

Park County WPLI Advisory Committee | MINUTES

October 19, 2017 | 5:30 – 7:40 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 Jenny DeSarro, John McGee, Christine Bekes, Karinthia Harrison, Phyllis Preator, Doug Smith, Joe Kondelis, Hap Ridgway, Dustin Rosencranse, John Gallagher; Chairman Bucky Hall, Facilitator Tara Kuipers, Secretary Shaunna Romero,

Other Attendees: Bert Miller, Tate McCoy, Tim Metzler, all from Cody Snowmobile Association; Mark Davis, Powell Tribune; Ken Lichtendahl; Scott Steward; Nic Patrick; Julia Stuble, Wyoming Outdoor Council; Paul Spittler, The Wilderness Society; Joe Tilden, Park County Commissioner; Loren Grosskopf, Park County Commissioner; Siva Sundaresan, Greater Yellowstone Coalition; Larry and Nina Parker; Max Miller, Cody Enterprise

Absent: Rick Harrison, Bob Jackson, Lee Livingston, Greg Mayton, Chris Pfister, JD Radakovich, Rori Renner

NEXT MEETING

Monday, December 4 – 5:30 p.m.
Cody Library - Grizzly Hall

AGENDA TOPICS

Approval of Minutes

The June 15 meeting minutes were approved.
The September 13 meeting minutes were approved.

McCullough Peaks WSA Draft Recommendation and public comment website

Chair Bucky Hall noted that the committee's draft recommendation for the McCullough Peaks WSA is on the Park County website. The draft recommendation will be open for public comment through December 1, 2017 via: <http://www.parkcounty.us/commissioners/wplimcculloughpeaks.html>

A "Draft" watermark will be added to the management proposal document and reposted on the county web site. Notice of the draft recommendation public comment period will be published in local newspapers. Commissioner Joe Tilden said the County Commission will consider paying for the newspaper ads. Committee chairman Bucky Hall will present this request to the Commission. The committee discussed other advertising, including a radio announcement and social media. Although Park County itself doesn't have social media capability, committee members will utilize their personal accounts to encourage comments from as broad representation of interests as

possible. An email will also be sent out to any members of the public who have attended a committee meeting and provided an email.

Comments will be compiled as a pdf document after December 1 and distributed to the WPLI Committee for their consideration and discussion in a future meeting.

Facilitator Tara Kuipers pointed out other resources available on the Park County web site, including agency presentations for both the McCullough Peaks and High Lakes WSAs.

Discussion: High Lakes WSA Draft Recommendation

Kuipers reminded the committee to complete the High Lakes WSA interests/options worksheet and submit it to her. She extended an invitation for anyone from the committee to share photos and discussion items from the two High Lakes field trips. None were presented.

Chairman Hall said he feels the group has all the data needed to draft a recommendation for the High Lakes WSA. "I submit we leave it like it is and call it a Special Management Area, allowing current uses to continue. There is no wildlife there in the winter, and (uses cause) no disturbance to people or animals." Hall asked the committee what more information is needed.

Discussion centered around wildlife in a 5,000-acre region in NE High Lakes WSA, specifically winter range and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's (WGFD) winter range types, definitions, and acronyms.

(Note: Data was previously presented to the committee by Shoshone National Forest and Wyoming Game and Fish representatives on February 15, 2017 and March 15, 2017. This data will be revisited to clarify questions the committee members may have, and the Game and Fish may be contacted to clarify points, if necessary. Following in the Resources section of these minutes are links to the minutes from those meetings and to the presentations from the Wyoming Game and Fish and Shoshone National Forest. These documents reside on the Park County web site.)

General Public representative Hap Ridgway said he would like clarification on the WGFD acronyms, and why the G&F calls it a CRWIN (Crucial Winter Range).

General Public representative Chris Bekes asked if the WGFD data is needed information, or just getting the committee "stuck in the weeds."

General public representative Doug Smith read from his notes from the March 15 meeting, saying, "Tim Woolley said the Wyoming Game and Fish Department has no concerns with the current management procedure."

Committee member Dustin Rosencranse emphasized that the motorized community has no interest in giving up any of the use area that has been used since the 1960s. Rosencranse noted that sixty percent of the Shoshone Forest is currently designated as Wilderness.

Rosencranse pointed out that the committee's designation has no effect on WGFD's ability to impose a winter closure in the area at any time. These closures are not always related to wildlife.

Non-motorized representative John Gallagher said there is a 13.75-mile system trail on the west edge of the WSA currently open to mechanized usage, as well as numerous hiking trails.

Sportsmen representative Joe Kondelis said his constituents would like to see nothing change from the way the WSA is currently managed: "No additional roads, nothing changed."

The group agreed that management needs to include assurance to allow for continued fish stocking in the High Lakes.

Concerns for winter habitat and maintaining a connection to Montana's Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness were raised by Conservation representative Jenny DeSarro. DeSarro said, "We're focused on this area. One reason people come to this area is the immense Shoshone Forest Wilderness. How do I get my interest met?"

Note: At the December 4 meeting, DeSarro requested the following addition to the October 19 draft meeting minutes: DeSarro suggested during the High Lakes discussion that, on the Forest Service map, east of the Beartooth Plateau contours (along steep contours) down to point 12 be recommended as Wilderness.

DeSarro asked for snowmobile use level management to be guaranteed. Rosencranse will provide the data he presented previously to the group.

General public representative Hap Ridgway expressed that Wilderness designation is desirable because it lasts forever.

Conservation representative John McGee: "It's a conundrum to me. We can't get around that there will be snowmobile use in this area. It's incumbent on us that, in off-snowmobile use season, the area has protections."

Gallagher said the committee talked about Wilderness versus another designation in the McCullough Peaks discussions, and that whatever legislation the committee writes now is also forever. "We can put whatever protections we choose in our legislation...I would encourage the group to think about it this way: How can we best protect the land, the water, and do that without having to use the big "W" Wilderness?"

Gallagher said a good resource is the Shoshone National Forest Visitor Capacity Analysis and Guidebook (April 2017) available on the SNF website. Usage is compartmentalized in this document, Gallagher said. "The interesting thing about that area is they consider it saturated with hikers. Not saturated with snowmobile users."

Smith said he does not represent a particular interest, but wants the management designation to be made based on scientific data and what's best for the land. "Not (to) win," Smith said. Smith expressed that no data had been presented to support there was criteria for a Wilderness designation in the High Lakes WSA.

Bekes noted that the majority of people already use the land in a respectful manner, both those from Wyoming and those who come from outside the state.

Chairman Hall again proposed that the committee consider designating the High Lakes WSA as a Special Management Area with management just as it is now. Hall said this satisfies all interests well.

The High Lakes interests summarized are:

- Connected landscapes for wildlife
- Winter motorized use maintained
- Sportsmen's access maintained w/ roads and roadless both
- No oil & gas development or mineral development
- Clean water
- Mountain bike route maintained
- Recommendation based on scientific soundness / expertise
- Detail in management strategies for USFS and specificity

Public Comment

Comments from members of the public included:

Joe Tilden, Park County Commissioner – Tilden said he participated in five years of the Shoshone National Forest planning process and WGFD management / winter range was discussed in depth during that process. “It’s very marginal. They’re not concerned at all.” Tilden asked DeSarro what her concerns are. He closed with comment to the committee that everybody is happy with the current management and reminding the group that the point of the WPLI is to write a recommendation for legislation to do away with the WSA legislation.

Loren Grosskopf, Park County Commissioner – Grosskopf said he was not surprised by the personal comments expressed by the committee during the meeting: “It’s exactly what we expected when we set up the committee.” Grosskopf pointed out that the amount of Wilderness and roadless area in the Shoshone National Forest is almost 85% of the total land mass, with visitor use “packed into the remaining 15%.” Grosskopf continued with summary of something he said he read a long time ago about an old miner who found a huge, beautiful jewel. The miner in the beginning wanted to share what he had found with others, but cautions from others and fear it might be ruined or stolen eventually caused the miner to lock the jewel up away and no one ever saw it again. “We can’t continue to lock everything up and put it away so it’s unusable.”

Nick Patrick, Wilderness and public lands advocate – Patrick said he has eight reasons for advocating for Wilderness and public lands - his eight grandkids. He expressed that the meeting was well-run and committee members’ statements well-articulated. “They aren’t making any more Wilderness,” Patrick said. He asked the committee to “zoom out” and look at the rest of the globe. “Don’t be hasty to divide the land off; take care to preserve it,” he said.

Paul Spitler, Director Wilderness Campaigns, The Wilderness Society – Spitler commented first on the committee’s efforts related to the High Lakes. 1) “One thing to remember is that the High Lakes were designated a WSA by Congress, very unlike McCullough Peaks and any other BLM WSA.” Spitler said the Congressional designation requires that the High Lakes “shall be managed consistent with the 1983 uses defined.” 2) Management has already been directed by Congress, so you need to have a compelling reason to change the name; 3) Is about values & philosophies and not data/statistics focus. (The committee is tasked to) come together to meet everybody’s interests. If you can’t, ok, we’ll move on to another area. Spitler’s remarks on the McCullough Peaks: 1) “Congratulations on reaching a tentative agreement and draft proposal. I hope my organization can support it.” 2) “A lot of elements in the written proposal are vague (motorized vehicle use, road construction, others). I’ve seen this happen many times and recommend you go back over the proposal, be as specific as possible now so there aren’t disagreements later about what was actually intended.” Spitler said he will be listing these points in his comments. “Don’t try to piecemeal. Take both as a whole,” he concluded.

Bert Miller, Wyoming State Snowmobile Association / American Council of Snowmobile Association – Miller said he appreciates the dialog and passion of the committee. Miller said that, of the High Lakes WSA, approximately 10% can be used by motorized recreation, comprising 32 to 34 actual miles of trails. He said this is the third smallest area in Wyoming to ride in. Miller said those who attended the field trip can see how well WSSA is working with local agencies. The WSSA pays for grooming that also allows accesses to other groups. The organization worked with the Forest Service on a grant to install a new bathroom that’s open for public use. “You can see how important this area is to the snowmobile community, how well taken care of it is,” Miller said, “I appreciate your open dialog; I appreciate Hap and Jenny coming to talk to me. The snowmobile community is not interested in giving up any of the use area.”

Brenda Miller, Wyoming State Snowmobile Association – Miller said the only groomed trail in the High Lakes WSA is the highway. Other marked trails go south of the highway. She said snowmobiles otherwise ride in open areas and are opposed to any area being taken away.

Julia Stuble, Wyoming Outdoor Council / Fremont County WPLI Committee Conservation representative – Stuble said Fremont County has five WSA landscapes they are considering and have barely begun to talk about their interests and expect a long discussion. “Don’t rush,” she said, “None of us are interested in shutting down motorized use.” Stuble said she maintains a solitude interest. “The list is too short to start considering a proposal,” she continued, “It is a philosophy, not science. It’s not about all or nothing, it’s about how to meet all interests.”

Tate McCoy, Wyoming State Snowmobile Association – McCoy said the Wilderness advocates the position that if something is taken away, something is required to be given. “It shows their motive is to get more,” he said.

Actions

A second subcommittee will meet prior to the December 4 meeting with Hall to schedule this meeting. The subcommittee will consist of WPLI Chairman Bucky Hall, Jenny DeSarro (Conservation), Hap Ridgway (General Public), Dustin Rosencranse (Motorized Recreation), and Doug Smith (General Public). Their tasks include:

1. Consider any parallels between land management designation and wildlife management.
2. WGFD definitions of “crucial” as related to the NE corner of the WSA.
3. Investigate any Montana wildlife impacts.
4. Investigate High Lakes WSA area wolverine study.
5. Outcome: a draft proposal for the full committee’s consideration.

Return High Lakes priorities surveys to Tara Kuipers.

Dustin Rosencranse will provide snowmobile use data to the committee.

WPLI Committee Meeting: Monday, December 4 - 5:30

Focus will be the High Lakes WSA.

Resources

McCullough Peaks WPLI draft recommendation & request for Public Comments

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

February 15 WPLI Committee Meeting Minutes

<http://www.parkcounty.us/commissioners/documents/wpli/2017/WPLI%20-%20Minutes%20-%20Feb%2015%20meeting.pdf>

March 15 WPLI Committee Meeting Minutes

<http://www.parkcounty.us/commissioners/documents/wpli/2017/WPLI%20-%20Draft%20Minutes%20-%20Mar%2015%20meeting.pdf>

Shoshone National Forest High Lakes WSA Presentation

http://www.parkcounty.us/commissioners/documents/wpli/2017/USFS%20Taglioli%20HLWSA_Presentation2017comp_2_10_17.pptx

WPLI High Lakes WGFD Presentation

<http://www.parkcounty.us/commissioners/documents/wpli/2017/WPLI%20High%20Lakes%20WGFD%20Presentation.pdf>

High Lakes Wildlife Observation Query (G&F)

<http://www.parkcounty.us/commissioners/documents/wpli/2017/HighLakesWildlife%20ObservationQuery2017.pdf>