

Lake Pend Oreille, Pend Oreille River, Priest Lake and Priest River Commission Meeting MINUTES-
DRAFT

June 20, 2013 from 9 AM until 12 PM

Dover City Hall 699 Lakeshore Avenue Dover, Idaho 83825

Commissioner's present: Ford Elsaesser, Linda Mitchell, Craig Hill, Doug Conde, Erin Mader
(Coordinator)

13 in audience

9:15 am – Commence meeting

Ford Elsaesser welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Board voted to accept the 4/22/13 Minutes. Linda made the motion and Craig seconded it.

Jim Fredericks, Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), reported on the fishery studies currently underway on Priest Lake.

Jim explained that some people around Priest Lake became concerned this spring when IDFG started netting lake trout for research. There was concern that IDFG had begun a project similar to the lake trout suppression effort on Pend Oreille Lake.

Jim gave some history on the Priest Lake fishery. He showed that the fishery was once kokanee dominated, but in the late 1970's lake trout began to dominate the fishery. The mean size of lake trout decreased from 30 inches in the 1950s to 22 inches in 2003. IDFG does not know what the mean size currently is. Priest Lake had a world renowned cutthroat fishery until the 1950s and a great bull trout fishery until the 1970s. Kokanee was introduced in the 30s and became a huge fishery. Mysis shrimp were introduced in 1965 and it seems that they upset the balance that kept the fishery diverse even with lake trout in the mix.

The occasional lake trout was found in Upper Priest Lake in the 1980s and they were common by 1993. IDFG began experimental removal of lake trout from the Upper Lake in 1998. For the last 6 years lake trout have been removed from the Upper Lake, but new fish replenish the removed trout yearly. This project has been expensive and is not a long term solution.

IDFG embarked on a public input survey to help them to decide how to manage the Priest Lake and Upper Priest Lake fishery. The options they proposed were to discontinue suppression efforts in the Upper Lake and allow lake trout to dominate both lakes or to develop a lake trout suppression plan and seek funding to implement it. The survey results were divided. IDFG decided to take time to answer key questions about the fishery, develop a stakeholder group, and build a foundation for a long term solution in 2018.

This year, 2013, IDFG is collecting data on lake trout abundance, size and age structure, growth rates, and food habits. Just over four thousand lake trout were handled during initial trapping with 696 dying and 418 sacrificed for data collection.

Questions led to these points:

- There are people who believe the Priest Lake fishery should be left alone because Priest Lake has the last lake trout fishery in the area.
- The percentage of people fishing has declined over the years, but the number of people fishing has increased. Angling on Pend Oreille and Coeur d'Alene has remained consistent, but has dropped significantly on Priest (50,000 angling hours).
- The change in drawdown practices on Priest may have benefitted kokanee populations.
- The Kalispel Tribe is helping to fund the IDFG studies and the suppression efforts on Upper Priest Lake. This money is available as a result of the Fish Accords with Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). The Kalispels are aware that even with their funding it is possible that lake trout will not end up being suppressed.

Helen Harrington, Idaho Department of Water Resources, presented on the revised State Water Plan, the North Idaho adjudication of water rights, and the Washington State study that evaluated feeding Lake Pend Oreille water into the Spokane Valley- Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer.

Helen explained that water management in Idaho is defensive. The Department of Water Resources formed in 1964 as a defense against southwestern states eyeing Idaho water.

The revised State Water Plan was originally written in 1974 and last revised in 1994. It is a policy plan, as opposed to regulatory, although it does expect agencies to abide by the plan. The new plan has a different format including policy, narrative, implementation strategies, and milestones. The new plan also has enhanced basin sections that are more reflective of basin characteristics and focus on regional issues and policies. The Panhandle Basin section focuses on interstate aquifers; minimum flows; and navigation, fisheries and recreation.

Helen then touched on the Rathdrum Prairie Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan (RP CAMP). This document plans for Idaho, there is no authority for the CAMP board over Washington. This plan lists out three primary objectives for Idaho's management of the aquifer including meeting future water demands; preventing and resolving water conflicts; and protecting the aquifer. The CAMP is an effort to understand future water needs, encourage conservation methods and plan for the future which will all display Idaho's efforts to Washington State.

Helen talked briefly about the North Idaho adjudication. The adjudication is broken into three phases. Phase 1 includes the Coeur d'Alene and St. Joe watersheds, phase 2 encompasses the Moscow area, and Phase 3 includes the Pend Oreille and Priest watersheds. phase 1 is funded and currently underway with a projected completion date around 2016. After phase 1, the legislature will have to decide to fund the phase 2. The adjudication will give Idaho a better understanding of water use around the aquifer.

Helen explained that in Idaho the water in the aquifer and the water in the Spokane River are separate, but about six miles into Washington State the waters overlap. This means that when water flows get low in late summer the river can lose water to the aquifer which typically results in very low flows in the Spokane River for about two weeks. She also explained that in 2001 two applications for out of state water rights came in requesting large amounts of water to cool natural gas stations. This request was denied, but it raised the question “how much water is in the aquifer and how does it move through the aquifer?” Idaho, Washington, and the USGS worked together to create a model of water movement through the aquifer. This model was then used separately by Washington State to do a study to answer the question “how can we enhance Spokane River flows using Lake Pend Oreille water?” The Director of the Department of Water Resources has clearly laid out requirements to follow for large out of state water right requests. Before that water right would be granted the water quality impact to the aquifer would have to be evaluated, as well as, other options that may exist to remedy the situation.

Questions and comments led to these points:

It is possible that the adjudication will show that there is a lot of unclaimed water flowing through North Idaho.

Single home wells do not need to be filed for in the adjudication process, but it would still be beneficial to do so. All surface water uses, including springs, need to be filed for.

Erin Mader, Coordinator for the Lake Pend Oreille, Pend Oreille River, Priest Lake and Priest River Commission, gave an overview of her activities of the 2013 budget year.

Erin gave a brief overview of the projects that she worked on this past year. She described her education and outreach projects, the invasive species projects she was involved in and some of the topics that she focused on researching this year.

There was a motion to change the name of the Commission to Pend Oreille Priest Basin Commission by Craig Hill, it was seconded by Linda Mitchell.

The following portion of the meeting was discussion.

Linda Mitchell stated her concern that there should be motorized use restrictions in Denton Slough to offer more protection to the western grebes that nest there. This topic was discussed and it was decided it could be mentioned to the County Waterways Board.

There was a discussion on creating a questionnaire for shoreline property owners to try and figure out how the drawdown impacts access and use of the lake. It was decided that Erin Mader would put together a questionnaire and try to get e-mail contacts from shoreline property owners to expand the reach of the questionnaire.

There was a discussion on what to do with the left over funds that are the result of Erin Mader being on maternity leave for most of four months this fiscal year. Representative Anderson questioned the

authority of the Commission to direct the use of those funds. The funds do not need to be used immediately so this question was put aside for the next meeting so that an answer could be clarified.

Meeting closed at 12:00 pm.