Lake Pend Oreille, Pend Oreille River, Priest Lake and Priest River Commission Meeting MINUTES
March 28th, 2019 9:10 am until 12:00 pm
Sandpoint, Idaho

Commissioner's present: Ford Elsaesser (Chair), Craig Hill, Darrell Early, Marc Brinkmeyer, Jason Flory, Molly McCahon (Executive Director). Darrel moved to approve the 11/2/18 minutes. Craig seconded, *the motion carried.*

Ford began by recognizing the PR Event Center and the Buck Merritt family who donated this facility to the community of Priest River for public forums and other events. Ford went on to say that this is an open public meeting for the Lakes Commission which is an advisory board with no enforcement powers. Ford announced the cancelation by PacWest.

Presentations

Logan Osgood-Zimmerman
Army Corp of Engineers, Senior Water Manager AFD

Last year we went above our maximum curve. We operate the top 11.5 feet of Lake Pend Oreille. April to July is refill season. Downstream the flood flow is 95,000 cfs outflow. This year, before January, Oct – Jan was really dry and warm – in the bottom 30%. In Feb the precipitation and snow pack were well above average and it was cold. Have heard there is more ice on the lake than you've seen in years. Most of snow in upper Clark Fork area. Looking forward, April – June above average chance of it being warm and a 50% chance of it being above or below. Snow pack 87% of average. 81% of average water year. Will begin refilling in a few weeks. Because it is a low water year we will target summer pool by mid-June. Logan announced a public meeting coming up April 23rd here. Ford asked about the high snow pack below our basin and how that will affect fish operations in the entire Columbia River. Logan replied that it shouldn't effect AFD Operations. Ford asked whether there was an attempt to conduct Flexible Winter Pool Operations this winter or if that ideas has faded from view? Logan replied that they actually did need it, but didn't use it and they used it last year twice. Ford asked whether the Clark Ford Delta Restoration projects with require to keep the lake low in the future. Logan wasn't sure. Q: How much cooperation takes place between agencies related to flood operations? Logan replied that there is constant cooperation.

Joel Fenolio
Bureau of Reclamation, Senior Water Manager Hungry Horse Dam

Joel reminded the audience that he used to have Logan's job with the Corp. He has been with the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) for a year now and one of the dams he oversees is Hungry Horse Dam, which is upstream of Albeni Falls Dam and is part of the Federal Columbia River Power System and feeds into Flathead Lake. HHD has control of 1600 square miles of the watershed. AFD 20,000 square miles. A lot of it is unregulated. So HHD operations influence 8% of the Pend Oreille Basin. Usually takes 2 week to a month for the water from HH to reach Lake Pend Oreille. There is approx.. 11-12 million acre feet of water that comes into Lake Pend Oreille unregulated. Of that 27 % comes from the Clark Fork, 53% from Flathead, only 15% comes from HH. So, not a lot of control from HH. Ability to produces a lot more power with a lot less water than AFD, but limited by power grid in the area. Primary uses are hydropower, flood management and fish and wildlife requirements just downstream at Columbia Falls and other flows that go through the Columbia System. Try to on control 1/3 of water coming through Columbia Falls. Winter months operate to Columbia Falls minimum. Jan – April. Currently the watershed surrounding HH is 93% water supply of average but will go down. Very low snow pack in Western MT. Hitting our bottom level about now and will start refilling April, May - don't see flood risk this year. Last year however we saw the 3rd largest snow pack since the 1950's. Started releasing more water in February to get reservoirs down before the spring freshet. 6,000 cfs Q: Is HH a top release or bottom release? A: It is a bottom release dam, but there is a spill hole at the top and can control the top 12 feet in emergency. Q: What is the temperate of summer releases? A: Not sure, likely 30-40 F. How do you coordinate for the Columbia River System? Whether we draft 10 or 20 from full depends on the water forecast. In May we will start discussions on flows for fish with the management team Q: You mentioned flood control is targeted at Columbia Falls? Is there any decision for flood risk bases on the rest of the system, ie; Lake Pend Oreille? HH has a little bit more control that Libby, but still doesn't control flows to LPO much. 1.6 million acre feet and because travel time is so long. Q: Is there a real risk to over drafting in the winter? A: If we drafted lower and we didn't refill we would risk not having flows for

summer. Q: Is there a recreation component on HH? A: Yes. Q: What are the priorities on HH? A: ESA takes the most, flood risk second, power 3rd, recreation lowest. Q: How many million acre feet of regulated flows feed LPO? A: 10.5 million acre feet of regulated flows.

Ken Bowens
Idaho Fish & Game
Walleye Incentive Program

Ken works with the Avista Mitigation Program for the Clark Fork Settlement Agreement. Walleye introduced illegally in 1991 into the Noxon reservoir and made their way into the LPO and POR and were first documented 2005/2006. Walleye are veracious predators, they are a fast growing fish and have a high reproduction potential. This gives them the ability to invade an ecosystem quickly. We know from gill surveys randomly done around the lake that they are doubling every 3 years. Abundance is still low but the doubling is very concerning. Similar to what we did with Lake Trout, which is the best metric we have, angling suppression tool. This incentive effort is different than some due to the fiscal uncertainty not knowing how many will be turned in. Also the potential for cheating by bringing Walleye from other waterbodies, exists. Walleye are present both upstream in MT and downstream in WA. There are 51 tagged fish...big money fish. Anglers won't know until the fish heads are submitted - worth $1000 a piece. Have to fish LPO to get them. Beyond that there are 10 drawings a month that are eligible for 100 dollars. IDFG is also interested in fish coming from Priest River or Pack River. Data slip is different than others: location and timing will have more emphasis. Increased the number of freezers, N. 40, Arny's in Kootenai, Sagle, Priest River. Q: Are fish tagged sterile? A: No. Comment: Mentioned that MT doesn't have a program for Walleye suppression. Q: What temperatures do Walleye like? A: They are a *cool* water fish, so in between trout and bass. Q: Wouldn't it make more sense to get more money in the program to really stop the spread? A: Want to understand and study as a pilot to see what sort of participation there is and how everything goes this year. Q: What would be your ask to MT? A: Want to know how many are coming down the system.

Andy Dux
Idaho Fish & Game
Priest and Upper Priest Lake Fish Management Plan

Andy provided an update on the recent history of planning for future management for Priest Lake and Upper Priest Lake. The State of Idaho develops Fisheries Management Plans for specific waterbodies and a new one came out for PL and UPL in 2019. The process for developing the plan involved looking at the current lake trout fishery and determining whether it needed to include a kokanee fishery and better support cutthroat. Poll showed 50/50 some liked the current fishery some wanted a kokanee fishery. Doubled down on research and formed PL Fish Advisory Committee in 2013 with goal to have that group help come up with ideas on how to manage. Group represented a lot of interests: kokanee fishermen, lake trout fishermen, businesses and agencies. Ultimately, the group set several management alternatives to take to the public for feedback. In 2017 group came up with 3 Alternatives. 1st - status quo: continue to manage as they have been for a stable lake trout fishery and continue to do lake trout suppression in Upper Priest Lake for native cutthroat and bull trout, 2nd - restore a kokanee population that could support harvest; lake trout suppression in both PL and UPL, 3rd - hybrid mixed species fishery; partial suppression of lake trout but kokanee would have a chance. 3 public meetings followed, social media, surveys; mail survey to random fish license holders, web based survey and an email survey. 5000 mail; 1000 back, 10,000 email; 400 back, online website 400 people filled out, and at public meetings. Overall heard from over 2000 people. We learned that numbers were pretty evenly split, but there wasn't an overwhelming desire for change and in order to seek significantly more funding for a change, IDFG would need overwhelming support for a change. IDFG will continue to suppress Lake trout in the UPL, but it is funding dependent. Public Comment and Questions: Q: what are you going to do about the lack of forage fish? A: can't support kokanee as a forage fish with lake trout in the system. Q: what are your concerns about changing rules for hooks on UPL related to Bull trout? A: Not concerned...LPO has an outstanding BT fishery under those rules. Q: Why is IDFG not obligated by law to protect bring back BT under ESA. A: One of our charges is to protect native species, but we also need public support in order secure funding in order to achieve that. A victory in this process for native species is the support we received for efforts in the UPL. Q: Why is there a limit on lake trout? A: in this case we heard that the public wanted to support the lake trout population, so will keep bag limit. Q: In your opinion how did small mouth ended up in PL. A: possibly before dam went in, possible illegal introduction. A discussion took place on funding sources for native species support and the need for it; USFWS has reprioritized.

Chip Corsi
Idaho Fish & Game
Priest River Cold Water Augmentation Update

Ford began by announcing that the Lakes Commission received letters of opposition to the PR Cold Water Concept from Donna Herak, Fred Enlow, and Peter Bock. Chip began by providing why this concept is being considered and what the concept is (not a project or proposal, just a concept.) IDFG has a directive to preserve and manage fish and wildlife for fishing and hunting opportunities and to make the fisheries better. PR has a TMDL and is impaired for temperature according to IDEQ. Chip explained that they are presenting to the Lakes Commission because the LC is directed to stay current on issues related to the waters of Pend Oreille Basin and how they pertain to native fish species, which is what this concept is about. Studied Idaho rivers and PR fish density is 2 orders of magnitude lower that other comparable rivers in Idaho. Studies over the years have determined that mountain white fish are the only game fish in abundance and that the trout fishery is poor. PR is an underperforming cold water fishery. Protecting native fish, improving water quality, trout habitat and fishing is the goal. Currently they only have an alternative assessment, which is not a plan, only an assessment. IDFG is very early in this process and are still in the conceptual phase. Looking at taking water from the cold water hypolimnion and find a way to deliver it to PR. Idea is to replace a portion of warm water that comes out of outlet dam with the cold water of the lake to make habit more suitable. Trying to get water from point A to point B. Concerns have been voiced about a pipe going down outlet corridor and we let engineers know that concept is not an acceptable approach. Cannot impede navigation, aesthetics, water quality or lake level. PR exceeds water temps for much of the summer and cold water species need to find cold water refuge in the tributaries, which tells us that temp is a limiting factor. Summer air temps and low water flows contributing. Portland State study shows adding cold water would buy the river up to 40 miles. Total volume use from the hypolimnion is very low -very unlikely to have an effect on hypolimnion. One alternative looked at using ground water instead of taking from the lake – would need enough water and power. Sport fishing economic survey N. Fork of CDA in 2011, which was a high water year and a light fishing year showed anglers took 15,000 trips @ $150 per trip. St Joe – short season -5,000 trips @ $340 a trip. Don't know exactly how much people would spend per trip to the PR, but took a conservative guess of 5000 trips at $150 a trip. Recognize that the first draft assessment didn't adequately address the concerns about aesthetics and so reevaluating. Don't have funds for consulting work or for construction. Alternative analyses should be out sometime this spring. Chip opened it up for questions from the Commissioners.

Q: if project implemented, do you have an idea of how quickly a fishery would response once we got through cold water bottleneck. A: Trout tend to respond more quickly than other species but it would likely take several fish generations (4-5 years). Q: Correlation between Payette hatchery and Priest Lake/Priest River. A: Looking at a similar reduction in volume and proportionally Priest Lake would be affect less. Q: history of cold water fisher pre dam? A: dam went in 1950ish. Very little data, but anecdotal reports say that it was a good cutthroat fishery. Lacking good solid data for what PR looked like before the dam. We do know that the dam impounds a shallow reach that is exposed to south facing exposure, so warms water some. Q: Considering you will be respectful of the aesthetic concerns for this project, how has positive results from Sullivan project looking? A: Everything thing points to Sullivan project working well. Q: are there other placing in the US that have very similar issue? A: If you pulled water from the lake it would be considered similar to a tailwater (water coming from bottom of reservoir) fisheries. There are many examples: the green river, the big horn river in MT, best trout fishery below Anderson Ranch. Q: You said cold water would reach to 40 miles. How long is the PR? A: 44 miles. Q: Is it possible to put the cold water were the water leaves the lake, before the outlet, or would it push the mileage back to 39 miles say. A: Run the risk of more limnologic problems and it appears according to engineers it doesn't seem feasible. Q: How do compare Sullivan to Priest when they are very different rivers? A: According to Portland State research, which considered the characteristics of the PR and who are the leading experts on this, showed that tributaries cool the river down, but that starting with cold water improves temps overall and in the long term. Q: if you used the 75% how many cfs would that require? If it was 60 cfs minimum, it would be 45 cfs. Try to think back to the 2015 drought when members of the PL community were okay with shutting the river down. Lake water rights will be protected and the Outlet dam improvements will be more protective than in the past. Q: If you were in a situation where you had a minimum stream flow (drought) how would this project impact the river? A: we would expect to see that the lower part of the river would suffer some. A public comment period followed and varied from total support for finding a way to get cold water to the Priest River to concerns over how it will impact water quality, levels, flows and the aesthetics of Priest Lake. Ford spoke clarifying that the summer lake level is fixed by statute in 1960. A productive outcome of the drought of 2015 was the genesis of improving the dam to hold the lake an additional 6" higher than it currently can, in low water years. Construction possible as early as this fall. There is no guaranteed stream flow for the PR and in 2015 it came close to drying up.

Ford announced that the next meeting will likely be in late June.

To listen to the full audio of the meeting you can visit the Lakes Commission website under Meetings at https://lakescommission.wordpress.com/

The meeting adjourned at 12:15 pm

Approved by:

Lakes Commission Chair

Date: 6/19/19