

Draft Meeting Record
Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative (KVRI), Hybrid Board Meeting
October 21, 2024 6:00 p.m.
Boundary County Annex Building

Board Members in Attendance:

Dave Bobbit, Idaho Fish and Game Commission (IDFG)
Dave Gray, Social/ Cultural/ Historical
Ed Atkins, Corp. Ag/ Landowner
Erik Olson, Soil Conservation/ Ag Landowner
Gary Aitken Jr., Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI)
Kennon McClintock, Conservationist / Environmentalist
Remington Daniels, Business/ Industry
Tim Bertling, Boundary County / KVRI Co-Chair
Tim Dougherty, Business/ Industry

Agency/ Others in Attendance:

Annie Murai, Measure Meant
Barb Moore, IDFG
Brian Micheals, KTOI
Carson Watkins, IDFG
Chris Bachman, Yaak Valley
Christina Hacker, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Genny Hoyle, KTOI
Greg Hoffman, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Jada Fairchild, KTOI
Jake Garringer, Governor Little's Office
Jennifer Ekstrom, Idaho Conservation League (ICL)
Kara Odegard, Measure Meant
Karen Schumacher, KTOI
Lacey Rammell-O'Brien, Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR)
Leon Basdekas, USACE
Marc Kilmer, Rep. Senator Risch Office
Megan Parnell, Idaho Farm Bureau
Michelle Richman, Department of Water Resources (IDWR)
Nathan Jensen, KTOI
Sean Wilson, IDFG
Shelby Therrian, KTOI
Theresa Wheat, KTOI
Troy Smith, IDFG
Wally Cossairt, Boundary County
William Barquin, KTOI

- **Welcome and Introductions** were made and the meeting began at 6:00 p.m.
- **Presentations:**

Karen Schumacher, KTOI, explained how the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI) is beginning to create a climate vulnerability project by reaching out to individuals, agencies and organizations who might have input and experience to help their consulting team retrieve and compare data.

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Kara Odegard and Annie Murai, Spokane's sustainability consulting firm known as Measure Meant. Their company works on creating climate planning work in the Northwest. The purpose of the Climate Vulnerability Assessment is to lead to adaptation planning, meaning Annie and the team are looking for ways to make species and people more resilient with increasing climate volatility. The process includes evaluating areas of importance for KTOI against future climate projections. Once the vulnerability assessment is completed, the Tribe will use the assessment to guide updates to the environmental plan including meaningful actions to benefit KTOI.

The current timeline for this project has been set for 10 months but that timeline may be extended should there be a need to. The six areas that formulate their plan include, Land, Fish, Wildlife, Water, Air, and Culture. Annie and the team will learn what is important within all six of these areas and incorporate their findings into the assessment, and then prepare an updated environmental plan. Their methodology is based on the United States Climate Resilience toolkit and other relevant resources. It is also important to incorporate as much local and indigenous knowledge as possible during this process. By including both information systems, they will be able to understand what the climate impacts are for all six areas of focus.

Once the team is able to identify the impact, they can begin to formulate the current capacity for adaptation within these changes. Anything highlighted as medium or high vulnerability will be addressed immediately in the plan.

Areas that may be of concern include shifting of the precipitation patterns, a prolonged drought in the summer, changes of temperature during seasons meaning hotter summer days and nights as well as colder winters. Changes in snow pack, heavier wind storms, late-night freezing events are all of concern. Current projections show an increased number of "fire danger days" as well as wildfires that burn more frequently into areas of wildland/urban interface. Mentioned during the meeting was that North Idaho is already witnessing loss of wetland habitat sites, and timber species. Tim Dougherty, of Idaho Forest Group added that North Idaho is experiencing large tree species die-off, due to the loss of shade and water, which is affecting the Hemlock tree.

Annie and the team made a poll for attendees to complete to help collect information on climate impacts. Anyone who wishes to help the team collect additional information can do so by scanning the QR code on their presentation posted on our website at <https://www.kvricollaborative.com/>. After the poll had been answered, a short discussion followed explaining the answers on the poll. Anyone with additional information, for example completed reports, that the team should be aware, please contact Kara Odegard, Annie Murai, or Karen Schumacher. Any information about similar projects that are currently underway in the region, please reach out to Annie Murai should you have information to share or if you wish to participate. Annie can be reached at annie@measurepnw.com

Leon Basdekas, USACE, is the Upper Columbia Senior Water Manager and is responsible for all water management aspects of the Libby Dam. Most of Kootenai Rivers water comes from Canada where it flows and is stored behind Libby Dam before flowing downstream into Bonners Ferry, Kootenai Lake, and then mainstem Columbia River.

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The snow this year was about 62% average during the middle of May. This winter there was a lot of rainfall in November and early December, resulting in more rain than there was snow. The May, water supply forecast, set the Sturgeon Pulse volume to 800,000-acre feet and the bull trout minimum flow after the pulse was 7,000 cfs. The Libby Dam drawdown target was 10 feet from full at 2,449 feet by the end of September, which is the augmentation water on the main stem, Columbia River. The water supply forecast was below the 30-year average for the entire season, and a lot came down as rain this year and not snow. However, the observed inflow was pretty close to average until April. May, and June levels were way below average inflows. The months of July, August and September were also considered below average but their levels were not as low as the previous months considering the low snowpack. Overall, the whole water year was 80% of average of

In 2024, Fort Steele gage recorded 3 main inflow peaks. There was an early peak in May time period, and another in the middle of June, followed lastly by a peak in July. These and other conditions made for a challenging refill season while balancing reservoir refill condition and the desire to have steady or slightly declining outflow post sturgeon pulse. September 2024 water levels ended at 2049.68 and it was able to hold the flow at 8,000 until October 5, when levels hit 2449.

Greg Hoffman, USACE, had a conversation with the group about the Libby Dam operations, which are complex. If you were not present, meeting record notes are not realistic to make it understandable. Refer to Greg Hoffman's slides presented at the meeting, located on our website at <https://www.kvricollaborative.com/> or to learn more, Greg would be happy to discuss operations and may be contacted at Gregory.C.Hoffman@usace.army.mil.

Troy Smith, IDFG Sturgeon Biologist, had collected data to track spawning season and the number of Sturgeons moving through the spawning grounds. They track the number of eggs collected on egg mats as well as the number of larvae. Idaho fish & Game (IDFG) surgically implant acoustic tags into the Sturgeon to track their movements. They try to keep 100 tags active, meaning about 1/3 of the tagged female population move to the Kootenai spawning grounds. The spawning grounds range from a location know as Shorty's Island to the 95 Bridge.

In 2022, 33 Sturgeons had reached the spawning grounds for the season. As the Sturgeon reach a location known as Ambush Rock, the number of Sturgeons drop and they start to struggle to make it past the 95 Bridge. In 2023, it was very similar, beginning with 36 Sturgeons and the number also dropped as they reached Ambush Rock. However, 2024 was considered an odd year, beginning with only 18 Sturgeons passing through Shorty's Island. This was not a big spawning year, only two Sturgeons were detected passing the 95 Bridge.

In the past 14 years, IDFG has tracked the number of eggs collected on eggs mats. Numbers jumping from almost 500 eggs collected in 2013 to an unfortunate number of 28 eggs in 2024, which is the lowest number of eggs collected in those years. The larvae are collected from drift nets due to the weaker body. The larvae number rarely exceeds 5 every spawning season, but in 2022 IDFG collected 48 larvae in the drift nets. After collecting that data, 22 of those collected larvae were sent to the lab for genetic testing. Two of the DNA results came back as Hatchery

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released fish, whether it was released as an egg or larvae, and 22 DNA results returned as a wild origin. Unfortunately, there were no larvae collected in 2024, but that is not unusual.

Nate Jensen, KTOI Fish and Wildlife Department Director, explained that the primary purpose of KTOI's conservation aquaculture program is to prevent the extinction of Kootenai River White Sturgeon. The program started in 1988, and the current objective is to use aquaculture science to create genetically diverse, healthy year-classes of Sturgeon each year until it occurs naturally.

Hatchery origin Sturgeon are now maturing and contributing to the program. The first hatchery origin Sturgeon brought back into the hatchery was in 2020, which was considered a huge milestone because their work is starting to take effect. The Hatchery program has two facilities and two dedicated teams of six members each, who handle approximately 75 Sturgeon adults each year weighing up to 150 pounds. The hatchery is only permitted to receive a maximum of 20 adult females and 45 adult male Sturgeon. The Hatchery is attempting to improve the age, growth and survival of White Sturgeon, and now have an accelerated growth program to help them accomplish this goal. This growth program essentially increases the water temperature in the winter to grow fish while feeding them premium diets at optimal feed rates. The success of this program relies on refining the aquaculture methods annually, habitat restoration, and strategic water management.

In 2024, 15 females joined the Hatchery in cooperation with IDFG. In June this year, there were 15 successful spawns and the Hatchery was also able to reach the 45 male upper limit target. There were 14 individual spawns released in early life stages and one was entered into a natural incubation experiment at the Hatchery. There is an increasing trend of Hatchery origin males returning to the Hatchery since 2020. These males age from 17-27 and weigh 80-100 pounds. The 2024 class juveniles will not be released until the spring of 2025. During the winter, these juveniles will be applied to the accelerated growth to allow them to get larger in size to help increase their survival. There were 4,300 juveniles released this past year, weighing approximately 300 grams. In comparison to the accelerated growth program, out of 25 years of spring releases, past average weights averaged only 60 grams. There were 15 spawns in 2024, and the Hatchery limits each spawn to 500 juveniles to ensure the program is not overstocking the river with juveniles. In addition to the standard practices of releasing juveniles, the program also releases eggs and larvae in May/June targeting Designated Critical Sturgeon Habitat upstream of Bonners Ferry near Crossport and the Nutrient Migration Site at the Idaho/Montana border. Survival is very low for early life stage releases as expected but is a valuable tool being used to investigate recruitment failure.

Legislative Updates:

Mark Kilmer, Senator's Jim Risch's Office explained how the Federal Government is funded for December 20, 2024 and there will not be a farm bill this year. There is also going to be a new session of congress.

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Jake Garringer, Governor Little's Office, shared the discover of identifying mussels in the Snake River again, and they are believed to be traveling upstream.

Carson Watkins, IDFG, explained the emergency order on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has been in effect since October 2, 2024 which established a CWD management zone. Samplings are required for any deer harvested within the CWD zone. Harvested deer also cannot leave the management zone unless being taken to a CWD checkpoint.

Upcoming meeting for Sub-Committees:

TMDL Sub-Committee – October 23, 2024 at 10:00 a.m.

Forestry Sub-Committee – November 14, 2024 at 10:00 a.m.

Next Meeting is scheduled for November 18, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.

Meeting was called at 7:35 p.m.

Meeting Recorded by Jada Fairchild