

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
4/24/18, PM
Special Meeting on Status of North Cascades Smokejumper Base

Present:

Facilitator: Ashley Thrasher

County Personnel

Jim Detro - JD (BOCC)
Andy Hover - AH (BOCC)
Lalena Johns - Clerk of the Board
(Chris Branch, BOCC - absent)

Mayors

Soo Ing Moody (Twisp Mayor)
Carleen Anders (Mayor of Pateros)
Sally Ranzau - (Mayor of Winthrop)

State:

Washington State Senator Brad Hawkins, 12th Legislative District

Congress:

One individual taking notes.

US Forest Service - Numerous individuals, including:

James Pena - Pacific Northwest Regional Forester (USFS Region 6)
Christy Darden - Deputy Director of Engineering, USFS Region 6
Mike Williams - Forest Supervisor, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
Jason Peterson - Okanogan-Wenatchee NF
Mike Lance - Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
Daren Belsby - Manager, North Cascades Smokejumper Base (NCSB)

(Note: The introductions went so quickly it was not possible to get all names.)

These notes have been taken by one of several volunteer citizen note takers and published on the website of Okanogan County Watch (countywatch.org) The notes have been taken as close to verbatim as possible, with any writer's comments or explanations in italics. For officially approved minutes of Board of Commissioner meetings, normally published at a later date, see www.okanogancounty.org.

Summary: The Regional Forester of US Forest Service Region 6 (Pacific Northwest Region) Okanogan County Commissioners, local mayors, and others meet concerning the timeline for decision-making and the funding processes that will determine whether the USFS will be able to retain North Cascades Smokejumper Base (NCSB) as an active firefighting entity in the Methow Valley. All parties agree to NCSB as a top priority and agree to collaborate

regarding actions necessary to gather funding and other resources that will make this a reality. The many aspects of competition for funding at National, Regional, and local levels are discussed.

2:00 - Ashley Thrasher: Meeting guidelines: Our goals are to make sure all are on the same page with our shared knowledge regarding what is currently happening regarding NCSB (North Cascades Smokejumper Base) what we'd like to see happening, and identification of some possible actions.

AH - We would like to thank everyone for coming today. As you can see, this is an important meeting for us. Many interest groups that are wanting to see the use stay in operation. NCSB is a big piece of our community and history. I think the work group we have put together shows our commitment to seeing this facility stay and remain productive.

We have a loose agenda -

*Want to discuss the USFs goals and objectives for NCSB and discuss how we can partner with the USFS in trying to facilitate funding to keep the base here because in the PPA it was determined that a 2-3 year time freeze was required to keep the base. Want to make sure things are going smoothly.

*Would like to ask USFS to ID goals and objectives in re NCSB

Mike Williams: We have had number of conversations, but want to go back to the letter wrote to the Regional Forester. expressing the concerns you mentioned. Took us awhile to get the meeting together, but he was more than wifing to come up. He has been particularly helpful in getting things done at NCSB.

James Pena - Thanks for organizing this meeting, and having chance to share info.

HISTORY: NCSB has been here for a long time. Because it has been invested in community culture, economically, resource- wise etc and is an important asset for fire protection, all these things are playing into how we are looking at going forward. Challenge is that it has been here for a long time, and our budgets have not kept up with needs. When I think of facilities within this region, have finally gotten to each district, and it runs the gamut. Foresters got out to the base and Ranger District offices a couple of times. Our employees take a lot of pride in facilities, and go over and above what is needed. To a certain extent, this is only practicalhelps to deal with facilities that have needs. Around North Cascades, there is more urgency to act - smokejumpers take great pride in their facilities.

RE airport - We need to deal with the setback that will reduce liabilities that are driving us to a fast pace.

REALITY is: some buildings are 50's era buildings that are tough to maintain. Health safety, water issues arise - and moving the first row of buildings back out of the zone that needs to be cleared for the runway for state and county desire to improve utility of the airport. We did a preliminary analysis in July of 17 to look at the options - all things being equal, that would be

modest effective way to site a jump base. At that time, we decided the best thing was to leave it where it is and deal with the upgrades, moving, etc. rather than to change.

That is where we are. It recognized a number of other things. operationally, there are other places that could give operations. *The tipping point was what the base contributes to the communities. To do what we can to keep the economic impact in place.*

FUNDING: In the PPA, we identified initially to relocate the buildings - about \$2.5 - 5 million. A pretty good chunk of change. That's why we identified that it takes time to cobble together the funding. Within the region, there is a long list of preferred maintenance from campgrounds to airlift facilities to replacing office buildings, etc. Trying to make sense when it's hard to compare apples to apples is tough. A boiler replacement needed at Timberline Lodge, where huge number of people visit - that will take 4 million. Have been trying to deal with the lower cost things to get things done, in order to figure out the larger ticket items and where to get the resources. AARA funding - we got along of work done with that in early 2010's. 2018 Omnibus bill - the rest of our \$\$ for this year - funding designated out of suppression funding for about \$65 million to deal with aviation related infrastructure, which includes aircraft facilities. A call order (?) we will be responding to next week - this renovation list will be in top priorities for that list. If you take the lower estimate of 5 million, it is 20 percent of 25 million. We will be competing with regions across the country.

Regional facilities fundings may be able to contribute. This is how we must operate. Congress gives the funding. A couple of things happened this year - Fire fighting fix put us on a path to take these freshened dollars which will kick in in 2020. We can work with Congress to replace funding that had been moved to other areas into the suppression budget to increase fuels treatment, restoration work, be more responsive to customer service like special use permits, etc.

We got about 85 million nationwide for facilities. It has typically been around 10 % from the national office. It's a bit up from that. Things are on the right path.

We will be working with (national force, National Forest?) to see how we can compete in the validity fund.

Once the project is funded, will do a site plan to lay out what needs to be done, a cost estimate for contracts, and a schedule. About \$ 250,000. Will contract this. Likely will need to do NEPA after site plan is done, document a decision on what will be done for remodeling that might impact historical nature of the site. NCSB is not on historic register, but existed for 50 years, which will require analysis.) That is procedural. When we get to the place of construction, will see how it will fit in as far as starting this year or later and to completion. Because of limited facilities funds, many of our projects are designed to (????)

I think Mike has conveyed that as we move through his process, we will have time for questions, answers, etc. This is pretty much where we are now.

Mike Williams - I think this sums it up. You all know my interest in these improvements. Jim has outlined the national - regional perspectives. This is not only a forest resource, but national resource too. Takes commitment. I am comfortable at the regional level, but we are an agency. It has been outlined well.

AH - In the funding for proposals , in the PPA - \$ 2.2-5.0 million range. Where might we be on that scale? Quite a big difference. Is there a standard that (?) Can we do things for less and get same things accomplished?

Pena - Site plan will deal with this, in assessments, etc., needs at each site. That is the first cut. The cut that might give a more realistic assessment is the site design. I will defer to others on this. Until then, it is speculative.....Jason, Christy?

Jason - the team we brought in for the recent PPA was looking at various options, using Daren's group potentially bringing in local flavor. Some things not included are some of the site work, outside of WA DOT taxi -ways, we have our own (?) We are looking at other things - this will be long-term...concerning taxi way...additional costs that we would end up finding to facilitate the site. This is beyond the portion you are taking about.

Another variability - is the location. The pricing may not cater to the remoteness of Twisp, regarding bringing in materials, etc.

Christy Darden - Preliminary number in there looked at modular vs state building design. Jan is right on...\$2.5-5 focused on the three buildings - rate system are other news, bunkhouse, etc.

Pena - bumps it into the upper limit of \$10 Million.

AH - The USFS is the largest recipient of services by the state airport. As such, important for us to have NCSB here, in order to keep the DOT involved in projects at the airport. This coming year, 5 million paving project going into that airport. That is large chunk in our economy. Shows willingness of this state to put money into the airport for all concerned. Want to be sure this is understood. Start and federal funding also available.

Soo Ing Moody - I want to add to that. What I have heard from you is the fact that you want to maintain the base here. I have heard this from all of you. What AH is saying is that this is indeed since that last couple of years this topic has come up. It is not only the elected officials, but the community that feels this way. I hope it speaks volumes to you. Would like to walk out of here with an assurance on the timeline and assurance enough to be sure it is not going to be moved elsewhere. The community is trying... a lot of work. This is a big deal. If we are going to put our community effort together to work with you, we don't want to see that in another couple of years it is going somewhere else. We all are now working in gov't, and know that this could happen.

Pena - I think you answered your own question. No guarantee. We are not on a stable raft. But we are making plans to do this, It is all depends upon finding funding. We hope that we will be in competition for the \$25 million. If not, we will continue to look at other ways to fund it. But we can't leave you with an unreserved commitment that will be there forever. About 3-4 years ago, there was an agency -wide look at how we were going to use the base as an asset. That kicked off some concerns about whether the base and jumpers will be there forever. You need to realize what is in our control and the way we look at now the base is an asset we need to maintain and will look for funds to do that. In re community support and what you are doing to rally that support and resources - I would like to see some continuing dialing in this arena

..staging (?) the community to discuss other resources to bring funding to the table. Our winter (?) track record has not been a priority for federal government.

AH - NCSB was ranked # 1 on North Central Washington district priorities. That bring up possibilities of funding. RE alternate funding - if there are grant \$\$ and private \$\$, how can these be focused into the USFS for a particular purpose?

Pena - This is what we'd like help with, regarding the communities. What grant monies, etc. are there? That said, there are things we can do to work it out - where are the areas that would or would not be worth our time? More conversations would be good.

Moody - I know our community will be behind this. Next question - \$20 million - you mentioned the repurposing of \$65 million that specifically points to aviation in re suppression. You mentioned the A\$ 25 million and priorities. My question is: What can we do in order to make this THE priority? Here in Twisp we deal with small budgets, multiple departments, etc. Capital facilities always a challenger. as Bran Hawkins here can tell you. In this regard, for this project these are cap infrastructure projects the have ben neglected for years,, under and the lack of \$\$\$. But now there are funds clearly earmarked for this purpose. How can we help you to put this at the top of this amount?

Pena- this is not the only aviation project in the region. Without guidance, it comes a lot fo expectations nationally. All kinds of improvements to runways, air tankers, All things nationally - any priorities we put up will be in competition. What we can do - when we know how we fare in the national competition, we will let you know and we can figure out where to go from there.

Moody - This particular project - you have the partnerships in place at levels of government here. You heard \$5 million from the state. These are investments by state and local resources. As much as I understand these other projects are important...not trying to undermine their values - but I passionately believe in this. I have written grants for the town ourselves because we have no grant writer. There are many factors that can cause a project to rise to the top. USFS has given a timeline - the timelines as well as other things aligning that make an opportunity for the UFS to step up to the plate. Not just me saying, it - it is true, because this is an offering I hope rests well with you.

Question from group: - As far as the marker goes forward to total costs. Is it \$10, 25 million?

Pena - This project is packaged in a way that it could go forward in stages. The time-sensitive thing - is moving the stuff out of the clear zone to another zone ...stuff needs to be called out in 2-3 year time frame. The rest has more time the ...needs to upgrade, etc.

Carlene Anders: Are you saying that the total amount of the packet would have to be approved before...

Pena - Yes. We want to be sure we are putting forward how much the whole need will be. Best strategy. We will put forward the whole thing, in stages.

JD - Usually I'm not this patient. I am a 40's era model. This is 50's year we are talking about at at the jump base. That is the Daddy of them all. The birthplace of smoke jumping. Some people area not going to come to see a monument - but it's not like an active smoke jump

base there since 1939. I want to see the jump base granted in perpetuity. You can't do it, but Congress can. I want you to know I am working on that. I appreciate that you are here and what you are doing. You (Pena) and Mike) might not be here for long. We come and we go. But we need to develop priorities and stick with the time lines. Not trying to be detrimental in what I say, but we all know how things can go.. For example we have been working for 15 years on a 10- year packing license. This shows how slow the wheels turn, and another person comes in with another idea. I don't want this happening.

One more point If I saved you 2 million dollars on Timberline boiler project, would you...? (Couldn't follow.)

Pena - I don't even have this amount.

JD - (Talks about county courthouse boiler.)

Pena - In response I hope that when we leave you get the feeling that, to be best of our ability, we are trying to get this job done. Before I came here, I already knew that NCSB was important to the agency as well as to the community. I used to work in Naches - involved with fire in for much of my career. Familiar with jump bases and projects we have. We have spent much more money than I ever imaged last year...fortunately we didn't get anyone hurt. My concern is safe projects for fire, communities, etc . As things change with technology, that may be challenged but for the time being, I do not see this change.

AH - Timeline. Has DOT directed to USFS that they have to move buildings out of runway on a certain time frame? Was under the impression that federal dollars could be affected but not necessarily.

Pena - They want the buildings to be moved so we do not see the grant funding go away.

Aviation Expert: Part of team, but in audience - It was identified ...the FAA has granted us a "guy " (?) so we can allow requirements....we don't request funding until we have the timeline in place. FAA may not keep funding until plans are in place.

AH - USFS has 19 acres there. A fairly large chunk of property to do business on. Has there been any thought of selling off that property to another agency of individuals in order to create a facility that could be multi-use for several different agencies for fire or emergencies.

Pena - We had until recently condos ring a ?? source of funding. Jason has shared with me that this footprint has been used for many ad hoc purposes, such as fire camps, etc. Certain options that could be considered when we do the site plan. Do not want to dispose of acres until we know that. At any time, if there is another agency that wants to colocate, we would be open to it but until we know how we need to use the site, we don't want to close our options. We want to be sure the purpose it is there for remains.

Moody - What is the priority for this base - what plan? You said there was a potential of the priority being the same.

Pena - The improvements are the priority. Overall priory is the whole thing.

Williams - We have a short timeframe. May 1 - the funds have only become available nationally, so we are struggling to put together the proposal. Between now and May 1, this needs to happen.

Moody - You are requesting how much?

Williams- Don't know exactly.

Pena - It will be an art. if we request 10 million out of 25 million (that is almost half?)we will have to decide what is critical to fund right now.

Moody - was looking thru PPA - the \$5.2 million....It actually says \$4 million is for the one building and an additional \$60,000 for operations and maintenance. If we are just looking at capital improvements, it is less than \$5.2 million. It was something I saw that was interesting in the PPA. It may not be as large an number we had thought originally. That alleviates a little.

Pena - realize these are all estimates. Until we settle on site plan..

Moody - But we need to start somewhere.

Ashley Thrasher - Is there anyone with questions?

*Is there an overall view of the site plan? Will funds be available, what kind of motion?

Christy Darden - we are drafting - if we find some funding, plan to award that early...best case, within the next 3 months.

Jason (?) Some of short term studies- regular surveys, we did some health and safety issues in bunk house. Probably the same one JD worked in. You have done a retreat (?) on remodeling. We are planning on immediate improvements so that the smoke jumpers there now will be safe in the bunkhouse. the bunkhouse was not considered in the PPA. Regional and other offices committed to these things as a priority - next few months, working on bunkhouse.

Christie Darden - Jim has shared that nationally we have gotten a bump-up in dollars, but no idea what this region will be getting. Until I get that number, I am a little iffy.

AH - Question for Director of Aviation: How far out from the runway can grant be used for taxi wayside etc.

Aviation Director - aeronautical use and non-aeronautical use. FAA will look at this when they locate its plan. Need to stitch plan together with FFA.

Christy - regarding conveyance.. the agency has authority through Sept 30 this year. part of the regulation. Has been renewed annually, and we continue to have that authority.

Pena - So local communities could work on Congress to give us another option where we have land that has value, we are able to convey.

AH - That could be a double -edged sword when some people look at - it's good for people to know (?) conveyance.

Pena - The Forest in this region that has been most successful on conveyances has been the Deschutes. They have high value land. They convey parcels in town and Lincoln, Bend, and Sisters. They convey public land to private for county. Trend is toward more private land than public. Also creates more of an opportunity that has a validity that is lower cost to maintain and deal with current needs. many facilities we have now were sized for a need that does not exist now. It's not a panacea, but in the right place it is another avenue to a solution.

AH - the only thing about that is that it would need to..... in my opinion..... it couldn't just go back into public coffers, it would need to be for a project in the same area.

Pena - That would be up to Congress. Right now, it doesn't go into general fund, but into the purpose of improving the community.

Question: On timeline. Curious if we are going to be tearing down 3 buildings that are pretty prime use and needed. When we tear them down, we will need other facilities already there. Is that correct?

Pena - Yes. This will be on the site development plan. Alternate work areas. Not closing the base down for a time.

Anders: - If there were partners hip involved where there is multi-use for fire with other agencies, would this leverage the priority, in your minds? It would increase capacity.

Pena - Not for this immediate funding, because nothing is jelled enough to talk about. Last few fire years, good interagency cooperation. I am encouraged by that. The people that work here look for ways to do that. From my perspective, ...my mission isat the regional level ...is to build a better relationship with DNR, which has progressed in the last few years. We have worked with dispatch, module level, their units and our units. Ag rest foundation to guild from.

Wilson- In terms of private - public partnership that holds together resources, that's for later dialogue, but not immediate funding. Where is the North Central Wa Development Council in making this their priority? Potential?

AH - Absolutely ...Karen Francis Mc (??) would be willing to do grant writing.

Moody - there are other partners also. We may be unaware of some.

AH - Our questions today helped answer how you channel private funding as to how you funnel private funding tin to such things.

AH - Who would be our contact in USFS re this?

Wilson: - Locally we have grants, etc. USFS would pull in help with Local person - Deb (Stanislov ?)

Moody :- Is there someone else??

Wilson: Locally, will be Jason Peterson, sitting here.

JD - I sit on the Wa State Commission of Public Lands Woodland Fire community. We have made great strides recently. I agree with you. We are seeing a lot more of people working together. If there is anything we can do from that perspective... in fact, there is a meeting in Elensburg on this.....if there is anything we can add...I also sit on National Association of Counties Stewardship committee...I wore out the concept of keeping this base viable. Randy Phillips is the Liaison with USFS, and every time he sees me coming.....

Ashley Thrasher - Summary. You will be drafting a call to action for funding as your immediate priority, which will have NCSB somewhere

AH - way at the top?

Pena - it will be the high priority

AH - Who will be our rep?

(Answer - Jason Peterson for USFS.)

(???) will be reaching out to Mike Wilson re funding.

AH - To make sure that as this project unfolds, if State DOT is involved - any funding that might be FAA funding can be channeled into this to. Would be good for their Master Plan and USFS plan would be lined up. Keep them in the loop,

Aviation manager/director - as soon as there is a site plan, we can submit to FAA.

Thrasher - and Christy is working on wording for the scope of work.

Anders- Really appreciate you making this a priority the desire to keep it here. As you said, if those silos had been broken down. Very different from 2014 until now. If those facilities had not been here, it would have looked and felt very different. The prices and recovery. It would be tragic to lose that availability. We are not going to have fewer wildfires. Hearing from hundreds of community member - a huge step backwards to lose it from recovery, etc., aspect. We know it is not easy and we are willing to make whatever calls, whatever to further move this forward from local to national levels, at a phone call's notice.

JD - Appreciate your willingness to come forward on this. Okanogan County is a critical spot. We lost our gold mine. You have up-front the date on the cattle industry and the heat. If we lose cattle, smokejumper base, we do not have a lot left. I am not a politician and not "pc," but I do care about the custom and culture of Ok county and that's why I am here.

Pena- All aspects of the economy and community are important to us too. Keep cattle industry viable..... it is important to have adequate space. If we lose that land in the forest, cut up into ranchettes, etc....problem the agency has recognized for along time. The cattle industry base

property is important to community. Felt good about the meeting we had with you last fall. Have been able to talk with the folks last week about range. There has been improved atmosphere. Outfitter guilders (*permit*)- I am as embarrassed about that as anyone, and we need to take care of it. Should not take 15 years to get it settled. A lot of things that need to be done in this huge forest. I hope we do not wear out before Mike.....

AH - We appreciate the fact that USFS looks at the overall economy of Okanogan county. You are big player in the economy of our county, recreation, trails, all aspects. Very nice that you come here to talk about this one piece of our economy. We really appreciate you coming to sit down with us.

Pena - Thanks for having me. This won't be the last time we come up.

Moody - Maybe end time will be a celebration.

(Thank you's all around.)

Meeting over.