

Lake Pend Oreille, Pend Oreille River, Priest Lake and Priest River Commission Meeting MINUTES
March 31, 2016 9:15 am until 11:30 am

Commissioner's present: Ford Elsaesser, Brent Baker (on phone), Craig Hill, Karen Cathey, Doug Conde, Erin Mader (Coordinator), Molly McCahon (Asst. Coordinator)

48 in audience

Presentations

Dale VanStone, Idaho Water Resources Board member, updated the Commission on the projects at Priest Lake. Dale said that the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) met with the three northern Idaho legislators a month ago to discuss these projects. Everyone was in agreement that these issues need to be addressed. It was decided that Bonner County would be the lead on the Thorofare project and IDWR would lead the Outlet Dam and lake levels projects. The goal is to have the results of studies on both lakes presented at the December 2016 Lakes Commission meeting. It is likely that then the State will grant funding for completion of the projects. Dale informed everyone that the Northern Director of IDWR retired and Morgan Case has taken his place.

Dale gave a brief update on the IDWR adjudication process. The Coeur d'Alene basin is scheduled to wrap up next year. The Palouse is scheduled for 2017 and 2018. The Pend Oreille Basin will most likely start in 2019 with Boundary after that. He informed the Board that the Water Resources Board will be meeting in Sandpoint on July 22.

Steve Klatt, Bonner County Parks and Waterways, followed up on Dale's presentation with more specifics on the Priest Lake projects and an anticipated timeline. Steve explained that a steering committee is being assembled to help guide the project. A "request for qualifications" will go out for an engineering group that can do the studies, including a public comment portion, of the project. The goals of rebuilding a structure that serves the purpose of the Thorofare breakwater are to improve ecology, preserve water quality, and require minimal future dredging. This study will include an investigation of the structural integrity of the sandbar at the Thorofare. Steve laid out a hopeful timeline: RFQ will go out mid-April; engineer selected by mid-May; process underway by Memorial Day; public meetings in June, July, and August; report in October, and the project wrapped up by December.

Discussion topics addressed during public comment about the Priest Lake projects:

- The County will likely be receiving WIF dollars to dredge the Thorofare channel, but it will not be dredged until there is a construction plan in place. It will not be dredged this summer.
- The Priest River below Outlet Dam is not part of these studies.
- There is currently no funding for temporary work on the breakwater.
- The concept of a siphon from Priest Lake feeding cold water to the river is not part of these studies.

- Craig moved to approve the 12/15/15 minutes. Doug seconded the motion, *the motion carried.*

Brad Bluemer, Bonner County Weed Superintendent, gave a presentation on recent control projects on the invasive aquatic plant, flowering rush.

Brad started his presentation by explaining that there a diverse number of tools for weed management and you can't please everyone with any one tool. Brad described flowering rush explaining that it changes the ecology of a lake enhancing predatory fish habitat, it harbors swimmer's itch, it can outcompete any other plant including cattails, and it grows twenty feet deep. Brad pointed out that flowering rush is still not in Priest Lake. It was likely introduced through an ornamental garden because of its beautiful flower. One of the most distinguishing characteristics is its triangular stem with a white pithy center.

Brad described the control project underway in the Clark Fork Delta driftyard. This project will run from 2015 until spring of 2017. There are numerous partners in this project. The project was undertaken as a result of the effectiveness of Brad's dry-ground treatments in Oden Bay. Brad went into depth about the design of the project. The herbicides that showed notable control were imazapyr and imazamox. Sixteen quarter-acre plots were laid out with 20 foot buffers between plots. The herbicides were applied in the spring when the plants had started growing and there was a rain event within twenty-four hours of application. Samples of the treatment plots were taken in the summer of 2015 and will be taken again in spring 2016, summer 2016 and spring 2017.

The preliminary findings from the project have shown that there can be significant initial control of flowering rush, up to 98 percent. This control is impacted by the timing of application because the weather is very important. Treatment is most effective on growing plants that are not on slopes. Brad informed the audience that the County was hosting an evening meeting about flowering rush on April 11 featuring Dr. John Madsen who is one of the main researchers in this project. Erin Mader, Coordinator for the Lakes Commission, informed the audience about the volunteer flowering rush dig at City Beach on April 16.

Discussion topics addressed during public comment about flowering rush projects:

- These herbicides are available locally and online. You must follow the label on the herbicides. You do not need a permit to apply them to the dry ground, but the Idaho Department of Lands would like to be informed of these applications.
- Aquatic herbicides breakdown quickly when they do not have vegetation to attach to. Once a dry-ground treatment is flooded there is no detection of herbicide in the water.

Matt Corsi, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, gave an update on the Pend Oreille fishery.

Matt explained that the lake trout suppression on Lake Pend Oreille has successfully dropped the lake trout numbers and now may be the time for a reduction in netting effort. Matt then went over the kokanee status explaining that kokanee biomass peaked in 2013 at the same time that mysis shrimp

numbers crashed. The kokanee numbers have declined some, but they remain on par with pre-closure numbers from the 1990s. Egg counts show a record number of kokanee fry possibly entering the fishery in 2018, but it is hard to predict their survival.

Matt explained that counting rainbow trout is difficult and therefore they use a measurement of relative weight to analyze the population. There was a tremendous jump in relative weight of rainbow trout from 2011 to 2014. They remain skinny until they get big enough to eat kokanee (about 20 inches) and then they jump up significantly in weight. Westslope cutthroat have been found to be widespread in the lake with a reasonably abundant average of 1.8 fish per net caught during surveys. Bull trout remain stable and abundant. Matt then touched on the mysis shrimp counts. He explained that mysid introductions worked to create a trophy kokanee fishery at one Canadian lake which sparked their introduction in Pend Oreille in the 1960s. In Pend Oreille they have helped to prop up lake trout population and compete with kokanee for food. Their population crashed for unknown reasons in 2013, but the population appears to be rebuilding.

Matt explained that there was a one year angler creel survey completed from March 2014 through February 2015. The surveys showed that the total catch and catch rate was as good as it has been anytime since the boom in the 1950s before there was lake trout and mysis in the lake. Average catch rates were: 4.07 fish per hour (fph) for kokanee; 1.92 fph for warm-water; .83 fph for cutthroat trout; .46 fph for lake trout; .44 fph for rainbow trout; .37 fph for walleye; .28 fph for brown trout; and virtually no one was fishing for whitefish.

Matt described the kokanee spawning habitat enhancement project taking place for the last two Falls in Idlewilde Bay. This project will have one more phase that will take place this upcoming fall. Each phase involves placing spawning gravel along a band of shoreline from 10 to fifty feet deep. The strip where the gravel is being laid has significant upwelling which has shown to benefit kokanee redds. Large numbers of kokanee are spawning in this area since the project started.

Matt went over some of the projects and plans for 2016. The lake trout suppression program will continue with a two week reduction in the gill netting season. There will be hatchery stocking of kokanee with about 3 million early run kokanee and 7 million late spawners being stocked. There will also be a survey of the warm-water fish population in the Pend Oreille River. A research project studying the interactions of mysid shrimp and kokanee is underway as well. This project will look at the overlap in their diets, mysid impact on kokanee growth in a lab environment, and the performance of early verses late hatchery kokanee.

Discussion topics addressed during public comment about the fishery included:

- Kokanee are no longer stocked into Priest Lake because the lake trout eat them all. At one point in history IDFG was stocking one quarter of all the kokanee in Idaho into Priest and they were all being eaten before maturity.
- Lake levels used to be the dominant factor in the kokanee research project on LPO, but then IDFG learned that there was significant deep water spawning which allowed for success without lake level management for kokanee.

- Mysis shrimp are not impacted by the lake level. Regardless of the winter pool elevation they stay twenty feet below that level. Their population is controlled by food abundance and predatory pressure.
- IDFG does not expect to ever have the historic fishery of 1950 and before because of mysis shrimp impact on kokanee and the altered lake environment that has come with the dams.

Jon Kenning and Rainee DeVaney, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, presented on the proposed Rock Creek Mine discharge permits.

Jon clearly explained that a discharge permit is focused on the very specific act of releasing water into a stream. The goal is to put clean water into the waterbody. This project involves two permits: one is the old permit for the mine that gets updated every five years and the other is a new permit for road construction. Montana designates everything after 1993 as “new” and these permits have much stricter standards than the “old” permits.

They explained that Montana oversees its pollutant discharge elimination system (MPDES) program. This program manages for point source discharge, but stormwater is also managed through this program because when it comes out of a pipe into a waterbody it is a point source. He explained how limits are chosen for the discharge permits. Both technology based effluent limits and water quality effluent limits are evaluated and then an analysis compares these two limits and they choose the more restrictive limit for the discharge permit. Technology based effluent limits are limits set by what technology can produce and water quality effluent limits set limits according to the receiving waterbody conditions.

Discussion topics addressed during public comment about the discharge permits included:

- The sizing limits for the retention ponds are 100 year rain events for three of the outfalls and a ten year event for the outfall into Rock Creek.
- Mixing zones may be allowed after MDEQ considers whether it is appropriate. For outfall 4 there is a mixing zone allowed two times the width of the stream downstream. By this distance all water must meet water quality standards.
- Comments are due on the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the mine by April 19.
- There was a question asking whether the background data for the Clark Fork River has been evaluated since the breaching of the Mill Town Dam which released toxics from accumulated in sludge behind the dam.

Joel Fenolio, Army Corps of Engineers, gave an update on management of Albeni Falls Dam and lake levels on Pend Oreille.

Joel reviewed the lake levels over the course of last fall and winter. This was the first time that flexible operations were used for their desired intent by Bonneville Power Administration. The lake was drawn down to 2051’ through December 25, then filled in January and again in March with a high pool of 2054.7’. It was drafted back to 2052’ by today and now it will begin to rise with an anticipated April 30 level of 2055’.

Joel explained that the snowpack is at about 95% of average in the basin. Above average temperatures and below average precipitation are forecasted for this spring. These factors point towards a low flood risk and therefore a likelihood of an early fill. Currently the Corps is targeting 2060' by May 31 and full pool by June 15. This full date could bump up a little if it remains dry. Joel also pointed out that parts of British Columbia are above average for snowpack this year.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:34 am.