated on what this new offshoot project will look like.

Kaniksu Winter Travel Plan

- The project generally continues as related in November's meeting.

Bog Creek

- The final EIS for the Bog Creek road project was signed in February 2019. The project entails repairing and maintaining 5.6 miles of the Bog Creek road, but there has been a voluntary stay of work pending ongoing litigation. The decommissioning work outside of the scope of the complaint is moving forward, though. USFS has until 2023 to complete the work according to the latest biological opinion.
- A graduate student at the University of Idaho is studying flora of the Selkirks and found a western moonwort plant that has never been found in Idaho before. The Native Plant Society has been in communication with the Forest about this discovery and avoiding impacts to the plant's population.

Prichard Creek

- The project continues to progress, and Trout Unlimited is now a partner. A planning document will be signed on February 1, and the aim is to have a consultant in place by the end of March. Sometime within a year, a phased approach to the whole project should be set and on-the-ground work able to begin. Idaho Fish and Game is working on putting the project area into a conservation easement, and the easement agreement with Kanisku Land Trust should be complete this year.
- The group discussed the good potential for this site to serve as a field trip opportunity in 2021, hopefully at a time this summer when the creek remains fully watered.

Public Comments

- Jeanne Higgins at IPNF noted that the CFLR project likely will not be funded this year, but further updates will be shared when possible.
- The Forest is also still awaiting approval from Congress for 2021 Great American Outdoors Act projects. They expect to hear back and receive funding by mid-March. Eleven such projects were proposed on the IPNF.
- Greg Becker is leaving his position at NRCS on March 31st, and hiring for his position will occur sometime in the near future.
- Paul Sieracki shared comments about the desire to preserve national forest areas from thinning and similar activity when other lands, such as around Hoodoo Lake, could be a fuels reduction priority. He also shared concerns about fisher habitat preservation and the importance of considering cumulative effects.

Final Thoughts of PFC Members

- Note that the deadline is February 11 to comment on the proposed rule from USFWS/NOAA regarding interagency cooperation on forest plans also known as the Cottonwood Rule.
- The group again reiterated the desire to get back into field trips in 2021, and applauded the agency for pulling through a tough year and remaining productive, the pandemic and all things considered.

- Note that IPNF is having a conference call next week with owners of residences on Lake Pend Oreille to talk about working as partners in that area on projects like fuels reduction, the importance of which was highlighted by last summer's fires.

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