

**Board of Okanogan County Commissioners  
Tuesday, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 1:30 p.m.**

*"These notes were taken by a County Watch volunteer. Every attempt is made to be accurate. Notes are verbatim when possible, and otherwise summarized. Note taker comments or clarifications are in italics. These notes are published at HYPERLINK "<https://countywatch.org>"<https://countywatch.org> and are not the official county record of the meeting. For officially approved minutes, which are normally published at a later time, see the Okanogan County Commissioners' website at HYPERLINK "<https://www.okanogancounty.org>"<https://www.okanogancounty.org> ."*

**Present:**

Andy Hover (AH), BOCC District 2  
Chris Branch (CB), BOCC District 1 (*via Zoom*)  
Jon Neil (JN), BOCC District 3  
Laney Johns (LJ), Clerk of the Board  
Justin Haug (JH), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Brock Hoenes (BH), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Josh Thomson (JT), County Engineer  
Tim Meadows (TM), Maintenance

*HYPERLINK*

*"[https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live\\_streaming\\_of\\_meetings.php](https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live_streaming_of_meetings.php)" & "\_blank"*

[https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live\\_streaming\\_of\\_meetings.php](https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live_streaming_of_meetings.php)

**Summary of Important Discussions:**

- Fish and Wildlife announces plans to acquire shrub steppe near Chesaw, riverside south of Oroville; two Methow properties less attractive due to grazing and maintenance difficulty, one is for conservation easement; improvements scheduled for Spectacle and Green lakes; winter wildlife area closures envisioned in Methow; Conservation Corps coming for 27 weeks
- Fairgrounds horse barn gets \$47,000 for repairs
- "Backfill" necessary following fairgrounds manager's resignation, list includes RV bathroom fixture repairs, unclogging sewer line plug, assigning post-fair garbage duty

**2:33:05**

**WDFW Regional Director, Region 2:**

**Brock Hoenes**

**Justin Haug - Recently promoted to Regional Wildlife Program Manager, Effective August 1 but will continue in his current role in our county until replaced.** Now in Ephrata(WDFW regional headquarters) Mondays and Tuesdays but here in the County the rest of the time for now.

**2:54:42 - Controversy over a couple of units WDFW are considering for purchase (on Rendezvous)** , both have grazing allotments, at least one of which would continue. AH concerned about the necessary maintenance cost and the ongoing grazing creating competition with the deer population. He cautions not to let the current public pressure unduly influence consideration of this acquisition. (The impetus was that DNR was going to put these parcels up for auction, and that's when they got a lot of public opposition to that, a lot of input from the community that these parcels remain in public ownership.) Want to know if BOCC thinks the public interest in this outweighs our difficulties in doing it. Hover points out these. lots can't be developed anyway now, due to Ecology's water rulings. The debate goes on. More discussions about upper Rendezvous and all the support of the neighbors.

**3:09 - Golden Doe** - this is about an addition to the Golden Doe, 100 acres off Carlton Road - Trying to cut out the house and ag lands around there (??) Trying to figure out the water situation. Three people involved now on that. Moving on this one. Hopefully by this fall, "all will be "closed out." (????) I think closing refers to the closing on the new piece of property.

**Closure of Methow Wildlife Areas this winter:** A number of proposed areas mapped out for closures in the Methow this winter. Working on a meeting at Barn mid-September. Has been an inside discussion to date. Bring people in, talking about what we are proposing. Mostly has been a regional discussion, with pulling in some state-wide folks. Will get to see what the "Temperature" is (Laughter.)

AH: Cautions, don't let public sentiment rule over the science of what deer need in the winter time. Look at the science . We are always hearing we don't need sprawling development and things like that because of the animals - Well, we shouldn't have trails in the winter time . They are continually growing. There are constantly people running, skiing, fat biking, snowshoeing, and all the other things that they've come up with for winter time activities - through those areas where the deer are supposed to be feeding.

WDFW Hoehn.- Yep. So we understand that point, and we are pretty firm on our position, but as you well know, once you go public, there's a lot of conversation, a lot of difficult conversation, a lot of positions, so I do want to ask that.....What's going to be important for us is to keep open lines of communication, So if you are hearing from constituents and want to reach out to us from the side, and we are willing to do whatever we can to promote this. Even if people don't like what they are hearing, at least they feel like there are lines of communication . If you are hearing from constituents..... want to hear about it. I like coming to meetings in these small communities because I think people tend to feel like they are more heard .....vs. big formal public meetings. We can have more conversations back and forth. More honest. A good example is the local meeting we had about Grizzly Bear EIS - better than a formal setting.

**Haug** - (To BOCC) Once we get details, we will share. Hopefully you will be there too and listen to the discussion.

1:37 - Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Acquisitions - *After the current public process phase these acquisitions will go to the management team, then back to the public for review. These properties were discussed:*

- Near Chesaw, 2-acre parcel, privately held. The owner has limited access. Meets WDFW priorities as shrub steppe with grouse, other upland bird and big game hunting including elk. It's near Strawberry Mountain and Lake.

- South of Oroville, an objective for the last two years, now possible with funds from a bond, expansive riparian area, all but a sliver is along the west side of the river, has white tailed deer, upland birds, 1 mile from Eyhott Island.

- Rendezvous (Methow), adjacent to Gun Ranch Rd., 32 acres, would be expansion of a conservation easement. JH asks BOCC's opinion since they haven't done one of these in awhile. It's shrub steppe, has four horses grazing on it.

BH: Will conditions be stipulated in Lands 2020 (providing \$1.3B annually for National Park acquisitions) funding?

JH: It doesn't exclude grazing but we must maintain habitat values.

BH: If you want to think about it, I also have interest in 39 conservation easements in that region, more than any other. Before I wasn't for more but... because we've felt that capacity to be accountable, we can open the door again. But does the county support it?

AH: Horses are hard on property; they're direct competition with mule deer. North of Riser Lake, north of Highway 20, I would love to see all that as conservation easement. But horse grazing is not conservation.

JH: We would assure that future horse grazing would (have as little impact as) possible.

BH: When we go out to see the property I can't see going forward with that.

CB: I'm interested in the landowner. Will they then keep the land? Put a house on it, let the rest go unmanaged?

JH: Weeds are often addressed in easement language too.

CB: Russian knapweed... A lot of property owners use the land as pasture, and use same person to move the animals around. There are no home sites on these properties. You all may remember the DNR (Department of Natural Resources) in 2019.

AH: They were going to auction them then we got in a tizzy.

JH: We had a lot going on. We get an earful. The DNR pulled back.

BH: The applications are due next month for the parcels we're considering. The last one I'd like to pursue is Balky Hill off the Eastside Road out of Twisp. It would be challenging. It's not fenced, there's recreation happening...

JH: There's BLM (Bureau of Land Management) on the north end of that...

CB: What does the maintenance entail?

JH: Signage. The grazing lease would have to continue. A small percentage.

BH: That's due to the ruggedness and steepness. Only 5% is (grazed on). It's not a candidate for development. AH says funds for maintenance are harder to get than funds

for acquisition, and that he'd rather maintain what they had than buy land that the DNR wanted to get rid of, mentions a Scotch Creek parcel that the Game Department let weeds grow on.

JH: RCO (Recreation and Conservation Office) funds (allowed) erosion mitigation, improvement of the day use area and boat launch at Spectacle Lake but (no funds for) Sibley Lake; The Green Lake campground is fully funded, construction to start in fall of 2024. Permitting restarted on Patterson, easement funding sought.

*JH reports on fuel removal in the upper Rendezvous, getting Golden Doe Wildlife Area's water situation figured out in view of closing down maybe this fall, seeking funding for Texas Creek, and holding a meeting in the fall at the Red Barn in Winthrop to discuss potential winter closures in the Methow Wildlife Area.*

AH: Don't let public sentiment get in the way. You shouldn't have so many trails in winter where deer are feeding. BH is optimistic about people communicating well in small areas, like they did with the grizzly bear debate.

BH: We got 29 weeks of Washington Conservation Corps coming from Wenatchee to assist with Western Landowners Alliance and water access areas. They're great for weed control, can use chainsaws, do Pacific Crest Trail work. It's a challenge deciding who gets the crew when. The Eagle Bluff Fire burned the entire eastern portion of Ellemeham Mountain area. Another difficult situation. Had grazing permitting that's been displaced. It's going to be difficult in the next couple of years. JH thinks Eagle Bluff recovery is going to be quick since it burned so quickly, it just grazed over the trees.

2:38 - \$47,000 is allocated for work on the fairgrounds' horse barn, out of current expense reserve as a capital improvement. Bond revenues to cover utilities installation (at Justice Center?).

2:59 - Special Occasion Liquor License granted to the Comancheros of Tonasket; motion passed to authorize county employees to work during the fair; step increases approved for commissioners' office secretary; contract for \$190,536 approved between county and WA State Health Care Authority. A brief conversation on legality of Fair Advisory Committee's voting by email, CB says it should be unanimous, and a FAC member who had a stand at the fair and received money but was cleared because this came from a non-profit.

Fairgrounds Maintenance Report - CB: Mens and Womens RV showers and bathrooms are fixed but (inaudible) is still coming off the wall.

TM: The womens' at the south end had only one sink with cold water... All the sinks were loose on the walls. When they were installed, they should have put an extra bracket.

CB: On the new restrooms to the north, seemed like one had a crack, with water spraying out. The Women's shower at the RV ark had something broken.

TM: On the bottom, where you change the valves.

CB (reads from a list from the departing fairgrounds manager) : Snake the bathroom drains, root killer in the sewer pipes, repair the pig barn door. We should prioritize: The

handicapped shelf in the showers shouldn't come off the wall. The announcer's booth *(had a problem with)* the roof over a window.

AH: That was from a windstorm.

CB: Make sure you get all those things done. Be prepared for the fair. The fairgrounds director left. We're going to have to backfill.

TM: A camper came up and told me about the shelf, the handicapped rails. They fixed it but it's not finished. *(It only had one screw out of three.)*

AH: Just put the fair on priority. The other stuff will just have to wait. We've authorized overtime. *CB talks about a plugged line in the sewer between a camp post spot and the well.*

JT: It all goes to the pump station, from the side of the bathrooms toward the drain field.

CB: Talk to the camp host.

JT: They all daisy chain together. *TM says they're working on it. JT asks if they're supposed to work at the fair, CB says something about after the fair. AH complains they don't even have inmates to do clean-up work. LJ says they contract out for things like the toilets.*

JT: A whole army of things have to be figured out after the fair.

TM: Naomi Peasley said she had everything covered except emptying garbage cans. *JT thinks it's the same ones who empty the toilets. AH doesn't see that on the list, says they're supposed to empty the drums into the dumpsters.*

3:41 - Meeting adjourned.

-