

Meeting Notes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative

July 19, 2021

7:00 p.m.

Board Meeting via Zoom

Board Members in Attendance:

Dan Dinning, Boundary County Commissioner, KVRI Co-Chair
Chip Corsi, Idaho Fish & Game
Tim Dougherty, Business/Industry
Dave Wattenbarger, Soil Conservation/Landowner
Dave Gray, Social, Cultural, Historical (Alt)
Adam Arthur, City of Bonners Ferry, KVRI Co-Chair (Alt.)

Agency/Others in Attendance:

Amber Kornak, Idaho Fish & Game
Alison Squier, KTOI Consultant
Carol Kriebs, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Mitch Silvers, Office of Senator Crapo
Ryan Bart, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Wally Cossairt, Boundary County Commissioner, (Alt.) KVRI Board
Frank Edelman, Idaho Fish & Game
Christy Johnson-Hughes, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
David Bogema, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers
Don Allenberg, Corporate Agriculture/Landowner (Alt)
Greg Hoffman, US Army Corp of Engineers
Hilary Whitcomb, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Jace Hogg, Office of Species Conservation, Idaho
Jake Garringer, Office of Governor Little
Karen Roetter, Office of Senator Crapo
Mark Reller, Bonneville Power Administration
Norm Merz, Idaho Fish & Game
Tim Bertling, Boundary County Commissioner
William Schrader, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers
Rhonda Vogl, KVRI Facilitator & Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Karen Schumacher, KVRI Recording Secretary & Kootenai Tribe of Idaho

Rhonda opened the meeting with introductions at 7:00PM.

Dan Dinning asked if there were any comments or changes for the June meeting notes. None were had and minutes passed by consensus.

Dan introduced Christy Johnson-Hughes to begin the presentation on the SLOPES (Standard Local Operating Procedures for Endangered Species) Programmatic Program.

Christy thanked KVRI for the opportunity to share how the US Army Corp of Engineers and the US Fish & Wildlife offices collaborate in the efforts to help reduce the negative impact to

Meeting Notes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative

July 19, 2021

7:00 p.m.

Board Meeting via Zoom

endangered species that may result from various activities in and around the Kootenai River. These efforts are specific to Sturgeon, Burbot and Bull Trout.

Christy introduced Ryan Bart, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and William Schrader, US Army Corp of Engineers, to begin the presentation. The presentation, in its entirety, can be accessed on the KVRI website at: [KVRI | KVRIID \(kvricollaborative.com\)](https://www.kvriid.com) by scrolling down to the July 19th meeting block.

Ryan began by explaining that the Endangered Species Act requires agencies to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that no actions that may be proposed are likely to jeopardize listed species or destroy official habitat. The USFWS issued the first biological opinion for SLOPES in May of 2013 and it was renewed February, 2020. This covers all of Boundary County.

William followed Ryan with a detailed explanation of what activities are covered by SLOPES such as bank stabilization and restoration efforts.

Ryan talked about considerations that are used nationally to assist in determining impact such as the timing of the proposed actions as it relates to when impact on species such as spawning time.

Excluded and Prohibited activities were discussed and how and why the US Corp would approach a variance for these.

If the agency deems the proposed actions as “not likely” to affect, (affect or “take” goes all the way from harassing to killing of species) an informal consultation then takes place followed by a letter of concurrence.

Ryan went on to explain the

Following the presentation Dan Dinning asked if a system could be implemented to assist farmers responding to banks eroding during high water. Dan emphasized that all the farmers want is one stop shopping for which it's agreed that if they do “X” according to whatever document is in place, then they are allowed to do “Y” to address the issue. The procedure in place does not allow the farmers to act quickly and there is a legitimate fear that the river is going to erode back and destroy their crops. The answer they are getting is that they are not allowed to address the problem without permission. Dan asked for assistance in figuring out a way to help.

William Schrader asked several questions and explored some options. He stated that because the dikes are not a part of the levy program for the Corp of engineers, it is possible that they can respond by using a regional general permit for emergency conditions that doesn't necessarily require a declared emergency.

William also stated that the office would be wary of a large activity category that's reoccurring every year. Stating that programmatic biological opinions have a certain amount of “take” that's allocated to them and if we dump a category in that's going to require a lot of “take” resulting in exceedances just by the inclusion of one category, we may end up over using

Meeting Notes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative

July 19, 2021

7:00 p.m.

Board Meeting via Zoom

SLOPES and then not having them for other activities. If this is a large-scale operation that is reoccurring every year with a group of land owners that are having this similar issue, it may be best to address that in its own programmatic or something similar as opposed to tying it into SLOPES.

It was suggested that we contact Coeur d'Alene Corps of Engineers Office to further discuss the situation in more detail to try to come up with a solution that ensures that property is protected while also ensuring that the natural environment is maintained. William assured Dan that he is happy to participate in the discussions.

Christy, Ryan and William were thanked and Sue Ireland was introduced to provide the second presentation of the night on the current status of the Kootenai River Habitat Restoration Program efforts. That presentation can be accessed at [KVRI | KVRIID \(kvrriid.kvricollaborative.com\)](https://kvrriid.kvricollaborative.com) by scrolling down to the July 19th meeting block.

Sue gave an update on the Kootenai River Habitat Restoration Program saying that this program requires extensive coordination and permitting to implement. The program goal is to restore habitat conditions to support self-sustaining and healthy populations of native fish in the Kootenai River.

Sue described the reaches of the river and shared that they have looked at each of these reaches and the factors that are limiting the aquatic populations and put together reach scale objectives. They put together different strategies and treatments that are combined into a project and are grouped for construction and feasibility purposes. The goal is to affect limiting factors on a reach scale.

Sue recounted the history prior to sturgeon being listed as endangered in 1994 and of how the Tribe started a restoration program and a hatchery to put fish back in the river. Sturgeon have not successfully reproduced in the wild since way before the 1970's. Sue also recounted the lawsuit by The Center for Biological Diversity and the resulting action by the Tribe to develop and implement habitat restoration to help meet the missing attributes that the sturgeon needs and to help keep the lawsuit from negatively impacting the local agricultural community.

As a result, a master plan was devised that allowed for recognition that the Kootenai should be treated as an ecosystem, holistically.

Sue reviewed the goals and accomplishments for the Braided reach and shared the extent to which the work required cooperation with local land owners, as well as agency partners. Sue then shared information on the Meander reach, that prior to diking and draining, was home to a lot of wetlands and off channel and floodplain habitat, that is critical to the ecosystem and to the fish that live in that that part of the river. They are trying to determine ways to work with the needs of the agricultural community and others to see where it is feasible to have floodplains interact with the Kootenai River again to provide food and nutrients.

There's also several other agencies and entities and private land owners working together to do restoration in this region and it is hoped to partner with them.

Meeting Notes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative

July 19, 2021

7:00 p.m.

Board Meeting via Zoom

Different ecological nodes have been identified for projects in the Meander reach with one of them being the area where Elk Mountain Farms is located. They have identified eight sites for potential restoration, narrowed to four sites along the river. Gratitude was expressed to Ed Atkins and Don Allenberg for their assistance in that project formation.

Sue concluded with a brief overview of possible future projects.

Rhonda Vogl expressed her personal admiration for the work being done and the collaboration with property owners.

Chip Corsi asked if they would request a flow to make this work happen this fall like it has been with the projects in the past.

Sue answered that the work is will not be implemented until late September with the hope that things could dry out more in that area so that they are not working in really wet conditions.

They are not requesting any flow changes from the Corp. but will plan to work with them should a need arise.

Subcommittee Updates:

The U.S. Forest Service, regrettably, did not attend the meeting due to the severity of fires and threat of fires.

Rhonda Vogl provided a brief Westside Restoration Project update. Draft decision has been out since June 10/11th and is in the 45-day objection period that should end around the 26th. They are still working on the over snow travel plan. It was clarified that all meetings for the over snow have been internal.

Correspondence:

Trevor Anderson sent an email letting KVRI, among others, know that he has accepted the newly created Collaborative Program Supervisor position with the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. The new position will be responsible for attending statewide collaborative meetings as they relate to recreation planning. The email, in its entirety can be seen at [KVRI | KVRIID \(kvricollaborative.com\)](https://www.kvriid.com) by scrolling down to the July 19th meeting block.

Federal/State Agency Updates:

Karen Roetter, Office of Senator Crapo

Senator Crapo is continuing to work on having PILT (Payments in Lieu of Taxes) fully funded and he and Senator Michael Bennet of Colorado have headed up a bipartisan letter to the Appropriations Committee in support of full funding. This will be pushed pretty much the same as is done every year. Last year Senator Crapo was a cosponsor of the Feinstein bill, called the Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act, which is an emergency wildfire public safety bill that

Meeting Notes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative

July 19, 2021

7:00 p.m.

Board Meeting via Zoom

included a lot of really necessary forestry reforms including the harvesting of dead and dying trees and more controlled burns and a cotton wood fix this year. Their office is ready to work with her on that issue.

Jake Garringer of the office of Governor Little

Governor Little did declare an emergency for the state and mobilized the National Guard. The guard has been working with IDL over the past year to prepare for wildland firefighting and aircraft and personnel are available now. The governor encourages everyone to be mindful of the restrictions and recreate responsibly.

Christy Johnson-Hughes, U.S. Fish & Wildlife

Christy had no update

Chip Corsi, Idaho Fish & Game

Jeremy Gaffield is the new a grizzly bear conservation education officer replacing Brian Johnson. Brian retired after almost 30 years. Jeremy is pretty jazzed about being up there, in the community and is on the ground running.

Kootenai river recreation use last year was kind of a crazy year with Washington closed down. There was a lot of people moving across the border too recreate and things got so busy up at the Leona access that the agreement that was worked out with the landowner and with Montana fish wildlife and parks landowner was in jeopardy of falling apart. After talking to him it was agreed that he would give us and it another year. It appears that things are apparently way better this year so that access site is up and running.

So far, even with all the fires, bears are not piling out of the woods. (Chip added, knock on wood!) There was an instance with a moose up at Harrison Lake. The moose had been around last year acting overly friendly with campers and this year it is back. A guy shot it after it trampled his tent was chasing him around a tree. It was deemed legitimate self-defense.

Mark Reller introduced himself of Bonneville Power Administration. He is the liaison for Montana issues which include Burbot, sturgeon and bull trout. Mark wanted to hear Sue's presentation and was specifically interested in possible requests for changes in flows and/or operations. Chip asked the question about possible changes in flow operations which Sue answered and Mark voiced his appreciation for the work being done and satisfaction with the answer given.

Norm Merz of Idaho Fish and Game gave an update on the efforts of Idaho Department of Transportation saying that the Cultural Recovery is occurring in the new highway right-of-way at McArthur Lake. It should be completed by September 1. They are looking at harvesting timber in September in the right of way and adjacent to the highway later this fall or winter /spring depending on weather conditions.

Meeting Notes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative
July 19, 2021
7:00 p.m.
Board Meeting via Zoom

Dan Dinning closed the meeting at 8:26 and reminded attendees that no meeting is scheduled for August. Instead, KVRI Board members were invited to assist with the fair booth assembly followed by the dinner of Indian Tacos and Huckleberry Cobbler. Our next meeting will be September 20th.