

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Tuesday, March 7th, 2023, 1:30 p.m.

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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
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:

- Architectural firm and engineering firm chosen as “go-to” consultants; needs include barn building, courthouse HVAC, jail boiler replacement, safety evaluations
- Legislative proposal to outlaw leaded gas bad news for small airports
- Oroville affordable housing project to break ground, similar work underway in Winthrop
- Tonasket ranger reports on:
 - stepping back from forest collaborative in light of law suits by a member
 - wildfire mitigation, thinning in Aeneas, Bonaparte, Conconully, prescribed burning on Mt. Hull, creating control line areas around designated “pods”, maintenance burning
 - road maintenance near Salmon Meadows
 - commercial harvesting; difficulties convincing “stakeholders” of public servants’ commitment to forest health

1:33 - *The commissioners have sent out RFQs (Requests for Quote) for on-call architectural services and an engineering services. They review the two responses received for each. AH: This is for structural stuff, not just roads and bridges. The barn (at the fairgrounds) for example. So we can design it ourselves. CB: Sometimes they have a team they put together, full-service teams. JN: (Architectural firm) JM Neil has done a lot of fire halls. CB: T, D & H have structural engineering. Their clients include architectural firms. Something we may want to do—list advantages of having an architectural firm or engineering firm vs. an architect. An architect is more creative. JN: The engineers have to figure out the design. AH: MJ Neil farms out their engineering to someone in Wenatchee. Don’t think there is a benefit. There are times when we’ve needed strictly an engineer. The boiler replacement at the jail is going to need some on-call engineering... It’s cut and dried on both. The architectural firm MJ Neil is in Wenatchee, preferable as a local company to A & E, in Oregon, and since Aspect only deals with geothermal, they will go with the alternative, T, D & H for engineering. They discuss point of contact, not wanting to meet with marketers who, says CB, they may never see again. JM Neil is coming the next day for a Justice Center “walk-through” (utilities?) so they will schedule an interview with T, D and H, and JM Neil only if necessary, to notify that they have been selected as the “go to” firms.*

CB: If we'd had an on-call architect service prior to deciding to do the infrastructure work at the Justice Building, would we have gone out for specific service? **AH:** I think so because of the scope of the project. **CB:** If you do, watch out for federal funds. Economic Development has this restriction: you could have someone do the preliminary work, the cost estimate, but they can't be the ones that apply for that particular project of the grant... **JN:** We ran into that. **CB:** It's frustrating. The ones who make the effort and then are out of the picture. We might want to have a discussion on potential services for the Courthouse HVAC system, things like that. Because we have so much of that. *AH says the engineer could help with small things like cutting a doorway, drawings for a pole barn.* **CB:** Another argument we need is where we have a building that we don't know whether or not it's safe. *AH asks JN about insurance adjuster's look at the pole barn.* **JN:** *The beef barn is in worse shape in my opinion than the horse barn. They took a couple of pictures. Roof line doesn't look pretty. About four sags, a pretty major flat spot.* **AH:** We could ask how much it would cost to get engineer's drawings for barns identical to these so when going out for bids they don't have to do the design work. **JN:** Is it cheaper to strip and rebuild a structure? *He says if they just replace the posts, it won't withstand a 1500 lb. bull running into them.*

JN: There's a legislative proposal, 1554, to get rid of all leaded fuels. It doesn't sound like a big deal but almost all small aircraft runs on leaded gas. If that goes through, almost all small airports are going to have no purpose. **AH:** I'm more than willing to write a letter, or have the county write a letter asking why did we come up with the Revitalization Board if not you're talking about doing this? We've loaned so much money for fueling depots across the state. **CB:** Oroville's isn't big enough to survive without fuel sales. **JN:** For \$20,000 you can make them so they will run on unleaded, but— **CB:** You'd drop your compression too... I'd be curious (*inaudible*) to see where the state aviation is on that. *JN will see what comments have been made. CB knows of a director of an aviation association they could consult.*

2:19 - *Minutes and vouchers approved. LJ announces the Okanogan Horticultural, Pest and Disease Control Board's monthly meeting at the old Flour Mill the next day. JN says he can be the designated commissioner to go.* **LJ:** I got a call from Ashley Range. They're getting ready to break ground on their affordable housing project (in Oroville), and wondering when to meet back with commissioners. Since they had to re-bid due to the cost of going over budget on the previous bids they received, I suggested she (*wait to*) receive those bids. **AH:** There's another one in Winthrop. Didn't realize there's only 15 low-income apartment units. Four different sites in Twisp. It's crazy. This'll be four or five (*sites*) for us, for those earning less than 60% of AMI (*Average Median Income: around \$40,000*).

2:33 - *LJ mentions a message from the PUD about the district's PUD Privilege Tax for 2022, based on sales of electricity in the county, for which a deposit is made and a resolution is drafted.*

2:34 - **LJ:** (*The planning director*) had submitted a letter regarding the change of location for Tiny Dancer Organics, a cannabis operation. The County objected to the application. Pete asked me to put up this follow-up letter. **AH:** The address they gave was not even a correct address. We said it should be ...suite B (instead of suite H). Now they want to change to suite E, which doesn't even exist. **JN:** When you use too much product... *AH asks LJ to contact the person and get it changed, since it looks like they were trying to correct it.*

2:39 - *CB leaves*

2:51 - Tonasket Ranger District report - **AH:** (*to Matt Marsh*) Commissioner Branch is on the NCW Forest Health Collaborative. Seems like that makes a difference when they're doing those timber cuts over here... The last sale they got sued and the judge struck it down. **MM:** There's a current one now but in the first cut—the Mission project—there was a lawsuit filed... We, the

Colville National Forest, have taken a step back from the Northeastern Washington Forest Health Collaborative. We'd go through the process and one member of the collaborative, Tim Coleman, was suing us. We said we're not in this anymore... We were being open and they were using the information and coming back at the 11th hour and litigating. It's the opposite of the definition of a collaborative... I've handed you a map, of the 20-year plan. Tonasket is married up with Republic. The new map is planning areas, high priority fire-sheds. **AH:** Basically the whole west side. **MM:** With that comes some extra obligations, some funding and some ability for us to "jump cut and line"; if we're looking for money, and/or hiring certain people we have a higher priority. This comes from the chief's message that our number one priority in the Forest Service is the wildfire crisis that we're in... We need to treat our landscapes. We're one of 21 high priority forests in the west, and we have these fire-sheds scattered across the whole Tonasket district. ...We're immediately going to Buckhorn block and the north part of Bonaparte. Trying to decide whether next to go to Scatter (*Swan Lake, bottom of Aeneas Valley*), Sweat, Conconully. It's been awhile since we were over on the west side of Tonasket, which is Conconully area. *They talk about DNR doing that area, a salvage sale which ended in January. MM will be talking with the adjoining Methow district. JN suggests including Toat's Coulee, Chopaka, 14 mile.* **MM:** The whole northwest corner is wilderness. May not be able to do much with it. Tiffanies is roadless area. **AH:** Which has more wood density, Scatter or Conconully? **MM:** Conconully. *He ways Aeneas is greener; Conconully is a woodland-urban interface that has lot of "white land" up against it. MM approves of AH's proposal to write a letter prioritizing the area.*

MM: Our prescribed spring burning plan includes Mt. Anne, and Baily (upper Aeneas). In the past we'd put units on aa map and tell the public when we're going to burn those. (*Now*) we say "Here's everything. We're going to take whatever day Mother nature gives us (the conditions for). ...There should always be one or more ready to go. There might still be high fuel moisture in the high elevations but not in the lower ones. All these are on the east side of Tonasket, mainly because we have not been in Conconully and Toat's coulee commercially for quite some time. We're generally on the heels of commercial and non-commercial sales when we do burns. Going to be active this year.

MM describes two new concepts: Pods (buffering roads breaking the forest up into units to have control lines around burns "to treat roads or ridge tops hard so we can defend from these areas, vs. falling way back if we haven't treated these areas", and PCLs (potential control lines) where they simulate a lot of fires and decide, according to wind direction, where a fire team can go.

MM: The outside teams all have their ways of fighting fire, which may not be the way (of) local districts. **AH:** By my house, Virginia Ridge, there was no place to stop that fire... (*There's*) 15 or 20 miles of timber that's got to burn through before you have a control line... **MM:** We're going to thin a ridge top on either side of a road so when the fire does come it takes us two days instead of two weeks to prep a road... *MM says they're deciding how to break up areas like Mt. Hull into multiple pods so as to move more quickly.*

They discuss "Viper", the federal hiring/contract system. AH wonders if these people can do thinning as well. MM says they are equipped for small wood-type thinning and brush removal.

MM: I'm hoping they'll offer more of these Viper trainings, and to have more BTAs (*blanket purchasing agreements*)—a list of contractors to ask for road maintenance, for example. Local-type lists. *He talks of preferring "broadcast burn" (A prescribed fire ignited in areas with little or no forest canopy present) to pile work.* We're also starting our maintenance burning. We've been doing first entry burning, been doing commercial and non-commercial harvest. Last year started some of the first maintenance burning that includes ten-year on average intervals. *He talks about going on the radio, open lines, to talk about spring burning. JN says he might also want to notify Emergency Management.*

Road maintenance - **MM**: This coming year (we'll do) 3,800, the North Fork straight up from Salmon Meadows. That pavement—we put a contract out to grind that asphalt. A phased approach. (To build a new paved road) would take millions so first we'll grind, shape ditches and shoulders, make a good gravel road, then ask for money in the following years to make a good level III asphalt road. Also the 3,700 road where they're logging out of Conconully, trying to stay within that general area. **AH** asks if the BPA contracts would help in emergencies, like when the road washed out in Conconully and people were trapped. **MM**: Not as fast as we would all like it to be, so it's nice that the County in the past has been helpful, when they're available. **AH**: A lot of people think, "Why's the County doing work that could be done by private contractors? An emergency is an emergency but if there's something in place where there's people in place with heavy equipment—you end up taking away a little bit of the economy. An opportunity. ...I was thinking about the County going out to bid for those emergency situations. **MM**: I will check on that... **MM** would like to cooperate with County road work projects, like the ten-year rotation on chip seals. **MM**: Thinking of heavy construction not taking away what these contractors can do, we're doing BPA contracts for road work and fuels work. They've got the equipment we're looking for and they're also local. Also...hiring local fire contractors weeks ahead of time. **AH**: Sounds like the Forest Service is actually trying to streamline stuff. **MM**: It's our 20-year plan... **JN**: You're always going to want to prioritize your area. **MM**: Right now we're prioritizing *your* area.

Commercial Harvesting - We're still winter logging on Mt. Hull ...coming off the north side. Our "Mack" sale wood goes to Zoegel, is weighed, hamped in lumber wood. Cold decking on a wood lot until Highway 20 opens. *Wood goes to Darrington*. Some is going to Vaagens, some to Boise. **AH**: Too bad some of that stuff is not going by rail. You could run it in the winter time. **MM**: These rails have never done large timber. There's lots of rules with federal wood. It's predominantly larch. We're trying to restore that pine landscape where fire can burn over it every ten years. Lot of fir in-growth we're pulling out. Ferry Co. is getting into firewood stuff in campgrounds. An operator bought most of our salvage sales. That's all I got. **AH**: I wish that the whole county was encompassed by a forest that did as much work as the Colville does. **MM**: That's good to hear. **AH**: Chris (*Furr, Methow Forest*) is great to work with over there. He wants to do the same thing but it's harder to get there. **AH**: He's got a different dynamic. Lot of stakeholders with a lot of time on their hands. I wish more people would realize that people who pour their heart and soul into public land management—they wake up to do the right thing, not looking to—**AH**: kill animals, kill forests. Looking to make it better. You have all these people who say we need to stop carbon emissions... Fish and Wildlife are looking to put the western gray squirrel on the endangered species list. The regional director said because of wildfires their habitat is very small. I said anything unhealthy for forests would be going against the Endangered Species Act. **MM**: They're burning a lot of lynx habitat. We're looking at punching holes back into some wilderness so we have different age classes like historic forests would have been. **AH**: We need to keep pockets for small animal hiding. You have none when you have vaporized landscapes. **MM**: We're trying not to let all this noise, competing interests, get in the way. **AH**: Good. Thank you.

3:43 - *They will convene the next day at the Justice Building site, 1240 2nd Ave. So., for the "walk through". JN says he's heard from the guy who says if legislation on unleaded gas goes through it would be a mistake.*

3:44 - *Meeting adjourned until Monday morning.*