

## **MINUTES OF MEETING**

### **Parks, Open Space and Trails Advisory Board – August 25, 2021**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Kari Kostka, Chris Miller, Hilarie Engle, Chuck Vertrees, Emily Reaves, Helen Carter

**ABSENT:** None.

**STAFF PRESENT:** Scott Koberg, Mike Edwards, Candy Hahlbeck

**OTHER:** Brent Moore (Development Services), Brad Lowe (Idaho Fish & Game)

### **INTRODUCTION:**

K. Kostka called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m. No conflicts of interest were declared by Advisory Board members. H. Carter moved to approve the July 28th minutes. H. Engle seconded. Motion passed.

### **BRAD LOWE-BOISE RIVER WMA**

Brad Lowe with the Wildlife Management Area presented to the group. He is the Regional Habitat Manager for the southwest region for Idaho Fish & Game.

There are 35,000 acres within the WMA. 21,000 of these acres are owned by Idaho Fish & Game. Ownership spans from Table Rock to Prairie and from Mayfield to just above Robie Creek. They started buying property in 1943. Management objectives include providing mule deer winter habitat and provide wildlife-based recreation. Brad went on to show a map of the probability of winter range for mule deer. Every five years there is a survey done on each unit. The most recent data from 2018 states that 20% of unit 39 mule deer winter on the WMA. There are 15,000 hunters in unit 39, that represents 15% of all Idaho mule deer hunters.

Fish and Game doesn't receive tax funds, rather they are funded from sale of licenses and tags. Unlike most federal lands, IDFG lands are not managed for multiple use.

On Boise River WMA, the most important use by wildlife occurs during the winter. Consequently, they can offer opportunities during the late spring, summer, and early fall so long as those don't further degrade what is available to big game. And the uses on the WMA are vast. They provide opportunities for hang gliding, mountain biking, hiking, mining, horseback riding, rock climbing, etc. in addition to the more traditional wildlife-based recreational pursuits like hunting, trapping, and birdwatching.

Just about every year they get complaints from landowners on the west end of Hammer Flat regarding use of the property by bird hunters. Because launching and landing aircraft is a prohibited activity on IDFG lands, they have provided a special use permit to a group of hang gliders every year and they have been pleasurable to work with. Last year, a group of paragliders sought permission. They granted that permit, but they had a run in with an upland game hunter near their landing zone.

Though not exactly what you had in mind, in terms of conflicts amongst user groups, IDFG continually weigh the costs to wintering deer of recreational hikers, bikers, and shed hunters during winter months. Disturbance from hikers, their dogs, bikers, or shed hunters ultimately amounts to a degradation of the habitat. Their presence pushes deer to higher elevations where, especially during harsh winters, snow depths either make for high energy expenditures or make forage unavailable. Even a deer that doesn't run off is subject to energetic losses as they endure increased stress. Those stressors are occurring with greater and greater frequency. They're presently at around 100 encounters per day depending on where on the WMA we are referring to. Several trails within the WMA are used throughout the winter months and extend to the top of Lucky Peak. Additionally, user-created trails like those leading to the top of Cervidae Peak run right through winter habitat for mule deer. While they strive to maintain a place for citizens to recreate, winter closures of some fashion are seemingly

inevitable. C. Miller inquired if the WMA closed for a period during the winter? Brad responded that no, its not. They did close the winter of 2016-17 because of all the snow.

While certainly well intentioned, recent articles, blogs, and social media posts about good places to go hiking that have included the Adelmann Mine, Lucky Peak, Kepros, and Cervidae Peak, have created elevated levels of use that are worrisome during winter months, but have also created some issues related to public safety. While they experienced a substantial bump in use when Covid hit, they have, over the past decade, seen increased use at the limited number of parking areas they have on the WMA. The area of greatest concern is in front of the gate leading to the WMA office/shop. This is also the route to Adelmann Mine. Brad foresees IDFG needing to install some sort of parking area here to more safely accommodate traffic. They have had 40+ cars lined up along Highway 21 which is far from ideal.

The Boise River WMA is, literally, the backyard to hundreds, if not, thousands of residents. In many areas, residents have created their own trails in attempts to connect with other trails. At the very least, each subdivision has created their own entry point into the WMA either using decommissioned roads or creating pioneered trails. Funneling users into specific areas helps in maintaining a balance between the needs of wildlife and the needs of recreationists. For wildlife to avoid one trail represents enough of a stressor, avoiding a spider web of trails has significant bearing on habitat quality both from a displacement standpoint and from a fragmentation standpoint.

Dogs off leash can be especially effective at displacing wildlife. However, people's connection with their dogs and their strong desires to let their dogs run free to get some exercise makes management of the issue particularly challenging. IDFG officers can sit on a trail and write ticket after ticket for dogs off leash; show up the next day and cite the same individuals. It's pretty incredible and it's very much a dangerous situation for officers. People get more worked up over a rule restricting their dogs than they do any other rule IDFG enforces. Consequently, their aiming to be more focused in their approach. IDFG's greatest concern lies with dogs disturbing wintering mule deer. So, as soon as their signs arrive (they were ordered this past spring), they'll begin initiating a more focused seasonal dog leash rule. In addition, they'll be creating a lend-a-leash program where leashes are made available at a kiosk. Koberg inquired if IFG officers issue citation or do they focus on education. Brad responded that for a long time they just provided warnings. Those were verbal then turned to written. Officers have been hesitant to write tickets because this would be a misdemeanor that ended up costing them \$350. This has now changed to an infraction costing them \$75.

Heavy use or use during certain times of year can cause damage to infrastructure that either impacts the ability of others to enjoy the same property or makes resource management very difficult.

Highland Valley Road experiences substantial rutting leading to significant erosion of the roadway and encouraging drivers to widen the road by driving on the edges of roadways to avoid ruts. IDFG attempt to grade the road on a nearly annual basis. This year was no exception, but the Wildlife Biologist had the grader construct robust water bars along the entire length of the road. There were complaints about the water bars from numerous user groups. With use, the water bars compacted and were a bit more user friendly. They assisted by scraping the tops off of some of the taller bars. While some may have felt that the water bars were excessive, they are likely to continue efforts to improve erosion as funding allows.

In 2019, IDFG installed a 20-station 3D archery range along existing roads and trails.

The range has been far more popular than was expected; receiving up to 100 users per day during the first year and doubling that during last year's COVID-19 recreation boom. Roughly 500 yards of the archery range trail was part of a single-track trail associated with the Ridge to Rivers trail system.

Bikers using Highland Valley Road (referred to as Shaw Mountain Road by Ridge to Rivers) had to pull off the road and hop onto the West Highland Valley trail to use this 500-yard stretch. Because the trail was a relatively high speed downhill stretch, to maintain the safety of archers, this 500 yard stretch was only open to foot traffic. The continuity of the Ridge to Rivers Trail was maintained by extending travel down Highland Valley Road. However, a number of mountain bikers took exception to the shift stating that those 500 yards were the most desirable along that route. This was a scenario where the Department's focus on management for use by hunters, trappers, and anglers was put into the spotlight.

They are planning to install a double-vault pre-cast outhouse at the archery range. Since restricting use, compliance has been lackluster. There have been several instances of near collisions between archers and bikers as well as near collisions with IDFG staff maintaining the range. The old route still shows up on Ridge to Rivers' maps. A new version of the maps is being developed and should have the corrected route displayed. Hopefully that will increase compliance and safety on the range.

Brad showed that mule deer movement route in an earlier slide. Highway 21 bisects that route at the tail end. Deer collisions along a couple mile stretch of Highway 21 were at about 300 collisions per year. Several years ago, IDFG partnered with ITD to take advantage of a bridge project that ITD was undertaking. Ultimately, the project involved a substantial number of collaborators which resulted in the construction of a wildlife underpass and associated funnel fencing. That momentum is carrying forward in a new proposal to construct an overpass several miles north. The overpass will be the first wildlife overpass in Idaho.

Idaho Fish and Game holds preference on BLM's Boise Front grazing allotment. The permit is for cattle grazing. For a variety of reasons, grazing hasn't taken place in over 10 years. However, BLM is anxious to resume grazing throughout the allotment. Unfortunately, following several fires, the fencing infrastructure is insufficient to properly manage cattle. Consequently, IDFG is planning to propose a shift from cattle grazing to sheep. However, it is possible that cattle grazing would resume throughout the allotment. B. Moore inquired about mining on the WMA. Brad explained that there are 3 mining claims on the WMA. Black Hornet Mine, Adlemann Mine and the third on the Charcoal Creek side that was recently steaked.

H. Engle added that the exciting thing about the overpass is that construction will start in the spring and will wrap up in spring of 2023. K. Kostka inquired if they are seeing pushback on the overpass like they are seeing in Eastern Idaho? H. Engle responded no, because the person that is leading this project made sure everyone knew about it before it happened. City of Boise gave part of their Open Space funds even though its in Boise County.

H. Carter added that her understanding for primary funding is licenses and tags for hunting. She inquired if the hunting numbers are going up or holding steady. Brad responded that they are stagnant. She went on to ask if there were any ideas for sources of funding given the stagnant funding from hunting. Brad responded that there is an Act called the Restoring America's Wildlife Act. This was intended to take off shore drilling proceeds and create states with wildlife malmanagement. He believes this Act is likely to occur and help with funds.

### **SUBCOMITTEE REPORTS:**

No reports.

### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT:**

S. Koberg supplied an update.

Fiscal Year 21 ends September 30<sup>th</sup>. We are working on year end items.

We are close to the end of Float Season. We are shut down operationally, Monday through Thursday of this week and next. A total of 7 operational days are left.

We surpassed the parking revenue budget number on July 18<sup>th</sup>. The anticipated revenue for next year is \$200,000.00. The anticipated revenue from equipment, shuttle concession was \$175,000.00. We are currently over \$300,000.00. We anticipate \$205,000.00 for next year. Any surplus becomes fund balance for our department to take on large capital projects that aren't supported by the General Fund. The Event Center is down in revenue. We anticipate \$100,000.00. We are currently at \$50,000.00. The alcohol sales anticipated revenue was \$13,000. We are currently at \$3,000.00.

We are preparing to advertise four job postings within the next couple weeks. There is a Maintenance Mechanic positions in both Parks and Waterways. The Trail Crew Foreman and Program and Education Specialist will start after the new fiscal year starts.

S. Koberg will sit down with Kari and Chris to discuss a date and times to interview the 3 applicants for the Open Space and Trails Board vacancy.

### **OPEN SPACE & TRAILS:**

M. Edwards updated the Board on his activities.

Oregon Trail-Install signage including kiosks and maps, address easement/trespass issues with BLM, City of Boise and Wagon View HOA and Work with BLM on EA for trail re-route and trail armoring. At Oregon trail off E. Columbia Rd. the homeowners decided to rent a tractor to create a fire break instead of using a weed wacker. While doing this, they ran over Kelton Trail. M. Edwards has submitted this to the PA's Office. Eventually he would like to get an easement for their fire break that spells out what they can and can't do.

Hubbard- Write Hubbard Reservoir Park Improvement Plan, work with Idaho Department of Lands on lease agreement and proposed improvements. Annual Maintenance includes fix drainage issues near parking lot culvert, remove debris and Russian Olive trees, annual grass trimming around parking lot and trails and if time allows use the Bobcat to re-establish narrow lumpy trails

Bike Park-Clean drains following rain events until ground freezes, Summer trail maintained on Flow, Storm'n Mormon, Shake'n Bake-rebuild berms and landings, fix cupping on Twisted Sister and Junk Yard, Rabbit Run and Treasure Valley Traverse and fix fencing-build and remove as needed.

Echanove-Treat pathway with herbicide to kill grass, harden trail way near irrigation pond with gravel to prevent muddy trail conditions and build fence and gate on east end of trail.

Dry Creek Ranch- Continue working on trail easement and write RTP grant to pay for trail development.

M. Edwards met with Dry Creek Ranch owner and Ada County Development Services to discuss the trail easement. Their major concern is trail user safety during construction. We agreed to start trail development no earlier than next Fall to avoid the next phase of land grading. We also agreed to close down the trail during major grading projects and for wintering wildlife and habitat preservation. M. Edwards also shared access and gate designs to prevent cows from escaping.

Dry Creek Ranch owner also agreed to sign the trail easement if Ada County will approve a grading plan for all phases of the project. The language for approving the grading plans is in a separate legal document.

### **OTHER ITEMS:**

Brandy Wilson will present at our September meeting to discuss Barber Pool.

K. Kostka will talk with M. Edwards about a time for the Parks Board to do some trail maintenance.

### ***ADJOURNMENT***

**K. Kostka adjourned the meeting at 1:08 p.m.**