

September 6, 2023

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners met for a regular session on September 6, 2023, in the Lincoln County Courthouse, Libby, Montana. Present were Commissioner Teske, Commissioner Letcher, Administrative Assistant Jennifer Brown and Clerk and Recorder Corrina Brown. Commissioner Hammons was excused.

Meeting allows for teleconferencing and Zoom availability. Present online were Ray Stout Reporter-Kootenai Valley Record, Rebecca Nelson Reporter-Tobacco Valley News, Joseph Schlarman, Bree Adamson, Michelle Byrd, Alyssa Ramirez, Alaena Woody and Darren Short.

Commissioner Letcher opened the meeting with the **Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer**.

10:00 AM **USFS**: Present were Scott Shindledecker Reporter-Western News, Hannah Chumley Reporter-Western News, Mark Peck, Jennifer Nelson, Veronica Bovee-Anderson, Brian Berryman, Chad Benson USFS and Heidi McRoberts USFS.

Chad Benson Forest Supervisor provided an update of Forest Service activities. Record low timber harvest this year, at approximately 5 million board feet, with the culmination of lawsuits over the last two-three years. Optimistic target for next year's timber harvest set around 15 million board feet along with plans for ten thousand acres of fuels treatment. Allocation of about \$1.3 million of PELL (Preservation of Existing Landscapes and Landmarks) funding, which is an increase from the normal program to fund projects in the WUI – Wildland Urban Interface area for fuels treatment. Potential allocation of about \$600,000 in PELL funding for wildfire crisis strategy this year. Updates on specific projects, including Black Ram (judge vacated), Ripley (still in litigation), and ongoing work on reprimands, BORZ additions, and the forest plan amendment. Efforts to strengthen collaboration with non-federal landowners along with strengthened biological opinions. The Forest Plan Amendment is set to close on September 10th. Addressed inaccurate information in a Western News article regarding the use of logging roads, with clarification on the use of temporary roads in BORZ. Projects on hold till this amendment is done include Sunday, OU3 Jackson CERCLA site, Norman McCedar, Miller West Fisher, McKay-Engle, Trojan Defense and waiting for ruling on Knotty Pine. Large East Fork fire in Eureka with a lot of decks and salvage opportunities, will try to put a team on it. Have approval for at least one team to for OU3 Jackson. Commissioner Teske emphasized this is a necessary project having one fire in and three surrounding the area this year. Chad revisited the BORZ discussion stating there is nothing at this juncture to cause people to lose recreational opportunities, they will continue to balance roads. Clarification that the grizzly bear analysis is handled by FWS, with the FS responsible for reporting. Commissioner Letcher raised concerns about the survival of our communities as a lot of loggers aren't loggers anymore. The 1987 Forest Plan was called free-for-all with logging and then the fix in the 2015 Forest Plan was adopted and now we have the record lowest timber harvest in the Kootenai National Forest. The county budget used to get roughly \$8 million per year in stumpage for timber sales and now we can't even cover our budget. We need to do something different. In the 2015 Forest Plan we had 1.7 million acres of snowmobiling now it says we are going to open 1.2 million acres of snowmobiling, closing half a million acres. Chad cited positive developments with GNA (Good Neighbor Authority) funding, leading to substantial improvements in recreational sites. Updates on the OU3 Jackson EDCA analysis should be done in six months, with a 30-day public comment period. Consulting with FWS for the treatment of 100 acres behind EM-Kayan Village in the OU3 site. Chad announced a hiring push, with plans to create 73 new positions in the next couple months. Nationally the FS is looking at permanent seasonal status with benefits. Mark Peck gave recognition to Sam Martin District Ranger for efforts related to the Trojan Defense Project, including an outreach letter in the paper. Jennifer Nelson Forester expressed appreciation for the public affairs efforts of the regional office, including video outreach. Mark Peck advised the premise of the recovery area is not based on scientific historic population of the bear. Jennifer announced a non-time critical removal action public meeting scheduled for September 18th at the Libby Ranger District Supervisors Office.

10:30 AM **Administrative Issues/Old Business: Approve Minutes**: Present were Scott Shindledecker Reporter-Western News, Hannah Chumley Reporter-Western News, Mark Peck, Jennifer Nelson, Veronica Bovee-Anderson.

- Minutes of August 28, 2023, budget meeting for approval. **Motion** to approve by Commissioner Teske. Second by Commission Letcher. No comments. Motion carried.
- Minutes of August 30, 2023, regular meeting for approval. **Motion** by Commissioner Teske to approve August 30, 2023, regular meeting minutes. Second by Commissioner Teske. Clerk and Recorder, Corrina Brown was approved to make grammatical corrections. No comments. Motion carried.
- Public comment letter to the Forest Service regarding the Kootenai Forest Plan Amendment for Bears Outside the Recovery Zone
- Regional FS Supervisor out of Missoula meeting in Eureka regarding the Kootenai National Forest Over-snow Motorized Use Travel Plan

10:45 AM **Public Comment Time**: Present were Scott Shindledecker Reporter-Western News, Hannah Chumley Reporter-Western News, Mark Peck, Jennifer Nelson, Veronica Bovee-Anderson and Tom Lane.

No public comment

11:00 AM **Superintendent of Schools – District Budget**: Present were Scott Shindledecker Reporter-Western News, Hannah Chumley Reporter-Western News, Mark Peck, Jennifer Nelson, Veronica Bovee-Anderson and Tom Lane.

Postponed

11:30 AM **Resolution 2023-31 Final FY 24 Budget Hearing Resolution & Adoption:** Present were Darren Short, Marcia Boris, Wendy Drake, Scott Shindledecker Reporter-Western News, Hannah Chumley Reporter-Western News, Mark Peck, Brent Faulkner, Alyssa Ramirez and Veronica Bovee-Anderson.

Commissioner Letcher read Resolution 2023-31 Levies for Lincoln County for Fiscal Year 2023-2024. Motion by Commissioner Teske to approve Resolution 2023-31 with a correction of public hearing date. Second by Commissioner Letcher. No public comments. Motion carried.

11:41 AM **Adjourned**

LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Josh Letcher, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Corrina Brown, Clerk of the Board