

Idaho Panhandle Public Lands Initiative

Meeting Notes

November 14, 2024

Location

Community Resource Envision Center, 130 McGhee Road, Suite 220, Sandpoint.

Attendees

Alan Harper, Bob Hays, Brad Smith, Cynthia Rozyla, Ed Atkins, Emily Strizich, Glenn Patterson, Janet Torline, Jim Lea, John Becker, John Finney, Mike Lithgow, Olivia Drake, Pam Duquette, Paul Sieraki, Rob Lawler, Ron Korn, Rose Olson, Scooter Drake, Stan Myers, Susan Simmons, Tony McDermott, Turns East, Wyatt Tietz

Round robin discussion

- Each attendee was given five minutes to answer the following questions:
 - What would you like to see in a legislative package?
 - What issues or ideas do you have concerns with?
 - What opportunities do you see for compromise and agreement?
 - What can we learn from prior, unsuccessful efforts to designate wilderness or achieve other land management goals?
- Broad themes emerged and potential areas of agreement and disagreement were identified.

Land designations

- Some attendees expressed support for wilderness designation. While proponents of wilderness preservation generally focused on the three areas recommended for wilderness in the IPNF Land Management Plan (Salmo-Priest, Selkirks, and Scotchman Peaks) at least one person expressed support for designation of all areas in the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act.
- Wilderness designation was suggested as a way to preserve land, fish and wildlife habitat, and provide opportunities for a non motorized and non mechanized recreational experience.
- Others expressed concerns about wilderness designation. Some attendees stated that the 2018 Scotchman Peaks Advisory Vote did not go favorably for wilderness advocates because they failed to listen to the concerns of the community and were unwilling to compromise.

- Despite differing opinions regarding the value of wilderness, some attendees believed that there is room for compromise (The Kaniksu Winter Travel Plan was used as an example of what is possible). Potential compromises could include adjusting wilderness boundaries, designating recreation or special management areas to ensure access, opening new roads or trails, and incorporating provisions for active management and timber harvest in non-wilderness areas.

Access and recreation

- Perspectives on access and recreation covered the entire spectrum. Some attendees expressed frustration with road and trail closures and called for an increase in off-highway vehicle, over-snow vehicle, e-bike or mountain bike access.
- Other attendees expressed concerns about human-centered views regarding access and use, noting that it is important to consider the needs of fish, wildlife, and the overall environment.
- Attendees in the middle felt like there is room in the forest to provide recreational opportunities while providing for the needs of fish and wildlife.
- The lack of trail maintenance across the forest was seen as a problem for multiple user groups. It was suggested that perhaps the IPPLI could identify solutions to help address the backlog of trail and recreation facilities maintenance. One attendee expressed a desire to make an exception for the use of chainsaws to maintain trails in any areas that are designated as wilderness.
- One attendee suggested that revenues generated on the forest should be reinvested in recreational trails and facilities, which could be included in legislation.
- The potential benefits of exchanging state and private timberlands in the Selkirks for Forest Service land somewhere else was also briefly discussed. An exchange would help secure permanent public access to trails that start on or cross some of these state and private parcels, which could be closed by the land owner at any time.

Fish and wildlife habitat

- Fish and wildlife habitat was a universal concern, but some attendees differed regarding management approaches. For example, some attendees believed that active management is essential to the restoration and maintenance of fish and wildlife habitat (e.g. reducing tree densities to create more forage for elk). Others believe that natural ecological processes (such as wildfire) will provide for the needs of species.
- Some attendees believe that wilderness designations or other restrictions could prevent efforts to restore or maintain habitat, while others felt that preservation of habitat through wilderness designation is needed in light of the amount of acres that have been impacted by development.
- Attendees generally agreed that the IPPLI's deliberations would benefit from the input of biologists, scientists, or other specialists.

Forest management and timber harvest

- Some attendees expressed frustration with the condition of the forest and encouraged more active management to address fires, fuels, insects, disease, and species composition. They suggested that ‘mandates’ are needed to ensure active forest management and to provide a dependable supply of wood for local timber mills.
- Another set of attendees felt like the national forests have been too heavily impacted by timber harvest and development, and ‘recovery’ is needed to save species from extinction.
- Folks in the middle thought that natural processes should be the predominant management paradigm in roadless areas and wilderness areas, but generally agreed that MA 6 and the wildland urban interface are appropriate places for active management and timber harvest.

Facilitation

- Some attendees reiterated the need for a facilitator. A single proposal for facilitation was received with an annual cost of \$52,000. Despite grant-seeking efforts, no funding source has been identified. Participants were encouraged to pass on potential grant opportunities.
- While suspending meetings until a facilitator is secured was suggested, most attendees agreed that doing so would risk losing momentum.

Next steps

- Attendees agreed that it would be useful to have a presentation about the IPNF Land Management Plan at the next meeting.
- The group also decided to discuss the potential formation of subcommittees at the next meeting based on geography or other factors.