

**JUNE 18, 2015**

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners met on June 18, 2015, in the Lincoln County Courthouse. Present were Commissioner Mike Cole, Commissioner Greg Larson, Commissioner Mark Peck, Executive Assistant Bill Bischoff and Clerk and Recorder Robin Benson.

10:00 AM **Grizzly Bear Petition:** Present are Rep. Jerry Bennett and Mike Cuffe, Sen. Chas Vincent and Bruce Vincent, Mr. Payne Payne, Scott Mattheis, and Don Truman.

The meeting was for general discussion regarding the Petition written by Mr. Payne Payne to delist the population of grizzly bears in the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem from the threatened species list and to update the recovery plan for the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem.

Commissioner Larson said there have been so many decisions based on grizzly bear, and questioned whether the petition would make a difference and help access the forest and create jobs.

Sen. Bruce Vincent said we need to identify concerns in the petition and determine what we can do that continues to protect the grizzly. Questioning the caring capacity is a very good question to ask and we should review it and the recovery plan. Enough data has been collected, and any management plan would have to strongly implement caring capacity and feels this is where dialogue needs to focus. If we are delisting, then the petition should be about management, not recovery because we all agree bears are recovered.

Sen. Chas Vincent feels if we are successful to get caring capacity looked at again, we need to acknowledge securing bear habitat through forest harvest by looking at the science and potentially rewriting bear habitat through forest harvest. Commissioner Peck feels the caring capacity is a huge issue and he would like to see key areas that would benefit bear habitat from timber harvest on an ecosystem, scientific level.

Mr. Payne said the benefit of the petition is that it states a strong case for recovery criteria to be looked at and lays groundwork for management discussions scientifically. The petition also gives the county the ability to file a lawsuit.

Rep. Mike Cuffe feels the USFWS issue will be connectivity between Glacier National Park, Yellowstone, Bob Marshall and Cabinet-Yaak to fully deem bears recovered. Allen said the petition starts those conversations for USFWS to discuss and answer questions about issues currently not being addressed.

Sen. Chas Vincent feels the end goal is to look at the recovery plan after 30 years, potentially having it rewritten. Allen said the petition is written in a way to do that now. Commissioner Peck said it is not a recovery now; it is an introduction into habitat. Commissioner Larson said if we would have been working in harmony by combining vegetation management and timber harvest which benefits habitat we would not have the economic issues right now. Sen. Bruce Vincent agreed that the lack of vegetation management subjects the bear into a decline and should be used in litigation to help bear habitat. As it is now, the bear is being used as a tool, not what's best for bear recovery.

Sen. Chas Vincent said the Recovery Plan lacks scientific data in all areas and there is a lot of good solid science and data that supports recovery. Mr. Payne agreed the criteria set by USFWS to determine if the grizzly is recovered is outdated and should now be updated to reflect science and data that has changed in the past 30 years.

Rep. Jerry Bennett said the job is to change the mindset of USFWS. The information is at their fingertips and they should utilize the scientific data to plan for wildlife habitat, but feels they are not doing this.

Commissioner Peck read a quote about "*Sivicultural Treatment*" from the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines; "*In some habitat types (pfister et al. 1977) in grizzly range, timber harvest, especially selection and group selection units and small clearcuts with no dozer piling of slash and no mechanical soil scarification, produces important amounts of herbs and scrubs bearing fruits eaten by grizzlies. Production of grizzly food species in these cuts is often greater than in uncut sites in the same habitat types. This indicates that certain timber harvest practices can be used in some forest stands to increase their grizzly food value*".

Mr. Payne suggested as next steps to draft a transition paragraph based on today's comments and suggested that Sen. Chas Vincent draft an introduction to the petition favoring bear recovery and habitat.

Commissioner Cole said the meeting was hugely beneficial and informative. Rep. Mike Cuffe agreed it was a healthy discussion and the timing is right.

11:30 PM The **meeting was adjourned**.

**LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

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Mike Cole, Chairman

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