

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Wednesday January 9thth, 2024, 3:30 p.m.

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Present:

Andy Hover (AH), BOCC District 2
John Neil (JN), BOCC District 3
Chris Branch (CB), BOCC District 1
Laney Johns (LJ), Clerk of the Board
Stephan Womack (SW), Chief of Okanogan Co. Corrections Center
Paul Budrow (PB), Sheriff
Matt Marsh (MM), Tonasket Ranger District

Time stamps refer to the time on the wall clock. 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:

- *Jail commissary to be flagged as retail to eliminate tax-processing chore, no revenue change, family, friends can make purchases; inmates to get tablets*
- *Tonasket district ranger says two timber sales completed on Mt. Hull, last sale requires winter units; emergency action protocol signed; local contractors sought for bunkhouse construction and fence rebuilding; Smoky's birthday to be celebrated with library story times; collaborative thinning project benefits bighorns; 3,000 acres of prescribed burn tallied; Conconully roadwork to continue this spring; 2023 was "good grass year" for livestock; Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) due in June*
- *Board agrees to sign letter to Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife after Commissioner Hover points to inconsistencies between Conservation Policy Draft; and state agency's 25-year plan with regards to hunting and fishing*
- *County will pay Methow Arts Alliance's radio ad bill but group missed deadline for 2024 LTAC (Lodging Tax Advisory Committee) funding*
- *Murmur heard about Grainger parking lot and another parking lot needing make-over*

3:34 - SW: Commissary system for jail, order additional food or clothing items, for many years jail ran wholesale pricing deal demanding hours a month calculating taxes and processing. Would like to get jail re-flagged as resale supplier at the commissary. Only changes: the percentage that comes back to the jail for additional services will change, going up from a 25% mark-up to 31% across the board. The taxes would then be taken out of that percent, making the change revenue-neutral, not increasing cost to users but taking workload off officers that have to do the processing. This spring there was a glitch in the matrix somewhere that led to weeks of man hours to get us back on track. This would

basically eliminate that workload from my staff. There will be some flex, depending on what is actually ordered. *SW mentions that some who might not have the revenue to order from the commissary because their accounts are used for medical bills, for example, could have their families or friends order directly from the commissary for them. It should increase the revenue for additional inmate services.*

AH: Basically going from a wholesale to a retail system?

SW: Correct.

CB: With the jail participating in the profit margin.

SW: ...We bounced the numbers around to get it neutral. *SW expects the extension of the commissary to family and friends, with the distribution of tablets, to increase the revenue stream for the jail. Commissioners agree that food taxes are complicated and agree to make this change.*

Before SW and PB leave AH says he will try meet with them in the following week or so, at Health Director Lauri Jones' urging, to talk about "systematic type things" with "some other players in the Health Department".

3:43 - Tonasket Ranger District Update - *MM begins by asking the board to keep their ears open to any feedback on forest management in his district. AH asks about a travel plan with the Tonasket district and the Colville. At a standstill, says MM; letting the tribes work out their own first. There is some litigation. WATVs are considered now like cars.*

Thinning and burning project on Mt. Hull wrapping up, two of three commercial sales are complete. *MM: If we get winter conditions we'll finish up with the winter sale on Mt. Hull which will be the last portion of the commercial side that we plan to do up there for, in a sense, the next 20 years. ...It's what we're looking to on the rest of the forest, stand-wise. (Dead fir, larch stands up by the border.) Wood went mainly to Boise and Boggins. He talks about sales using "winter units" he hopes he can get up there so they can move on to the non-commercial side of things. We're moving on next to Buckhorn, encompassing the north side of Bonaparte, everything from Lost Lake to Highland Sno-Park to Virginia Lily Trail North, Beth and Beaver Lakes, the Buckhorn Block, also encompassing some BLM (Bureau of Land Management) land.*

3:48- MM: The U.S. Forest Service Chief recently signed The EDA (Emergency Action Determination) that allows us to move quicker with our wildfire crisis landscapes. Tonasket, Methow, Okanogan-Wenatchee are part of that. ...This allows us not to have an objection period, as long as we stay within the nine categories: commercial, non-commercial, fuels, salvage, vegetation-heavy, some minor aquatics, making sure roads don't wash out, right-sizing pipes, potentially; very focused on the vegetation treatments. It limits us on the side of recreation or travel management. We wanted to, with the 20-year plan, treat the travel plan by project area, not open the whole area up. This EDA may limit us to do travel management at the project scale so to be determined. Now with the wildfire crisis we're just trying to treat acres.

3:51 - A couple of other "non-veg" projects that we have are trying to get some bunkhouse space up at our office. (*Looking*) for local contractors. I'm asking for your help—one way of getting bids in is to be in Our Sams program, similar to anything related to fire stuff or contracting with the federal government. If you have constituents, contractors... that are

looking to bid, they need that process. If anyone calls wanting to get into the Sams data base to bid on a federal project I'll send that step-by-step process to you.

3:52 - CB: At one time they had a training project for anyone who wanted to sign up for the contracts. *MM says that would be good at the local level.* MM: We did two trainings. If Economic Alliance would put a training on I would definitely support that and come and help.

MM: For Smoky's 80-year birthday we'd like to go around to the libraries and do stories. We'll be there with shields on, representing the agency and Smoky.

CB: Anything we need to know about in regards to Whistler Canyon trails?

AB: They just decided to put a bunch of money into Pacific Northwest trails.

MM: We're putting money into it, rerouting it. A lot of that work is up on Mt. Hull. ...There's a larger Forest Service group that's working with the trail so we're working with that group to do the re-route. Is the trail head still county property? CB: Yes. MM: We're still in the process of doing more thinning around the trail head. ...It was a project of over half a million dollars, thinning, piling and burning. We're still burning those piles as we have time. We're still looking to do more. (The thinning project) has benefited bighorn sheep, in a cooperation between the Wild Sheep Foundation of Washington and the DNR (*Dept. of Natural Resources*). We got 800 acres treated with that project. We're continually working with DNR to look for Good Neighbor Authorities (*whereby the agency helps forestland owners collaborate across property lines at a landscape scale*).

JN: Is there a sign on top to get you to Black Diamond Lake? MM: No. There's no legal road access. The easiest access goes through Nine Mile Ranch. Our 300 road will get you close, then you have to go on foot through DNR. That's why you don't have a sign for it. Summit Lake is our big lake up on Mt. Hull.

3:58 - MM: We're well over our targets. We've burned well over 3,000 acres with prescribed fire and also pulled off the first cross-boundary burn with the state in the Aeneas Valley. They're in their infancy of doing prescribed fire so we're looking to help them.

CB: Have you got adjacent Fish and Wildlife land?

MM: More adjacent to DNR land. *CB asks some inaudible questions. MM talks more about training for contractors. ...Roads are a big thing. The Conconully Road going up to Salmon Meadows. We ground that up, put on a top coat, rolled and graded it. There are still some rough spots on the dirt road that will get worked on under the same contract this spring.* We're also going to do the same work on the 3,700 (lower Conconully Lake up to Baldy Pass). Grazing - We're 90% covered as far as active permits... Just finished up our annual meetings with the producers. Overall had a good grass year. We even got some new committees, same amount of pasture, just a new seat at the table. ...Still repairing fire damaged fences. Got funding for that. If we can get local contractors, we generally don't have the problem of contractors leaving us. We've seen them do a very good job. We have a lot of fence builders in this county but historically we haven't had a lot of *(them)* bid on our products and I'm not sure why. I'm hoping we can turn that corner. The last two construction contracts and last two fence building contracts came out of Oregon, increasing the price.

MM: We're still working with the Conservation District with their new CWPP (*Community Wildfire Protection Plan*) that they're putting out. Chris Furr (*Methow district*) and I are the points of contact. They've got an ambitious plan. It's (*coming out*) in June I think. (*MM leaves*)

4:07 - Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Conservation Policy Draft - AH: There's comments due on the Wildlife Commission policy deal on Friday. ...If you don't want to send those in as I board I'm going to send them in as a person.

CB: The only thing that I'm looking at here is that that in your comments you're saying nowhere is the information, because you've looked at the statute. Isn't this an amendment to a policy document that already has that stuff in it? The 25-year plan?

AH: From what I understand this is a new policy document. It references the statutes but when you look at the mandate they have through that law, "You shall manage for increasing hunter and fisher—"

CB (*Quoting the policy statement*): "The department's 25-year strategic plan lays out a roadmap for implementing the department's mandate. In addressing these Conservation challenges therefore building...(inaudible)." My understanding was that this (*policy*) would be a part of the 25-year plan... I'm not saying that you shouldn't emphasize what you're emphasizing, because this isn't a stand-alone policy for the management of the Fish and Wildlife grant plans. ...I would suggest that (*these comments are*) indeed a part of that plan... Nowhere do you see these things but they're part of the 25-year plan that's referenced here. Your comments would probably get that point across. That policy statement should address the fact that this is one of several policies that include these items. ...I feel strongly about the same stuff. I would be inclined to know if the 25-year plan included those mandated items, and that's what I was looking at in the over-view of that plan.

AH: It's interesting that they have a 25-year strategic plan that actually addresses a whole bunch of stuff. So why do they have to have the Conservation Policy that muddies the water?

CB: That might be the comment... Because there is an emphasis on recovery. And this one near-term action that includes—this isn't just their overview—that it's engaged communities to recreation and stewardship. There was an emphasis by the new commissioner, that still stands today, it emphasizes conservation and disregards those items like hunting. Conservation is fine as long as (*it*) is serving our desires and needs for hunting and fishing. Recreation is what it is. That's where I'd like to head them off in terms of that emphasis, as long as they're including in their near-term emphasis recreation and stewardship. ...I have a lot of friends who are constituents that ask me "Where's my access? How come they're cutting my hunting season down to zero? The fact is that there's people in this county who don't just go out and recreate. They actually eat what they're doing. That's part of their lives.

AH: I love to hunt but management by unit is important. (*Other states*) manage down to the unit. *CB doesn't agree, says he found the policy pretty specific. AH says Idaho, Wyoming, Montana are much more specific as to species and units.* Okanogan County is a large chunk of land that has resident mule deer and white deer populations, migratory populations, but there are no restrictions on the number of animals that can be taken out. Just point restrictions. ...In the RCW it says "You shall manage for increased hunting

opportunities.” The scientists say “Spring bear (*season?*) needs to happen to manage this population, but then they ignore it and say they’re taking away the spring bear season. They defy the RCW, they defy the science, and that’s what makes some people so pissed at other people in general. If they’re going to tell us—I know one of the games commissioners. She was on MVCC (*Methow Valley Citizens Council*) as their attorney. We always get chided that we need to follow the science. Hypocrisy is something that is so latent sometimes. It’ll hit you between the eyes.

CB: Back to the comments, I know that we don’t have a lot of time. But I would say “if you were to change it to be more oriented to referencing the 25-year strategy and clarifying, even, that this is in fact part of the conservation policy and if it’s in conflict with those other items in the strategic plan, we’re not going to like it too much.

AH: I agree with you. He’s right. ...It’s a document that’s been accepted, but there were different commissioners. You didn’t hear the uproar that’s going on right now. So if they’re trying to pass a document that’s supposed to be under the umbrella of that 25-year plan, or controls (*it*), but is in conflict with it...? They agree that AH as vice chair should write a letter on behalf of the commissioners saying they have a concern with this policy being adopted outside of the 25-year strategy.

4:22 - *CB asks to share the letter with a hunter friend who has served with WDFW. AH remarks that the state population is far superior to that of states farther east, making conservation management here more difficult. He is not against wolf populations, is more leery of grizzlies, but insists on management, respecting the correlation between predator and prey populations.* AH: They’re talking now about limiting bear and cougar hunting timeframes. (*They’ve*) already taken it from no hound hunting to—bears have taken off, that’s why there’s a spring and fall season— to two bear tags. Cougars and different but they went to a quota system. Once they hit three, they shut (*the season*) down, so you’d better get out there fast if you want to shoot one. *He talks about how hard it is to hunt some high country deer without baiting them. CB wants to move on to the minutes and vouchers approval.*

4:40 - LJ: For 2023 the Methow Valley Arts Alliance was approved an amount for their LTAC (*Lodging Tax Advisory Committee*) award. They didn’t not apply for 2024 funding. They will apply for 2025 funding. They incurred a \$1,250 KTRT radio arts promotional ad invoice December 18th. Usually Nov. 1st is the cut-off. They’re asking if we can reimburse them from the 2023 fund they didn’t use. They weren’t able to submit an invoice until all our county invoices were turned in to the auditor for the last FEMA (*Federal Emergency Management*) date.

CB: What did the auditor say?

LJ: We didn’t run it by her.

CB: Deadlines are deadlines, but I’m inclined to keep them afloat. LJ explains that usually end of year expenses are accounted for in the following year’s budget.

AH: We allow a back date for the budget.

LJ: I made the decision not to allow the late application for LTAC, but said I would approach the board about the invoice. *AH says as long as the (2023) contract says from December 31st to December 31st, they will honor the invoice. But AH thinks they should*

rethink the contract to match the fiscal year so it matches the November deadline. AH will ask LTAC about what they want to see, a 10 or a 12-month contract. LJ reminds him that LTAC is only responsible for allocating. They will bring this up at a later date.

CB murmurs about it being a good idea to asphalt a parking lot, mentions that their own parking lot is getting worse and worse, and they should talk to the public works director about it. It should be a rebuild.

4:53 - Meeting adjourned until Tuesday, Monday being a holiday.