

North Fork Coeur d'Alene River Watershed Advisory Group

Draft Meeting Notes

December 17, 2015

1:00 – 3:00 pm

US Forest Service Bldg., Smelterville, ID

Next meeting: January 21, 2016

Please visit the WAG website:

<http://www.deq.idaho.gov/north-fork-cda-river-subbasin-wag>

Contact Kajsa Van de Riet with any questions or suggestions:

(208) 666-4633 or kajsa.vanderiet@deq.idaho.gov

Participants: Will Young, Ryan Foote, Kajsa Van de Riet, Barb Hansen, Ed Lider, Jim Ekins, Sandra Raskell, Dan McCracken, Bob Burke, Fred Brackebusch, Leslee Stanley

Meeting Purpose: To convene the Watershed Advisory Group for the purposes of water quality improvements and protection in the North Fork Coeur d'Alene River Subbasin through Total Maximum Daily Load development and implementation.

- Introductions, review agenda, & distribute previous meeting notes
- River Cleanup – There was no 2015 River Cleanup due to the wildfires, but we will plan to hold one in 2016.
- North Idaho Fly Casters/ River Recreation –
 - Ed reports IDFG is acquiring some property from the Idaho Department of Transportation on the old river road side of the river upstream of the steel bridge, and hopes to develop a river access site.
 - The NIFC want to continue working with the USFS to develop a river access site at the Prichard Bridge day use area. They say that, ideally, launch sites every 6 river miles would make for excellent floating experiences. These projects fit nicely with the WAG's Cooperative River Recreation Plan.
 - The 2015 Conservation Festival in June was very successful, and another is being planned for June 2016. Dates and details TBA and it's expected to be on a site in cooperation with the USFS. People have suggested the next event have **double the amount of cookies!!**
- Moose Drool Watershed Restoration –
 - We had a WAG field trip on July 23, 2015 to the Moose Drool Watershed Restoration Site up in the Little North Fork Coeur d'Alene River headwaters. This

is the site being restored by the USFS over the past several years with lots of forest road treatments and in-stream habitat improvements. It was also the site of the 2015 Conservation Festival. The field trip was well attended with around 15 people and we visited several sites to see the range of activities underway to improve water quality and habitat.

- The USFS staff reported no major plans for the Moose Drool project area in 2016. They are focusing on post-fire activities and planning for the remaining Moose Drool activities that are larger, big-ticket items.
- For more info, visit <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34428>.
- Bottom Canyon Project – The USFS Decision Notice for this timber and watershed improvement project was signed in August 2015. The WAG submitted a letter of support for the project. For more info, visit <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=42483>.
- Beaver Creek Project – The USFS Decision Notice for this timber and watershed improvement project was signed in June 2014. The WAG submitted a letter of support for the project. The project has been divided into several sales packages and the first, White Beaver, was sold and initial roads work completed in 2015. For more info on this project, visit <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=40488>.
- Post-fire salvage project – The USFS said they were developing plans for a timber salvage project after the 2015 fire season and that we should expect a scoping notice soon. This project has become a high priority and will be discussed at the January WAG meeting.
- DEQ Preliminary Assessment Program for Mined Lands and Industrial Facilities – Kajsja briefly described a program from DEQ that is used to evaluate and prioritize assessment of potentially contaminated sites. The program assesses private lands on a voluntary basis and at no charge to determine if there are risks to human health or the environment from historic mining practices. There will be an opportunity to have preliminary assessments done with private landowners in the North Fork CdA Subbasin and DEQ's State Office will be sending letters out soon to let landowners know about the opportunity. For more information, visit <https://www.deq.idaho.gov/waste-mgmt-remediation/remediation-activities/preliminary-assessments/>.
- Suction dredge mining – The WAG had a brief conversation about management of placer mining activities and small suction dredges. The regulatory context is challenging for agencies and miners alike, and many areas in the North Fork CdA Subbasin have become difficult or impossible to operate in under the current sediment TMDL and NPDES permits from EPA. There has been some desire to provide miners with opportunities for these activities while also providing improvements to the watersheds so that the overall trend in water quality and habitat is improving. We'll continue these discussions in the future to see what kind of options we have.

- 2015 Fire Season – Ryan Foote and Will Young (USFS) gave a presentation and update about the 2015 fire season in the North Fork CdA Subbasin.
 - More than 30 fires of varying sizes burned on the Coeur d’Alene River Ranger District.
 - Overall, around 3% of the District was burned.
 - The fire season was longer than usual and some fires burned for around 3 months. Colder, wetter weather around the end of October finally put most of them out.
 - The Grizzly Complex of fires was the largest on the District, and approximately 26,000 acres burned. There were multiple fires in the complex and mixed severity of impacts.
 - In some areas, the fires were very hot in the duff and impacts to trees (including mortality) and soils will still manifest over the next several years.
 - The Settlers Grove of Ancient Cedars in the West Fork Eagle Creek drainage burned and is closed due to dangers of falling trees. After the winter passes, the damage will further assessed and plans for the future will be reevaluated.
 - Firefighting resources were spread very thin nationwide this season and so the strategy used here had to change based on the available resources. The focus was on protection of structures and communities.
 - There was lesser ground impact relative to other fires of similar scope due to the firefighting strategy. There was less backburning and fewer dozer lines, for example. Only around 6 miles of dozer line was used around populated areas in the Eagle Creek area. Less ground impact generally corresponds to less aquatic impact.
 - The USFS staff conducted a Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) assessment to determine any rehabilitation needs. No immediate needs for water quality were identified.
 - No major road or culvert problems have been seen during or after the fires.
 - In some areas, the wildfire may end up being beneficial for wildlife.
 - The inversion with smoky conditions likely reduced the spread of fires and helped contain them.
 - The closure of the area to the public went well. There was some confusion from some members of the public about which areas were closed and the conditions, but in general, the closure was well respected and was appreciated by local residents.
 - Plans are being developed for a post-fire timber salvage project as well as future planting and reforestation.
 - The WAG talked about outreach needs for fuels reduction on private property and the care that needs to be used when treating fuels in riparian zones and floodplains. We’ll come back to that in future meetings.
- TMDL Implementation Plan – Kajsa shared the latest versions worked on by the WAG during the May meeting, but we didn’t have time to discuss them in any detail.