

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Tuesday, May 23rd, 2023, 1:30 p.m.

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Present:

Andy Hover (AH), BOCC District 2
Jon Neil (JN), BOCC District 3
Laney Johns (LJ), Clerk of the Board
Andrew Lavelle (AL), Public Affairs Specialist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife
Ann Frochouer (AF), Deputy State Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife
Brad Thompson (BT), State Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife
Representative from Ferry County (FC)
Dennis Rabidou (DR), Court Administrator
Hank Rawson, Superior Court Judge

*An AV Capture archive of the meeting on this date is available at:
https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live_streaming_of_meetings.php*

Summary of Important Discussions:

- *US Fish and Wildlife Service says introduction of 25 grizzlies in North Cascades National Park will respect input from stakeholders; Commissioner Hover asks for commitment to adapt to local circumstances, Commissioner Neil makes sure no "problem bears" in the equation; another meeting to follow as plan develops and more input received*
- *Court Administrator presents plan to retain Staff Interpreter an extra year; Commissioner Hover wary of "retention bonus", prefers bigger salary hike instead; several applications received for Juvenile Court vacancies*

1:30 - Discussion on Grizzly Reintroduction - **AL:** *The North Cascades Ecosystem (NCE) is one of six grizzly bear recovery zones with Selkirk (NE Washington), Cabinet Yaak (Glacier), Bitterroot and greater Yellowstone. NCE is trans-boundary. The US portion is larger than the state of New Jersey. Most of the zone is under federal management– national park surrounded by Forest Service land. It's different from other zones, without a bridge allowing the grizzlies to reach feeding areas. There are none (now)–they were decimated by direct killing. He explains that the project, in collaboration with British Columbia, started with an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) last November, and creates an experimental designation through section 10J of the Endangered Species Act.*

AL: After the initial 25 bears are released, others will be released gradually, only 200 within 60 to 100 years. The EIS gives two alternatives. The first, "No Action", entails improved sanitation, motorized access management, educational programs on grizzly recovery, plus research and monitoring. The "Action" alternative proposes a sustained population through a combination of capture and release and subsequent reproduction, guidelines to prevent and respond to grizzly bear conflicts, access management and replacement of any bears lost to mortality or migration. 10-J is a

simultaneous rules-making process introduced in the early 1980s to address landowners' concerns over federally-listed species (*before re-introducing them*). (*Other 10-J projects: The blackfooted ferret, bull trout, California condor, wood bison, and the gray wolf in Colorado.*) The process includes retrieving and removing bears who have left the ecosystem or have been in conflict, and issuing permits for landowners to haze or kill bears attacking livestock on private lands when it's not been possible to deter degradation through other means. *There have been four public meetings and 6,200 public comments. Last winter they developed alternatives. After receiving comments this summer the final EIS will come out next spring.*

AH: Did bears exist there prior to the formation of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem?

AL: In 1975. **AH:** Why aren't they moving down from northern British Columbia into Cabinet

Yaak? **AF:** You can follow up on that with (*our specialist*) Wayne.

1:43 - **AH:** If BC is going to be moving bears along our northern borders, does one of your options include no action on our part but a 10-J rule? **AL:** Part of that has to be active restoration. **JN:** How do you keep them contained? How do you move them? **AL:** It's likely in 100 or 200 years (*for them to move*). We're looking at Yellowstone for tools to manage that. ...**AH:** It helps with the fact we drafted a joint letter asking for a consultation. The counties know things about recreation that the Park Service may not know about. Will bordering counties have a direct consultation with you on issues important to that rule? **AL:** We could meet again after the EIS comes out.

AH: The Methow has a heightened possibility of conflict because of proximity to the park. The terrain in NCE is different from the Rockies: newer range, more rugged. We're seeing black bears move down as summer progresses. Will grizzlies do that? Hopefully we can adapt or change the rules.

BT: It's valuable to be working with the counties... the 10-J opportunity is really flexible. You can choose something that fits the need. We are moving in that direction as we meet with different stakeholders. *AH evokes the wolf situation, the boundary of the Yellowstone re-introduction being Highway 97.* **AF:** They've expanded more quickly than what we thought. **FC:** If (*the bears*) left the NCE, would the State take over? *AF says the bears are on the federal threatened list; they will need to create buffer zones.* **FC:** Make sure the bears know. **AH:** Would they be collared? **AL:** The first 25 would be. **FC:** How long before you assess if it's successful or not? ...I see people are still doing the caribou in the Selkirks but they're stepping back. It hasn't worked.

*AH talks about adaptive management, if the bears come down. Says with the wolves, they've had to move them again and again. ...***AH:** Some of my constituents are going to ask, 25 is not a lot of bears but can they drop a hundred in? You say how many, then you don't say how many. **AL:** It could depend on how many are hit by a car. **AH:** Is it direct replacement of the initial population? **FC:** Is it the genetic trends? The genetic limits? They're going to want to know. It would be helpful to back a lot of this, not give a blank check. **AH:** ...When do you decide (*to stop introducing*)? These are things that people will want to know to feel comfortable. **JN:** I'd like to have a cap, maybe 40 bears at any one time.

BT: ...Over a short period, we'll get a founding population that could gradually expand. The Cabinet Yaak wasn't the same eco-system. They came out of the huddle, ran back to where they were from, got hit by cars. Hopefully the bears will like each other, reproduce, stay in the ecosystem. (*If they go in the valleys*) ...We have some tools available to address that. Your communication helps us better communicate our intent.

2:23 - **JN:** You're talking about bringing some out of Yellowstone. How many are problem bears?

AF: We're looking for wild bears with hopefully little exposure to humans. **AL:** younger bears, a few years old, establishing territories. We're not willing to accept conflict bears, but the ones with the biggest chances of success.

AH: Can you put this in writing? **BT:** We should make that very obvious. **AH:** That's another question we get all the time. So that would be wonderful. **AH:** I would like another meeting when you get 10-J developed.

2:30 - Court Interpreter Salary Discussion - **DR:** We've been recruiting for over a year to replace Raoul Martinez who has given a July deadline for his retirement. Today we propose to fix the recruitment issue and keep Raoul for another year. The staff interpreter's classification hasn't changed since 2002. Judge Rawson and I have talked to Commissioner Branch. It's currently \$4,400 a month. *He talks about a \$3/hour raise for one year starting July and a bonus of \$8,000.*

AH: Have you talked with (*Human Resources*) about the bonus? The auditor said it's a weird area for the State. **DR:** There's no impact this year. It's \$11,594 in total but the bailiff is retiring. The post will be vacated three months. **AH:** As long as it's unfilled. ...So the monthly salary is easy for me to justify but the bonus? **DR:** It's very conservative (*compared to the state average*). *They've only had three inquiries for the post in the last year.* We can hire someone next July and keep them on the condition they pass the State boards. We might actually get some to apply, get someone before next July. (*The \$8,000*) is a retention bonus. **AH:** For an employee who's going to retire. *DR talks about the reclassification bringing up Martinez' salary to \$30/hour from \$24. The replacement would start a grade lower.* After AH asks LJ to see with the auditor about bonuses, he tells DR he would rather the bonus be translated into a higher salary. *DR says that would be about \$38 an hour.* **AH:** It's better to pay a position what it's worth. *They agree to meet in two weeks.*

DR: We appreciate your support. We're seeing applicants on the juvenile side. We did a retention bonus. We're still not fully staffed but hope to keep rolling. *AH asks LJ about authorizing CB to sign an engagement letter for SAL when he comes back.*

2:49 - *Meeting adjourned until Tuesday morning.*