

Park County WPLI Advisory Committee | MINUTES

December 4, 2017 | 5:30 – 7:45 pm | Park County Library – Cody – Grizzly Hall

Meeting called by Bucky Hall, WPLI Committee Chair
Type of meeting WPLI Advisory Committee
Facilitator Tara Kuipers, Tara Kuipers Consulting

Attendees

Committee members JD Radakovich; Chris Pfister; Jenny DeSarro; John McGee; Phyllis Preator; Doug Smith; Rick Harrison; Hap Ridgway; Dustin Rosencranse; John Gallagher; Rori Renner; Joe Kondelis; Chairman Bucky Hall, Facilitator Tara Kuipers, Secretary Shaunna Romero

Other attendees: Loren Grosskopf, Park County Commissioner; Warren Murphy, FOAL; Stephanie Kessler, Wyoming Outdoor Council; Ed Higbie, Cody Country Snowmobile Assoc.; Bert Miller, Cody Country Snowmobile Assoc.; Linda Reynolds; Kendal Barry; Bob Deroche; Ken Lichtendahl; Steve Christiansen; Debbie Christiansen; Tim Metzler

Absent: Committee members Bob Jackson; Christine Bekes; Karinthia Harrison; Greg Mayton; Vice Chairman Lee Livingston

NEXT MEETING

Wednesday, January 3 – 5:30 p.m.
Cody Library - Grizzly Hall

AGENDA TOPICS

Approval of Minutes

It was noted that the committee meeting date was changed from November 29 to December 4. This change was made after of the October 19 committee meeting. Tara Kuipers explained that the meeting date was changed because Grizzly Hall was not available due to the library's book sale the November 29 week. Jenny DeSarro requested the following addition to the October 19 draft meeting minutes: DeSarro suggested during the High Lakes discussion that east of the Beartooth Plateau contours (along steep contours) down to point 12 (a point defined by DeSarro on her map of this region) be recommended as Wilderness.

The committee voted to approve the October 19 minutes.

McCullough Peaks WSA Draft Recommendation and public comment

Chair Bucky Hall opened the meeting with status of public comments received on the McCullough Peaks draft recommendation. Meeting facilitator Kuipers said the comments had been compiled into a pdf document and indexed. Any comments received outside of the Park County WPLI email were forwarded to that email address. Kuipers said due to the file size, the committee will receive an email link. Committee members were asked to review the public comments prior to the January committee meeting.

Kuipers pointed out that several comments in the pdf document reference both McCullough Peaks and High Lakes WSAs. Hard copies of the comments will be printed (at request only) by contacting Nicholle Gerharter at the Commissioners' office after noon on December 5.

Discussion: High Lakes WSA Draft Recommendation

Chairman Hall addressed the High Lakes WSA original designation and the question of permanence of WSA designations previously acted on by Congress. Comments made in a previous meeting by Paul Spitler, Director of Wilderness Campaigns for The Wilderness Society, that there has already been Congressional action on the High Lakes WSA [Forest Service WSAs were established as part of the 1984 Wilderness Act, separate from WSAs established by the BLM], caused question as to whether another designation would be considered for legislation. Hall said the opinion of the Wyoming County Commissioners Association (WCCA) is that the WSA is still in limbo; the committee should move forward with a draft proposal.

Hall reported on questions from the committee around game migration trails. WY G&F Biologist Tim Woolley resubmitted his previous presentation to the committee, confirming it is fully within G&F agency authority to designate trails and winter habitat at any time.

The group continued discussion of desired uses in the High Lakes, potential designations & management and the pros/cons of each. The definitions and controls for National Conservation Areas, National Recreation Areas, and Special Management Areas were reviewed. Revisited was the desire of the Conservation community to have additional Wilderness in the High Lakes, or to consider lands outside of the WSA, or to revise the McCullough Peaks proposal to gain more Wilderness there. The Motorized Recreation representation reiterated that they are not willing to give up any additional access for snowmobile use in the High Lakes.

It was noted that the committee was formed with the intent of moving the change from WSA forward, and the committee should focus on the desired management and protections that can be included from knowledge gained since the 1984 designations. Also noted was that any blanket legislation, as occurred for National Recreation Areas, has the potential to modify all lands under that designation in one fell swoop.

Chairman Hall proposed that the High Lakes draft management be a Special Management Area and be posted on the Park County WPLI web site for public comment. Hall reminded the group that the committee will not be drafting the Legislative language/proposal. The WSSA will be doing this for all WSAs in counties throughout the State.

Hall said he would present again to the Park County Commissioners at their December 5 meeting the Conservation community's desire to consider additional lands outside of the WSAs for Wilderness designation. He invited the committee members to attend the Commission meeting with him.

The group defined uses and restrictions they would like included in the draft proposal, including snowmobiling, system trails and non-system trails. The group was unable to reach consensus on 1) expanding Wilderness, and 2) limiting snowmobile use / trails.

Kuipers will compose the draft proposal, to include management and provisions contained in the 1984 Wilderness Act, and will send it to the committee members for their input. She'll revise the draft to reflect the committee's comments, as needed, and the draft proposal will be posted on the Park County WPLI web site for public comment through February 1, 2018.

Public Comment

Comments from members of the public included:

Steve Christiansen – Christiansen said he’s disappointed in the potential for restricted ATV use. He said he and his wife ride their side-by-side in the McCullough Peaks and in the Beartooths. “We go slow, look at the flowers. There’s no way we would try to take things away from you local people. We know how Wilderness works. We’ve gone through RAR1 and RAR2 [Roadless Area Review].” Christiansen commented on the North Fork Wilderness trails and difficulty in maintaining them without power saws. He asked the committee if they go to the Peaks, and how they access the region. [Committee member John Gallagher noted that roads and trails east of Bridger Butte were utilized.]

Ed Higbie, Cody Snowmobile Association – Higbie said this is the first WPLI Committee meeting he’s attended and questioned the method of decision making, “In most committees, the majority rules,” Higbie said, “It seems tonight was balanced all to the Conservation side.” Higbie expressed that there ought to be consensus with majority rule and moving [the recommendation] forward. [Chairman Hall explained that the WPLI Committee charter requires 100% agreement, and dictates the process.]

Bert Miller, Cody Snowmobile Association – Miller asked that the committee consider what makes the High Lakes WSA so special. He expressed that recreational uses in the High Lakes positively impact Park County’s economics. Miller said that, of the approx. 2.4 million acres in the Shoshone National Forest, 580 thousand can be used by snowmobilers. The High Lakes is particularly desired by the snowmobile community because it connects to Cooke City, MT. Miller noted that the pending Shoshone Travel Management decision will reduce dates of permitted use. “It’s the Shoshone Forest management. It’s what we pay them to do - manage it. If this piece is taken away, where do we go?” Miller said.

Stephanie Kessler, Wyoming Outdoor Council – Kessler said her organization has existed in the State for more than 50 years, and that Jenny DeSarro, as the Conservation WPLI representative, represents the interests of the WY Outdoor Council. Kessler thanked the committee for its “really thoughtful deliberation and approach.” Kessler asked “can we take a look outside the WSA boundaries” and said the outcome of the committee’s recommendation would be “kind of a zero sum gain.” Chairman Hall reminded Kessler that the committee has no control over the decision to restrict the lands considered in their recommendations to that within the WSAs.

Linda Raynolds – In reference to the McCullough Peaks WSA, Raynolds said while some feel they are losing land for recreation, she feels the same about places she can go to walk, specifically in the desert and on BLM land without encountering vehicles, and without roads.

Max Miller, Cody Enterprise reporter – Miller asked for clarification as to whether some sort of swap for lands in the Shoshone National Forest had been proposed. Hall clarified that, no, a land swap was not a consideration. Kuipers added that parameters for what the committee can consider exist.

Actions

Review public comments to McCullough Peaks draft recommendation prior to the next WPLI Meeting. Consider things in the comments, specific or general suggestions that could make the recommendation better.

Review and provide input to Kuipers on the draft High Lakes proposal.

Draft High Lakes Proposal to be posted on the Park County WPLI web site through February 1, 2018.

WPLI Committee Meeting: Possible meeting dates Wednesday, January 3 or Wednesday, January 10. A Doodle Poll survey was requested as the method to determine the best availability for the committee members, to be sent out within 24 hours of the meeting and responses requested within 24 hours.

Resources

High Lakes WPLI draft recommendation & request for Public Comments

<http://www.parkcounty.us/commissioners/wplihighlakes.html>