

Idaho Panhandle Public Lands Initiative

Meeting Notes

February 13, 2025

Location

Boundary County Annex, 6566 Main Street, Bonners Ferry, ID 83805

Attendees

Alan Harper, Bob Hays, Brad Smith, Carson Morter, Chuck Roady, Dave Wattenberger, Ed Atkins, Ellen Sanford, Emily Strizich, Erik Olson, Erik Sjoquist, George Gehrig, Glenn Patterson, Jacob Heinrichs, John Becker, John Finney, Les Pinkerton, Matt Kramer, Meryl Kastin, Mike Lithgow, Mike Ripatti, Olivia Drake, Pam Duquette, Phil Schwuerle, Rod Barclay, Roger Morter, Rose Olson, Scooter Drake, Stan Myers, Susan Simmons, Tony McDermott, Trevor Schneider

Grizzly Bear Access Amendment

- An overview of the Grizzly Bear Access Amendment was presented. This amendment, found in Appendix B of the 2015 IPNF Land Management Plan (pages 151-155), places limits on motorized access in areas of the forest where grizzly bears are present.
- The slideshow used for the presentation is available on the IPPLI website.
- A map illustrating grizzly bear management units, road restrictions, and grizzly bear habitat is also posted on the website.

Upper Priest River Watershed

- Participants resumed discussions on the Upper Priest River Watershed and potential additions to the Salmo-Priest Wilderness.
- Some attendees stated they would only support wilderness designation under the following conditions:
 - Big game habitats are excluded from the designation.
 - Legislation includes mandates for timber harvest.
 - Motorized access to the forest is increased.
- A specific suggestion for expanding motorized access was shared, proposing that Bog Creek Road be opened to public use, allowing travel across the northern tier of the Selkirks between Bonners Ferry and Priest Lake.
- A representative of the ranching community noted that public access via Bog Creek Road from July 15 to September 15 could occur without disrupting grazing operations in Grass Creek and Cow Creek.

- A clarifying question was raised about whether side and arterial roads should also be opened, citing potential impacts on wildlife, particularly grizzly bears. Proponents clarified that side roads could remain closed.
- Discussion also covered designating specific areas for mandated timber harvest and setting an annual timber sale volume. A representative of the timber industry suggested that instead of designating specific areas, it would be more effective to set a volume goal for the entire North Zone, covering the Sandpoint, Bonners Ferry, and Priest Lake Ranger Districts.
- A proposal was shared to designate the Upper Priest River from Upper Priest Lake to the US-Canada border as a Wild and Scenic River, as outlined in the 2015 Land Management Plan. This designation would provide some protection to the river corridor while allowing mountain bike use to continue on Trails 308 and 28. The proponent also suggested including the land between the river and Road 1013 in the upper half of the corridor.
- The need to engage residents of the Priest Lake community and solicit their input on the Upper Priest River Watershed was recognized.

Selkirk Mountains between Harrison Peak and the US-Canada Border

Potential Land Exchanges

- A suggestion was made to explore a potential land swap involving alternating sections of state and private lands in the Selkirks, which are intermixed with Forest Service lands in a “checkerboard” pattern.
- One proposal would involve exchanging private timberlands in the West Fork Smith Creek, Myrtle Creek, Snow Creek, and Caribou Creek drainages for Forest Service lands in the Purcell or Cabinet Mountains, where Molpus and Manulife own more alternating sections of private timberland. This exchange would allow landowners to consolidate their holdings in the Purcell and Cabinet Mountains, while enabling the Forest Service to consolidate its holdings in the Selkirks.
- Similarly, the State of Idaho could exchange its timberlands in the Selkirks for Forest Service lands in the Cabinets, where the Department of Lands has other properties. This would help the State consolidate its holdings in the Cabinets while allowing the Forest Service to unify ownership in the Selkirks.
- Additionally, there are small privately held parcels in the West Fork Smith Creek drainage, and the need to engage these landowners was recognized.
- Any land swaps would be strictly voluntary, but potential benefits include:
 - Consolidation of ownership, leading to more efficient land management.
 - More consistent forest management across uniform ownership patterns.
 - Securing permanent public access to trails currently located on state or private land.
 - Increased protections for endangered species habitat in the Selkirks.

Potential Selkirk Wilderness

- A potential wilderness designation in the Selkirks was presented and discussed. The Forest Service's 2015 Land Management Plan recommends designating a wilderness area that includes the Long Canyon and Parker Creek drainages, along with a narrow portion of the Selkirk Crest extending south from the upper end of Long Canyon to Harrison Peak, including Myrtle and Two Mouth Lakes.
- The proposal presented at the meeting expands on the Forest Service's recommendation by also including Bottleneck Lake, Snow Lake, Ball Lakes, Pyramid Lake, Trout Lake, Cutoff Lake, and West Fork Lake.
- Some attendees stated they could not support a wilderness designation larger than the Forest Service's recommendation, while others advocated for a smaller wilderness proposal.
- Over-snow vehicle users expressed concerns about the proposal, particularly the prohibition on motorized access to high-elevation areas. A suggestion was made to create corridors across the Crest to allow over-snow vehicle users to travel between Priest Lake State Forest and Bonners Ferry.
- West Fork Lake was specifically identified as an area that should not be designated as wilderness, as its terrain and snow conditions make it an ideal location for over-snow vehicle recreation.
- Representatives of the agricultural community in the Lower Kootenai Valley requested a buffer between the wilderness boundary and private property along Westside Road to allow for forest and fuels management, reducing wildfire risk to landowners and property.

Next steps

- No decisions or votes were taken on any of the above items. The IPPLI will continue its watershed-by-watershed approach, discussing new ideas, gathering feedback, and revisiting each watershed and issue in an effort to reach consensus.
- Additional outreach to the Priest Lake and Priest River communities is needed. Please share any contacts or suggestions you may have.
- The next meeting is scheduled for **March 13th** from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the **Community Resource Envision Center** in Sandpoint. The agenda will focus on the West Cabinets and Scotchman Peaks, including the Trestle Creek and Lightning Creek drainages.