

February 8, 2016

## LINCOLN COUNTY CONGRESSIONAL STAFF MEETING

Present were Commissioner Mark Peck, Commissioner Mike Cole, Commissioner Greg Larson, Clerk & Recorder Robin Benson, John Fuller/Congressman Zinke's Office, Chad Campbell and Smith Works/U.S. Sen. Tester's Office, Kyle Schmauch/Sen. Daine's Office, Rep. MT House District 2, Mike Cuffe, Craig Barringer and Kaide Dodson/Libby Public Schools, Jacob Francom/Troy Public Schools and Nick Raines/Asbestos Resource Program.

Commissioner Larson **opened the meeting** with the Pledge of Allegiance.

10:00 AM **Vocational Education Project**, Craig Barringer/Jacob Francom:

Mr. Francom and Mr. Barringer gave a PowerPoint presentation explaining the background and history of the Vocational School of Innovation and the expanding educational opportunities for Lincoln County high school students. Lincoln County Vocational School of Innovation is working towards offering a variety of learning opportunities as it expands its curriculum. Specific career paths/classes to be considered are mining, EMT, electronics, construction, plumbing, health care, business, computer science, CDL and more are found in many other vocational schools. Students who successfully complete these programs are ready to jump into entry-level jobs and/or the credits earned encourage students to continue their education. The goal is to expand classes beyond automotive and welding. The next step is to present a 3 year plan to the Board of Public Education to form a Charter Program.

The Mission of the school prepares students for the workforce and/or post-secondary education, inspiring students to be lifelong learners and community builders.

Discussions are taking place with Lincoln County Campus and other colleges for students to receive college credits prior to graduation to encourage them to continue their education towards a degree. Mr. Fuller suggested potentially offering evening classes in the future to provide more flexibility for students. Mr. Fuller also suggested working with local legislators and unions to help local school boards have authority and ability to choose its teachers based on their qualifications.

Mr. Cuffe questioned the connectivity with Eureka and asked about classroom remote availability. Mr. Barringer said the challenge is the distance but there is communication and discussions with Eureka about options to address that very issue. The Commission commended Mr. Barringer and Mr. Francom for their commitment and efforts to improve the educational opportunities to the students of Lincoln County.

11:00 AM **Partner's Creative 20/20 Project**, Commissioner Peck:

Commissioner Peck said the idea came from a meeting with the regional administrator with the EPA. Commissioner Peck said that his biggest concern besides institutional controls and healthcare is how do we change the image of Libby? The public perception is not even close to where we are at. Realizing that PR is not EPAS's strong point, Commissioner Peck and Nick Raines met with staff at the University of Montana who brought in Partners Creative. Partner's Creative viewpoint is that our (Libby and Troy) greatest weakness is also our greatest strength. You don't run from the past, you embrace it, put closure to it, and then figure out where you are going. But you need to have community buy in; where does the community want to go and what does the outside world want from Libby?

Lincoln County is currently in a collaborative contract with Partners Creative who has conducted community focus sessions, interviews, and has had a lot of contact with local businesses and citizens. Commissioner Peck stressed the bottom line is taking control of your destiny. There are a lot of economic opportunities here and we need to create a more desirable place for the younger entrepreneurs. I would like to see a strong viable wood products industry on a smaller level, get the mine going, combined with recreational tourism and an increase in small businesses. We can make Lincoln County the type of place where young entrepreneurs come, bringing business with them. Commissioner Peck said he feels our remoteness is our strength.

This project is moving along and has brought people together. There is a lot of energy, direction and results that are coming from this effort. It's time to move forward and blend history and future. Partner's Creative is the means to do this because the plan is being put together, but we lack the implementation and knowledge on how to make it happen. Other communities have overcome superfund sites; the bottom line is this is an opportunity to take control of our own destiny. We need to prove ourselves and not focus on the past, but focus on our future.

The goal is to have a countywide effort and countywide message. Commissioner Larson mentioned the difficulties regarding conservation easements that may be needed. There is no question the current image is affecting investing and the economy. Commissioner Cole said the question is how we create a business climate; the jobs will come after we accomplish the business climate first. Mr. Fuller suggested taking a look into any countywide regulations and/or citywide regulations regarding the friendliness to businesses.

11:45 AM **Statewide Natural Resource Management Collaborative Model**, Commissioner Peck:

Commissioner Peck said he recently spoke at the Montana Logging Association meeting and discussed the lack of collaboration and coordination of agencies in Montana. There are a lot of good people in agencies but limited collaboration between them. We don't speak with a solid voice. Commissioner Peck asked the group to think about what ways legislators can help bring these efforts together. Commissioner Cole said he is looking for our congressional leaders to help make legislation happen. Commissioner Peck said he wants to focus on what we can control at the local level but this takes a strong element of support policy with legislators. The group discussed how to encourage other counties and state agencies to work together with congressional leaders to push more collaborative effort on these issues. Commissioner Peck feels this is vitally important to local and state government. We have made the cuts, now we need to focus on the revenue side. Let's make sure the connectivity is there.

12:30 PM **Columbia River Treaty Update**, Rep. Mike Cuffe:

Rep. Cuffe said HB 590 is a fund or account to receive any compensation from the Columbia River Treaty authorizing DNRC to administer the account. Rep. Cuffe gave an overview of the Columbia River Treaty and how revenue is

generated. The Columbia River Basin is a transboundary watershed that crosses one international and seven state boundaries. Rep. Cuffe said that we are not asking for new money; there is money that is being made from our valley but Montana currently has no benefit and he is asking only to treat Lincoln County fairly and equally as Canada. Rep. Cuffe said this is to seek monetary compensation for taxpayers and citizens in Lincoln County by using the same formula to compensate Lincoln County that was used to compensate British Columbia and Columbia Basin Trust. BC Hydro will be compensated for energy losses at its Kootenay Canal operations that result from the timing of water releases from the Libby Dam. Rep. Cuffe said he fiercely believes this should happen and is requesting letters from state and congressional leaders to President Obama stating Montana receive compensation to be included in the Columbia River Treaty and to remove language giving Canada the right to divert Kootenai River water into the Columbia River at the canal flats. Canada or British Columbia should benefit Montana for the benefits that Canada receives from Libby Dam; those benefits include flood protection, power generation, recreation opportunities and irrigation. The Commission is in agreement with Rep. Cuffe that Montana should be included in the Columbia River Treaty.

**1:30 PM Timber Summit Libby, Commissioner Peck:**

Commissioner Peck gave credit to the work that Kootenai Stakeholders have done and the final product or common ground plan for timber management on the Kootenai. Commissioner Peck said that at some point in time, he would like to get congressional leaders, governor and regional and state foresters, and other leaders to sit down and take a couple days to meet and work on policy issues and to actually get out in the woods and physically show the mess we are dealing with here. Maybe even include some of the Idaho and panhandle forest as well; the issues are pretty much the same. Everybody is recognizing the problem and looking towards solutions.

Lincoln County does have tremendous history of sound timber management although maybe not necessarily recently. Anybody in forestry in the 60's and 70's came through here to learn and see the support of sustained yield. We got the history and still have the knowledge as well as very talented people still working and retired here. We are completely capable of demonstrating good management at the county level. We need to be allowed to demonstrate that we can manage timber sales. We have areas of huge fire risks and forests that do not support bear habitat. The Forest Service needs political support. Commissioner Peck said he is in favor of the concept of the possibility of counties actually having trust lands same as the states. The management would still be according to state laws, NEPA, endangered species act, clean water act etc.... It would take a burden off the Forest Service. Commissioner Peck stated that he realizes these concepts are way outside the box, but it makes sound, logical sense.

We want to be able to discuss these concepts since we are all looking for solutions to these issues. Everything land management is always policy based instead of research, testing and scientifically sound. Go back to the mid-west and you will find this is common practice. It's actually not that radical, it just does not fit the traditional management we are used to. It's not land ownership; its county management.

Commissioner Cole asked about a time frame for congressional and state leaders to visit Libby. Kyle Schmauch said the August recess sounded like it would be good timing. Commissioner Peck said he is not saying local people should have all control, but we should have more say than what we have now.

Commissioner Peck read a quote from Gifford Pinchot saying that we should look at his model. Gifford Pinchot said to acknowledge the importance of people who will take the best care of something, is the people who actually live and function on the land.

Commissioner Peck added that we are killing wildlife here. There has never been a history of a lot of grizzly bears in this country. Bear management guidelines state that good, proper timber management is a means to create grizzly habitat. We need to have a more realistic discussion on the endangered species act, although I understood it's well-intended. Shutting everything down is not working. We are not looking at this scientifically and what we are doing now is not working because we are losing habitat. It's time for solutions, what we are doing is not working on any side of things.

**2:00 PM Staff Updates:**

Kyle Schmauch attended a Lake Kooconusa Monitoring Research and Working Group meeting on the selenium issue; reports will be coming out. It's a research focused group about how to conduct research and sampling methods. The group is working to determine how different temperatures in lakes and released water for the fish effects on selenium. How far downstream to conduct testing? They are also looking for funding opportunities for testing and continued and thorough research. The groups focus is all scientific research and background at this point including how to determine levels of nitrates and phosphorus in the water.

John Fuller asked about EPA issues. Commissioner Peck said there are meetings with EPA to start the discussions on institutional controls. Commissioner Larson stated his concerns about the economic impact of EPA leaving since they spend up to 10 million per year locally. Commissioner Peck said discussions are taking place to select the oversight committee for IC's and hammering out responsibilities, expectations, and applicable laws.

Kyle Schmauch asked about the last call letter sent out to homeowners that have refused investigations. The owners may be running a risk of having property devalued later. Commissioner Peck said this is all part of current discussions. John Fuller said he felt the press coverage was positive on the results of the burn testing.

**2:30 PM Asbestos Resource Program Update, Nick Raines:**

Nick said the IC's will be more public assistance driven. The goal is to meet the science and reduce the risk of exposure but balanced with working alongside the property owners.

EPA officially signed the ROD earlier this morning. A press release will be going out. This is a big milestone of the overall project. Nick will be attending a meeting in Missoula tomorrow to discuss Operable Unit 3; the mine site. Discussions on remedial investigation and roles and responsibilities regarding institutional controls are taking place.

The big thing going forward is how IC's are going to be implemented and how they will be paid for.

**3:30 PM Meeting Adjourned**

**LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

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Mike Cole, Chairman

**ATTEST:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Robin A. Benson, Clerk of the Board