

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

March 26, 2014 from 9 AM until 12 PM

Bonner County Administrative Building Conference Room

1500 HWY 2 Sandpoint, Idaho 83864

Commissioner's present: Ford Elsaesser, Marc Brinkmeyer, Brent Baker, Craig Hill, Doug Conde, Ben Conard, Erin Mader (Coordinator)

45 in audience

9:08 am – Commence meeting

Ford Elsaesser welcomed everyone to the meeting and briefly introduced some of the topics on the agenda.

Board voted to accept the 12/13/13 Minutes. Craig made the motion, Doug seconded it.

Kathy Cousins, Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) spoke about the phasing, engineering, and timing of the Clark Fork Delta (CFD) restoration project.

Kathy explained that the project was broken into two phases. The work that will be done this year will focus on Area 3 in Phase 1. The rationale for starting with Area 3 is that there is currently funding for all of that area, Area 3 is the only part of Phase 1 that needs the water to stay down throughout the winter, Area 3 has the most erosion and there are no known cultural resources in that area.

Kathy described the roadways that will be built for the project. Some of the roadways will double as the toe of the future breakwater. She described the use of vegetation throughout the project. Kathy explained that rock bendway weirs will be used to bump the thalweg into the center of the channel, reducing erosion to the shoreline.

Kathy went over the timing of the project events. Permitting will need to be completed by the end of May. The plan is to begin posting signage and improving roadways in the driftyard in June. Monitoring pre-project conditions will start May or June. In July, staging of the project will begin in preparation for the winter construction stage in November through March.

Kathy described the website that is being developed as the connector to the CFD project. Visitors to the website will be able to see photos and learn about the delta over the last century. Interested volunteers can sign up to join in on monitoring, willow cutting, planting, and other events. The website is scheduled to go live by March 31st.

Questions following Kathy's presentation led to these points:

- The total acreage of the delta is about 5000 acres. The entire project will touch about 1200 acres.

- IDFG is the leader of the CFD project. The majority of the funding so far has come from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and Avista Utilities with each supplying three million dollars. The entire project is estimated to cost more than ten million dollars.
- IDFG has identified three contractors who are currently prepping bids. The contractors have the option of barging materials in starting on July 1st, or they can opt to use only trucking which could begin once the water is down. Bids will be turned in by May 5th and decided upon by May 9th.
- It is currently known that 12 to 15 acres of the delta are eroding each year. In Area 3 as much as 8 feet of land can be removed each year.
- Both the upstream and downstream dam operations impact erosion in the delta. The biggest eroding factors are the big waves that pummel the front of the delta in the high water season.
- The Pack River Delta restoration project has been very successful with 46,000 vegetative recruits including a rare species. The 2011 flooding event added substantial woody debris to the islands.

Ryne Lineham, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), gave a brief update on the Pend Oreille River modeling being done in accordance with the Kalispel MOA.

Ryne gave a little background on the modeling work explaining that it is the result of an agreement between BPA, the Kalispel Tribe, and Bureau of Reclamation to work to improve bull trout habitat. The modeling explores whether modifications to dam operations could impact downstream river temperatures. Ryne explained that there were some retirements in the modeling department and therefore there are still no results to the modeling. The goal is to have results by June.

Ryne notified us that there will be a public meeting about Albeni Falls Dam operations from 6 until 8 pm on April 22. The meeting will be composed of an hour long presentation from the water manager and an hour for questions.

Questions following Ryne's presentation led to these points:

- BPA did not request to use flexible winter power operations this year
- The modeling could impact the September drawdown timing. If the modeling shows benefit from August drawdowns that will require an environmental analysis which will include a public comment period.

Jenna Peterson & Bill Maslin, BPA, presented on the National Environmental Policy Act portion of the Clark Fork Delta project.

Jenna explained that BPA is proposing to provide partial funding to the CFD project and they are completing the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project. The regulatory agencies involved in the project are Bureau of Land Management, Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Idaho Department of Lands. There are numerous partners aiding in the overall project.

Jenna explained that final NEPA decision should be released this spring. She went over the comments that were received from the public during the EA process. Most of the comments were supportive with

a variety of questions included. BPA is currently working through the comments before they can release the final EA.

Questions following Jenna's presentation led to these points:

- The project will be on schedule if the final EA is released by the end of May.
- If there was a finding of significant impact in the EA, an Environmental Impact Statement would be required. BPA does not currently predict that significant impact will be found.
- There will only need to be one winter season of full (2051') drawdown to complete the project.

Erin Mader, Lakes Commission Coordinator, summarized the lake level management concerns that are currently on the horizon.

Erin explained that the winter lake level on Pend Oreille in the future will most likely be 2051' unless an entity asks for something different. Kokanee spawning issues were the deciding factor for winter lake levels over the last decade, but recently IDFG has found that there appears to be no correlation between the winter lake level and spawning success.

Erin went over some of the pros and cons of the lower winter lake levels. Cons include less usable ramps (the only safe launch is in Hope at 2051'). At 2051' flexible winter operations can occur every year which may have recreational and ecologic impacts that are not fully understood. 2051' generally requires a more rapid fall drawdown which means a two foot drop as opposed to one foot by September 30. Pros include a greater area of Eurasian milfoil control from freezing in the drawdown area and increased power generation which impacts rate payers.

Erin pointed out that the winter drawdown level is generally requested by BPA, as well as, the implementation of flexible winter operations. Any entity can request another operation and the request will be evaluated by the Technical Management Team (TMT) at ACOE. She went on to explain that if this was the route chosen it would be wise to compile evidence of impacts for the TMT to use in their analysis.

Discussion/questions following Erin's presentation led to these points:

- Ford Elsaesser recommended that the Commission submit a request for only a one foot drawdown during the month of September.
- There was discussion of doing an economic evaluation of lake level impacts to the local economy. Erin Mader explored this idea with University of Montana. It would be an extensive and most likely expensive project, well beyond the means of the Commission.
- Ralph Sletager announced the unveiling of a lake association type of group that is interested in pursuing lake level issues and is currently soliciting support. The group is named the Lake Pend Oreille Alliance.
- IDFG does not foresee submitting any operating requests to BPA for fish and wildlife in the near future except to keep the water down for the CFD project.

- There was discussion of extending public launches to increase access opportunities to the lake and river at 2051'.
- Tom Trulock pointed out that his marina, Heitman Docks, is subjected to physical and economic damage from the winter lake levels and timing of drawdown. He also pointed out that he did not see the crack in the ice this year that would help to limit ice damage to docks.
- Erin will look into writing a request for slower September drawdown this year.

At 12:00 Ford motioned to go into Executive Session to consider employment options, and the members agreed.

No motions were made in the Executive Session.