

INTER LOCAL REPORT, FEBRUARY 10, 2010

The winter Inter Local meeting was held February 10, 2010 at Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks in Kalispell. David Abegglen of the U.S. Border Patrol hosted the meeting.

The big news at the meeting was the announcement the preceding day that British Columbia had declared the Canadian portion of the Flathead Valley off-limits to mining, oil and gas development and coal bed gas extraction. University of Montana scientist Erin Sexton, who also serves as Transboundary Coordinator for the Flathead Basin Commission, was on hand to comment on the announcement. Although the text of the memorandum of understanding between the provincial government and the State of Montana had not been released, Sexton anticipated that it would incorporate a collaborative approach to transboundary issues. Those issues include managing resources and paying for retirement of oil and gas leases on both sides of the border.

North Fork Landowners' Association vice-president Margaret Heaphy reported that the Flathead County Commissioners plan to do a feasibility study on the lower North Fork Road. The study will be conducted by an independent entity under contract with the state. The options are paving, dust abatement, and doing nothing. The process will include a public comment period. Heaphy also reported on the activities of the NFLA's History, Fire Mitigation and Weeds Committees. Stories about the committees' activities are posted on the NFLA website.

Ray Brown, president of the North Fork Road Coalition for Health and Safety related that the Environmental Protection Agency had recently announced a grant competition for communities wanting to reduce pollution at the local level. Proposals for the Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) grants are due March 9, 2010.

Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks officials discussed the status of wolves on the North Fork. According to Kent Laudon, wolf specialist for FWP, the Dutch Pack now has a minimum of eleven members and the Kintla Pack has eight members. A new pack has been identified in the Teakettle/Big Creek area, one of whose members was harvested during the Fall 2009 hunting season. In addition, a pack based in Canada has been roaming south of the border.

FWP's Tim Thier commented that overall, the wolf hunting season had gone well. In response to questions, he explained that illegal kills and overruns in other areas could not be applied to the North Fork quota. The agency hopes to continue the hunt next year, maintaining the quota of two wolves for the North Fork subdistrict. Thier also is considering transplanting wild sheep to Teakettle and goats to the upper Red Meadow drainage.

Brian Manning advised attendees that in January 2009, the Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation had let a three-year contract for the North Fork by Two Timber Sale. The contractor was not active last year due to market conditions. Manning expects some activity this year in the Moose section, however. The DNRC also is considering several other small timber projects. The Coal Creek stand inventory that began last year will continue this summer.

Glacier View/Hungry Horse District Ranger Jimmy DeHerrera observed that Forest Service personnel will be “really busy” this summer because of the Recovery Act. Although the principal focus will be on Hungry Horse Reservoir, the North Fork can also expect activity. Forest Service personnel will replace several bridges; work on trails; blade roads; plant trees; post new signs; remove culverts from Shorty Creek Road, which was decommissioned many years ago; and groom and brush snowmobile trails in the Canyon Creek Area. DeHerrera remarked that the Forest Service has found that the NFLA website is a good way to let the North Fork community know what’s going on.

Other Forest Service news:

- The Forest Service is completing its Travel Planning Environmental Assessment. The “end result” is to map areas in which motorized travel is open. Previously, areas were open unless they were specifically designated as closed.
- The long-anticipated Red Whale fuels reduction project will move forward this year. The Forest Service has begun to implement the non-commercial portion of the project. The commercial portion must be sold separately because of market conditions. The agency plans to conduct a stewardship sale in October.
- The Winter Recreation Amendment is now fully in effect, after Judge Molloy lifted a temporary restraining order. Generally, the season terminates March 31. In a few specially designated areas – Canyon Crest is the only such area on the North Fork – the season terminates April 15.
- The Forest Service hydrologist has concluded that the river does not threaten the Funk School House. The agency plans to do an environmental assessment, restore the school house on site and put it in the cabin rental program. DeHerrera commented that it will take a tremendous amount of time and effort to restore the structure.
- The “Bear Ranger” will be back on the job this year, working with campground visitors. In addition, the Forest Service plans to hold an educational “Bear Fair” at which biologists, vendors, outfitters, and other interested persons will get together to discuss living with bears. The agency would like input from the North Fork community about when and where to hold the fair. More information will be forthcoming.
- Michael Dardis, Hungry Horse/Glacier View Fire Management Officer, stated that the Forest Service is looking for funding to staff Thoma Lookout. Fire personnel hope to complete burning of slash piles on Trail Creek this spring.

Some of the piles were too big and too full of dirt to burn completely on the first try.

Speaking for Glacier National Park, Scott Emmerich reminded attendees that 2010 is the Park's centennial year and that May 11 is its official birthday. For information about centennial events, go to www.glaciercentennial.org. Several other highlights from the Park:

- A person who is otherwise entitled to carry a gun in Montana may do so in the Park effective February 22, 2010. It is unlawful to discharge the gun there, however.
- The Park Service continues to capture lake trout in Quartz Lake and to put tracking devices on them. Emmerich observed the lake trout population in many lakes in the system is out of control but that efforts in Quartz Lake are having some success.
- Emmerich also noted the extent of agency cooperation in the North Fork valley. For example, Border Patrol agents went through EMT training so they can assist in an emergency on the road.

Finally, David Ableggen, agent in charge of the Whitefish Border Patrol Station, provided an update on Border Patrol activities.

- The agency now has a place on its website for tips. If a tip turns out to be good, the agency will pay the informant, whose identity remains anonymous.
- In 2010, the Flathead County Sheriffs Department, the Kalispell and Whitefish Police Departments, and the Montana Highway Patrol are participating in Operation Stone Garden. The program gets local law enforcement officers up to the border. They may run radar or be assigned other duties on their rides with Border Patrol agents.
- The Whitefish Station now has about twenty-five agents. Several more hires, including a supervisor, are pending. Their area runs from the Continental Divide to the boundary between Flathead and Lincoln Counties. They made six apprehensions in October 2009 and three in November.

The North Fork Road Coalition for Health and Safety volunteered to host the 2010 Summer Inter Local meeting, scheduled for Wednesday, July 7, 2010. Lunch will be served at noon and the meeting will begin at 1 p.m.