

**Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition
Quarter 4 Board Meeting
December 14, 2023
6-8pm MT**

Flathead Valley Community College, Lincoln County Campus, Zoom



Participants

Board Members

Aubrey Bertram
Brooke Bolin
Dawain Burgess
Bob Castaneda
Tim Dougherty
Doug Ferrell
John Gubel
Ed Levert
Mark Peck

Board Members Not Present

Chuck Ekstedt
Tye Sundt
Jerry Wandler
Cameron Wohlschlegel

Juli Thurston
Tony Petrusha
Shawn Morgan
Phil Hough
Josh Letcher

Guests, Advisors, and Collaborative Support

Hannah Anderson, Facilitator
Jason Bray, FS, Kootenai NF
Michael Fieger, USFS
Nick Raines, Libby W.R. Grace
Steve Kimball, DNRC
Wayne Maahs
Senator Mike Cuffe
Winston Taylor, Senator Daines Staff
Ray Stout, Kootenai Valley Record
Brian Baxter, Kootenai Valley Record
Chris Bachman, YVFC

Meeting Objectives:

- Receive updates from the Kootenai National Forest, and engage in Q&A.
- Hear guest speaker perspectives on the Kootenai National Forest and it's importance.
- Vote on adoption of the 2023 Work Plan guiding document and proposed budget.
- Review updates from KFSC subcommittees.

Meeting Summary

Welcome and Introductions

Facilitator Hannah Anderson called the meeting to order and thanked participants for joining both in person as well as virtually via Zoom. Hannah prompted the Board members to introduce themselves. Non-board members were asked to introduce themselves as well, including the organization, agency, or interest they represented.

Kootenai National Forest Updates

Jason Bray, Kootenai National Forest, provided the following updates from the KNF:

- Hiring updates: new deputy forest supervisor, as well as about 11 new positions. Kristin Kaiser is leaving KNF to move to a different district. KNF is in the process for hiring replacement of that position.
- A wildlife biologist and new
- Edna Fortine: plan to have first project roll out next summer.
- Libby District: Flathead NF team came over to do a rapid assessment exercise studying Norman McCedar.
- Granite Snowshoe – new categorical exclusion category that allows treatment on up to 1000 acres.
- Montana Rights Protection Act – gave the ability for MT DNRC to trade out trust lands. KNF has started work on this at the regional office. Primarily affects Flathead, Kootenai and Lolo forests.

Discussion:

- Clarification on state led lands from the Forest designation. Land is held in trust with Tribe.
- Circlet project: looking at treatment just outside of the circle of authority, and doing an equivalent analysis as a CERCLA. But still navigating what it means to do that under CERCLA when it comes to fish and wildlife service, vs doing in not under CERCLA. Relates to managing fire spread, and fuels and forest management pieces as well which will be reviewed in greater detail later in the process.
 - Can the decisions of CERCLA authority be challenged?
 - Nick Raines: Not sure, that was part of the idea of looking at proceeding under CERCLA vs. not and how timeline/schedules would be impacted.

Guest Speaker, USFS

Michael Fieger provided an overview of the USFS Current and Future Program of Work, covering the following:

Current and Future Program of Work; Operation:

- Cabinet has been pretty quiet for the last few years and projects are now coming as sort of a flood gate. Had a challenging spring
- Mixing smaller and bigger projects in order to remain efficient and to progress work.
- Dry Creek Stewardship
- Purple Maten EA
- Minton Trout Natural Fuels Project

Current Analyses

- Pilgrim II SEIS - Court order to do additional environmental assessment.
- McKay Engle EA: in draft EA phase, to be released for public comment this spring.

Saw Creek HFRA Project

- Vegetation restoration, natural fuels, and WUI hazardous fuels project
- Purpose and need:

Information on the KFSC can be found at Kootenaifuture.org

- Build resistance and resilience
- Reduce hazardous fuels within the WUI and other at risk areas
- Provide forest products that sustainably contribute

Discussion:

- Saw good public engagement with Saw Creek and Flat Tail. Planning to directly engage stakeholders with field trips in June or July again. Story Maps and other tools have been effective for sparking interest and encouraging general public education and feedback.

2023 Work Plan and Budget Adoption

9/18 members in attendance = quorum.

2023 Work Plan Vote: 9/9 in favor. Work Plan is adopted as proposed.

KFSC Treasurer, Bob Casteneda provided context for this new vote, explaining that in the past, KFSC's finances were handled by outside agencies (WM, Lincoln Co.). Adopting this budget is a first step in the Board being its own entity through financial independence. Bob gave an overview of the items included in the budget noting that it prioritizes retention of facilitation services through TLG, expense related to the Forest Fair, and misc. printing. Finally, he noted that funding sources are currently expected which will cover the proposed 2023 budget.

Budget Vote: 9/9 in favor. 2023 Budget is adopted as proposed.

KFSC Committee Updates

Subcommittees reported out as follows:

- *Executive Committee:*
 - Doug: The EC has been pursuing a recent effort to update the KFSC website. The EC recently met with a communication and marketing coordinator. Phil and Doug are going to take the findings from this forward to audit the website for specific updates needed.
 - The EC has intention to continue keeping the full board membership included and appraised of EC work. Encouraged members to give feedback to EC, Co-Chairs or Facilitators on an ongoing basis.
 - Tim: Co-Chairs recently attended MFCN conference in Missoula. The conference was attended by approx. 100 people including LeAnn Martin, Regional Head of BLM, Chief of FS, and more. Offered opportunity to discuss difficulties and potential remedies and to get a better picture of collaboratives that are out there. Doug and Tim chaired a presentation on what it takes to gain collab approval and legislative efforts for conservation in public lands.
- *Education and Outreach:*
 - Recently presented to the Troy Snowmobile club, left map and materials. Open dialogue and well received, good questions.

Information on the KFSC can be found at Kootenaifuture.org

- Working on setting up some presentations with Chambers, and other groups. Continue to look for other community groups, asked for folks to reach out if they have any ideas for other agencies or groups to present to.
- *Grants and Funding:*
 - Applied for MFCN grant. On track to be covered for 2023.
- *Recreation:*
 - Currently working on south lower fork plan. They presented to County commission yesterday. Working on a couple different projects and looking to get a bit more involvement from KFSC rec committee. Please reach out to Tony or Brooke if you have any ideas.
- *Legislative:*
 - Going to meet in January which coincides well with end of legislative session. TBD more info.
- *District Subcommittees:*
 - Three Rivers – Tim: Going to miss Kristen Kaiser’s leadership. That being said, new project is Pleasant Pheasant. Initial scoping has not yet been released. Next order of attention will be: Ripley, Knotty Pine, Black Ram.
 - Libby - Ed & Bob: Ed talked with Nate Gassman today about McCedar. The district will be taking it back over in January, and is suggesting another field trip with the KFSC this coming spring. Talked about Whipple sale, Rainy Creek, and another project on the reservoir. 4k acres of commercial preening, 5 miles of drainage has been awarded.
 - Cabinet - Shawn & Doug: Not much to add in addition to Fieger’s presentation.
 - Eureka – Tye: Tye and Cameron have a comment letter prepared to send to the NEPA coordinator. Was reviewed by EC and will be sent to general board before submitting. There is a large noncommercial component and agency is looking at alternative funding for that work.

Mark Peck discussed the MOU between the County, NRCS, and Forest to jointly plan for projects in the WUI/urban interface. He talked about the good neighbor agreement specific to the Kootenai which authorizes the state of Montana to work on 10k acres through the good neighbor. He shared how pleased Lincoln County is with the coordination, direction and inertia of recent work especially given that everyone is severely understaffed. He noted the Granite Snowshoe project as a perfect show of how to get things moving fast.

Mark shared that the Port Authority Board will meet the following Monday, at which there will be two different proposals for some pretty major projects. One is coming out of South Korea to primarily wood energy.

Next Steps

Action items before next meeting:

Action item	Responsible Party
Meeting Minutes	Facilitator
Website Updates	Co-Chairs and Facilitator

Information on the KFSC can be found at Kootenaifuture.org

Topics for the next meeting agenda:

Action item	Responsible Party
Board Member Vote Cycle	