

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Monday, Oct. 23, 2023 AM

JN—Jon Neal, BOCC, District 3
AH—Andy Hover, BOCC, Vice-Chair, District 1
CB—Chris Branch, BOCC, Chair, District 2
Cam—Cameron Burdette, Deputy Clerk of the Board
Tim—Maintenance
PP—Pete Palmer, Director of Planning
MG—Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management
CF—Chris Furr, Methow Valley District Ranger, USFS
RS—Rosemary Seifried, Recreation Staff Officer, Methow District, USFS
JD—James DeSalvo, Executive Director, Methow Trails
JB—Joe Brown, President, Methow Chapter, Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance
JM—Julie Muyliaert, President, Methow Valley Trails Collaborative

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Summary of significant discussions:

- Commissioners have a long discussion with people from the Forest Service, Methow Trails, the Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, The Methow Valley Trails Collaborative concerning new trails, wildlife, overuse and improving outdoor recreation opportunities in the north county.
- Adjourn at 11:48.

00:10—Pledge of Allegiance.

AH and JN read and make corrections to minutes from Oct. 16, 17 and 18.

20:10—CB arrives. Asks if there were any public comments.

No public comments.

CB tells about seeing wildlife on someone's video.

CB—(The original discussion about the Brightly Software contract, formerly Dude Solutions was discussed at the Sept. 19, 2023 BOCC meeting.) The marketing people we talked to aren't there anymore. Discussion as to whether data migration was included in the contract. CB says the Planning Department will discuss this during the weekly phone call with Brightly.

27:25—Tim distributes photos of roof damage to the commissioners. Discussion of roof damage at the Agriplex and the annex. Also discussion of the Horse Barn roof that was damaged by snow last winter. Also a brief discussion of installing windows in the Auditor's Office.

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38:45—PP—Good morning. I'm Pete Palmer, Planning Director. I've got just a few quick things.

PP—First thing is a correction to your agenda. The Planning Commission meets today, but at 6:30 PM, not 8:00 AM.

PP—Last week we met about budgets. Today I learned about some stuff from GIS that needs to be included in the 2024 budget—about \$11,400 of stuff. It includes a subscription to Windows 11 for about \$4,600 and a new plotter is about \$6,300.

AH—Can you please send an email with this stuff and their BARS codes to Cari (Hall, Auditor) and Pam (Johnson, Treasurer) and to each of us?

PP—I received an email on the 17th from Angela Johnson, the Stream Flow Restoration Planner for the Department of Ecology. She wants information about our WRIA 49 (Water Resource Inventory Area 49, Okanogan River) Plan Implementation to do an assessment on that. She wants the source and amount of the funding received and the status of the project—whether or not the water and habitat achievements were made. I emailed Craig (Nelson? Of the Okanogan Conservation District) because I have nothing on this project. He said he could put something together, but he couldn't get it done by the deadline. Do you guys know anything about this?

AH—Call Chris, from the Tribe. He should know about the Antoine Creek project. I don't remember if Johnson Creek was included in this project. It's getting done. Josh (Thomas of Public Works) would have the information on that. I forget about the other projects. Can you send me a list?

PP—OK.

PP—The last thing is the notification from Kimberly Preacher at the Department of Defense. It notified us they're going to put out an environmental assessment in January to expand their training fly space in the Methow and reservation. It'll expand to the west. Won't change the altitude or times they fly. They have a floor altitude of 11,500' and a ceiling of 25,000.

AH—They fly way less than 11,500!

PP—When I first started to work here, there are areas where they go as low as 500'.

AH—I've seen it.

AH—Do you have a map of the floor area?

PP—Yes. I'll send it.

AH—People get pissed and it can be annoying sometimes, but most of the time it's OK.

PP—Little kids at the daycare like it.

PP—That's all I've got. I'll be back at 1:30.

Commissioners decide there's room in the agenda to discuss the Lake Management District ballot issue in the morning. PP thinks she'll need only about 15 minutes. Rocky (Robbins, Senior Planner) says it's not a big deal because we've already got it ready to go. We just need to know if you want to do it.

AH—I just want to know the time frame. How long for comments, etc.

PP—I can have that info in about 15 minutes.

48:40—JN—I move to approve vouchers for \$597,564.73. Motion passes 3-0.

CB—FYI, I'm still putting together the itinerary for the Connections people when they come. I think it will culminate in a round-table discussion here. Do you guys want to be a part of that? It's on the Intercept Modeling. (*Note: The Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) details how individuals with mental and substance use disorders come into contact with and move through the criminal justice system.*) Okanogan County is on the 31st. The Mid-Valley Hospital District person said it was very timely Emergency Rooms are key intercept points. I'll try to do just the hospitals and maybe the school district

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superintendents, too. If we ended here with a round-table discussion, we could get groups that can't be on the itinerary—like in the Methow because it's too far away.

AH—That sounds pretty good.

CB—It'd be around 4:00. I'd bring the prosecutor and the sheriff in, too. Maybe at 3:00.

54:05—JN—Did you read the library email? Apparently they're trying to phase out some bookmobile routes. I'm disappointed that wasn't mentioned when she (Barbara Walters, Executive Director of the North Central Washington Libraries) was here last week. We got this email Friday from Amanda Brack (Communications and Engagement Manager, NCW Libraries).

AH—No. We're not just going to leave it up to the schools. We should write them. Schools have libraries, but other people have library needs, too.

Discussion of areas in the county that should have bookmobile service because the public library is far away.

58:05—MG—I'm Maurice Goodall, Emergency Management. I was just at the Auditor's Office talking about the budget.

MG—We had a meeting of the organization. We didn't have a quorum, but it was a good meeting.

MG—I'm out of the area from this Friday through the next.

MG—Burn restrictions are off and we're supposed to get snow in the mountains, soon.

MG—I've been helping to blow out the waterlines at the fairgrounds. We discovered some of the maps are inaccurate. We have some valves that need to be fixed or replaced. Some valves got buried when we put the arena in and we don't know where they are now.

Discussion of waterlines and plumbing issues at the fairgrounds.

MG—The truck is dripping antifreeze so it needs some work.

CB—Maybe next week we should look at another issue you're aware of, but we'll have to do it in executive session.

MG—I'm gone next week. I'm here this week.

CB—I'm gone this week.

1:07:00—CB—to PP—Good morning .

PP—Quick answers: We can have the ballots in the mail tomorrow. The public notices will go in the papers on the Nov 9 & 16. The hearing would be for Dec. 4. We're already going to have a hearing that day to assess the rolls. The vote would be out from Oct. 24 to Dec. 3.

CB—There's a resolution of our intent to put it on the ballot. How does that work?

PP—I don't think it's a requirement, but I'll check and get you a resolution if you need one.

CB—Do we want to go forward with it?

JN—Everybody I've talked to says yes. The verbiage says if anything changed or you want to redo it, you had to go through the process.

PP—OK. We'll get moving on it.

JN—I talked to Moran and (*inaudible*) both and they wanted to proceed.

CB—I haven't heard any complaints.

JN—I had one guy with issues, but he always does.

Cam—I want to double-check on the dates. The hearing will be on Dec.4?

AH—Yes. That's the day we count them.

JN—How does it work? If you have the hearing after the final ballot day...

AH—You collect all the ballots and the day of the hearing you tally the votes.

CB—I'll ask PP to send us a calendar with the dates.

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1:28:15—AH—I move to pay Dwayne Hall the final 50% of the contracted amount for the race horse barns after fixing items on the punch list.

JN—Do we need to get the buildings inspected?

AH—I don't think so. He only had to do (*inaudible*). He said he'd done it and sent some pictures.

Motion passes 3-0.

1:29:30—CB—Our next agenda item is the Methow Valley Ranger District Planning Projects. Chris, you're the lead?

CF—Yes. We'll do introductions first. I'm Chris Furr from the Methow Valley Ranger District.

RS—I'm Rosemary Seifried, Recreation Staff Officer, so I manage trails, campgrounds in the Methow District.

JD—I'm James DeSalvo, Executive Director of Methow Trails and a board member of the Methow Valley Trail Collaborative. It represents lots of different users—motorized, non-motorized, winter, summer. My main goal is with Methow Trails.

JB—I'm Joe Brown, president of the Methow Chapter of the Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance. I also serve on the Collaborative.

JM—I'm Julie Muyllaert, president of the Methow Valley Trails Collaborative.

CF—AH and I had a casual conversation a few months back and he said he'd like to know when we're doing trail planning. So we're here to update you and give you an opportunity to ask questions about a couple of plans before they go out for scoping. Also, give you a heads-up about additional work we've got going on. James is going to lead us off with a discussion of two projects we're planning. Then Joe will talk about the evolution of the Chickadee trail system. It was lumped in with the Twisp Restoration, but then we had the Cedar Creek Fire, so now the plan has changed. Rosemary will also talk about new trail bridge planning we've got going on, too. Any questions so far?

AH—I've got one. I'm on the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee. Unfortunately, the last meeting was on a Tuesday, so it's hard for me to participate. In the executive portion, there was a recommendation from the tech team to drop the buffer for non-motorized vehicles to 250' or maybe meters. What trails are included? All of the trails on the map right now? Does that mean if there are new trails added, you have to take off trails because of the no-net loss to the ecosystem?

CF—With something new like this, but as we do NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act), our wildlife biologist would (*inaudible*) that.

AH—I just want to be sure. Some of your trails farther up away from mountain biking that don't have the money for funding—I'd hate to see that trail go away because of no-net loss to serve something else. I hope with the Collaborative, you guys would go through the process of trade-offs.

CF—When I think about the Cub Creek Fire, there are trails that aren't that valuable. If we did have to do tradeoffs, we could minimize the impact.

AH—OK.

JD—I'll show you some maps.

1:36:10—JD—Cub Creek Trailhead is summer and winter. Mostly Nordic skiing in winter and non-motorized biking in the summer. Also most every user in the valley uses it for something. For years, a private owner has let us use the property for winter only parking with portable toilets. But he wants to develop the property and our tenure there is about over. It worked before only because the use level was low. Last year, we got a new area to zero in on. 9/10 of a mile up the road. The proposed area was logged before and would serve motorized and non-motorized winter and summer recreation. The

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trailhead would be 2.3 acres with pit-toilets or portable toilets. Maybe a picnic shelter. Connects with already accessible recreation.

JD—The huts in the area are used in winter by the skiers and used by hunters in the fall.

JD—I think this project is a win-win-win situation. Hope to have a scratched-in version by next winter and we hope to fund it from the state's RCO (Recreation and Conservation Office)

AH—With the WDFW proposal to shut down their properties, does this impact this a little.

JD—It shouldn't impact this at all.

CF—I'll say one thing. James and crew have done their homework to see if there were any private land options. With increasing use, the roadside parking problem will get worse. This is pro-active.

AH—How hard is it to get a trailhead like that put in?

CF—This one has some details to talk about re: fisheries. We talked about it several times. We'll put it out for public comment and you never know what you'll get with that, but it's fairly straight forward.

CB—You're talking about motorized use-like ATVs?

JD—Yes. On the USFS road infrastructure.

AH—Cub Creek was one of the roads the WATV club asked us to open.

CF—WATV aren't currently authorized on USFS roads, but that's a different discussion.

CB—Do you have to finish the Travel Plan before you decide?

CF—No. We can make this change on a more limited scope.

JD—We talked to the land owners in the areas. There are 6-12 owners depending on how close you're talking about. They've all been very supportive of this project. They'd like a permanent home for the recreation. Lots of the public park in places they aren't supposed to. This project is a much better option.

1:46:45—JD—The next project we're calling the Mazama Firebreak Trail. People in the neighborhood would like this connection. It's the west firebreak, near Timberline. There's 2000' of USFS land and all the rest is private. It's been used informally for years, with Steve Devin doing the grooming. Firebreak maintained for many years and was used during the Cedar Creek Fire. Better to maintain it yearly instead of only when there's a catastrophic fire. Maintaining it as a trail also maintains the firebreak.

JD—Also, it's on the south side of the valley so it's not sunny in the winter. We might get one more week of skiing at the beginning of the season and one more week at the end. This relates to tourism dollars, with more skiing at the beginning and end of the season. There are also lots of housing, some low-income. One reason that it's attractive is for equitable access. Some people could ski to these trails instead of drive.

JD—Impact on deer? Methow Home Range says there's no impact on deer because the highway and the houses are already there.

AH—Plus deer don't like to be in the shade in the winter.

JD—We could have a trailhead here, too, by adding another parking lot, but also by little connectors to the housing. We can make a connection to the Community Trail which makes grooming more efficient and makes a nice loop for skiers.

JD—Questions?

CB—Seems like a good idea.

CF—And we'll get public comments on this, too.

1:55:05—JB—This is all in reference to maps you've got—the Sun Mountain Trails. It's a series of small projects that are part of us building about 25 miles of new bike trails at Sun Mountain to convert non-system trails into system trails. After that was completed, the fires came. That started the conversation about how do we re-open, how do we improve and fix the issues we discovered because of the fire—

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particularly drainage but also trail access and sustainability. If you have a blank slate, what would you want to do after the fire? We came up with 6-12 smaller projects.

JB—All the segments in green on the map are connectors or a slight relocation to a better place for drainage in case of another fire.

JB—We've seen a huge increase in use due to the pandemic. How to spread people out or maybe make directional trails.

AH—Where are the trails.

JB points out some steep two-way trails that were converted into one-way up or down trail. He names the trails.

JB—This is a wish-list, and they might now all be approved.

CB—One-way trails are good. People can descend really fast.

JB—And add horses in the mix, too.

AH—I'm glad I asked that. More users won't necessarily mean more trails. Non-motorized use is more scary for deer than motorized use. I want to make sure that when we propose increases to trails that we keep the wildlife in mind when we're doing this. I want to make sure we keep thinking about this. At some point the system won't be able to handle more people.

JD—I agree. Methow Trails and the Collaborative Board endorse the WDFW plan for winter closures. We have a responsibility to manage usage. It's not just recreation.

AH—CB and I discussed the lodging tax the other day because I'm on the committee. We spend a lot of money on trails in the Methow and not near as much on trails in the north County. They're not nearly as organized. How do you take care of it all? How do we shift people to the north? How did Methow Trails start?

JD—We've been around for 48 years. We've had a number of people really passionate about sports. 48 years ago, it wasn't Nordic skiing they were passionate about, it was just family recreation. We've evolved into a Nordic-centric ski organization mainly because the Early Winters Alpine Ski Area wasn't approved. The idea of Early Winters brought in a lot of people to the valley who were skiers. When that failed, they wondered what was acceptable to the county and the valley, as a recreation amenity that balances the wildlife, the water, the community, the ethic that we want to have. The answer then was Nordic skiing. It brought in lodging tax money and created a feedback loop in the Methow with people who are all recreationally minded. Built a world class facility. But it also has the amenities people want—coffee shops and bakeries, etc. To replicate that in the north county, I think it could happen, but it needs a critical mass of people all in it and fairly aligned with some leadership. But connectivity—I think will generate the most amount of buzz and feedback if there are trails that connect the Okanogan Valley with the Methow.

JD—I've had conversations with a lot of people about that. But our focus is the Methow Valley. We don't want mission creep. But I can see the connection happening. I can see us asking how do we bring those people into the fold.

JM—I see the loop trails as a way for that to happen. We look at horse use, bike use, and trail runners. That's always been a part of our plan.

JM—Also, all of our organizations don't want growth just for growth's sake. To AH—We were talking about maintenance while we drove over here. We're approaching the amount of new trails, how do we continue to maintain the trails we have. One of the reason Evergreen came about 10 so years ago was that a land agent partners said—we have disparate uses in the valley and we want a group to help us plan to mitigate the trail building by all user groups. So we've thought where is it appropriate to have this trail grow, where can it connect, how does it impact wildlife? We think of user groups, wildlife, water, landscapes—all of that. Together it's our responsibility to maintain these over time and to serve the people who work and live in the valley and those who visit the valley.

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JB—You guys have amazing opportunities over here. Just a few months ago, people from the Highland Trails Alliance came to a meeting, wanting to know how they can collaborate with us. Can we use your momentum? They were mostly concerned with summer access, but people want more trail access. There's an interest on this side as well.

JD—The Trails Collaborative meets monthly as a Board, but bi-monthly as a community. If we can motivate any of you as a business, or trail organization or people with an interest...

AH—The meetings are on Monday. I can't go.

JD—That's how we start the conversation to maximize the economic benefit, health and well-being benefit. We'd like to see something like that happens.

CB—I wrote some comments about trails. The Pacific Northwest Trail is pretty much where I hang my hat and have for 20 or 30 years. That effort needs the support of the county. There are different links to the trail that needs to be developed. It's something the north part of the county could grab on to.

RS—Are you talking about the parts of the trails that don't exist, that are on roads? Most of that is in the Colville National Forest, so I don't know a lot about it, but they're doing some planning. It's relatively young for a scenic trail. It took a Pacific Crest Trail a long time to get the sections off the road. We're focused on maintaining our sections of the PNT.

CB—Certain groups are working on it, but I don't see the collective effort.

CF—I think that's what's remarkable about the Community Trail and all of the places it crosses. To get that many people to all pull in the same direction.

CB—There's a huge difference in the populations in the north county and the Methow. There was a business in Oroville, a local bar and the owner said—What does that trail do for me? I told him the clientele of the trails showed up in the bar.

CB—Is there a trail called The Golden Staircase going up Starvation Mountain. The fires had a heck of an effect up there. A whole bunch of ATVs use that trail. If you manage recreation and you've got ATVs around, you better make a place for them or they'll go anywhere they want.

JM—Yes. That's an ATV trail.

JB—It's been a long time system trail but hasn't always had access to it from Starvation. Motorized and non-motorized users have used it to access other areas. We did trail work there with the NW Motorcycle club show up. My first experience with motorcyclists, bicyclists, hikers, etc. all working side by side doing the maintenance. It's advocates and user groups that do this. We got new signage and that helps a lot.

CB tells a story about someone who rode off the road because the trail wasn't well signed.

CB—One more question—At Starvation, the snowmobile has a trailer up there. What's it for?

JM—It's a warming hut.

CB—The huge beaver pond meadows. There's no trail marked. How do you keep motorized off that?

JB—It's a sensitive area. There's work that needs to be done.

JM—It is a motorized trail. We work with the Motorcycle Association, and it's on the list to make the trail better. Keeping motorcycles on the trail is good.

AH—Is that the last thing you guys have—the improvements at Chickadee?

JB—I'll talk about them if you think it's a good use of our time.

CF—I think the thing to talk about with Chickadee is the connection to Twisp. Part of our conversation. How to keep people from driving up to Sun Mountain but have access to the trails. There's a bike trail/road.

JB—Instead of going up from Patterson Lake, take Thompson Ridge Road from the Twisp River Road to the trailhead.

AH—Park where?

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RS—To summarize all the changes for Chickadee—10 miles of new trails, two of which are in the burned area. Three are already on the road or user build trail. Five miles new that are connector trails that try to connect on the Twisp River side. There's a little parking lot.

AH—When I talk about the USFS and the lack of road maintenance, which isn't your fault, the picture I take is Thompson Ridge Road just below the intersection with Little Wolf Creek Road. (Describes big potholes.) If there's going to be more traffic there, you need more maintenance.

CF—We've just got new gravel up the first ¾ of a mile—to replace wear and tear of fire suppression. But JD and I have talked about how to improve access to trailheads.

AH—Also, we just hired a person for Public Works who will be the Paths and Trails person. I want him to start inventorying the county's property where the Methow Trails are. Like how many bridges do we own?

JD—That person could get involved with the Collaborative, even just scouring minutes of past meetings to learn stuff like that.

CB—We also have the issue to keep an updated Parks and Recreation Plan so we're eligible for RCO grants.

JS—Would that person be writing grants?

AH—I hope so. For Methow Trails, the lodging tax pays for bridges, etc. In the north county, there's no entity to apply for that grant. Writing the grant is great, but it's finding the people who'll get the work done that's hard.

CB—The PNT had a trails' coordinator but we haven't talked to him much.

RS—We do work with him.

JD—The Collaborative has different organizations writing grants, but it's not competition. If someone gets the money, we all win. I'm happy to have someone cut and paste and share our grant applications. I think we're leaving money on the table.

CB—That Rec. Plan is key to this. (Talks about several places he's been where places have had problems because of overuse.)

JD—I read a survey of people—they want to recreate but they want to recreate the way the locals want them to recreate. People want to do the right thing, but they may not know how. Need money for maintenance and development.

RS—Communications, too, so people get the word.

AH—I was thinking about motorized use and the USFS road system. Seems like the more people out there, the lower risk people are going to be where they shouldn't be.

CB—I agree 100%. I've seen trails with tank traps and people don't know that means no motorized. Or at that's their story.

CB—And sometimes there are 30 people in a group. That makes challenges.

CF—When we have the public discourse on that, it'll be interesting.

JM—I see an opportunity with your new Paths and Trails person. The collaborative started out as a loose consortium. There's a capacity to start bringing groups together in the north county. I think there's interest and desire is there, just needs a little support.

CB—I think we can go a long way with it. It's a big piece of our economy. Even if you have to get grants to keep this work going.

AH—Thanks for coming in and sharing the plans. For a long time, we've wondered how the trails get build without NEPA being done. I have some concern about the impact on wildlife. We have hearings about something and people will ask—well, did you think about the sage grouse? And those same people are recreating on these trails out there in the middle of a place where, when I was a kid, there'd be 200 mule deer out there in the winter but now there's none. We have this special place. Let's not keep expanding just to be expanding, or to feed the needs of the west side of the state's needs.

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SR—We do NEPA on all of them and we get public comment.

CB—We appreciate you coming.

CF—I'll get with Lanie to get on your calendar to talk about the Recreation Plan.
They leave.

Adjourn at 11:48.