

# Idaho Panhandle Public Lands Initiative

## Meeting Notes

April 17, 2025

### ***Location***

Mugsy's Tavern and Grill, 7161 Main Street, Bonners Ferry.

### ***Attendees***

Bob Hays, Brad Smith, Ed Atkins, Emily Strizich, Glenn Patterson, Jake Garringer, Matt Kramer, Olivia Drake, Pam Duquette, Rose Olson, Russ Schenk, Scooter Drake, Stan Myers, Susan Simmons, Tony McDermott, Trevor Schneider

### ***Northern Selkirks***

- Representatives of over-snow vehicle (OSV) users presented an alternative wilderness proposal for the Selkirks that includes Long Canyon, Parker Creek, and the upper end of Smith Creek, extending past the last section of private property.
- This proposal differs from the Forest Service's recommended wilderness boundary by excluding Myrtle Lake, Myrtle Peak, and Two Mouth Lakes. These areas were excluded to preserve east-west OSV access over the Selkirk Crest, specifically between Ball Creek and Lion Creek on one route, and Myrtle Creek and Two Mouth Creek on another.
- When asked whether Myrtle Lake could be included in the wilderness boundary, OSV users responded affirmatively, indicating that maintaining the connection from Myrtle Creek to state lands via Two Mouth Lakes was more important to them than the Ball Creek to Lion Creek route.
- OSV users were also asked whether they would support including West Fork, Trout, Pyramid, and Ball Lakes within the wilderness boundary. They stated that while some additions—such as Fisher Creek and certain backcountry lands north of the Forest Service's recommended boundary in Smith Creek—could be considered as trade-offs, they would oppose the inclusion of Pyramid, Ball, and West Fork Lakes in the wilderness designation.

### ***Upper Pack River***

- The Upper Pack River has long been an area of significant interest to both wilderness advocates and over-snow vehicle (OSV) users.
- The portion of the Upper Pack River that includes Chimney Rock, and Harrison, Beehive, and Fault Lakes was recommended for wilderness designation in the Forest Service's 1987 Land Management Plan.

- In 1994, the Forest Service closed a portion of the Selkirk Crest to OSV use—from the upper end of Long Canyon to the West Branch of the Pack River—in support of caribou augmentation efforts.
- A 2005 court injunction affirmed and expanded the closure, restricting OSV use on approximately 200,000 acres of Forest Service lands in the Selkirks. While the injunction remains in effect, it is expected to be lifted when a new Winter Travel Management Plan goes into effect in winter 2025–2026.
- In the 2015 Land Management Plan for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests, the Forest Service removed the Upper Pack River from recommended wilderness, responding to public interest in restoring OSV access. Instead, the area was designated as a “Primitive” Management Area. While the 2015 Plan acknowledges the area’s wilderness characteristics, the Forest Service chose not to recommend it for wilderness due to strong public desire for OSV use.
- The forthcoming Winter Travel Management Plan, expected to take effect in winter 2025–2026, will implement this direction and open the Upper Pack River to OSV use from November 15 to March 31.
- A proposal was presented to designate the Upper Pack River as a Recreation Area. Under this proposal, the area would be managed like wilderness, with two exceptions: OSV use would be permitted from November 15 to March 31, and the use of motorized tools for trail maintenance would be allowed.

### ***Recreation fund***

- A proposal was shared to establish a recreation fund through federal legislation.
- For a period of ten years following the passage of the legislation, revenues generated from timber sales and other activities on the Bonners Ferry, Priest Lake, and Sandpoint Ranger Districts would be deposited into the fund.
- The fund would be used to support the maintenance and construction of recreation trails and facilities.
- An advisory council, composed of diverse community members, would be created to advise the Forest Service on how to allocate the funds. Funding would be made available to governmental and non-governmental organizations through a competitive grant process.
- If successful, this proposal could serve as a model for other National Forest units across the country.

### ***Next steps***

- The next meeting of the Idaho Panhandle Public Lands Initiative (IPPLI) is scheduled for May 8th at the Community Resource Envision Center in Sandpoint. The agenda will include continued discussions about Lightning Creek, Trestle Creek, and the Scotchman Peaks.
- The June meeting is tentatively planned for Priest Lake, where the group will discuss the Upper Priest River and proposed additions to the Salmo-Priest Wilderness.