

Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Collaborative

Board Meeting

June 15, 2023

6:00 - 8:00PM

Flathead Valley Community College, Lincoln County Campus



Participants

Board Members

Brooke Bolin
Dawain Burgess
Tim Dougherty
Chuck Ekstedt
Doug Ferrell
John Gubel
Phil Hough
Josh Letcher
Ed Levert
Wayne Maahs
Cameron Wohlschlegel
Nick Raines

Jerry Wandler

Guests, Advisors and Collaborative Support

Hannah Anderson, Facilitator
Tracy Ortiz, Facilitation Support
Chris Bachman, YVFC
Robyn King, Former KFSC - Yaak
Andrea, Center for Biological Diversity
Ray Stout, Reporter
Jake, Forest Service Employee
Chad Benson, Forest Service
Wayne Kazworm, US FWS
Wayne Johnson, Retires FS
Steve Howke, Office of Congressmen Zinke
Scott Schingledecker, Western News
Brian Baxter, KVR
Pat McCloud, Resident, Friends of Scotchmans
Member
Nate Gassman, District Ranger Libby

Board Members Not Present

Aubrey Bertram
Morgan Shawn
Juli Thurston

Meeting Objectives:

- To convene KSFC Board Members for the 2nd quarterly board meeting
- To engage in a panel style discussion with select speakers on the topics of Grizzly Bears and Road Management
- To hear updates from the board sub-committees

Meeting Summary

Welcome and Introductions

Facilitator Hannah Anderson called the meeting to order and thanked the 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. Co-chairs Tim and Doug announced that the Board held an executive session prior to the public Board Meeting.

The Facilitator reviewed the agenda for the evening which proceeded as follows.

Kootenai National Forest Updates

Chad Benson, with Kootenai National Forest, provided the following updates from the KNF:

- Searching to fill 70 vacant positions in the area.
 - wide spectrum of positions with a wide range of salaries.
- Moving forward with the snow NEPA process for the Access Travel Management Plan.
 - Launch of public meeting scoped to begin around July 10th.
- Black Ram Project.
 - Will be discussed in court on July 13th.
- Ongoing projects with hopeful decisions
 - Norman McCedar
 - Granit Snowshoe Fuels Break
 - OU3 Jackson Project
 - 2 Projects in Eureka
 - BMU4- they are close to the finish line on this one
 - Fire shed south of Troy- Trojan Defense
- Wildfire Crisis Strategy
 - Annual target to increase to 4,000, but there are already 7,000 acres of accomplishments
 - Shooting for upwards of 10,000 acres next year for treatments for our community

Grizzly Bears and Road Management

The facilitator and Bob introduced the panel discussion objective of developing a better understanding of the need for grizzly bear security through closures. It was noted that the 2023 KSFC work plan items include assisting the KNF with messaging the importance for public understanding of road closures and recent court rulings have stressed the need for the FS to analyze the effects of road closure violations.

Wayne Kasworm, Biologist, presented the following:

- Recovery plan, demographics, targets and metrics
 - Highlighting the importance of tracking females with cubs of the year.
- 2022 Statistics
 - Bear counts and bear presence
 - Significant improvements from previous years.
 - Mortality rates
 - Causes of deaths.
 - Known and unknown bears.
- Telemetry monitoring for population trends.
- 2023 field work plans.
- Cabinet Yaak genetic sampling goals.

Information on the KFSC can be found at Kootenaifuture.org

Discussion: The facilitator introduced the Grizzly Bear and Road Management panel, Wayne Kasworm (Biologist), Nate Gassman (Law Enforcement Officer), and Chad Benson (US Forest Service). Each panelist gave the board a brief two-minute overview of the work they do in the area and how it relates to the topic of discussion.

The discussion panel was opened to questions from the board and the public. Questions were as follows:

- Is there any data on bears killed in the wildfires?
 - Wayne: No bears were killed in the significant 1988 Yellowstone fire. Although, no bears were collared in the area. Only one known bear disappeared during the fire.
- Bear avoidance of roads was found in early studies. The result is the road does not kill the bear, but people using the road make it difficult on the bear. What does the panels take on that?
 - Wayne: We investigate home ranges, and we see what areas are impacted by roads/gated vs unloaded areas. We saw displacement of bears from roads, and even in the absence of mortality-bears started avoiding roads. They may still cross a road or be seen, but in majority they are using areas away from roads.
- Is there a penalty for violating a road closure?
 - Nate: Yes. Fines start around \$100 and may couple with other offenses.
- Can county law enforcement officers be given the authority to assist on federal lands?
 - Nate: Yes. They are not there to enforce violations of a person on the road but can assist us (LEO) when pursuing or citing someone for another violation and tack on citations as well. Parks also have a similar role – they are not able to enforce Forest Service law enforcement, but they can issue citations for something in their wheelhouse which can be added on too.
- Can Forest Service funds be used for Law Enforcement Officers?
 - No, the money given by the Forest Service is already allocated.
- Judge Christensen’s ruling that you must analyze effects of road closures seems to imply the need to obtain a large amount of data on how often that occurs and under what conditions. How do you analyze something you do not have information on? Do you have plans on obtaining more data in order to do that analysis?
 - Nate: Right now, the goal is to increase monitoring of roads to 70-80%. The plan is to continue working on the goal we have already set.
 - Chad: We are pretty advanced in our recording methods now compared to what they once were.
 - Wayne: Our crews all report these things too as we are out in the field. People want to be out there - both aging recreation populations as well as fire suppression crews. What is your perspective on the obliteration of roads instead of gates/ beams which people just go around - in terms of future uses for fire suppression?
 - Chad: We have tried that. We are also thinking about using fallen trees which are quick to move if needed by fire crews but a real deterrent for nefarious actors.
- When working with a BMU, the agency will do what is called a corner swap - cut off access on certain roads in order to access other parts of that BMU - what are your thoughts?

Information on the KFSC can be found at Kootenaifuture.org

- Wayne: That was the point - keep a corner to remain in place for 10 years, so bears can learn or relearn to use that area and recognize its largely free of motorized use. "corner-swap theory".
- Chad: Was it ever talked about treating certain areas with opening for food but closing and using core?
 - Wayne: We can replace acreage in core areas with closure areas.
- A few years ago, the Pilgrim Creek lawsuit was filed in the Cabinet, that argued that road closures were not sufficient for bear management. There was a common sense suggested approach to have motorized users display plates, and LEOS could host camera systems. That way when we catch them, we could fine them significantly- \$5,000.00 as opposed to \$100.00.
 - Bob: How do we get people with this recent wave of litigation, like Ripley, to know what they could be causing? They might not have any idea they are affecting these projects. Is there a way we can tie the importance of people understanding and reason for road closures? It would mitigate this contentious nature of litigation in courts.
 - Chad: The idea of completely rolling up the road as totally unusable, people do not even get to have that mistake.
 - Tim: IFG has "Bear Ambassadors" - the group does public involvement to educate people on bears, an example would be informing the public about what they are doing to train bears to go for chicken coops.
 - Wayne: There could be positions which promote education and living in bear country. That has been Montana's approach.
 - Nate: If you are on a vehicle, it must be licensed and/or registered with a sticker. Maybe we just have a need for proper/severe punishment for not having the proper license or registration.
- Humans have caused bear mortality -- were those tied to someone associated with being behind a closure?
 - Wayne: For example, well, we know we have a dead bear and a bullet - it is harder to know who did it, whether near an open or closed road. Though they are typically closer to open roads, yes, bears die as a result, but catching people is more difficult on closed roads, those deaths could be associated with people violating closures in a non-motorized fashion. We close roads to reduce the mortality rate for bears.
- Nick: How are citation ranges and rates set? Is it across the forest system, region wide, etc.? Is it easy to change those?
 - Chad: The determination is done high up because of a need to tie it to the definition of violation.
- What can KFSC do to help?
 - KFSC could get more Op-Eds explaining the challenges of bears. It could be more effective and different than those that could come from a federal group.
 - Wayne: Encourage Montana Fish and Wildlife to change rules for getting licenses - write them a letter?

Facilitator thanked the panel.

Committee Updates

Each committee provided a brief report on their efforts over the last 6 months.

- Education and Outreach
 - Over the last 6 months the group has made a ton of good presentations to snowmobile groups, LORA, recreational riders, commissions in the area, and have many others planned.
 - Forest Fair Sept 22nd
 - Look out for informational emails
 - .
- Funding
 - At the start of the year the goal was to raise \$20,000.00. The group is close to that.
- Recreation
 - Flowers Crick Snowshoe Trail- is still out there, getting into analysis
 - Discussion on E-Bikes
 - Will send out reaction survey, and KFSC can send this out to our mailing list.
- Legislative
 - Formal proposal being prepared
 - Board members are welcome to join the meeting if they are interested in the topic.
- District subcommittees
 - Cabinet District
 - Trying to do 3 field trips this year and also involve more media.
 - Have many people interested in bird dogging this year
 - Libby -
 - Work with Nate in his district on these projects.

Meeting Wrap Up

The Facilitator informed the board and the public of the next meeting and asked for potential topics.

- Next Meeting September 21, 2023
 - Elections open

Next Steps

Action items before next meeting:

Action Item	Responsible Party

Topics for the next meeting agenda:

Topics	Responsible Party
Legislative Update	Legislative Committee
Elections	Executive Committee