North Idaho Working Group Meeting Record
Tuesday, February 15, 2022 from 5:00 – 8:00 pm PT
At Boundary County Annex Bldg. Conference Room (6566 Main St., Bonners Ferry) and on Zoom

Meeting Summary

Attendance

Members: Trevor Anderson, state government representative; Ken Barrett, outfitter & guides representative; Leon Brown, outfitters & guides representative; Commissioner Tim Bertling, Boundary County; Commissioner Jeff Connolly, Bonner County; Tom Dabrowski, non-motorized recreation representative; Olivia Drake, motorized recreation representative; Hilary Eisen, non-motorized recreation representative; Greg Figg, motorized recreation representative; John Finney, motorized recreation representative; Craig Hill, motorized recreation representative; Jacob Hinrichs, motorized recreation representative; Phil Hough, conservation representative; Mathew Kramer, motorized recreation representative; Aaron Lieberman, outfitter and guides representative; Tony McDermott, wildlife representative; Orin Moses, motorized recreation representative; Stan Myers, citizen at large representative; Mike Peak, mining and motorized recreation; Chuck Roady, private landowner representative; and Brad Smith, conservation representative.

Technical assistants: Jake Garringer, Executive Office of the Governor; Jace Hogg, Governor’s Office of Species Conservation; Norm Merz and Merritt Horsmon, Idaho Department of Fish and Game; Nate Sparks, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation; Jessie Berner, Beth Bigelow, Michelle Caviness, Dan Gilfillan, Greg Harris, Kevin Knauth, Patrick Lair, Brett Lyndaker, Kaleigh Maze, Doug Nishek, and Kim Pierson, Idaho Panhandle National Forest (IPNF); Mike Lithgow, Kalispel Tribe; John Carlson, Kootenai National Forest; William Barquin, Shannon Ehlers, Scott Soults, and Rhonda Vogl, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho; Marc Kilmer, Office of Congressman Russ Fulcher; Mitch Silvers, Office of Senator Mike Crapo; Darren Parker, Office of Senator James Risch; Christy Johnson-Hughes and Hilary Witcomb, US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Stakeholders: Scooter Drake, Boundary Backcountry Access Club; Commissioners Wally Cossairt and Dan Dinning, Boundary County; Paul Sieraki and Ed Atkins, citizen-at-large; Adam Gebauer, The Lands Council.


Meeting Objectives

- Hear from a panel of U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife staff regarding winter travel planning in North Idaho. Panelist and topics include:
  - Jessie Berner – Introduction to winter travel planning in North Idaho and timeline
  - Kaleigh Maze – Regulatory framework for winter travel planning
Decisions
- Members approved the January Meeting Record with amendments.
- Members approved the change to the code of conduct, closing membership as of this meeting.

Action Items
- Christy Johnson-Hughes will share information on the breakdown of caribou habitat in Idaho, Washington, on the IPNF, and how much is within Wilderness.
- Ben Irey will put the recent court order, which shows the injunction area, on the website.
- Ben will draft language closing membership and share it back out to the group for final review.
- Jace Hogg will talk to Idaho Fish & Game about the relevance of the Idaho State Wildlife Action Plan for listed species on this process.

Bin Items
- Members will consider an OSV digital closure notification system based on camera trap or radio collar presence/absence information for caribou and grizzly bears.
- Ben Irey will consider better options for reviewing maps in the hybrid meeting format.
- John Finney will share the app that notifies riders of closures.
- Members hope to focus more on the maps in future meetings.

MEETING RECORD
1. Join Zoom, introductions, approve meeting record

Ben Irey outlined three amendments to the January meeting record. Members approved the meeting record with these amendments.

2. US Forest Service & US Fish & Wildlife Services panelist presentations
- Jessie Berner, Sandpoint District Ranger, shared gratitude for the Group convening and clarified the context of the North Idaho Working Group (NIWG) in relation to the IPNF.
  - She clarified how this group’s timeline will fit with the IPNF’s process.
    - The Group is working from now until June 1 towards producing a recommendation for a proposed action.
    - At that point, the IPNF will begin the analysis process, working towards a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) that would be coming out in early spring, with a decision coming in early summer 2023.
• The recommendation provided by this group will inform the EA but will not supersede the decision-making authority of the IPNF.
• Kaleigh Maze, an Environmental Coordinator working as a team lead on the interdisciplinary team on this project, presented on the regulatory framework of travel management in the context of Over Snow Vehicle (OSV) planning, though she acknowledged that there are additional regulations that will be at play.
  o The FS conducts travel management under the 2005 Travel Management Rule, which was amended in 2015 for OSVs.
    ▪ The rules require the FS to analyze the impacts of the roads, trails, and areas on National Forest (NF) lands that allow OSV use.
    ▪ These areas need to be designated in the units and it requires an OSV use map.
  o The deciding official for the OSV plan has to follow designation criteria.
    ▪ General criteria include considerations for the effects on natural resources, cultural resources, user conflicts, maintenance, administration of rules, and the availability of resources.
    ▪ Specific criteria include considerations for the effects on soil, vegetation, water, wildlife, conflicts over use, and impacts on neighboring lands.
    ▪ These are called minimization criteria because they minimize impact, but they do not inherently prevent this use.
    ▪ A treatment of motor vehicle use must consider the existing rights and uses.
    ▪ Wilderness and primitive areas are exempt unless off-highway vehicle (OHV) use is included in enabling legislation.
  o Executive order 11644 instructs federal agencies to control and direct OHV use to prevent degradation of natural and cultural resources and minimize conflict.
  o The 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule establishes provisions on road construction.
    ▪ It was superseded in Idaho by the 2008 Idaho Roadless Rule, which includes five management themes.
    ▪ There are 19 ID Roadless Areas in the IPNF.
• Doug Nishek, IPNF Bonner’s Ferry North Zone Planner, discussed the context of the Forest Plan.
  o A Forest Plan is written every 15–20 years on each NF and is considered a guidance document for National Forests.
  o The IPNF Forest Plan, written in 2015, provides sideboards for all actions on the Forest.
  o Different management areas have specific limitations and rules (i.e. some emphasize logging, watersheds, habitat, cultural resources).
  o Doug Nishek displayed a PDF showing the Management Areas.
    ▪ There are 12 types of Management Areas on the IPNF that have OSV restrictions.
• Jessie Berner presented on whitebark pine habitat.
  o Jessie displayed a map showing the habitat suitable for whitebark pine on the IPNF.
- Whitebark pine may become a federally listed species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in the future.

- Christy Johnson Hughes, the USFWS Supervisor out of the Idaho Coeur d'Alene office, presented on caribou and OSV impacts on the IPNF.
  - Caribou are one of many different species that the FS will need to focus on in its analysis.
  - Southern mountain caribou are endangered under the ESA.
  - There are 600 acres of designated critical caribou habitat on federal lands in Boundary County.
  - The USFWS is working on cross-boundary management with Canadian authorities.
  - The South Selkirk Caribou Management Plan 2018 is compatible with the USFWS Recovery Outline, though many jurisdictions and landscapes will need to be considered.
  - Caribou critical habitat includes mature, old-growth cedar, hemlock, spruce, and fir forests along ridge tops and in high elevation basins. The presence of arboreal lichen is key. Habitat also includes shallow secondary stream bottoms, riparian areas, and subalpine meadows with succulent forbs and grasses.
    - It is also crucial to consider corridors and transition zones that connect habitats, as caribou need areas to escape disturbances such as OSV use.
  - There are currently no caribou in the US, but all of the critical habitat will need to be considered in OSV planning, given the international management and recovery plan.
    - The ESA prohibits the destruction or modification of critical habitat against the likelihood of recovery.
    - Impacts to late winter habitat can impair feeding and breeding habits.
  - Given these considerations, the future options might include any of the following:
    - Buffers for migratory pathways.
    - Buffers against the impacts that grooming and packing has on predator access.
    - Designated routes that create less stress than open play areas.
    - A closure notification system.
  - These considerations should be included in the Travel Management Plan, though some of these analyses will happen in the future.

- Brett Lyndecker, IPNF Wildlife Biologist, presented on wildlife considerations in management areas (MA).
  - Brett shared the draft Kaniksu OSV Travel Plan.
  - The 2015 Forest Plan and Record of Decision (ROD) only expressly prohibits OSV use in the 1B and 4A Management Areas, along with the eligible wild and scenic river areas.
    - The FS didn’t want to be too prescriptive, and they left more detailed planning to this current process.
  - Standards and guidelines are where the Forest Plan have teeth.
Big game winter range will be considered, including goats and caribou habitat.

- Sometimes OSV trails can access lynx habitat, which is tied to the presence of snowshoe hares and deep snow, where lynx have an advantage over other predators. There is evidence that OSV trails draw other predators into what is otherwise primarily lynx habitat.
- Grizzly bears can be vulnerable to disturbance in the vicinity of den sites in immediate post-emergence period (the standard date is April 1st).
- Wolverines are solitary and secretive, but may be impacted as well, as both males and females respond negatively to increased intensity of winter activity in their home range.

Dan Gilfillan, IPNF project manager, presented on the sideboards of recreation on the IPNF.

- Determining the sideboards of recreation involves considering the infrastructure and the recreation opportunity spectrum, which doesn’t always match the Management Area boundaries.
- Much of this tiers back to the ID Roadless Rule, which is prescriptive and provides recommendations.

**Q&A with Panelists**

- **Q:** Does the work included in the ID State Wildlife Action Plan for listed species, conducted 2011-14, have any bearing here?
  - **A:** There are no Forest Plan standards that address wolverines, but there are other groups that address wolverines, including the state.
  - Jace Hogg will send this question to Idaho Fish & Game and report back.

- **Q:** How exactly does the caribou recovery outline relate to the recovery plan?
  - **A:** Christy Johnson-Hughes explained that the outline explores and discusses management recommendations and high-level options in the US that lead to conservation and recovery. There are additional issues that might come into play in the recovery plan, which requires public review.

- **Q:** Could a closure notification system for caribou in conjunction with a trail camera system be used to manage caribou-related recreation closures?
  - **A:** This could be considered if caribou return to the US, although the current camera traps are not set up in caribou critical habitat. Also, most caribou have radio collars on already.
  - The goal is certainly to keep management as focused as possible and keep recreation as focused as possible to not preclude the return of the caribou.

- **Q:** Could a notification process for identifying grizzly bear denning and emergence work as well?
  - **A:** The proportion of grizzly bear collaring is far lower than caribou and therefore couldn’t be used to completely assess the denning locations.

- **Q:** Could the USFWS share a breakdown of the caribou habitat acreage in Idaho, Washington, and on the IPNF? How much is in wilderness? Also, how many animals are needed to have a sustained population?
  - **A:** Christy Johnson-Hughes will share information on these questions.
• Q: How can this group think about a matrix for outlining the scale of management options that are available for any given area, or the prioritizations for areas? Where could we limit the area, and where are the actionable areas? Are there any existing documents for this?
  o A: The Forest Plan is key to this, and from a Forest Service perspective these considerations flow from the Forest Plan out through filters.
    ▪ Management Area maps have the prescriptions on there, and the FS is trying to update some other documents that have outdated references online currently.
• Q: Have there been any whitebark pine inventories done?
  o A: There are no complete surveys currently. There are whitebark pine on the forest, but the FS doesn't know where all the stands are. The FS is planning to do this analysis and ground-truthing this summer.
• Q: Predation of caribou is a huge problem, and thus wolf and lion management is an issue. ID has a wolf management plan, but what are the considerations there?
  o A: Christy Johnson-Hughes shares that for the designation to go away, the species has to either fully recover or go extinct. There is predation pressure, though this is not the only impact and there are other aspects and impacts, including summer forage availability. If it is determined to be predominantly predation, there are management actions to take. But if it's other things then it will have to be a more balanced approach.
• Q: The injunction could have a huge bearing on collaboration. What is the timeline? Who filed it? What are the restrictions in that injunction?
  o A: The injunction area extends beyond the critical habitat areas. A motion was brought by Idaho State Snowmobiling Association (ISSA) to remove the injunction because the caribou were no longer present. Defenders of Wildlife participated in supporting the injunction and a recent ruling maintains the injunction so that the USFWS has time to study the adverse impacts and future recovery in the planning phase.
    o Ben will put the recent court order, which shows the injunction area, on the website.
• Q: Where does the April 1st closure date on the 2019 map come from? What drives it?
  o A: This is based on the average den exit dates of grizzly bears. It was decided by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee as an “across the board” date.
• Q: Are there examples of other management strategies with different criteria that trigger certain limitations based on the presence of grizzly bear or caribou?
  o A: John Finney will share the app that he uses to identify closures. One has to be a club member and pay dues.

Proposed amendments to the code of conduct

• Ben Irey describes how with 27 members consensus might be onerous. There are also concerns about the balance of representation.
  o If a member, especially of a snowmobile group, sees their voice represented by another member, email Ben to step away.
• Membership will be closed after this meeting, and any new members would go through the process committee.
  o Ben will draft this language closing membership and share it back out to the group for final review.

Opportunity for public comment

• Have there been flights mapping snowmobile use to develop the existing condition?
  o Neither the USFS nor the USFWS is aware of any such flights.

Round Robin of members final thoughts

• Members expressed gratitude for the meeting and for the presentations.
• Members acknowledge the breadth and depth of detail involved in the current data and with creating recommendations and expressed interest in being more economical and efficient with time.
• To this end, members expressed willingness to work on these issues and discuss the details in between meetings.
• It was proposed that interest groups come up with proposals, bring them to the NIWG and members would discuss agreement and disagreement.
• The limitations of hybrid meetings make discussing maps difficult.
  o Ben Irey will consider options for improving this aspect of the meetings.
• Chuck Roady shares interest in discussing the latest executive orders on Roadless Areas with Kaleigh Maze.
  o Chuck Roady will call Darren Parker as well.
• Tim Koerner expressed openness to stepping back from a voting role.
• The next meeting is scheduled for 3/15 from 5:00-8:00PM PST in Bonner County.
  o Meetings are on the 3rd Tuesday of every month, alternating between Boundary County and Bonner County.