

Pend Oreille Basin Commission
9/24/08 Minutes
Panhandle Health District (2-5 p.m.)

Commissioners present:

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| Ford Elsaesser | Linda Mitchell |
| Brent Baker | Craig Hill |
| Doug Conde | Caryn Miske |
| Rich Torquemada | Kate Wilson (program coordinator) |

Guests/public

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Agenda

- 1) Introductions and approval of Minutes from 6/11/08 meeting (Linda Mitchell)
- 2) Presentation on Albeni Falls Dam operations (Joe Summers, Project Manager)
- 3) Discussion: winter pool on Lake Pend Oreille
- 4) Presentation on Pack River Delta restoration project (Kathy Cousins, IDFG)
- 5) Presentation on the proposed Pend d'Oreille Bay Trail (Susan Drumheller, IDL)
- 6) Update on aquatic invasive species in Montana (Kate Wilson)
- 7) Project discussion (Kate Wilson)
- 8) Discussion: upcoming meeting dates

Meeting

Craig made a motion to *approve the 6/11/08 Minutes as written*. Brent seconded. All in favor; **motion passed**.

Joe Summers gave a presentation on the operation of Albeni Falls Dam. He reported that it was a "chaotic spring" and that operation of the Dam was different than usual. The authority for USACE management of Lake Pend Oreille is changing; it is now managed through the Seattle office. 1947 was the wettest year on record; 2048(2079 was highest level on record) feet was considered "natural low" lake level. There were some years in the 1960s when the lake was at "full pool" in the winter. Last winter the winter pool was 2055'. December 31-March 31 they have the authority to fill Lake Pend Oreille. The winter pool must be reached no later than November 20th each year (per agreement with IDFG).

Albeni Falls was built in part to protect the Sandpoint shoreline. In the spring, all 10 spillgates were opened to let the Pend Oreille River flow naturally. In early June the snowpack in Montana was higher than the 1997 levels. They were worried about flooding. On June 17th they took one foot out of the lake; people were upset because many of them had just put their boats in the water; notification could have been better. It was at full pool by July 4th. No more than 10,000 cfs is allowed per day (outflow). There are sloughing/erosion issues with changing the lake level too often. This winter (2008-9) has not yet been decided; meeting in Bayview coming up. It was suggested that we put the USACE hotline link on our website to aid people in notification of lake level changes.

Chip Corsi gave an update on kokanee survival in Lake Pend Oreille and tributaries. There are an estimated 31,000 spawners this year (up from 15,000 last year). He went over the "decision tree" (factors in determining Lake Pend Oreille winter pool). A question on kokanee food resources came up. Chip responded by saying that it does not seem to be a

factor at this point (affecting kokanee survival); the lakes where fertilization does seem to be successful were nutrient-poor reservoirs for the most part. Mysis shrimp are believed to be a “next exporter” of nutrients as they drop to the bottom of the lake when they die; resulting nutrients not available to the fishery. He explained that Lake Pend Oreille essentially has two diverse systems: an open water system and a nearshore system; they operate very differently.

Kathy Cousins, Mitigation Biologist for IDFG, gave a presentation on the Pack River Delta restoration project. Low water is needed (in the winter) to begin work on the project. She explained the difference between on-site work mitigation and off-site restoration; the Pack River Delta project is sponsored by a large partnership of organizations. A million dollar grant from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act was sponsored by Ducks Unlimited for this particular project (\$500,000 to this project, \$500,000 to purchasing conservation easements on important tributaries).

The project will “restore the functionality of the delta.” At high water, the islands are submerged. The Pack River contributes 240,000 tons of sediment annually. They will use engineered log structures to stop erosion and make the system more stable. They will raise the islands a couple of feet to keep them from being completely submerged; they will redirect the flow away from the banks. The dam drowns out the vegetation and the wetlands are gone for a large part of the year. Historically, the delta was logged, hayed, and grazed. What was 6000 acres of wetlands and 8900 acres of deepwater marsh is now mostly gone. The soil/sediments washing down the river are not absorbed in the delta like they should be; instead they flood into Lake Pend Oreille and are a large contributor of nutrients. In the spring (after the islands have been raised, log vanes, and large wood debris structures installed), will plant native vegetation to keep the soil and new structures intact. The delta is a “culturally sensitive area,” so there is a 150’ setback. If the project is successful, they hope to take on a similar project in the Clark Fork Delta, which is eroding quickly. It is eight times the size of the Pack River Delta. Boats exacerbate the erosion. Construction will commence in December and continue through February. Community assistance planting in the spring is requested.

Susan and Jan Griffiths gave a presentation on the proposed Pend d’Oreille Bay Trail, which would connect Sandpoint to Ponderay and Kootenai. History: In 1964-75 and again in 2004 USACE stabilized the banks along the shoreline (where the trail is). In 1966 the Hall family purchased a substantial chunk of the property. In 1981 the Hall family began discussions on the Trail. In 1993 the Hall’s leased part of the property to the railroad. In 2005 the City of Sandpoint got involved with the “Rails to Trails” program. An organization was recently founded to move the project forward, “Friends of the Pend D’Oreille Bay Trail.” Originally, it was an ad hoc group of the City.

There is a lot of buy in to the community trail concept. However, there are public access issues, many different landowners, environmental clean up needs, and safety issues on railroad property. With the increased economic vitality of the area, there is considerable interest in the project. There are some important historical sites for the area also, such as the Humbird Mill site, BlackRock, as well as native plants, wetlands, and wildlife. The project would protect the shoreline from future development. Susan explained that this project doesn’t meet the “Rails to Trails” program because the rails are still active. It is more of a “rails with trails” project, she said. “There is a cooperative spirit guiding the project.”

Agreements are needed between the cities on access, maintenance, and law enforcement. The trail needs safe access with controlled trailheads and a pedestrian underpass that is big enough for emergency vehicles. The group is waiting to hear on a National Park Service grant that would assist them by providing a trail planner. The Friends of the Pend D'Oreille Bay Trail requested the Commission to become a partner and participate in the planning process. In addition, the Commission could review water quality data in assessments and be listed as a partner in grant applications.

Brent made a motion to *become a partner in support of the proposed Pend D'Oreille Trail as it is within the charge of the Commission to enhance and protect the shoreline and facilitate environmental cleanup*. Linda Mitchell seconded. All in favor; **motion passed**.

Kate gave an update on aquatic invasive species upstream in Montana. Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM) was first discovered in Montana just upstream of Lake Pend Oreille in the Cabinet Gorge and Noxon Rapids reservoirs in 2007; the "Sanders County EWM Task Force" was created in response. They are in the plan of developing a state-wide management plan for EWM. The aforementioned reservoirs also have curlyleaf pondweed and flowering rush (aquatic invaders known to be in Lake Pend Oreille already). Currently, they are utilizing bottom barriers in the reservoirs and hiring Dr. Madsen to do comprehensive mapping. The Montana Dept. of Agriculture is the lead on aquatic invasives in Montana; they would like to work with us to communicate better. Legislation is being written by Governor Schweitzer's Invasive Species Subcommittee. They hope to have it drafted by October to go the January Legislative session; it will change the subcommittee to an advisory council, create a coordinator position, add specific laws for inspections, and allow affected Departments more rulemaking authority.

After discussing potential projects for FY2009, the Commission decided to move forward with the proposed Priest Lake*A*Syst project. By allocating funds to reinitiate Lake*A*Syst efforts at Priest, the Pend Oreille/Priest coordinator positions may be combined to offer more long-term work. The Commission would like to see the program focus on the Pend Oreille River also. Funds for this year will be available for coordinator time, travel, and the development (and possible printing) of Priest Lake materials. Linda made a motion to *fund the project as proposed*. Brent seconded. All in favor; **motion passed**.

The Commissioners requested that Kate review the budget and, in the case that there are available funds, get line items for the water quality public awareness campaign for a possible additional project (Tri-State Water Quality Council will be developing campaign).

In order to resume our regular meeting schedule, the Commission will be holding a conference call on November 26, 2008. Subsequent meetings will be held in February, May, and August 2009.

Linda made a motion to *adjourn the meeting*. Brent seconded. All in favor; **motion passed**. Meeting adjourned at 4:58 p.m.