

Okanogan County Board of County Commissioners meeting Tuesday, January 30th AM session

CB – Chris Branch, BOCC Vice-chair District 1

AH – Andy Hover, BOCC member, District 2

JN – Jon Neal, BOCC Chair, District 3

LJ – Lanie Johns, Clerk of the Board

Cameron – assistant to Clerk of the Board

DR – Dennis Rabidou – Court Administrator

RG – Robert Grim, Superior Court Judge

JT – Josh Thompson, Public Works Dept manager, county engineer

TG – Taylor George, Conservation District, Voluntary Stewardship Program Coordinator

CN – Craig Nelson, Director, Okanogan Conservation District

BH – Brock Hoenes, WDFW

BT – Brandon Troyer, WDFW Lands Operations Manager

MH – Mallory Hirshler – WDFW Habitat Biologist

TM - Sgt Troy McCormick – WDFW enforcement

These notes were taken by an Okanogan County Watch volunteer. Every attempt is made to be accurate. Notes are verbatim when possible, and otherwise summarized or paraphrased. Note takers comments or clarifications are in italics. These notes are published at <https://www.countywatch.org/bocc-boh-notes> and are not the official county record of the meeting. For officially approved minutes, which are normally published at a later time, click [here](#).

Summary of Significant Discussion:

- *Public comment opposing military training flights over wilderness areas*
- *Superior and Juvenile Court update - numerous vacancies*
- *Voluntary Stewardship Program advisory committee appointments*
- *Discussion about wolves*
- *Public Works and Solid Waste updates- road restrictions and legislation to watch*
- *WATV Discussion with WDFW personnel regarding the Methow Valley area. Goals and strategy.*

The time notations refer to the time stamp on video that is published on the county's AV Capture site. To watch the video for this meeting, click [here](#).

00:58 – Pledge of Allegiance

BOCC reviews previous minutes and makes corrections as necessary. Casual conversation.

25:15 – Isabelle Spohn calls in with public comment opposing military aircraft flying over wilderness area

00:31 – public hearing on budget supplemental. BOCC votes and approves supplemental for therapeutic court fund. (*Roughly \$9000*).

BOCC resumes reviewing minutes.

00:45 – (CB leaves for dentist appointment) DR gives update on courts. Superior court – have 2 open positions (due to retirements) for judicial assistants due to retirements. Have had 14 applicants and done interviews but none are qualified. We have excellent staff that we are moving around to fill slots. My request today is to upgrade a JA1 employee to a JA2.

AH – suggests to advertise job internally

DR – we have done that

AH – asks if it is a union position

DR – no its not. The impact is about \$2300.

AH – asks if it is a promotion

DR – Yes

AH – we have a policy on promotion that we need to adhere to. DR will write up a resolution for BOCC to sign.

DR – says they have 3 more applicants and are hopeful that they will be able to fill the two remaining open positions.

DR – We had a discussion about the CJTA Bailiff's stipend that we budgeted. We want to shift the stipend to another position. (Dependency Unit Manager). The extra work load is not on the Bailiff. It's already in the budget and simply a matter of shifting it from one department to another. It's historically assigned to the Bailiff, but we don't see the Bailiff doing that work in the future. The previous Bailiff did the work, but she retired and we don't currently have the Bailiff position filled so we want to assign the grant and associated work to another department.

53:00 – RG enters and speaks in support of salary increase for the employee who is doing the work of three people.

DR – On the juvenile court side, there is a national problem. The systems are in crisis. It's always been difficult, but it's really bad now. We are interviewing to fill a position. We have multiple other positions still open.

On the court services side, we have 5 positions open. That's probation unit or dependency unit. Also functional family therapist. The state requires certain credentials, and it's a struggle all over to fill positions. We have a lot of competition from other areas that can pay more, and the private sector. Also burnout is a big problem. We are just trying to get through this with extra overtime, and we thank you for your support. We are making progress.

56:30 RG - says he would like to bring the new Superior court judge but she is in training right now. We will bring her up for an introduction when she gets back.

AH – I think I will see you tonight at the game. Short discussion about local sports teams.

1:00:00 – BOCC resumes reviewing minutes

1:15:40 – JN mentions proposed legislation about regulating tires. Claims that it would regulate tire size in a way that would negatively affect vehicle handling.

1:21:50 – BOCC approves minutes for Jan 17, 22, 23.

1:30:00 – TG - Okanogan Conservation District discussion on Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP). Taylor George introduction. She joined team in August. Worked for Noxious Weed board for 3 years, then OCD. Grew up in Okanogan County. Was a barrel racer, well connected with community. We have received two new work group member applications. The workgroup advises on implementation and reviews plans. There are 7 appointed positions. There are reps from Cattlemens Assn, Farm Bureau and at large. We have been trying to fill all positions since I

came on board. We have received an application for Farm Bureau and At large. Farm Bureau applicant is Rob Enlow. He has been very involved for a long time. Knows water quality, familiar with the land and knows a lot of Ag producers. The other one is from Adam Lang, and does cattle and hay. He is residing in Pateros, owns a ranch there. He also has experience in managing family orchard. Good background in both scenes. He would provide good input.

AH – we just need to get some appointment letters drawn up by Lanie, and a resolution.

CN – Taylor has done a good job of getting the word out. We are still working on filling the Cattleman position. We will need some sort of approval action from the BOCC.

AH – we are working on that with Lanie.

TG – It's hard to find someone who has the time to be involved.

AH – Lanie is writing them up and will send them down.

AH – how long have you been looking for applicants?

TG – a few months prior to my starting (August 2023).

1:39:00 – TG and CN leave meeting.

Casual conversation about AH truck accident with unseen person in the room. (*Appears to be BH*). Discussion about how insurance, sharing stories about accidents.

1:52:00– Discussion about low snow pack, how PUD has expressed concern about power production due to low snow pack. They had to spend \$5M on extra power during cold snap. AH asks if person has listened to hearing on the wolf bills. BH says no how did they go? AH said there were a lot of people there and lot of people in favor. Noted that he and CB testified in favor, Tribe was also in favor. Three conservationists testified and claimed that the Tribes just kill them all. That ruffled some feathers. It's frustrating when they are trying to manage a small territory with a whole bunch of different species, not to destroy them, but to balance them out. That's what we should be doing. I don't care if there are wolves here, but it pisses me off when a person's dog gets eaten and you can't do anything about it. On the west side if a coyote comes into the area they shut the school down. What happens when a wolf or a cougar or bear is in your back yard. How does that make you feel?

I look through the agreement (for North half) where it says that if circumstances change, you have to look at it again. I'm curious about if the Tribe is considered a co-manager with the north half?

BH – yes, they are considered a co-manager. We meet with them every year and we have an opportunity to collaborate. Our staff works closely with them. Goes on to describe the process.

AH – asks what happens if the county thinks the Tribe is doing something to damage the mule deer herd, can we do anything about it?

BH – Have you heard that the Colville's are supporting Colorado's wolf re-introduction. The wolves are going to be relocated from the Colville land to Colorado.

1:49:45 AH – Regarding cattle on public land, people need to understand that we are making it very hard for low income people to have meat in their diet. You are taking that piece and moving it to South America and China where they don't have environmental regulations. This country won't go all vegetarian, and they can't afford organic. It hurts the lowest income class.

BH – I'm not sure who can afford organic?

AH – I certainly can't. As long as I know where it (the food) is coming from, here in WA state we have good regulations for the most part. There is some stuff I'm not so sure of.

BH – Did you know that the first week in Feb the Feds are coming out with the rules on de-listing.

AH – Will it go back to court again? I can't understand this process. It goes to court and they say it can't. Then the next Administration delists again. One administration can list, then the next can de-list? This doesn't make sense. Where is the science? So we can't translocate in our own state, but we can translocate to another state. I find it hard to argue that moving wolves around within the state would disrupt them too much, but taking a whole pack and moving it out of state is just fine.

BH – Well, the transfer to Colorado is strictly between the Colville Tribe and Colorado – we are not involved in that.

1:58:00 JT arrives. JN asks what's new at public works. JT says road restrictions- everything warmed up all at once and all the roads got soft.

AH – asks about Rodeo Trail road. Are we doing anything for a permanent fix? JT – it just got more difficult- because of new designation in urban cluster there is a new pot of funding. He will have to get familiar with different funding sources. Short discussion about road restrictions and how public works will work with users to get around problems.

2:00:00 – CB returns from dentist.

JN – begins public hearing about Chelan County PUD franchise agreement. No public comment received. JT – this is for a short section near Antoine Creek. I have no objections.

BOCC approves franchise.

JT – gives public works update. Maintenance and road conditions – there are weight restrictions due to temps warming up. This time we listed the few roads that are NOT restricted because there are so many. Sometimes radio stations will read the list, and since it's so long we tried it this way. We are looking at some legislation. [SB 6143](#) – riparian standards bill could have impact on setbacks, etc. Could require counties to acquire priority habitat. [SB 5770](#) – allowing up to 3% property tax increase. That one may not move forward. It had language about population and inflation. Small engines bill appears to not be moving. Traffic cameras bill there is a lot of conversation. It would be cumbersome and counties were not in favor. [SB 5133](#) – responsible bidder criteria. Adds more requirements for small businesses. We are asking to wait on this. [SB 6040](#) prompt payment for certified small business. I think it's a good idea, but the implementation is a problem. They are trying to enforce things that we don't have legal authority to do. We have weighed in as concerned. Also JTC have convened a group to look at state highways that they want to turn back to counties. Not a lot of information yet. Also [HB 1990](#) & [SB5954](#) have to do with state imagery and sharing with counties for low cost. That looks like a good deal.

I was optimistic about a meeting with CCT regarding Cameron Lakes Road Project. Met with CCT but it did not go well. They accused us of threatening them and kicked us out of the meeting. Said they would lease us the land, but I can't build a road on leased land. The CCT DOT said that we have done everything right, so they will try again but I can't extend the deadline much farther. Everything is ready to go, but we will see. Consent agenda has cattle guard renewals, etc. Reminder that next week several of us will be gone.

AH – make sure Lanie knows there is no PW update next week.

Kent - Solid waste update Bills we are watching - [HB 2144](#) – bottle bill. Poorly written, don't think it's going to pass. Need to tie in with haulers to make it work. To achieve their goal they

need to not be so selfish. We built a great system to recycle aluminum cans, and now they are trying to make people take it to a center. We've educated folks to do it one way, and now we would ask them to do it a different way.

Improve recycling bills, [rewrap act](#) (free free free); and [HB 1900](#) – being pushed by haulers. There is more traction on 1900, but I don't think it will move. [HB 2301](#) is one to watch. New organics bill. It cleans up a former bill (1799). They cleaned up a curbside yardwaste program. It affects 3 counties, (us and two others). We would still be exempt due to apple maggot quarantine. But it would still have other requirements such as reducing methane.

Next topic – rendering disposal. Apparently all the rendering processors pulled out of Eastern WA. There are 7 different individuals who don't have a place to send their stuff for disposal. We are working on it. I got a call from Newhouse's office asking about this. I've been working with WSU on obtaining a rotodrum-composter. I'm working on trying to help out as much as we can.

Grants – I'm going to get more aggressive going after grants. Maybe bring in a grant writer. There is someone who has helped with Douglas/Chelan county. There is a Federal grant for underserved communities that we qualify for. We all pay into the system we might as well try to get some of it back. The other one is the public works trust fund. It's for underserved counties and would be to our advantage.

Last thing is airshed meeting – it was brought up that Public Health was going to have a meeting with DNR regarding smoke coming up in February. The EPA was interested in attending that meeting to make sure that the BOCC will be involved. I remember hearing that 7-9 would be the threshold. We are at 10 something. The EPA wanted to explain what is going to happen. We need to stay on top of it so could you let me know if you hear about it.

AH – asks Cameron to put overlay on Zoom.

2:21:15 – Discussion on WATVs.

BH – appreciates opportunity to be here.

MH – please Zoom out on map. JT confirms that map is the same one from September.

AH – the USFS has opened up roads. The travel management plans are not great. If you open a county road that is short and connects to a USFS road, but the USFS has conflicting rules it causes problems. The mind set in the Methow Valley is not very receptive to motorized use. Maybe we should look at the loops that would facilitate long distance routes. We issued an NDNS saying we have to have signage, higher fines, etc. We discussed barrier fencing, in one particular spot it was close to a wetland but I can't remember exactly where.

MH – our concerns are going to be how are the WATVs going to stay on the road, and how is it going to be enforced. We would like to see robust signage that is consistent, barriers, and have the county ensure that they won't be going off road in critical areas on both public and private lands.

AH – do you have a lot of off-road activity?

BT – not a whole lot in the Methow. A handful of cases a year. One spot is Lester Road.

AH – clarifies that there is a county road going through WDFW property that is not open for public use.

BT – We have boulders in front of those roads now, I haven't seen any instance in the last year. One vehicle can do a lot of damage. You can see it on Lewis Butte. There are just a few little spur roads that might be impacted. Short roads that go to USFS but you have to cut through us first.

So heading some of those areas off. Those are what we are concerned about. We prefer gates so that we could open if necessary for firefighting. We have used boulder barriers in the past when necessary. Gives example of violation that was successfully addressed. There has been confusion in the past, and having approved routes would help.

AH – Lester road will need mitigation. Are there other places that would need more attention?

BT – Campbell Lake road is not listed here, but people are going to see the lake and the restroom. The approach is a county road.

AH – that's a good point. It's not on the list, but its very visible.

AH - Gunn Ranch road – I personally don't think it should be on the list. But I don't think it's worth the argument.

BT – I think we all appreciate that the goal is to find loops.

AH – wanting to get into Winthrop and have lunch, get fuel, etc is a concern. Winthrop is not open to ATVs, but we do have county roads that go to the boundary.

BT – right by the beaver ponds on Lester Road is also a concern. We have had some ATV use coming off of USFS road. We need to define that it is a WDFW road that is open to jeeps and cars but not WATVs

AH – Asks about WATVs on WDFW property. Is there a policy?

Look to Troy for that.

TM – I do know that outside of Okanogan there are a couple of areas that have green dot roads that allow WATVs. We have primarily dealt with Sinlaheekan area. We have had ATVs in the campgrounds, and after discussion with campground manager we have focused on education to let folks know that they are not allowed in the campgrounds. Need to be trailered.

BT – asks to clarify AH questions.

AH – clarifies that WATVs are a different class, and asks if they have been considered by WDFW.

BT – says he will check on it.

AH – I'm not saying that I want to you make that accommodation, but just that it could be confusing to someone who sees a truck driving on a road but the WATV can't go on it.

-We removed the WATV signs around Fish Lake to allow an area where people could go and get to a bathroom. There are some areas where we are testing out to see if it would work with other areas.

AH – have you seen a real increase in bad off-road damage up there?

One of the areas near hunters camp there has been some hill climbing, and some fields off the road.

AH – did it happen prior to us opening the road?

TM – I believe so.

AH – we have \$5K fines for this, but limited enforcement. When they are caught it should be referred to Prosecuting Attys office.

When we find someone operating off road where they are not allowed, we use the civil infraction.

CB – asks if motorcycles are included in prohibition along with ATVs? Are they treated the same?

Yes, we generally treat them the same.

AH – but if it is a licensed dirt bike they are allowed.

Discussion about the nuances of this. There is a lack of education about it.

AH – rules are different in different counties. So I would like your list of roads with specific recommendations.

BT – Is there any talk about adding additional parking?

AH – no, because most of the property is WDFW. That's a good point. We have a lot of tourism. We have partnered to use lodging tax for lots of different things. If the WDFW is interested in increasing parking capacity somewhere, I could see that the county could partner with them to get some of it done.

CB – asks if the intent is to have a place where WATVs can load and unload? If there are parking areas in the controlled recreation areas that could lend itself to a certain type of grant. It seems like an opportunity for education and control.

AH – Lester Road – this is an example of a road that vehicles can drive on. But anything motorized cannot go off the road legally. Not just ATVs, but ebikes, too. There are places like Gunn Ranch road where people are parking on the county road because they don't want to get a pass to park in the WDFW lot. They are not WATVers, but hikers, etc. Here is an example of a parking area that people are not using.

BH- We had a meeting that made me think about parking lots that people might use for WATV use (near loops, etc). Do you have a list of such places? We should consider that they might get full of WATV trailers and not have enough room for other users.

Discussion about how important it is to have clear communication and signage. There is no approved signage that depicts WATVs specifically.

JT – the state requires that WATV riders carry a map on their person while using the roads.

CB – asks if it can be any map, or an approved one that shows the necessary information. I use the wood cutting map as an example. When you get your permit, you get a map and sign for it so they know that you have received it.

AH – we hope that everyone follows the law and doesn't tear the hell out of everyone's property, but it is concerning. If we open something up, then we have the responsibility to do something about it.

BT – We are talking about a small percent who can ruin it for everyone, but we need to pay attention to it. It's my understanding that when you opened the roads on the other side there was a commitment to have an annual meeting to look at how it's going.

AH – we meet regularly with you guys and the USFS – I would hope that if there are problems there would be a dialogue.

CB- ATV groups need to be part of that conversation. They need to police themselves. Gives examples of people confronting the abusers.

AH – It's not like we are opening trails across country. We're talking about roads that have been historically used. Gives example of how many people are using the wilderness.

BT – the ATV user groups need to be a big part of it with regard to outreach. If it's not collaborative effort it won't work.

CB – there are a few people who are open to learning about this, but sometimes the gates don't even work.

AH – asks if there is anything in the south part of the county.

MH – not really. It's pretty steep.

AH – there is also more people out there to do the reporting. If I see someone I would get their license plate or just call.

CB – I was curious about how things are going with the Sheriffs department in these areas. Are they out in these areas?

TM – we do work routinely on many levels, but they mostly respond to calls, whereas we are more patrolling.

AH – discusses specifics of fines, etc.

TM – I want to make sure you are familiar with the green dot roads.

AH – yes.

TM – I think it's a good system, because if the sign is there, they know they can go there. And even if the sign gets ripped down they are still legal.

TM – the other thing is that people see the \$1000 fine sign posted and think they can't go on that road, when it's actually that they get the fine if they leave the road.

CB – talks about how to alleviate the confusion.

AH – this is where the ATV club can educate their members.

CB – I do appreciate the effort you are doing because word does get around.

TM – The ATV club had way more influence than I do just encountering folks one on one.

BH – To build off this conversation, when these roads get open, let's work together to get the word out and do the enforcement.

TM – Mentions how tourism maps can help when they have the right information.

Member of public – I have one question about WDFW land closures to ATVs?

BT – gives example of wildlife area in Grant County.

Discussion about why WDFW buys land – for conservation of habitat. So it doesn't make sense to allow WATVs that will disturb the habitat.

MH – asks if they have a timeline for getting a SEPA notice out?

AH – no, we are still waiting for USFS to get some stuff done.

3:31:00 – Discussion concludes, BOCC adjourns for lunch.