

Pend Oreille Basin Commission
3/11/09 Minutes
Panhandle Health District (2-5 p.m.)

Commissioners present:

Ford Elsaesser	Marc Brinkmeyer
Brent Baker	Craig Hill
Doug Conde	Caryn Miske
Rich Torquemada	Kate Wilson (program coordinator)

Guests/public

14

Agenda

- 1) Introductions and approval of Minutes from 11/12/08 meeting
- 2) Update on Angler Incentive Program and kokanee salmon status (Jim Fredericks, Project Manager)
- 3) Presentation on Lake Trout Telemetry Project (Andy Dux, IDFG)
- 4) Presentation on the state of the Upper Priest Lake fishery (Jim Fredericks, IDFG)
- 5) Pack River Delta restoration project (Kathy Cousins, IDFG)
- 6) Legislative updates-water quality related (Doug Conde, IDEQ)
- 7) Project updates; meet new LAS Coordinator (Kate Wilson)
- 8) Discussion: upcoming meeting dates

Meeting

Craig made a motion to *approve the 11/12/08 Minutes as written*. Doug seconded. All in favor; **motion passed**.

Jim Fredericks, Regional Fisheries Manager provided an update on the Angler Incentive Program and the state of the kokanee salmon. Lake trout harvest is very good, but Rainbow trout harvest is not so good. The nets are mostly being used in the north end of the lake. This year, they are fishing where they are most effective. Ford asked about the bull trout by-catch in the nets. Jim responded that last season they had 200 bull trout mortalities out of the 1000 that were caught in the nets. They are avoiding areas with a bad ratio of bull trout/lake trout, doing a creel survey on anglers with bull trout, and working on education/identification efforts. Over 40 bull trout heads were turned in by anglers in the AIP last year. This year, there will be a study that traces bull trout origins to specific tributaries as well.

Gill nets must be tended and specialize in catching fish less than 16 inches; trap nets they set out and leave overnight—they work well on fish less than 20 inches. 63,597 lake trout have been removed since the beginning of the AIP and netting programs in 2006. The harvested fish are cleaned, filleted, and given to area food banks.

This year, the kokanee spawners are up nearly double what they were last year. There are enough fry for good production if they can stay alive long enough to spawn. We need higher survival rates. 630,000 eggs were collected from Sullivan Springs this year. They supplemented the stock with three million eggs from Whatcom County and Deadwood Reservoir. Lake level management is still very important for kokanee survival. Most of

the spawning habitat is between 2051'-2055.' Bull trout are better protected when kokanee numbers are thriving. The Commissioners commended IDFG on outreach; the AIP and netting programs are not nearly as controversial as they started out to be. Andy Dux gave a presentation on the lake trout Telemetry (tracking) project. They have been tagging lake trout with acoustic tags and tracking them around Lake Pend Oreille to determine spawning sites and behavior characteristics. In 2007 they identified two likely sites that were verified in 2008 through the continued program. The tags have depth and temperature sensors as well. "Lake trout aggregate when they spawn," he explained. "Often they have just a few spawning sites in one waterbody."

Andy's team tracks weekly during spawning season and monthly all winter. In 2007, 29 fish were tagged; in 2008 38 fish were tagged from all over the lake. By mid-September both years the tagged fish were pretty much all in the southern half of the lake—at Windy Point and Echo Bay. Both sites have 2-3 miles of shoreline and are very deep right off of shore (100-125'); 73 percent of the tagged fish were at one of the two sites in 2008. The program will continue in 2009 and expand to track juvenile lake trout as well. If anglers catch lake trout with tags IDFG encourages them to turn them in for reuse.

University of Idaho Limnologist Dr. Frank Wilhelm and his graduate student are working on a project on the lake to look at the role of mysis in nutrient distribution. They believe that because Lake Pend Oreille is so deep, they mysis are not contributing what they might in other, shallower waterbodies; in fact, they might be removing nutrients from the system. Discussion ensued on Oganogan Lake; they have a productive shrimp fishery (for the tropical fish aquarium industry mostly).

Jim Fredericks gave a presentation on the state of the Upper Priest Lake fishery. Lake trout were introduced in 1925 but weren't widely distributed until at least 1985. The first removal project was in 1998; 2006-2008 IDFG contracted with Harbor Fisheries (run netting program on Pend Oreille) for one week of lake trout removal on Upper Priest Lake. In 2008 they removed 2700 lake trout; catch rates decrease as the week progresses. Though it is effective, this seems to be an expensive, short-term solution to the lake trout problem in Upper Priest. Essentially, they start all over each year. The lake trout migrate through the thorofare and pose great threats to native trout. IDFG is investigating ways to block them from moving to the upper lake. Potential methods include: using strobe lights to repel them, pound nets, or a floating or electrical weir. There are lots of issues associated with all of these ideas, Jim says they are "rapidly running out of alternatives." Discussion ensued on the purpose of the breakwater. It was originally put in to protect homes (Sandpiper Shores) and transport logs. Is there a way to keep lake trout out with a new breakwater design? Bull trout numbers have dropped in the upper lake as the mackinaw numbers have increased exponentially.

Kathy Cousins, Mitigation Biologist for IDFG, gave an update on the Pack River Delta restoration project. They did not move forward at all last year because of the lake level. The low level this year enabled them to reach the construction goals. The objective of the project is to mitigate for impacts from Albeni Falls Dam, which holds the water high for an artificially long time. Through 50 years of dam operations, erosion has occurred and

nutrients are largely washed to the bottom of the lake. Through the restoration, sediments from the Pack River should settle out in the confluence at the delta. Eight islands are being raised up, they are putting in log jams, log veins, boulders, fascines, root wads, a “geotube” breakwater, and lots of native plantings. There are several partners who have made the project possible. The native vegetation will provide better habitat for a myriad of fish and wildlife species. They have a very intensive monitoring program in place. It is engineered for a 100 year flood event. Though the snow slowed down the process a bit, the project is on time.

Doug Conde gave a report on water-relevant Legislative updates. IDEQ adopted a new rule regarding septic designs to more accurately reflect wastewater from average homes by sizing the systems differently. For the second year in a row, the Legislature rejected this rule, mainly based upon testimony from realtors and other interest groups concerned with home sales. They want to see rates of septic failures but there is no way to show this; the Health Districts cannot track the systems over time. Waiting for contamination from failing systems seems to be a step in the wrong direction if the concern is protecting surface waters. Brent mentioned that the Building Contractors Associations were opposed to changing design standards. IDEQ will be collecting more data in 2009-2010 before moving forward with the proposed rule again.

There is actually a proposal now to reduce the setbacks from surface waters in the septic rules; the Commission would not support this. Instead of a bill, it sounds like the proposal will go to a Technical Guidance Committee.

The State is having to make all kinds of budget cuts. The Commission lost \$5000 off the top. Tom Herron said that at this time, there are no further holdbacks, but it is hard to say where the reductions will stop; right now it is at eight percent, but there is talk of as high as 15 percent.

House Bill 213 was introduced by Rep. Eric Anderson. This would require all boaters to purchase an Aquatic Invasive Species sticker that will go into an AIS fund for prevention and education. At this time, there are not a lot of details about how the program will work, but sticker fees are proposed as \$20 for out-of-state boaters, \$10 for Idaho boaters, and \$5 for non-motorized.

Jim Brady stated that the low water was helpful to the bypass project as well as the Pack River Delta project.

The next Commission meeting will be held in late May; date and location TBA.

Brent made a motion to *adjourn the meeting*. Craig seconded. All in favor; **motion passed**. Meeting adjourned at 4:52 p.m.