

## **March 19, 2020 Bitterroot Ecosystem Subcommittee Conference Call Notes**

On the call Matt Anderson, Kim Annis, Jennifer Fortin-Noreus, Elisa Stamm, J.J. Teare, Greg Chilcott, Linda Price, Brett Barsalou, Rebecca Mowry, Justin Martin, Karyl Krieger, Cheryl Probert, Lori Roberts, David Diamond, Jamie Jonkel, Scott Jackson, Russ Talmo, Sandy Fisher, Chris Swanson, Amy Baumer, Hilary Cooley

Chuck reviewed the agenda, first on the agenda was to discuss the Summer IGBC Meeting in the Bitterroot. Chuck wanted to see what folks would like to propose to the Executive Committee, we will operate under the assumption that we will still have the meeting.

Secondly Chuck would like to discuss the communication plan assignment that came out of the meeting between Fish and Wildlife Service and Regions One and Four of the Forest Service. Chuck said based on his discussions with some folks that we might not necessarily all be on the same page with what the intent is of the communication plan.

Chuck would then like touch upon a couple topics regarding the formation of a science team. It looks like we might be able to do some DNA sampling this summer in the ecosystem. We can cover any other topics folks might have after that.

Chuck asked David Diamond if he would be helping to facilitate the summer IGBC meeting, David said that was correct. Chuck said Hilary prompted him with some thoughts on what we might like to cover. Hilary suggested talking about the historical context in and around grizzly bear recovery in the Bitterroots and discuss the biological aspects of connectivity and certainly some of our recent activity with bears moving in and out of the ecosystem. Also talking about the conflict situations that we've got over in the Bitterroot Valley. Jamie can talk to that subject because I know we've talked more than once about the conflict issues that we've got in and around the Bitterroot Valley. Hilary also suggested talking about the social aspects of recovery and connectivity with bears coming back into the ecosystem and how we might connect with local communities during this meeting. Also talk about grizzly bear conflict reduction as bears come back into the Bitterroot ecosystem and how we're going to live with bears and what that might entail. We usually have field trip on the second day of the meeting, Chuck is looking for ideas from folks about what we might do and if they've got thoughts and ideas about hosting the IGBC meeting at the end of June.

David Diamond said that if we have the meeting, we need to think about the fact that there could be a distance component. The governor's grizzly bear advisory committee is meeting online this morning as one example. Assuming that we are meeting in person it is a tremendous opportunity for this subcommittee. This is a meeting of the interagency grizzly bear executive group, so you get the directors from the state agencies and the regional directors from federal agencies and they have a practice with their summer meetings of doing essentially field visits. The last time they visited the Bitterroot ecosystem was 2012 when they met in Lowell Idaho. So it has been some time and things have changed on the ground in your area and the question Chuck is posing here is pretty important. How do we make sure that the

community is ready take advantage of having these decision makers coming to visit and what are the issues for folks in this area that we need to put forward?

Chuck said that Martha Williams, IGBC Chair, wants to stay in Montana, so we will be focused in the Bitterroot Valley. Cheryl said she would suggest that we have some very concentrated work to get viewpoints, social challenges, opinions and economic effects information from the Idaho side because that's where there are some big differences. So, if we're going to stay on the Montana side that's fine, but Idaho can't be an afterthought in the planning. JJ said he agrees and that he believes within the next year we need to be talking to our local communities and start to have some meetings in Idaho with some leaders, as to the Montana side last year was literally the first year within our communities that they started thinking about grizzly bears with 927 coming through and a lot of press around that. Before then it was pretty much not in people's minds. So, there is a bunch of work to do on mine and Cheryl's side. We will be looking to IGBC for assistance on these communication issues. Chuck said he agrees even though we will be in Montana for the meeting portraying the Idaho situation will be really important.

Lori said to convey those points from the Idaho side could we reach out to commissioners or do you have any ideas about who would be best to talk to? Cheryl said that JJ, Chuck and she need to get together and discuss, but it is very important to make sure that our counties are represented. We have also have collaboratives that have done a lot of work in resource management and recreation management across the board and they overlap a lot, there is a southern Idaho and North Central Idaho component to that, we work with together to get that information. Chuck said we also have Brett on the phone and asked his thoughts. Brett said he would help however he could. Chuck said local government and community participation is key. Brett said the more accurate information we can get out there will help facilitate our mission moving forward.

Lisa said that she is sitting in for Jeanne Higgins and that she will mention this to her, and that she would also like to be involved with this.

Chuck asked Jamie about his thoughts concerning discussion topics in the summer meeting. Jamie said for a field trip in regard to bear conflicts he could think of a couple spots where the committee could get a pretty good feeling of what is at hand on side roads with 30 to 40 garbage cans. Maybe even going up toward Lolo Hot Springs so folks can see some of the work we're doing with that particular business, if it's on the agenda, might be a good one. Also letting folks see what the habitat looks like. It will probably be a little early for huckleberries to be in bloom, but it would be nice to let them see what kind of huckleberry production is occurring and what kind of serviceberry production is occurring. The natural foods that are there in the river bottoms and in the surrounding mountains.

Lori asked if it would be possible to give a summary of the last five years of black bear conflicts. Jamie said those calls are a little scattered but that he could give a short talk and maybe a

couple of the wardens could provide a briefing. Chuck asked Matt if he had any thoughts, as he would be the host, Matt said he would defer to Jamie but one thing we can show here is the difference with so much urban interface and people here and the chance for conflict.

David Diamond said that in terms of in-person time, assuming we get to have an in-person meeting, the Fairgrounds in Hamilton is a good facility to hold the meeting. In addition to some fieldtrip options and business meeting, is there the ability to do a public engagement or public meeting. Either day or evening but also what might work for that location not just for one way communication, but two way communication. Jamie said that in the last month he has been doing a lot of education and outreach with schools and has a canned presentation for the Bitterroot where we have had verified grizzly observations. Folks are interested in that because it has given them the real information and it kind of addresses some of the rumors. Jamie said he would be happy to give that kind of information. Greg said we better be prepared for our Ag community to come out with not a ton of understanding and a lot of frustration. If they know there is going to be a meeting that has to do with grizzly bears there is going to be a full house. Is it best to have an evening community event? What do you guys think about making some time for public comment, it is kind of important right now I think that the executive committee is trying to do that more so that everyone feels like they're being heard.

Chuck said we want to make sure that we frame the discussion really well and we just don't say well yeah we're going to have a meeting on grizzly bears otherwise things would be all over the place. It is important to spend a little bit of time on thoughtful preparation about what we would like to hear from the public, so that way we could benefit everybody. Lori asked if Chuck if he thought it would be helpful to have people from the NCDE or the Yellowstone Ecosystem that are from the Ag community that deal with bear issues or do you think it's too soon for that? Greg said he thought having peers there would be a benefit to the discussion. Was thinking of Cole Maddox? Would suggest having folks that are frustrated as well. Important to get both sides of the issue. Lori said that is why she thought of Cole Maddox, he is on the governor's council and has been really impressed because he is from the Blackfeet and he's really well spoken and he does come from both sides, where they have adjusted things to live with bears but not excited about living with bears. Brett said he doesn't know what Ravalli County has done in the last couple days in relation to virus, but we have shut down our Fairgrounds until further notice which might be through the summer. Greg said he doesn't know where we will be in June. Chuck said that the reality is we could be holding this meeting virtually or maybe not at all. Chuck said that Cheryl had mentioned sharing the Idaho perspective at the meeting. Cheryl, JJ, Jeanne Higgins will work on getting that information for the meeting. Chuck asked that Jamie, and anyone that wanted to work with Jamie to get the framework for the fieldtrip together. Rebecca and Matt said that they would help Jamie. Chuck asked Matt to work with David on logistics as far as a meeting facility.

Chuck asked that we shift gears and move on to the communication plan update. Chuck said that back in the mid-January Regions One and Four of the Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service in both states Idaho and Montana got together in Missoula for 2 days to get us all on the same page in regard to where we've been with grizzly bear recovery in the Bitterroot and where we think we need to go. Chuck thought it was well time well spent and one of the tasks that we identified for folks to accomplish for the short term future was putting together a comprehensive communication plan. Chuck looked back on the notes last night what we really wanted to do was try to explain how we got to where we are today, in regard to the larger ecosystem and where we need to go in grizzly bear recovery. Some thoughts about the investment in relationships at multiple scales is going to be important to grizzly bear recovery in the Bitterroot ecosystem as well as involvement of communities and local government. The majority of us felt that this communication will be crucial in establishing a foundation for us, not only in this subcommittee and the IGBC, but also with the communities that surround and depend on the lands in the Bitterroot ecosystem and in preparing for grizzly bears with what recovery looks like. We also need to talk about preparing folks for bears come into the forest, showing the public and our partners what we want to do, what that plan of action looks like and having something more concrete moving forward. We've had questions over the last year and a half or so from people that are wondering what we are doing for the recovery of grizzly bears in the Bitterroot ecosystem and we need to be able to answer those questions. Sandy Fisher, Amy Baumer and other folks were identified to help try to flesh that out and start putting together a framework for that communication plan. Chuck isn't sure that we are all on the same page about the communication plan and what the intended audience is. Chuck would like to hear from folks about their understanding. He feels it's critical to talk about where we've been how we've gotten to today and where we're moving forward with grizzly bear recovery and then how we share that information so that we're being inclusive enough so that people understand what grizzly bear recovery means in the Bitterroot ecosystem. It's key that we're on the same page on this communication plan. If this communication plan is a federal thing it isn't going to benefit us very much, it needs to include the states, Idaho Fish and Game and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks and County government needs to be include. Having a diverse united front moving forward about what grizzly bear recovery looks like is going to be important especially with how that gets presented to the public.

Chris Swanson said thanks to Chuck for doing a good job reflecting on the meeting that happened in January. In the past six months we've been talking on at least one conference call and we've just done some preliminary outlining of all the different components of grizzly bear recovery and of course communications was a big part of the need to go forward together. What we wanted to do is ensure that we had all of the potential parts of the communication plan on the table so that we weren't moving at a pace that missed key components. So, on my end I needed to vet a lot of the parts and pieces of that through my internal leadership and then the plan wouldn't slow us down because we're at a pretty good point with the draft and the content in that should not be a surprise anyone. In the next months we would have a

chance to make sure our leadership was good with the components that we identified and then fully engage everybody. We would engage all of the partners and players across this ecosystem that care about bears and our stakeholders to make sure we had full input into this thing and accurately start with a good basis. That's what we were hoping to get out of this, not to start off with a shotgun approach but rather to have a thoughtful start that would then fully engage everybody on this sub-committee and then of course all the stakeholders.

Matt said that in the January meeting he learned a lot about the history. He feels like we need to have that same conversation with the rest of interested parties to get that historical piece in place and then move forward. Matt hopes the communication plan gets us all on the same page as intended back in January. I don't know that we're all on the same page of where we go but at least we can be on the same page of where we have been.

Cheryl said she echoes what Matt said and it was important and helpful and provides good context especially because a lot of the people that we are going to be talking to about this informational outreach have more history with it than us. So we need to make sure that we are being transparent about that history and helping them bridge the gap over the last two decades.

JJ said he echoes transparency, it's going to be important to get this federal communication strategy with state input to look at these communities as we develop this. We need to acknowledge that people haven't lived with grizzly bears for a long time or understand the impact they will have on their recreation and in their lives. I think it's going to be important as we move forward to be transparent with this history and share with these communities how it is going to impact them. Also show them the successes in the Flathead Valley with bears, how in Bonners Ferry they're living with bears and in the Greater Yellowstone there are some good examples moving forward that we do have places that people are living with bears.

Jamie said transparency is big thing missing in a watershed-wide or community structure. That leaves us leaning heavily on the state and the Feds rather than the public but I don't know how to set something like that up. The Bitterroot Valley is fairly fractured territorial wise with a lot of different NGOs but it would be lovely to get them to all come together to assist with this whole communication plan. I don't know how to do that though.

JJ said that he gets the feeling, especially within the Clearwater region, that folks see the NGOs more as antagonists. And they're very antigovernment folks it's just a different culture here and there's really no strong communication working with NGOs, which can have pretty negative effects. Maybe the Fish and Game and Forest Service together would have a little better luck as a united front. Jamie said he misspoke with NGO, maybe more of a watershed entity coming from grassroots in the communities.

Cheryl said given that definition maybe again we can all talk about that, several of us have collaborative groups that we've been working with for a long time and that could be something that have an interest in helping with that community wide perspective. You might have three or four of them that, because distance isn't the only differences in our communities, but they could perhaps work together as group with their own collaboration. I don't know that any of our collaborators would want to take that on and work together on it but perhaps they would and that could be a mechanism.

David said the plan itself is a static thing, is the plan itself that you are going to be working on closely with the communities going forward in some way? What is the 30 second pitch here? Is it that things are different there is no official formal plan to take steps, however things are happening and there's a need for the community to get ready. What exactly are you landing on or is there still a discussion about what it should be? If you're going to engage the public, how they're going to be involved going forward?

Brett said as you know we've been dealing with the communication aspect of a forest plan revision for the last couple of years it is definitely a challenge and I agree with all the comments around the table that say this is the critical part of the plan going forward. I think it's going to take a lot more discussion to figure out how we do that because just like someone said the Clearwater area is fractured, well so is the Lemhi and I'm sure the Bitterroot is fractured in the philosophy of the people that live there. We need to keep the narrative simple, it should not be confusing or cumbersome with too much data. We have to know where we came from and I do not know that, so it's pretty hard to support a message going forward until I'm more educated on where we've been so that's an important part of the plan and I guess that kind of makes me representative of the majority of the population. We need to present this as not just the government plan and give a lot more thought on how we do bring the civilian population into the conversation and have them educated at that point.

Greg said he agrees with Brett, but also wanted to discuss NGO's or collaboratives, they are often seen as outsiders trying to influence what happens to the locals. Trying to engage the community as a whole is a better idea. We need to not make this look like government is working with the NGOs to shove something down the local's throats and I think that's part of the message we have to be very subtle about but I think we have to be aware of it.

It would be nice to see a rough draft as soon as possible. Sandy said that based on this conversation this is kind of more in the realm of the I&E subcommittee at this point and so is it more appropriate in her mind for the I&E folks kind of take the lead on this moving forward. Amy said this definitely helpful information for her moving forward, most the people we've been engaging with so far are on the I&E committee but not all of them. I think we're definitely still going to need some help from folks outside of that group for some of that expertise that we don't have in order to move the draft forward. Amy said she has a meeting with several folks the region this afternoon in regards to this plan she can share this information to help move forward.

Chuck said we've got some internal things as we unveiled this communication plan and provide this information to the public. From the standpoint of the States and County government we need to be inclusive and transparent in order to gain trust and credibility. The composition of the subcommittee is diverse enough and we've got the right players in place to help us do that. If we're missing a beat here in regards to moving forward, folks should probably catch us on that so that way we can look back and make sure we cover what we need to moving forward and address what David said is the main objective.

Chris Swanson said he wanted to reiterate that everything that everybody brought up is what we've been talking about as the first steps of a communications plan. The whole goal is to have this committee and the I&E subcommittee talk about what's needed for the key components that's going help us all realizing this is a multifaceted multistakeholder approach and it is in no way going to be a federal communication plan. It's going to hopefully meet the needs with all the key facts and themes we need and wanted to make sure that it was thoughtful from the beginning. We are at a starting point and we need everybody's input at this point to help craft the core messages together that we're all going to need now and in the future for all of our key relationship stakeholders, the public, everybody that's affected by this. The whole goal is to make this communication plan a multi-stakeholder approach to grizzly bear recovery. We are just trying to get our ducks in a row so that we had the key parts covered as a starting point and that would serve as the key place to get everybody's engagement. It's going to be the foundation of how we move together.

Formation of a science team, I don't have any particular method to how we do this. I've had some folks step up that would like to be part of a support team to the subcommittee to provide science support and inform our processes.

Jennifer said we have been talking about the importance of having science members from all of the representative agencies on the Bitterroot subcommittee participate in things like reviewing what the recovery plan currently says and other topics such as where do we do DNA surveys. In our minds the first step in setting up a science team is to have all of the agencies appoint a biologist that is going to represent their agency on this science team. Other ecosystem science teams have more than one representative from each agency but we do need to know from each agency who they think are best suited to be part of the science team. Traditionally we've had science teams meet once or twice a year in conjunction with the subcommittee meetings so usually a few days before or the day before to be able to report out to the subcommittee about their progress. Jennifer said that there could be an email follow up of who is going to be participating from each agency.

Lori suggested appointing a committee chair at the first meeting so that the committee will continue to meet report out and good progress.

Chuck said the last topic he had was an update that we might be able to go out and do a little surveying this summer. Jennifer said that we are going to be able to hire two people that will

work in one team for approximately 3 months. We've been working with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks and will continue working with the Forest Service. The plan is to target areas where we have had verified sightings, such as the Big Hole, so it's not a large scale a grid sampling that many people I think have in their minds when they think about DNA surveys. This is a targeted effort to try to capture those areas where we've had verified sightings or even some multiple possible sightings. David John Cole has been helping identify where some of those locations will be along with Cecily Costello and Roy Trimbo is involved also for Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks. We will be setting up cameras and hair snares to hopefully capture pictures if we capture pictures of possible grizzly bears at a location then we will send in the hair for DNA. Russ is also on the phone and hopefully he can talk about how Defenders will help out with some further efforts. Russ said about a year and a half ago Erin Edge and he attended a subcommittee meeting and there was an interest in a monitoring effort and how to engage the public in that as well. We have been able to run a carnivore monitoring project in the Bitterroot with about 140 volunteers and it's been very successful in the five years we've been running. It seems like a good template with the ability to tap into this sort of volunteer army that are all members of the public and local residents in the Bitterroot to do additional monitoring for grizzly bears. We're hoping that this would basically complement everything that Jennifer just mentioned partnering with Fish and Wildlife and Parks and the Forest Service so that this is not the great Defenders of Wildlife grizzly bear treasure hunt. It is actually a coordinated effort with the agencies and we're just the facilitator for the volunteer side of it so everything else that Jennifer mentioned would be following the same targeted effort of places that are reachable for us and our volunteer folks. I would say, as all of you are aware of the coronavirus happening, we suspended our whole water watchers project as of this week.

Chuck asked if anyone else had anything else to discuss. I appreciate everybody's participation this morning and I appreciate everything you all you do, so be healthy, be safe and have a good first day of spring thank you.