

Lake Pend Oreille, Pend Oreille River, Priest Lake and Priest River Commission Meeting MINUTES
December 15, 2015 8:45 am until 12:00 PM

Commissioner's present: Ford Elsaesser, Brent Baker, Craig Hill, Erin Mader (Coordinator), Molly McCahon (Asst. Coordinator)

40 in audience

Presentations

Joel Fenolio reviewed the Albeni Falls Dam operations from the past 2015.

Joel reviewed the September operations agreement between the Corps and the State of Idaho. These operations were achieved even with low flows throughout the summer. He talked a little about the record low snowpack, hot and dry weather and low flows of the past summer. He stated that Avista had to drop their flows below 4,000 cfs which is the minimum discharge that can occur from Albeni Falls. The winter operating range was reached on Nov. 16 in time for kokanee spawning.

Joel said that the winter operating range would continue to be held between 2051' to 2051.5' until around the New Year. After the new year flexible winter power operations may begin and the lake could fluctuate. The operating range for January and part of February would be between 2051' and 2054' because of a special situation this winter. From February through March it could fluctuate between 2051' and 2056'.

Dale Van Stone, Idaho Water Resource Board Member, gave an update on the Priest Lake water levels.

Dale explained that the Idaho Department of Water Resources owns, operates, and maintains Outlet Dam. He talked about the low water levels this summer and that the elevation of Priest Lake was maintained through the summer, but the flows coming out of the dam got very low feeding less than 40 cfs to the river. Recently the concept of modifying the dam has surfaced hold back an extra six inches of water has surfaced. This could keep flows into the river more adequate during low water years while also assuring the summer pool. The impact to shoreline landowners of an extra six inches of water is unknown. IDWR is interested in securing state funding to do a feasibility study to evaluate impacts of raising the lake six inches. It was mentioned that there are couple of areas of the lake in the southeast and north that will probably lose beach area. Dale requested that the Lakes Commission support the study through a letter to the legislature.

Craig Hill gave an update on the Thorofare between Priest Lake and Upper Priest Lake.

Craig explained that the recent wind storms have had huge impacts the Thorofare breakwater and multiple channels have moved underneath the breakwater creating a new discharge point into the lake. The main channel has silted in and now it is very difficult to get through in a motorized boat. Bob Davis from Elkins Resort stated that ten years ago navigating the channel was a challenge, but now we are in an emergency. Steve Klatt, Bonner County Waterways Director, said the County is applying for a permit to dredge the channel next winter. They are also seeking a state appropriation to fund rebuilding of the

breakwater which is estimated to cost in the \$750 thousand to one million dollar range. Craig requested that the Lakes Commission also write a letter in support of these projects.

Tim Swant and Shana Bernall, Avista, presented on fish passage and Total Dissolved Gas projects at Avista Dams on the Clark Fork River.

Tim briefly went over the 1999 settlement agreement for the FERC relicensing of Cabinet Gorge and Noxon Rapids Dams. Cabinet Gorge is just about a quarter mile in Idaho and Noxon is eighteen miles into Montana. The agreement designated 26 protection, mitigation and enhancement measures and involved numerous partners.

Shana spoke about the Native Salmonid Restoration Plan (NSRP). The NSRP examines five factors that may influence the success of restoration activities including genetics, pathogens, exotic species, native fish and distribution, and habitat. The genetic testing of bull trout at Cabinet Gorge Dam showed the fish very closely related to the bull trout upstream. Every five years Avista will help coordinate a basin-wide pathogen survey. Since 2013 an import permit has been required annually. This permit requires the testing of 60 bull trout for pathogens. In 2001 Avista moved the first bull trout over Cabinet Gorge Dam and it traveled to a tributary as hoped. In 2005 they moved fish around Noxon Rapids Dam. It is obvious that fish also want to move above Thompson Falls Dam as well. Each fish is genetically analyzed to decide where it will be released.

Avista is also transporting juvenile bull trout around the dams down to Lake Pend Oreille in an effort to benefit overall survival. This removes the predatory pressure that exists on the small fish in the reservoirs from walleye and Northern Pike.

This year was the first attempt at passing westslope cutthroat trout above Cabinet Gorge Dam. The management committee approved the transport of fifty tagged fish. They have been tracked anywhere from four to eight months and some of the fish moved into streams during their spawning season. Avista believes that they will get a MFWP import permit again in 2016 to move fish above Cabinet Gorge Dam. There will most likely be some movement of cutthroat-rainbow trout hybrids, but the hybrids are also found above the dams so this isn't a huge concern. There is concern regarding the IPN pathogen that was found at the old Cabinet Gorge hatchery site and in Spring Creek.

Ultimately, a goal is set to have an operational fish ladder to a trap at Cabinet Gorge Dam by 2019. The ladder will be located at the south bank of the dam with six entrances and 14 steps. After the fish swims up the ladder they will enter a holding pool where they will be crowded and lifted in a hopper prior to release into a fish transport truck. The fish will be trucked downstream approximately one mile to a fish holding and sorting facility. Bull Trout will have genetic testing completed and be hauled to the release spot that the genetic testing indicated. There is not a fish ladder at Noxon Rapids Dam at this time.

Tim spoke about the Total Dissolved Gas (TDG) modifications to Cabinet Gorge Dam that are being evaluated. High levels of TDG can cause gas bubble trauma in fish which can be lethal at high levels. He explained that the standard for TDG is 110%, but levels in lower Clark Fork River during high spring runoff have reached 149%. Avista looked at re-opening the two diversion tunnels but found that they

could not reach the reductions they needed with that method. In a new attempt to reduce TDG Avista built baffle blocks on spillway 2. This was very effective at dissipating energy and thus reducing TDG . Two additional spillways were modified this year and if river flows are high enough Avista personnel will test their effectiveness. If the modifications are successful in reducing TDG levels, baffle blocks will be installed on two additional spillways next year. This project needs to be wrapped up by 2018.

Ross Lane gave a presentation titled "Running a Safe Railroad in the Pacific Northwest" for BNSF Railways.

Ross introduced himself as the Director of Public Affairs in the Spokane office for BNSF. He gave a little history on BNSF. BNSF is an accumulation of almost 400 railroad companies over the last 160 years. It competes with Union Pacific as the biggest railroad company moving one fourth of the nation's rail freight. He also noted how fuel efficient rail transport is moving a ton of freight 500 miles on one gallon of gas.

Ross spoke about BNSF's commitment to safety with a strategy that includes three legs: prevention, response and mitigation. He pointed out that 99.9989% of all BNSF hazardous shipments ("key trains") reach their destination without a release caused by train incident.

Ross went over the different fuel cars used for High-Hazard Flammable Trains (HHFT). As of Oct.1 2015 all new HHFT tank cars must increase their thickness to 9/16 inch steel, have thermal protection, have jacketing with minimum 11-gauge steel and weather-tight, and a ½ inch thick full-height head-shield. He went over the deadlines for retrofitting of older tank cars.

Ross explained that BNSF has about 13,000 active bridges with over 300 miles of bridge. He described the rules of the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Railroad Administration for bridge safety. He also mentioned that BNSF's inspection program always meets and often exceeds these federal requirements. He said that 99.9995% of all rail bridge miles are traveled without any service interruption and that no derailments have been caused by a failure of the structural integrity of a bridge.

Ross went over the emergency response activities of BNSF. BNSF supplies shipment information to first responders per request. They have also provided a nationwide inventory of resources for 212 "Key Route" emergency responders at 60 locations across their network. These places have many different emergency supply kits. Ross described the practiced geographic emergency response plan that was done this fall at the Dover Marina. They plan to do future trainings two times a year.

Luke Russell and Doug Stiles, Hecla Mining, presented on Hecla and the proposed Rock Creek Mine.

Luke started by giving a little background on Hecla Mining. Hecla has been in business for 125 years. They have operated the Lucky Friday Mine for seventy years and are currently extending the shaft for another anticipated thirty years of operation. He explained that Hecla has strong operating and technical expertise and also strong financial assets. Hecla continues to innovate and better the mining process. Currently they are working on the development of tele-remote drilling and mining which would put fewer bodies in the mine which would drastically improve safety. He also described some of

Hecla's charitable work investing about 1.5 million dollars in people and their communities. Hecla acquired the Rock Creek project and Troy Mine in June of this year. Troy Mine has closed for good because the ore body is no longer worth the cost of mining it. Its reclamation will be overseen by Doug Stiles.

Luke described the similarities of Hecla's Greens Creek project near Juneau, Alaska to the Rock Creek project. Green' Creek is in a National Monument. Rock Creek is anticipated to mine under a proposed Wilderness Area. The mining techniques are similar between the projects with Greens Creek using the underground cut and fill method and Rock Creek will use the underground room and pillar method. He explained that Greens Creek has had citizen involvement through a committee and Rock Creek also has involvement through their Environmental Stewardship Panel. Greens Creek uses the dry stack method for the tailings and Rock Creek is planned to use a paste method both which involve dewatered tailings. Both mines are in endangered grizzly bear habitat and have listed species of fish in surrounding waterways. He also mentioned that the Greens Creek project has needed more than 85 permits for operation.

Doug Stiles gave a brief history of the Rock Creek project which was permitted in 2001, but the Record of Decision was remanded by the court in 2010 for NEPA issues. The Supplemental EIS is projected to come out in February of 2016. It will address four main issues: complete identification of riparian habitat conservation areas; schedule for implementation of sedimentation reduction measures; supplemental information report required to comply with NEPA; and review latest available project information. He explained that there are two planned phases to the project with the first including site development and construction of the exploration adit. Phase two will include construction of the other adits and operation and production of the facility.

Doug described the location of the mine and showed computer generated images of how the tailings mound would appear over the thirty years. The tailings area will cover 335 acres and when completed it will be about 300 feet tall. He explained that paste mounded tailings are about 70 to 80 percent solids as opposed to about 40 percent solids for traditional liquid tailings. The foundation of the tailings area will be primarily impermeable with any permeable sediment sealed with clay. There will be a seepage collection system that will go to the treatment facility. The final design must be approved by a high level independent review panel and it must comply with 2015 Montana tailings legislation.

Doug went over the water quality protections that Hecla has planned for the Rock Creek project. He explained that a multi stage water treatment facility will be built to process all discharged water and some stormwater. In phase one of the project there will be no surface discharge. The previous geochemistry results showed that the mine would not be acid generating. The discharge in phase two must meet strict drinking water and aquatic standards. He explained that before any construction begins the mine is fully bonded for the USFS and the state to reclaim if needed. Doug responded to questioning that the only organic products are used in the processing of the ore including mainly pine oil.

Board decided to host a conference call the following week to vote on issues that could not be voted on due to a lack of quorum. Meeting adjourned at noon.