

Draft Meeting Record
Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative (KVRI), Hybrid Board Meeting
April 15, 2024, 6:00 p.m.
Boundary County Annex Building

Board Members in Attendance:

Carson Watkins, Idaho Fish and Game (IDFG)
Ed Atkins, Corp. Ag/Landowner
Erik Olson, Soil/Conservation
Gary Aitken, Jr., KVRI Co-Chair
Kevin Knauth, US Forest Service (USFS)
Rick Alonzo, Mayor, City of Bonners, KVRI Co-Chair
Sandy Ashworth, Social, Cultural, Historical
Tim Bertling, Boundary County, KVRI Co-Chair
Tim Dougherty, Business & Industry

Agency/Others in Attendance:

Austin Terrell, Office of Species Conservation (OSC)
Barb Moore, Idaho Department of Fish & Game (IDFG)
Caleb Davis, Office of Rep. Fulcher
Caroline Sime, U.S. Fish & Wildlife (USFWS)
Cassie Olson, Boundary Soil Conservation Service/ Landowner
Chris Bachman Conservation Director, Yaak Valley Forest
Dave Gray, Citizen
Eddie Whitcomb, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Jake Garringer, Governor Little's Office
Jeremy Gaffield, IDFG
John O'Conner, Local Landowner
Kierstin Cox, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI), (KVRI) Reporting Secretary
Marc Kilmer, Sen Jim Risch
Norm Merz, IDFG
Rob Morris, IDFG
Rosie Costain, People and Carnivores
Shannon Ehlers, USFWS
Shelby Therian, KTOI
Theresa Wheat, KTOI, KVRI Facilitator
William Barquin, KTOI

- Welcome and introductions at 6:00 p.m.
- Meeting Record from March 18, 2024, Approved
- Presentations:

Rosie Costain, serving as a Program Coordinator for People and Carnivores, presented the concept of Bear Smart communities. She began by introducing her organization, which operates primarily in Western Montana, but also reaches into Idaho and Wyoming. The organization focuses on facilitating co-existence between humans and large carnivores like wolves and mountain lions through conflict prevention tools.

During the meeting, Rosie emphasized the concept of Bear Smart communities as a community-led and community-wide effort aimed at preventing human-bear conflicts. She described how this approach is not merely about individual actions but involves collective community efforts to create environments less likely to attract bears. Key strategies include securing garbage, setting up electric fences to protect livestock, and educating the community on bear safety.

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Rosie shared the origin of the Bear Smart concept, noting its roots in a Canadian program designed to help communities manage bear conflicts proactively. While the U.S. adaptation by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) lacks an official certification like its Canadian counterpart, it provides a framework and manual to guide communities.

She outlined the essential steps involved in establishing a Bear Smart community:

1. **Formation of a Bear Smart Committee:** This committee is crucial for steering the community efforts and should represent a broad spectrum of community members including local government officials, educators, and waste managers.
2. **Community Assessment:** A comprehensive assessment that helps understand the current situation regarding bear conflicts, main attractants, and community attitudes towards bears.
3. **Developing a Community Plan:** Based on the assessment, this plan includes targeted actions, education, outreach efforts, and a timeline for implementation.
4. **Implementation of the Plan:** Putting the community plan into action with the support of the established committee.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Ongoing tracking and refinement of strategies based on their effectiveness and changing conditions.

Rosie highlighted the importance of addressing bear conflicts as communities expand into traditional bear habitats, noting increased encounters between bears and humans. She discussed the challenges of managing attractants and waste, which are significant conflict points, and the benefits of a unified community approach over piecemeal efforts.

Furthermore, Rosie discussed funding strategies, mentioning how communities like Virginia City use tax dollars to fund bear-resistant garbage cans and educational programs, while others rely on grants and collaborations with nonprofits.

In conclusion, Rosie's presentation underscored the need for community involvement and a structured approach to effectively manage and reduce human-bear conflicts, promoting safer co-existence through education, proper waste management, and community-led initiatives.

Sandy Ashworth emphasized the established efforts and progress already made by KVRI in fostering a Bear Smart community. She highlighted the formation of a Grizzly Bear Committee and the local initiatives undertaken, such as waste management changes and educational programs. Sandy pointed out that while many foundational components of a Bear Smart community are already in place due to past efforts, the ongoing challenge lies in coordination, education, and funding.

She expressed confidence that the infrastructure and expertise needed to implement further measures are readily available through collaborative networks and that the community is not starting from scratch. However, Sandy noted a significant challenge is the influx of new residents who might not be aware of the local wildlife dynamics or the necessity of co-existing with bears. She stressed the importance of

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education to bridge this gap, mentioning successful events like demonstrations on using bear spray, which helped raise awareness about the reality of bear encounters.

Overall, Sandy articulated a positive outlook on the community's capabilities to enhance its Bear Smart initiatives, suggesting that while the groundwork has been laid, continued effort and resource allocation are essential for sustained progress and integration of newcomers into these practices.

Shelby Therian outlined a comprehensive Bear Spray Recycling program initiated by her department, KTOI's Fish and Wildlife. In Boundary County, Idaho, she emphasized its significance due to the environmental hazards posed by discarded bear spray canisters. Shelby noted that each year, thousands of canisters are bought by both locals and visitors for safety in bear-prone areas but are often discarded improperly after expiration or use. This creates risks in landfills due to the harsh irritants and chemical propellants in the canisters.

Shelby explained that bear spray is the best defense against bear encounters in the wild, creating a deterrent mist, but after its use or expiration, the disposal becomes an issue, especially with travel restrictions that prevent bear spray from being carried on airplanes. Many visitors end up discarding these canisters because they have no use for them back home.

The recycling program, inspired by successful initiatives in National Parks like Yellowstone, where approximately 1,000 to 3,600 canisters are discarded annually, aims to provide designated drop-off locations where people can safely dispose of their bear spray. Shelby described how these canisters are processed: "Re-using aluminum instead of adding waste to a landfill also cuts down on the need for mining and manufacturing aluminum, a toxic process that has resulted in Superfund cleanup sites, including one in Kalispell, Montana. Pepper spray has high value for re-use in other products, for example, the pepper ingredients are added to paint on the bottom of boats to keep barnacles from attaching to them." (*Tabish, D. 2016 04 05. IGBC Bear Spray Recycling. <https://iqbconline.org/bear-spray-recycling/>*)

The plan includes setting up drop-off points at strategic locations in Boundary and Bonner Counties, like the Sturgeon Station and the Sandpoint Ranger District office, with secure collection boxes designed to prevent unauthorized access. The collected canisters are to be managed by the Kootenai Tribe, with collections scheduled quarterly or more frequently as needed.

Shelby also discussed potential collaborations with local businesses, suggesting incentives for those who recycle their bear spray, such as discounts on new purchases. She stressed the importance of community involvement and awareness, reflecting on the positive impact of educational efforts about bear safety and proper disposal methods.

In summary, Shelby's presentation detailed a proactive approach to managing bear spray waste, highlighting the environmental benefits, community safety improvements, and the collaborative efforts required to make the recycling program successful.

Austin Terrell provided an update on the carcass pick-up program, a joint effort involving local Fish and Game authorities and OSC to pick up livestock carcasses from landscapes to prevent attracting bears to homesites. He highlighted the effectiveness of a specially equipped trailer with a fabricated winch, which

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has greatly facilitated the process of loading and transporting various livestock., The program has successfully conducted ten pickups so far, which include single cows, cow-calf pairs, pigs, and horses.

Austin also discussed the financial aspects related to livestock depredation, mentioning a new initiative that allocates \$225,000 through the State Department of Agriculture. This fund is split into \$150,000 for depredation compensation to producers who lose livestock and \$75,000 for prevention measures, such as fences and drive-over mats to protect farms and ranches. Although the funding is held by ISDA, the program will be administered by OSC. This funding, supported by local agricultural and wildlife associations, aims to directly assist producers in enhancing their defenses against wildlife, thereby preventing potential losses.

Forestry Updates:

Kevin Knauth: provided a detailed update on the Katkee Fuels project, emphasizing its focus on fuel reduction in the county to mitigate wildfire risks. He described various components of the project, including non-commercial work like setting and managing nature fuels, as well as commercial timber sale components aimed at reducing fire fuels. Kevin highlighted that the project also involves helicopter operations on steeper grounds and closely borders private land, prompting efforts to encourage landowners to participate in fuel reduction on their properties.

He mentioned that the public scoping phase has concluded, receiving a range of feedback, and now the team is conducting an environmental impact analysis of the proposed actions. Kevin also discussed plans for upcoming field trips to the project area, which will allow community members to see the efforts firsthand and provide feedback, enhancing transparency and community involvement in fire prevention and land management practices.

Additionally, Kevin touched on the broader context of fire management challenges faced by the community, including prescribed burns aimed at clearing slash ahead of planting activities. He emphasized the increasing importance of effective community outreach and education on fire safety given the hotter, drier summers and increased recreational use of forest lands.

Norm Merz provided an update on the efforts to enhance wildlife crossings and reduce road collisions in the McArthur Lake section. He described a collaborative project with the Idaho Department of Transportation (IDT) to transform a 300-foot span bridge over Deep Creek into a functional wildlife underpass. The project currently includes defensive fencing extending about a half-mile on either side of the underpass, with plans to expand this fencing to better funnel animals towards the crossing and enhance safety. Norm mentioned that the team had gathered contact information for adjacent landowners and the railroad as part of an initiative to engage the community and stakeholders. The goal is to conduct public outreach this summer and implement the project by next year.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: provided an update regarding regulatory revisions and staffing changes. The update highlighted revisions to three key sections: Section 4, which involves listing and delisting species; Section 7, which concerns consultations with federal agencies; and Section 10, which deals with recovery permits and habitat conservation plans. Additionally, external webinars scheduled for April 29 and 30t were announced to provide further details on these revisions.

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The update also covered staffing changes, specifically the departure of Christy Johnson-Huges who has taken a new position in South Carolina. The agency reassured attendees that recruitment is actively underway to fill her position and ensure continuity. Furthermore, the public scoping period for an ongoing project is open, with an open house scoping meeting scheduled for April 30. This session aims to gather public input, which can be submitted through the EPA's project page, as the EPA is the lead agency for this initiative, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a collaborating agency.

Idaho Fish and Game:

Carson Watkins provided an update on two main topics. First-, he announced the transition of Rob's Conflict Management position from a temporary 8-month role to a full-time, permanent position, which has been approved by the Legislature and the Governor. This move aims to add stability and continuity to the program, allowing for closer community engagement and quicker response times to wildlife conflicts in the Kootenai Valley area. Recruitment for this position is set to begin soon, with plans to have Rob help transition the new hire.

Second, Carson discussed a recent legal setback concerning wolf trapping regulations. A federal magistrate in Boise issued an injunction that significantly restricts the normal wolf trapping seasons, limiting them to December through February on public lands. This injunction impacts the state's ability to control wolf populations, particularly in areas of the Panhandle with underperforming elk populations due to wolf predation. The state is currently considering its legal options, including appealing the decision or requesting the judge to reconsider certain aspects of the case. This legal challenge has caused significant frustration within the agency, as it disrupts well-established wildlife management practices. Carson expressed hope for clarity and resolution in the coming months as they navigate the implications of this injunction.

Congressional Updates:

Marc Kilmer, provided updates on two key issues affecting Idaho. First, he discussed legislation co-sponsored by Senator Risch and Senator Crapo that would grant Idaho the authority to require invasive species stickers on watercraft. This measure aims to help manage and mitigate the spread of invasive species in Idaho's waterways, although implementing the sticker requirement would be optional for the state.

The second issue concerns the Port Hill border crossing hours, which have been a point of contention due to changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been ongoing rumors about further restrictions at Port Hill, despite previous expansions. To address this, Senators Risch and Crapo, along with Congressman Fulcher, have sent a letter advocating for the reinstatement of pre-COVID operational hours. Marc emphasized their commitment to maintaining this progress and preventing any rollback on the improvements made.

Jake Garringer provided updates following the legislative session. He highlighted three key financial developments:

1. \$17 million augmentation was added to the Fire Suppression Deficiency Fund, which is aimed at enhancing the state's capacity to manage and suppress wildfires.

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2. Allocation of \$1 million for wildland firefighter bonuses was approved to support and incentivize the firefighting workforce.
3. The Governor's budget, with the Legislature's approval, included an additional \$20 million in funding for outdoor recreation, directed to the Department of Parks and Recreation. This funding is intended to enhance and expand outdoor recreational activities across the state.

New Business/Updates

Forest Service and KVRI Field Trip: Scheduled for May 16 at 9 a.m. Participants are advised to bring lunch and a beverage, although snacks and water will be provided. The meeting point is at the U.S. Forest Service Ranger Station.

Boundary Soil Conservation District Farm Tour: *Cassie Olson*, discussed the annual farm tour set for May 24, which is organized in partnership with the local Farm Bureau. The tour will include a panel of experts discussing forestry and agricultural practices throughout the county. The event accommodates around 60 people, features a bus tour starting at 8 a.m. from the Fairgrounds, and includes various informational stops. Lunch will be provided, with the tour concluding around 4 p.m. This year's tour is sponsored by the local Farm Bureau, with more details to be advertised soon.

ISDA Watercraft Boat Check Station: Progress on the boat check station was shared, including the completion of permitting for signage. The station is set to open by the third weekend of May, aiming to enhance watercraft safety and management.

Next Meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for May 20, 2024

Upcoming Meetings for Sub-Committees:

Grizzly Bear Sub-committee July 11, and October 21

Forestry Sub-committee: June 13, and October 30

TMDL Sub-committee: October 9

Meeting was called at 7:20 p.m.

Meeting Record Prepared by Kierstin Cox