

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

May 28, 2014 from 9 AM until 12 PM

Panhandle Health District Conference Room

322 Marion Street, Sandpoint, Idaho 83864

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

7 in audience

9:00 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 3/26/13 Minutes. Craig made the motion, Brent seconded it.

Chip Corsi, Idaho Department of Fish and game (IDFG), gave a brief IDFG update on local topics.

Chip explained that discussions with contractors have been occurring. One of the interested contractors worked at the Milltown Dam removal. This contractor showed how their available equipment could be used to do the project without barging which could keep costs down and leave more time for the NEPA process.

Chip stated that the kokanee limit had been raised to 15 fish in the region. In 2013 there were 1.25 million kokanee spawners and more are estimated for this year. This is a huge increase from the low of 5,000 spawners in 2007. Chip stated that mysid numbers are still low, but this phenomenon is not understood.

Chip stated that fish passage at Cabinet Gorge is gaining momentum. Currently a sorting facility is being built. A ladder will be built to a trap from which fish will be taken and sorted. Healthy bull trout, and, it is hoped in the near future, Westslope cutthroat, will be passed into Montana. By June a draft addendum to the 1999 Avista settlement is expected to direct construction of the ladder/trap, which may cost in the vicinity of 10 to 15 million dollars.

Chip updated the board on the fishery efforts at Priest Lake. A creel survey is underway along with a number of other fishery research efforts. Upper Priest Lake lake trout removal starts soon. He pointed out that kokanee numbers have increased at Priest (between 20-30,000 spawners in 2013), but not to the huge extent of Pend Oreille. Chip explained that Idaho Department of Water Resources decides the lake levels at Priest Lake.

Ford explained that water issues in the Pend Oreille Basin have changed over the last twenty years, but they continue to arise. He stated that he has always encouraged the community to form a stakeholder

group focused on water quantity issues. He introduced the Ralph Sletager and the “Save Pend Oreille Alliance” (SPOA).

Ralph Sletager, SPOA, introduced the Save Pend Oreille Alliance and encouraged people to visit the website at www.savependoreille.org.

Ralph explained that SPOA is a broad based stakeholder group including business and property owners, municipalities, chamber of commerce representatives, anglers and more. He stated that the SPOA is very supportive of the mission of the Lakes Commission. The SPOA’s mission is to defend the rights granted by Idaho State Code 67-4304 written in 1927.

Ralph explained that the SPOA is drafting a letter to be sent to all shoreline property owners informing them of changes that may be taking place on the lake levels of Pend Oreille. He said that the historic functions and operations of Albeni Falls Dam are at risk.

Ralph spoke of a number of the concerns of the SPOA. He spoke briefly about the Kalispel MOA stating that it was done without public input. He stated that the Columbia River Treaty Review (CRTR) violates NEPA requirements because NEPA requires a letter to landowners about the plan. He said that the CRTR sent a draft to the Department of State making it more difficult to add input, but not impossible. He questioned the three tiers stated in the draft and whether there is a supremacy issue.

Ralph stated that the SPOA would like the Lakes Commission to notify the U.S. Entity that the Lakes Commission would like to enter a comment to the draft recommendation for the CRT. The SPOA would also like the Lakes Commission to vote to support the SPOA.

Discussion continued raising a number of questions about the CRTR and the regional recommendation. It was decided that the Lakes Commission will host Jim Yost, who was the Idaho representative on the Sovereign Review Team for the CRTR, at a future meeting to help clarify the specifics of the Treaty.

Chip Corsi, IDFG, spoke about the concept of withdrawing water from the cold, deep waters of Priest Lake to feed the Priest River in the hopes of benefitting cold water fish species. The quantity of water withdrawn would be equivalent to natural flows. The Lakes Commission is planning a river trip on the Priest with IDFG for mid-July.

Meeting adjourned at 11:25 AM.