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Working Together for Healthy Watersheds on the Kenai Peninsula

Subject: Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership Steering Committee October Meeting

Date and Time: November 1st, 2021

Where: Virtual Meeting (see end of document for Zoom link)

Completed by: Branden Bornemann, KPFHP Coordinator; Jack Buban, Kenai Watershed Forum

Completed for: KPFHP Steering Committee

Desired Meeting Outcomes:

- panel discussion on temporary exemption from KPB 21.18 for bark beetle kill
- instill greater level of understanding of what revegetation strategies should look like

In attendance: Branden Bornemann, Benjamin Meyer, Kyle Graham, Michael Daigneault, Emily Munter, Erika Ammann, Katherine Schake, Samantha Lopez, Sarah Apsens, Peter Micciche, Tony Munter, Jessica Johnson, Jen Chauvet, Angela Coleman, Dakota Truitt, Mitch Michaud, Pam Russell, Marcus Mueller, Jim Renkert, Maura Schumacher, Jack Buban

1. Call to Order **Meeting begins at 2:04 PM**
2. Approve Agenda **agenda approved 2:04 PM**
3. Minutes from Previous Meeting **previous minutes approved 2:04 PM**
4. 50' Setback and Beetle Kill Panel (45 minutes to an hour)
 - a. Samantha Lopez - this year has seen a huge increase in the number of permits handed out in KPB for tree removal in 50' setback. Normally 300-350 a year in 2019 and then 1600/year in 2020 now nearly 2100/year,
 - i. Should the borough seek out a timeline extension for agencies or exemption without having harmful effects on the riverbanks?
 - ii. J. Renkert: Where do people obtain seedlings/saplings? Answer: up to the discretion of the landowner
 - iii. B. Bornemann: Code references using native species, what is the guide for that? Answer: not super spelled out but typically based off the native species list
 - b. Panel member introduction (Matt James, Mitch Michaud, Jim Renkert, Maura Schumacher, Marcus Mueller, Pam Russell)
 - i. M. Michaud: long term ecological mishaps are something to be wary of when regarding riparian corridor forest management
 - c. Discussion/Q&A
 - i. B. Bornemann: aware that losing some of this vegetation can exacerbate climate change problems including stream temps and nutrient cycling

- ii. P. Russell: Many of the big projects are not even sure how many trees they will be cutting. Could the permit be obtained after the cutting?
 - a. Private owners vs. larger agencies, some of the questions need to revolve around how can we get rid of as many trees as possible while also wondering where the money is going to come from to replace these?
 - b. How can you get a permit when you don't know how many trees you're going to cut?
- iii. M. Michaud; We learned that we can grow a heck of a lot of calima grass from the bark beetle issues of the 90s, especially in highly disturbed soils. When this was done previously it was focused on salvaging timber without an insight into fire management. We must be aware of fire ignition. We also learned that riparian corridors don't burn very hot because that is where high moisture is in the air. What we want in the end is a restored riparian corridor that can function as it would naturally.
- iv. BB: Homer and the Southern Peninsula is kind of a do nothing scenario. Are we gathering enough of the right data to answer some of these tough questions? Are there opportunities to research these plots for further information or are we beyond that point?
 - a. M Michaud: we need to do something now because landowners are already seeking action
 - b. P. Micciche: wrote a letter to Murkowski about dealing with beetle kill and might be able to pull something off with specific funds for reforestation with a portion of that funding
- v. M. Michaud: "mitigating the mitigation"- looking for money and we should also think of what problems we could face even after we cut these tree's down. Oftentimes when planting trees native species can come back at a higher rate than expected. If we can get to a fully stocked riparian area in 7 years through natural regeneration isn't that better than manual regeneration
 - a. D. Truitt: the survival monitoring is typically done in years 1, 5 and 10. Natural recruitment is common in riparian corridors but we need to leave good soil for this to happen when removals occur. The root firmness for bank stability should last long enough for natural regeneration to occur.
 - i. M. Mueller: Is this if the roots are left in place when the tree is removed? Answer: yes
 - ii. M. Mueller: Is stump removal a practice in 50' corridor? Answer: not really, it is not addressed in the Borough Code. Code says you have to take everything out that you cut but no specifics on what you leave
 - iii. M. Mueller: Can saplings planted where the stump was help erosion in a similar way? Answer: not really, the stumps staying in place is quite helpful. Removing stumps is probably gonna do more harm. D Truitt: it takes 10 years for saplings to have enough roots to help erosion control

- vi. T. Munter: Didn't KPB put in for a large grant for spruce beetle kill mitigation? Answer: Sort of, KPB put in a direct federal request at the \$35Million level for a suite of beetle kill responses including reforestation efforts. Request is still pending.
- vii. B. Bornemann: What is the exemption looking like in actionable items? Answer: a focus on wanting to target huge swaths of land
- viii. B. Bornemann: How much is a spruce seedling? Answer: on a large scale you can get them for about a buck a piece,
 - a. M. Mueller: from an agency perspective in order to fund a reforestation effort of any scale, there is lots of planning and decision making it is a multi-year effort, agencies have a role to play (leadership) KPB is still trying to figure out how to take it out, keep the scale and scope of this in context 21.18 programs important to "hold our feet down"
- ix. M. Michaud: With our soils being colder stumps and the pedestals they form are often the best natural regrowth sites. Smoothing and sculpting often retards natural regeneration and destroys the pit and mound water retention features of a riparian buffer.
 - c. A. Coleman: is a big problem across the Peninsula in high use rec areas, USFS is trying to explore it based on what they put in their original plan via limiting commercial harvest and now realizing there needs to be a way to think of it in a broad aspect. when they did the Russian River project and left the trees in riparian area where felled
- x. S. Lopez: Does anyone have experience on whether or not leaving the cut trees helps or hinders regrowth?
 - a. D. Truit: Sometimes leaving cut vegetation on site can provide micro-climates that aid in seedling establishment, but often they can crowd out any natural regen and hinder growth
 - b. D. Truit: leaving stumps and mulching/chipping the slash would be the best case scenario for bank stability and fuel loading intersection.
 - c. M. Michaud: In one instance real and recent, chipping and grinding will prevent natural regen. Thus, a true need to plant trees....occurs.
 - i. BB/A. Coleman: it can be a potential fire hazard in the future
 - d. M. Michaud: some research done about how coarse woody debris left and what the benefit is. Copper River Valley, dead trees and reforestation finding out that natural regeneration was much better when deadfall was present because of red-backed voles. Some trees are good, too many are bad. Can use it to keep a people off riverbanks as well
 - e. BB: some parcels large or small can change aesthetically which can alter the commercial/development interest in it
- xi. K. Schake: difference between BMPs and what is in code, how to help

Sam in the short term? could the exemption be tied to a multi agency BMP document so that the Borough isn't trying to figure out what is in code but instead reference a living document that changes over time

- a. S. Lopez: great given that code is a static document
 - b. BB: what do exemptions generally look like in this case
 - i. S Lopez: it doesn't have to be a specific exemption but can be an adjustment to a minor revegetation permit. Something trackable is important.
 - c. KWF and KPFHP could be an area to try and develop some BMPs as a way to keep these areas intact and healthy
 - d. M Michaud: lots of expertise available in the government, have USFS present mitigation plan for their tree removal
 - e. A Coleman; every watershed is going to be different and the feds have taken steps to be adaptable in regards to the intent, allowing different land management agencies to provide their own justification for each specific area with mitigation plans despite the fact that it will provide more work to KPB
 - ii. M. Mueller: support this concept, regardless of whether it is site specific or large scale both are valuable. Have a written plan.
 - iii. BB: different characteristics are important to note because not two sites are the same even within one landowner. has natural revegetation been measured in this area and if it is taking off in 3 years can we create a metric to measure how natural revegetation is going
- xii. M Michaud: shifted reforestation date to 7 years Alaska wide (data focused on interior Alaska) two years prior to the deadline the landowner will do a regen survey. how it works here too, people like to reforest immediately after harvesting because site prep costs are high here.
- i. M. Mueller: if we are looking at an exemption for agencies that are presenting a mitigation plan, would there be a standard requirement for a 2:1 replacement, or if there is another proposed plan would alternative techniques be acceptable? Would KPB be willing to look at other techniques other than tree planting?
 - a. S Lopez: if it can seed, regenerate, and grow we are willing to explore it
 - b. M Michaud: the mounds are problematic because seedlings don't survive at high and low spots but instead in the middle layer which is the natural layer. Reforestation rate isn't possible in a lot of places based on tpa in certain spaces. Pay more attention to tpa than a specific 2:1 replacement ratio (try to hit a 125 tpa)
 - c. A. Coleman: 150 tpa. From a land management agency perspective, the 2:1 seems a little excessive,

in a lot of places these trees aren't being removed they're just dying and would we then still be subject to planting even if the trees are dead and downed prior to human interaction?

- d. P. Micciche: Is there not a difference between sites? Aren't there some sites that will regenerate well because they already have saplings in the ground that will benefit from the increased sunlight?
S Lopez: code is very black and white and doesn't provide for that exemption

- xiii. D. Truitt: even if we are just removing dead trees with an acknowledgement of safety do we have to reforest? Answer: Yes you still have to reforest

5. Coordinator Report

- a. a synopsis of the federal bills that are moving through federal legislation right now

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Y2zpLudihpLPAYqljK4GnAYiKu3xYPdhXhRnKMfT5FQ/edit?usp=sharing>

- b. This shows where the national partnership is at with support at some high levels moving towards a permanent funding structure

- c. national board meeting last week and their conservation priorities did not change but added some coordinator dollars and support as their own specific point

- i. no threat to us this year, we have some room to make our priorities fit within theirs
- ii. there is talk about changing their priorities in the future but wasn't supported by the regional coordinators
- iii. RFP by the end of this week, if you would like input into these docs we can send them out. we are going to add a statement that 1:1 non federal match is required not requested to hopefully free up some funds
we still don't know how this is going to be calculated at a national level (project level, regional level, national level?)
native organizations dollars do not have to be matched 1:1
- iv. K Schake: tribal dollars can count as non federal match?
BB: I think this is true but more so if projects are coming from or sponsored from these organizations then match is not required
- v. K Graham: Will any of the BBB or huge infrastructure bills be filtered into the Partnership dollars?
BB: yes and no. The 7.6 million dollars and some of these funds will benefit Partnerships either directly or indirectly
- vi. M. Daigneault: this conversation shows the NFHP is not specifically mentioned in any of the bigger bills and is still not officially funded because it still goes through USFWS. NFHPs are not identified specifically
- vii. Timeline: Open RFP end of week, month to month a half to recruit projects close before holidays, make decisions at the January meetings and forward projects to NFHP in Feb/March

- J Johnson: ADFG needs 30 days so the longer timeline such as a month and a half is beneficial
- viii. E Ammann: Could we use the term preference instead of required 1:1 non federal match?
BB: I don't think so
- ix. M. Daigneault: by doing this are we possibly eliminating some other really good projects because of this?
BB: will follow up to see what the exact requirements of accessing nonfederal match through universities
- x. K Graham: Should we include the 5 priorities in the RFP?
BB: Yes they will be included in the RFP for FY23

6. Partner Reports

a. Permanent Members:

- i. ADFG - Tony Munter - resource developments in and around Soldotna Creek in regards to that tributary that got developed. Trip report for what was found and the fish trapping efforts going forward. Is not officially anadromous yet but can't be adopted to AWC until June 2022. Anadromous fish have been caught by Ben Meyer of KWF. If anyone wants the trip report reach out to Tony.
- ii. NOAA - Erika Ammann - anticipate the restoration center will get some of the infrastructure funds, will keep everyone in the loop and will also have the regular RFP coming out this year
- iii. USFWS - Kyle Graham - fish passage culverts on the north kenai spur getting worked on still but finished up here soon. Had some EVOS funding not go the way expected. KWF got some Stream Watch funding which has received KPFHP funds in the past

b. Non Permanent Members:

- i. KBNERR - Coowe Walker
- ii. KPB River Center - Samantha Lopez - not much to report on that wasn't covered in the discussion
- iii. USFS – Adam Cross
- iv. DEC – Sarah Apsens - wrapping up projects from last summer, reports, data entry, big things are the Harbor Survey (<https://alaskaseagrant.org/2021/09/29/there-are-90-harbors-in-alaska-how-clean-is-yours/>), other thing is some of the raw data from the Kenai Water Quality Program monitoring program on webpage (<https://dec.alaska.gov/water/water-quality/>)
- v. KWF – Ben Meyer - wrapping up some reporting and analysis from AKSSF using Thermal Imagery using cold water seeps in 4 watersheds in Kenai Soldotna area and how to talk to landowners about this. other AKSSF project about expanding AWC in North Kenai and Nikiski area. Also working on projects from Bureau of Reclamation to analyze trends of 20 year dataset of Water Quality data on Kenai.
- vi. KP-CISMA – Katherine Schake The next KP CISMA meeting is November 24th and will consist of a larger brainstorming session on how

to expand the invasive species taxa that we focus on. We will continue to stabilize the invasive plant programs.

- c. Advisors
 - i. State Legislature – Peter Micciche - Not much to report, still ready to stand by and support KPFHP. If the infrastructure bill ever does come through to legislation to allocate so it will become a fight to get some funding for fish.
 - ii. USFWS - Mike Daigneault, Emily Munter - nothing to report
 - iii. ADFG - Jess Johnson - in Kenai and saw about 30 streambank sites to this group as it has been a great outreach tool. knew who to contact. Found some RCG when down here and helpful to know who to put them in touch with.
- 7. Old Business
- 8. New Business
 - a. CAP Meeting Recruitment - rough agenda as to what an entire virtual session will look like. If you are interested in participating we have some flexibility to reiterate that
- 9. Action Items
- 10. Roundtable

Meeting concludes at 3:57 PM

Future Meetings:

Monday, December 6th, 2021 @ 2PM
Monday January 3rd, 2022 @ 2PM
Monday, February 7th, 2022 @ 2PM
Monday, March 7th, 2022 @ 2PM
Monday, April 4th, 2022 @ 2PM

Zoom Information:

Topic: Kenai Watershed Forum's Meeting Room
Join KWF Zoom Meeting (computer access, video and/or audio)
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6785578964?pwd=U3dqGVRcTBoaERTdFJ4MDIPdzJiUT09>
Meeting ID: 678 557 8964
Password: 246419

Join KWF Zoom Meeting (phone access)
1-253-215-8782

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