

PANHANDLE FOREST COLLABORATIVE (PFC) MEETING RECORD

Wednesday, March 17, 2021 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. PDT

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

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendance

Members: Jeff Connolly, Bonner County Commissioner; Tom Dabrowski, recreation group representative; John Finney, motorized recreation representative; Alan Harper, timber representative; Eric Nave, forest industry representative; Phil Hough, community non-profit representative; Liz Johnson-Gebhardt, community non-profit representative; Mike Petersen, conservation group representative; Brad Smith, conservation group representative; Peg Polichio, citizen-at-large; Laura Wolf, wildlife representative.

Technical advisors: Aubrey Hoxie, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS); Phillip Blundell, Felipe Cano, Jeff Lau, Dan Scaife, and Jessie Berner, Idaho Panhandle National Forest (IPNF); Ed Wingert, Idaho Department of Lands; and Nathan Demmons, Bonner County Recreation Manager.

Guests: Lyndsie Halcro, Bonner County Parks and Waterways; Kathy Hubbard, Bonner County Daily Bee; Paul Sieracki, community member; Samantha Flowers, Idaho Backcountry Hunters & Anglers; Bob Smathers, Idaho Farm Bureau; Jace Hogg, Governor's Office of Species Conservation; Bart George, Kalispell Tribe; Derek Antonelli and Susan Bates-Harbuck, Native Plant Society; Marc Kilmer, Office of Congressman Russ Fulcher; Jake Garringer, Office of Governor Brad Little; Darren Parker, Office of Senator Jim Risch; Karen Roetter, Office of Senator Mike Crapo.

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

Decisions

- January meeting record approved.
- The group agreed to sign on to the CFLRP funding letter to congressional appropriators.

Action Items

- The next meeting is Wednesday, May 19, from 1 – 3 pm PST on Zoom.
- After receiving it post-publication from Phil Hough, Ben Irely will distribute the Friends of Scotchman Peaks trail work calendar.
- Recreation committee co-chairs plan to meet as a group soon to discuss re-energizing the committee's efforts. Contact Tom Dabrowski if you would like to join this committee.

- Ben add Josh Jurgensen at IPNF as the GAOA contact.
- Ben Irely will distribute photos of the Old House Project after receiving them from Jessie Berner.
- Watch for a doodle poll email from Ben Irely to solicit good dates for a field trip to Pritchard Creek.
- Put Ed Wingert on future agendas for Good Neighbor Authority.

Bin Items

- The group discussed pursuing a Bottom Canyon field trip in early June, which could also incorporate a visit to Potter's Wheel.
- Recreation Committee should talk about the motorized use components of the Chloride Gold Project.
- Recreation Committee to discuss Kaniksu Winter Travel Plan.

MEETING RECORD

Welcome/Introductory Comments

The group approved the January meeting record.

Policy Updates

- [The group discussed the two billion dollars from the latest COVID relief bill that will be headed to Idaho, but noted caution regarding chatter about how it will be disbursed; this process awaits rulemaking at the Treasury Department and lawmakers have so far avoided committing to specifics.]
- [Note that Governor Brad Little signed House Bill 204 into law, which directs some \$3 million of Building Idaho's Future into the Department of Parks and Recreation.]

Recreation Update

Friends of Scotchman Peaks

- The winter hike series through Friends of Scotchman Peaks has been successful – near capacity on all hikes, a trend expected to continue into summer.
- A trail projects calendar of dates will be published soon, with 16 trail work days in total through the season; watch for details on the Friends of Scotchman Peaks website by Friday, March 19.

Idaho Trails Association

- Similarly high demand has been seen at Idaho Trails Association; the summer schedule was just published, and some projects filled up immediately. Among 46 projects state-wide, the Association will have 16 in the IPNF.

- Note that the trail reporter on the Idaho Trails Association website is now active; updates to this for those who are out and about are very useful for association members and other Forest Service partners.
- The group discussed the prospect of revitalizing the PFC's recreation committee as there are increasing opportunities for more involvement in recreation projects. Anyone interested in participating in upcoming activity with this committee should email Tom Dabrowski.
- [The group discussed the prospects for securing Great American Outdoors Act funds to be used on IPNF lands.]

Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program Letter

[The group reviewed a letter that other groups have signed on to imploring Congressional appropriations leaders to fund the CFLRP at its full authorized amount of \$80 million. The letter was authored by Sustainable Northwest. The PFC voted and decided to join as a collaborative group signatory. The group also discussed distributing the letter to Idaho's congressional delegation.]

Project Timeline and Status Updates

Shared Stewardship

- Outreach to private landowners to garner support and inform them of opportunities has been successful. One upcoming kickoff conversation will be in conjunction with Bonner County.
- Landowners within scattered lands project area will receive a postcard and can get more info/potential visits if they express interest; the outreach efforts target particular geographic audiences in priority treatment areas.
- For purposes of cumulative effects analysis, private lands estimates are being incorporated much like lands are on other USFS projects. The agency is in the process of responding to comments and performing an effects analysis, and encourages those with any further questions or concerns to reach out following that process.

Scattered Lands

The agency is on track to have a draft decision on this project around September. Much of the progress on this project has been in conjunction with Shared Stewardship, and landowner outreach has led to some productive modifications.

Buckskin Saddle

IPNF is working with the Fish & Wildlife Service on finalizing the decision for this project. Expect it to be finished and signed within the next few weeks.

Chloride Gold

This project is on track to move into a proposed action as the field season picks up and the agency continues to collect data. Some aspects such as motorized use require a further look. This subject in particular would be great to engage with the Recreation Committee on.

Rosie Cedar

IPNF is still refining the proposed action based on some comments received. Expect to hear from Chandra Neils with more details about this project at a future PFC meeting.

Honey Badger

This project is in the final stages having a draft NEPA document finished—expect that around the end of March. A new GIS person has come on board, who will help update the story map. A final decision is slated for August.

Bottom Canyon

This project is moving ahead, and soon should be breaking ground on stream channel/road realignment. Bottom Canyon would be an excellent field trip location for the PFC community. The 206 road reroute and stream restoration should begin mid-May, so early June might make for good field trip conditions—expect to discuss this possibility at May's meeting.

Kaniksu Community Project

- The timeline for a decision is now pushed out to an estimate of the fourth quarter of 2024 because many of the above projects are more immediate priorities.
- The Priest River Experimental Forest (PREF) portion has been separated out into its own project that can be discussed in the future on its own. This project will hew more closely to the PREF mandate, which is precise on what kind of silviculture demonstrations are appropriate there.
- [The group discussed the potential of PREF as a field trip location.]
- Note that as petitions arise for the whitebark pine to be listed as threatened, USFWS is developing a new category to address regarding "locations where bears may be present."
- Whitebark pine restoration projects, involving prescribed fire, have been planned at PREF, but great windows of time for the burn did not arise last year, so these may proceed in the future.

Potter's Wheel

- Roads will be removed from a riparian area and re-routed.
- The group discussed this location as a good stop along with a Bottom Canyon field trip.

Old House

- This project is in the midst of implementation. Jessie Berner is in possession of photos of the area that she will distribute to the group via Ben.
- Landowners in this area have also been engaged through Shared Stewardship.

Kaniksu Winter Travel Plan

Expect to hear more about this project soon. This is another subject that would be good to connect with the Recreation Committee to focus on.

Bog Creek

- This was a Border Patrol-proposed project in which USFS would rehabilitate roads near the border and Bonner's Ferry. The project has been litigated, so the agency is currently awaiting guidance from the General Counsel's office about next steps.
- [The group discussed the effect of the discovery of a moonwort species unique to the area, a matter that has been brought to the attention of the Forest Supervisor.]
- Ongoing contract work in the area relates to road storage efforts that are different than the work on the proposed route that was the primary focus of the project and the litigation.

Prichard Creek

- The group discussed the additional potential of this project for a field trip location in late spring or summer.
- A contractor should be selected by next week for the first stage of the restoration plan.

Discussion of Goals for the Next Year

- The group discussed upcoming goals for the PFC and reflected on how the collaborative has been going, with an eye toward detailing the PFCs plans in funding applications.
- Among other subjects, the group discussed the following upcoming prospects for PFC activity
 - Re-energizing the recreation committee.
 - Taking up many more field trips as the pandemic subsides, especially given their invaluable role in demonstrating and building understanding about the effect on-the-ground of things discussed in collaborative meetings.
 - Aquatic restoration projects.
 - PFC-led public outreach on the large-scale Kaniksu project when it picks up.
- The group also discussed the relevant and encouraging findings of recent research projects, including [this paper](#) from the University of Idaho about the positive impact of collaboration on USFS projects and [this paper](#) on the "Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats" relevant to collaboration in Idaho and Montana.

- Please do not hesitate to reach out to Ben Irej if any additional thoughts or feedback about how the PFC's collaborative efforts are going.

Public Comments

- Paul Sieracki registered concerns about collaborative communication with the Forest Service precluding some public engagement and his distrust of the focus of collaborative groups.
- Ed Wingert provided an update on the Good Neighbor Authority, which has recently made a couple of new hires that should free up capacity for its employees in the northern zone. He can provide regular updates on GNA's work at future PFC meetings.

Final Thoughts of PFC Members

- The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 19th, from 1-3pm, on Zoom. Check for a calendar invite or email Ben Irej.
- Members of the group expressed appreciation all around for a productive meeting and noted how they look forward to getting together in person soon.