

**August 26, 2020**

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners met for a regular session on August 26, 2020 in the Lincoln County Courthouse, Libby, Montana. Present were Commissioner Peck, Commissioner Bennett, Commissioner Letcher, County Administrator Patrick McFadden and Clerk and Recorder Robin Benson.

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

10:00 AM **Administrative Issues:** Present were Dallas Bowe, Roger Guches, Marv Sather, Derrick Perkins, and Jennifer Nelson. Present was Nikki Meyer, Eureka, via VisionNet. Present was Ray Stout via phone conference.

- The commissioners signed a letter to Mayor Brent Teske for the support of a wastewater treatment and collection system grant for the City of Libby. **Motion** by Commissioner Bennett to approve support letter as submitted. Second by Commissioner Letcher, motion carried unanimously.
- Robin presented the minutes for August 19, 2020 regular meeting for approval. **Motion** by Commissioner Bennett to approve minutes as submitted. Robin commented that all the comments submitted at the Northstar Public Hearing will be filed in Laserfiche. Commissioner Bennett asked if the audio could also be stored in Laserfiche. Robin said she will verify that capability. Second by Commissioner Letcher, motion carried unanimously.
- Commissioner Peck gave an update about the U-Serve Agreement for maintenance of the community tennis court. The original agreement has expired. Under the new agreement, the account will not be held at the county and Commissioner Peck is requesting to close the current account and give the funds of \$6,500+ to U-Serve to manage. A new agreement is being written and will reflect the change. **Motion** by Commissioner Bennett to approve closing the U-Serve account held at the county and give those funds to U-Serve to manage maintenance at the tennis courts. Second by Commissioner Letcher, motion carried unanimously.
- Commissioner Letcher confirmed the FWP grant has been received for the liner at the fishpond in Eureka. The total cost of the liner with shipping is approximately \$38,500 and the grant is close to \$29,000. Commissioner Letcher said he is requesting to pay the shipping cost out of the Eureka Parks budget. Project has already been approved. **Motion** by Commissioner Bennett to accept grant and approve Commissioner Letcher to pay the shipping costs out of the Eureka Parks budget. Second by Commissioner Letcher, motion carried unanimously.
- Commissioner Bennett talked about the land transfer for the shooting range in the Yaak. The shooting range is looking into putting up a screen for liability and safety concerns. Commissioner Bennett will keep the commissioners informed.

10:15 AM **Public Comment Time:** Present were Marv Sather, Derrick Perkins, and Jennifer Nelson. Present was Nikki Meyer, Eureka, via VisionNet. Present was Ray Stout via phone conference.

Dallas explained that TCI is coming in today to take the flagpole down. The etiquette of proper folding of the flag for replacing the flagpole will be observed and implemented. Dallas said she is anticipating phone calls and will put a message on the reader board that the flag is temporarily removed for replacing with a new flagpole and bigger flag. The current flag will be retired to the VFW.

10:30 AM **Forest Update:** Present were Marv Sather, Derrick Perkins, and Jennifer Nelson. Present was Nikki Meyer, Eureka, via VisionNet. Present was Ray Stout via phone conference.

Jennifer gave a brief update on The Greater Libby Interface Stewardship Project, involving the forest service and NRCS; very much a collaborative effort. The project area is 263,000 acres. Commissioner Peck, commended Jennifer for writing the draft of the initial agreement. The MOU will go through the county attorney for approval and will be signed by the commissioners. Jennifer said this is a national grant opportunity and all of it is coming together with the Joint Chiefs Proposal, Shared Stewardship Proposal and the MOU documenting the shared collaboration. Commissioner Peck commented that this takes it beyond collaboration to integrated planning.

Kootenai Forest Initiative Project is in progress. These are multiple project areas, not one. Currently, we have 75 acres under four different agreements with landowners for a total of \$69,000 under cost-share agreements; \$51,000 from the grant and \$18,000 from landowners and 4 different contractors in North Lincoln County involved. Phase II will have more flexibility of the area and currently there are six landowners in the Bobtail area that have expressed interest.

Jennifer said she has submitted a grant for western bark beetle, still pending. This grant would help finance more work by the DNRC in J. Neil's Park in 2021 if we are awarded. The submission was for \$31,320. Wages for DNRC fire crew account for \$27,500 of the funding request.

Commissioner Bennett talked about the Parmenter Creek Project and asked about the process for those landowners to get on a list for a cost-share opportunity. Jennifer said that area was prioritized as high priority in the Joint Chiefs proposal, and she could submit for a hazardous fuels grant, but joint chiefs would be a better funding source. There was a brief conversation about the process for picking areas for cost-share fuel reduction projects. Other funding opportunities and resources were discussed.

11:00 AM **WUI Stewardship Discussion / Steve Kimball:** Present were Greg Poncin and Jodi Turk representing DNRC, Marv Sather, Derrick Perkins, Jake Mertes, and County Forester Jennifer Nelson. Present via phone were Steve Kimball representing DNRC, and Ray Stout. Present was Nikki Meyer, Eureka via VisionNet.

Steve talked about the WUI proposal and DNRC support, saying the DNRC would like to make the WUI a priority with its resources including Good Neighbor Authority projects.

Commissioner Peck commented that the support letter from DNRC was one of the strongest received and is greatly appreciated. Steve said he is working with Jennifer and the forest service on the MOU. The draft is complete and will be finalized, laying out mutual goals and collaboration and the Joint Chiefs proposal supports it also. Steve said he does not see any problem moving forward. Steve stated that overall, the main goal is to get larger scale projects approved sooner and expressed that with the partnership, MOU and commitment, we can move things forward at a quicker pace. Steve said he would like to see stewardship contracting with private contractors, although the forest service is limited. There will be a time we could go that route in the future when the time is right.

Jennifer said she is planning for fall in October and the Forest Action Plan will be released in September. Commissioner Peck commented that Jason Singleton of GeoControl will be assisting with the mapping and the Forest Action Plan will be a great tool for planning.

Commissioner Bennett expressed the importance of consistent messaging and how it should be the same as a whole for the entire forest. We need to take this time to develop messaging forest wide. We are operating the same regardless of district and we should be consistent, not just with the WUI, but also with GNA projects.

Steve talked about the 5-year plan and how we can come together in order of priorities.

Commissioner Peck expressed that we have diverse rangers and the key piece for value added of planning to happen, is to have a separate planning group for long term planning; GNA vs. 5-year WUI schedule. The leadership is there but it is a big step, so we need to think about the planning.

Steve proposed to separate the WUI out from GNA to fully make sense of planning and suggested potential using GNA funds for planning and NEPA ready projects. Lincoln County is one of the first places to try this and get the forest service on board. Steve encouraged to engage the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders in the WUI and particularly with community support and holding open houses. Steve commented it would be helpful if the forest service could dedicate someone as a lead person to help coordinate, county and DNRC.

Commissioner Peck agreed that is critical and reflected that if you look at successful models, you will see strong, dedicated, coordinated efforts. Steve commented that when you include logging and the Ski-Dale type projects is another reason to get a coordinator involved.

Commissioner Bennett commented that he supports meetings and efforts that have productive results, so lets hit the ground running and continue to move forward. Commissioner Bennett said the county is willing to help encourage stakeholders to participate.

Commissioner Peck thanked Steve and DNRC for its support, effort, and overall approach, saying that it helps to have that validation. Commissioner Peck expressed his appreciation to Steve for his expertise and approach to bring knowledge of agreements, and to bring that expertise to local government and being open to help wherever he can. Representative Steve Gunderson commented that this is one of those agreements that can do nothing but good for everybody.

**11:30 AM Trails / Ben Scott:** Present were William Langhorne, Tony Petrusa, House Rep. District 1 Steve Gunderson, Marv Sather, Chris Nelson, and Jennifer Nelson. Ray Stout was present via phone conference.

Tony updated the commissioners on the Nordic Ski Course and modification changes. Tony said city decisions have caused some delay, but there is communication. Tony talked about his walk-through with Kenny Rayome and how Kenny expressed that he agreed and approved of the work being done. DEQ no longer performs the source water analysis reports and the purpose of that report is to determine threats to the water system and mitigation; report pending. Considerations are the flow directions and flow control culvert analysis. The study determines which way we want to direct water.

Ben commented that he took 20 kids up to Granite Lake which is the reason why he keeps doing this. Ben said he was surprised at the number of local kids that are not exploring these types of areas and are not even aware these places exist.

Ben said he is asking for a letter of support for work on the ski trails and asked if the commissioners would be willing to talk to the forest service about the ski club's work and efforts. Ben talked about the ski club's history and working relationship with the forest service, which was good prior, but with the changes in leadership, there has been a lack of responses. Ben conveyed his frustration trying to work with the forest service and its lack of communication and lack of support. Ben stated that the club does a lot for the forest service. Ben said he did apply for an \$8,000 RAC grant for culvert work but was denied.

Tony listed 8 or 10 things that are restrained by the forest service, but they are working with the city and communicating well for continued improvements. Tony expressed frustration trying to get the forest service to mobilize and act in some manner. We are talking about small requests, even just basic decisions, and approvals.

Commissioner Peck said that he is more than willing to have a sit-down meeting with the forest supervisor and ranger and to have a walk-through of the trail area. Patrick said he will help coordinate those efforts.

**11:45 AM Voting Procedure Discussion:** Present were House Rep. District 1 Steve Gunderson, William Langhorne, Lee Kibler and Marv Sather. Present were Jennifer Curtiss and Nikki Meyer, Eureka via VisionNet. Present was Ray Stout via phone conference.

Chris provided information regarding active/non-active voters, absentee voters, polling place options and precincts, ballot drop off locations and public notifications. Chris talked about providing options for polling places in Libby, Troy and Eureka.

Commissioner Bennett suggested sending letters to active non-absentee voters and encouraging voters to apply for an absentee ballot if they are uncomfortable going to a polling place.

Commissioner Peck talked about how people can choose how they want to vote; by absentee/mail or going to their polling place and commented that the majority of poll judges want to work. Over 50% of voters are already signed up for absentee ballots. Commissioner Peck agreed with Commissioner Bennett of sending a letter to those that are not absentee, encouraging them to file absentee if they are not comfortable going to the polls. This allows people to do what they want and determine for themselves how they would like to vote. Commissioner Peck said if people can sit in a bar and drink, then he is not going to tell people they cannot go to the polls.

Chris talked about the MCA's, public notices, and processes to provide clear information to the public.

Commissioner Bennett conveyed that part of the messaging is that we are paring down the number of polling places for the general election only.

Chris said he has not filed a voting plan with the state and confirmed the commissioners do not need to submit a resolution of opposition to a mail only voting plan.

Commissioner Peck commented to encourage early voting, many people may not know about this.

Commissioner Bennett talked about public messaging regarding the drop boxes instead of placing ballot in the mail.

Commissioner Letcher said he appreciates freedom of choice for the citizens of how they want to vote.

Marv commented that in Spokane, they used libraries as alternative places for drop boxes.

Lee asked if an absentee ballot can be dropped off at any polling station. Chris said yes.

Chris informed the commissioners that he has approximately 60 judges currently available.

Jennifer commented that if there are extra judges, would there be consideration to open more than 3 polling places. Chris said yes, it's an option, there are those possibilities.

Commissioners requested an update on the final plan and to take a look at the letter to be sent to non-absentee voters.

The commissioners commended Chris for his hard work and efforts to accommodate all voters in Lincoln County.

**2:30 PM Preliminary Budget Hearing:** Present were Wendy Drake and Derrick Perkins. Present was Nikki Meyer, Eureka via VisionNet. Present was Ray Stout via phone conference.

Patrick submitted a preliminary levy spreadsheet for commissioner review. Patrick said we are looking for 16 mill reduction to balance the county budget and should have that completed next week. Patrick said currently the budget is at 120 mills, but 104.46 mills are allowable. The budget was at 140 mills last week and after talking to departments to decrease further, we are moving in the right direction.

Commissioner Peck commented there was a \$98,000 increase in liability and property insurance.

Patrick expressed that the process timeline really needs to change, clarifying that our fiscal year ends June 31, but we don't know our valuations from the DOR until August. Commissioner Peck agreed and added that our budget year begins July 1<sup>st</sup>, prior to knowing revenues.

Patrick commented that he is confident the appropriate reductions will be made, and the budget will be balanced.

Commissioner Bennett said the larger budget departments are working diligently to review and find where expenditures can be decreased.

Patrick talked about how the finance department has trained department supervisors to go into the budget software, enter their budgets, print budget reports for monitoring, empowering them for better understanding of how to budget for their departments. **Motion** by Commissioner Bennett to approve the preliminary budget as presented with the understanding the reduction to decrease mills to 104.46 as allowed. Second by Commissioner Letcher, motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Peck commented that he did wish there were more citizen participation and input, saying that our democracy is set up so that we are accountable to and have oversight by the citizens.

**12:00 PM Meeting Adjourned**

## **LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

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Mark Peck, Chairman

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