

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners

August 19, 2024 AM

JN—Jon Neal, BOCC, Chair, District 3

AH—Andy Hover, BOCC, District 1 (Absent until he arrives via Zoom at 11:00)

CB—Chris Branch, BOCC, District 2

LJ—Lanie Johns, Clerk of the Board

SM—Stacy McClellan, Deputy Clerk of the Board

NB—Nick Bates, Fairgrounds Manager

PP—Pete Palmer, Director of Planning

TM—Tim Meadows, Maintenance Supervisor

MW—Mike Worden, Dispatch Center

DY—Dave Yarnell, Undersheriff

BH—Brock Hoenes, Director, North Central Region of Washington Dept of Fish & Wildlife

BT—Brandon Troyer, Methow Wildlife Area Manager, Washington Dept of Fish and Wildlife

These notes were taken by an Okanogan County Watch volunteer. Every attempt is made to be accurate. Notes are verbatim when possible, and otherwise summarized or paraphrased. Note takers comments or clarifications are in italics. These notes are published at <https://www.countywatch.org/> and are not the official county record of the meeting. For officially approved minutes, which are normally published at a later time, see https://okanogancounty.org/offices/commissioners/commissioners_proceedings.php

The time stamps refer to the times on the AV Capture archive of the meeting on this date at https://www.okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live_streaming_of_meetings.php. To locate items in real time, the clock on the wall in the AV Capture screen can be helpful.

Summary of significant discussions:

- Pete Palmer, Director of Planning, and the commissioners set priorities for what code revisions the county should work on next. Because of the stipulation order, Palmer says it's a "no-brainer" to prioritize the Shoreline Management Plan and the Development Permit Procedures and Administration Plan.
- The commissioners hear a presentation from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife about six sites in the county that the WDFW is considering buying.
- Meeting adjourned at 12:25.

-3:26:25—Pledge of Allegiance.

JN and CB discuss several sites that will be proposed for purchase by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

CB says he was asked to join a "short lived group" in WSAC (Washington State Association of Counties) to look at transportation funding options.

JN—I know some counties are trying to get together to increase funding for rural transportation. Basically every RTPO (Regional Transportation Planning Organization). It wouldn't affect MTOs (Metropolitan Planning Organization). They don't have the funding issues we do.

CB—Has WSAC been involved in the conversation?

JN—I don't know. It's spearheaded by Thera Black, who works for the Peninsula RTPO.

CB—Through the state?

JN—Yes. I'll forward to you what I've got.

CB—The meeting is on Thursday and I'll be there. I worked with Thera on the Rural Roads committee.

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners

August 19, 2024 AM

-3:11:25—No public comments.

JN—At OCOG (Okanogan Council of Governments) we got \$75,000 every biennium, ever since it started.
CB—It's not enough, I know.

JN says his wife's rig has tranny problems in Olympia. He and CB trade stories about car trouble when traveling.

-3:00:29—SM tells the commissioners that they haven't yet passed the resolution to set rental fees at the fairgrounds. NB has asked them to approve it on August 5, but so far that hasn't happened.

JN—There will probably be a statewide recount for Commissioner of Public Lands.

-2:56:09—NB—I'm Nick Bates, Fairgrounds Manager.

NB—Entertainment Contract for the Fair. It's kind of weird because they changed things. It needs to be signed so we can get it back to the booking agent.

SM—I thought we signed it last week.

NB—The horse barn is done. There's just a little clean-up to do.

NB—I finally found someone to haul the shavings. Nobody around here has that type of truck. Delivery should start on Tuesday or Wednesday.

NB—The second round of spraying was done on Thursday. He'll probably come back two weeks after the fair. He suggests we use a preemergent next time. It might be a little cheaper.

NB—I don't know about parking at the Fair. The Fair Advisory Committee needs to deal with it.

NB—Did the waiver for the Special Olympics get approved?

SM—Yes. Are you not getting them back?

NB—What about the grounds rental?

SM—It's not done yet.

JN—We'll send it to Shelley (Keitzman, Risk Management) and Esther (Milner, Chief Civil Deputy Prosecutor).

NB—That's all I've got.

NB—We had two events last week. We had a wedding in the Agriplex with 700 people. Wow.

-2:51:19—JN—Pete?

PP—I'm Pete Palmer, Planning Director.

PP—I finally heard back from the Department of Ecology (DOE) about a meeting with the BOCC. They don't think the issue has risen to the level of the BOCC and Prosecutor, so they want to talk to just Rocky (Robbins, Planner) and me to go over the properties. I set up a meeting in my office on August 20. We'll see how it goes from there.

CB—Sounds promising.

PP—I hope. Meeting is at 9:00 AM via zoom.

PP—You asked me to prioritize the code revisions. We've got six that are knocking at the door. Nightly rentals are one. Under the stipulation, there's Development Permit Procedures and Administration and Shoreline Management code. Basically, those are simple revisions that will include the permit software verbiage. Then there's Clearing and Grading, update to the Critical Areas and update to the Floodplain.

CB—What about the Mobile Home Ordinance? I talked to Esther, and it's got a serious glitch in it.

PP—Is it a Building Permit issue?

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners

August 19, 2024 AM

CB—Yes. The L&I rule doesn't fix the ordinance. Since we allow RVs to be lived in, our ordinance says they have to be installed to the same standard as a mobile home. So the person who's moving an RV has to get a professional to install it, instead of using the guidelines from when you bought it. People won't get the permit and that's a problem.

PP—Just because the park models and RVs aren't constructed to be full time homes...

CB—That could be a decision, too, that you can't live in them full-time, but I don't think the park model should be looked at that way. They're allowed in mobile home parks. It's an 83 ordinance. We don't see much of it. I don't know how many RVs have people living in them, but there's plenty. The building department doesn't feel it's important to enforce this because of homelessness.

PP—It's understandable.

CB—I think it'd be easy to fix because other counties have.

PP—So I think it's a no-brainer that the stipulation order, the Shoreline Management Plan, the Development Permit procedures and Administration would be the priorities. They'll be pretty easy. The nightly rental is out of our hands until the Health Department makes its changes. That leaves us with Clearing and Grading, Critical Areas, and the Floodplain. Floodplain and Critical Areas are being pushed by the DOE. The Department of Commerce (DOC) is also pushing on Critical Areas. Clearing and Grading is unidentified need.

JN—you'll have more information about Floodplain after tomorrow.

CB—But that situation is more on the enforcement side.

PP—They gave us samples of changes they'd like to see. I think we'd need to look at what they're suggesting. Then go look at our code. I'm sure there will be some the county won't agree on.

CB—Did FEMA hand them the changes, or did they make it up on their own?

PP—I think the DOE did it on their own.

CB—I think it's important to get it out of the way, if they're not huge issues. FEMA updates shouldn't be too arduous. But it's them calling the shots.

PP—So instead of starting something new, you suggest next would-be Critical Areas and Clearing and Grading?

CB—Yes. And DOC is pushing that because it can affect the funding sources. We don't want to get caught there. I think we were once.

PP—We were once—with Housing funding in Oroville or Tonasket.

CB—Do you know what kind of changes they're talking about?

PP—I just ran my thumb down them. Didn't really look too closely but now that we've got a little breath to take...

CB—I suspect they're related to the priority habitat species.

PP—Yes. And a lot are statutory changes that we haven't kept up with.

CB—A lot of the Critical Area and Habitat Species, there's a lot of cross-over and they're not so bad.

JN—OK then.

CB—You've got it lined out, then?

PP—I *think* I do. And away we go! PP leaves.

-2:40:41—JN—Tim?

Tim Meadows, Maintenance Supervisor, discusses a number of projects Maintenance is working on: repairs in the jail kitchen, power washing and painting the courthouse, buying a used truck and plow, handicapped ramps, the jail generator that needs to be rebuilt, TVs and tablets for jail inmates and a new, bigger dumpster for the courthouse.

-1:56:28—JN—It's 10:30 and we have a public hearing for a budget supplemental for the Prosecutor's Office. \$25,000.

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners

August 19, 2024 AM

CB—This is for the new prosecuting attorney software.

No public comments.

CB—There's one thing that I'm not sure I understand. It's written unclearly. The resolution says one amount and the request itself says a different amount. I move to continue the hearing until maybe tomorrow when we'll have clarity about the amount.

Motion passes 2-0.

CB—We could do it tomorrow at 3:45. Lanie would know, but she's out of the office today.

-1:47:55—JN—I'll open up another hearing, a budget supplemental appropriation for the Radio Network Improvement Fund. Resolution 110-2024.

MW—I'm Mike Worden, Okanogan County Dispatch Center. The request is for infrastructure work. \$500,000 is about half of the legislative allocation.

CB—The source is from the Reserve Fund Balance and there's also the contract \$500,000.

JN—No public comments.

CB—I move to approve Resolution 110-2024 for Fund 161 in the amount of \$1,543,352.00.

Motion passes 2-0.

MW—Thank you.

JN—It's nice to see progress on this.

-1:45:00—JN—Next?

DY—I'm Undersheriff Dave Yarnell.

JN—looks at his phone and says he has to take the call.

CB—The total project cost was the number we talked about the other day?

DY—Yes.

CB—And there's a willing seller?

DY—Did you receive the budget supplemental request from the Auditor's Office.

SM—I don't see it.

DY—The Auditor needed to know where the funding would come from on the county's side. She didn't know.

CB—I talked about it briefly. I thought it was from the LACTF (Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency Fund).

DY—The Auditor spoke to Commissioner Neal.

CB—So he'll know.

CB and DY talk about videos from the State Patrol.

JN returns.

DY—On my last visit here, we talked about the Sheriff's Office purchasing three vehicles from Juvenile. I've got a cost breakdown—three Ford Interceptors from Juvenile, assigned value by the Auditor is \$54,460. The equipment needed to outfit the cars is \$25,000 for two of the cars. Plus, there's painting and graphics on the side so the total cost is \$83,879.15. It's a good opportunity for us to get three additional vehicles. They've got low miles. That contrasts with new vehicles we bought new last year and cost a lot more. So we're asking for \$84,000 to cover the three vehicles.

JN—The equipment total does not include labor. Estimate for that is...?

DY—About \$5,000. One car needs a radio and dash lights. We can do it in-house. We can probably cover it in our current budget.

JN—I talked to the Auditor on Friday and told her to hold off until we knew the final numbers. But this all sounds good and get this process going shortly.

DY—Her only question is where the funds were coming from? Do you know when we'll know?

JN—We have to advertise, so it'll probably be about two weeks.

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners

August 19, 2024 AM

DY—Thank you! DY leaves.

CB to JN—I asked DY if he had any interest in that (the videos?) and he said not very often.

JN—I'm curious what we pay for that service—storage of videos. I heard Spokane County was paying \$250,000 per year for that.

-1:29:14—JN—Good morning.

CB—Does WDFW enforce county code on the lakes?

BH—I think so.

CB discusses an incident in Conconully last weekend.

BH—It's the same as a speed limit. The trucks don't have radar, but if they can tell someone is speeding, they can give a ticket.

AH joins the meeting via Zoom.

BH—Good morning. I'm Brock Hoenes, Regional Director, WDFW. We've done this before. Over the year, we've had property owners reach out to us, or we're interested in buying property. We have a process we go through, Land 2020. To kick that off, we do outreach with the tribes and the county to hear your comments about the proposed acquisitions. I think we're scheduled for the staff to start going through this on Thursday.

BH—I'll hand this over to Brandon Troyer, the Methow Area Wildlife Manager, and he'll walk us through them.

BT shares his screen. (This takes a little while.)

BT—There we go!

BT—Brock covered this already. Lands 2020 is our process to acquire land. We're in the early stages. Discover land, talk to you and the tribes. Then it goes to the tech team and a variety of reviews. Then public review through last November and then the BOCC gets the final review. I put photos of mule deer in all my slides.

BT—There are six areas we'll discuss today.

#1 is Scotch Creek:

- Directly adjacent to Scotch Creek Headquarters.
- 92 acres
- Water birch dominated riparian area
- Active sharp-tailed grouse (STG) winter habitat (on the State Endangered List). Water birch is their winter forage.
- Working lands—grazing. Minimal fencing to protect the water birch.
- Currently for sale.

AH—How long has it been on the market?

BT—Not very long. Some of the others on the list sit longer.

AH—If there are big properties, there are always questions about the state buying property in the county. It can be a good thing. If you see a good property, do you ask the landowner?

BH—Sometimes we see the sign go up, but sometimes the owner proactively reaches out to us. This one is one where we just saw was for sale.

AH—How do you value the purchase price?

BH—We get an independent appraiser for lands we decide to try to buy. And we don't go above or below that appraised value. We don't want to run up the price of land, and we don't want to low-ball it either. Most of our property is paid for by RCO (Recreation and Conservation Office) grants which allow us to offer up to 10% more than the appraised value, but we've never done that.

AH asks about grazing leases.

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners

August 19, 2024 AM

BH—There's grazing leases and I can get you a map. We're trying to upgrade irrigation facilities and we're trying to improve the grazing opportunities.

(AH is difficult to hear) Asks about thistles and other noxious weeds.

BH—We look at the land with management in mind. Does it need fences? We're bringing contractors now to look at property in the Methow right now because we have funding for the acquisitions now

BT—We did have a history of acquiring lands without any money to manage it. Two bienniums ago, we get money via an equation, and we get money for O&M for the properties. We think that new model will enable us to manage the properties effectively.

AH—OK. Thank you.

BH—We look closely at the cost of management now.

#2 Ellemeham Inholding

- Ellemeham Mountain Inholding
- 109 acres
- Recovering shrubsteppe habitat (burned 2023)
- Sharp-tailed grouse. Rearing and brooding habitat.
- Enhanced ungulate winter range and migratory corridors
- Enhanced landscape connectivity and public access. It's right on a road.
- Working lands: Grazing with only one lease.
- Currently for sale.

AH—How are you looking at growing the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area? After 15,000, you'll stop because of management issues.

BT—We don't have a set size, but we're cognizant of the staff we have. This is an inholding. It's not big. It's right on a road. There are a few proposals over 1,000 acres on this list and we need to figure out how we'll manage it.

BT—The goal is to retain the current lease holder.

#3 Lockman Ridge

- Lockman Ridge—Tunk
- 960 acres
- Recovering shrubsteppe habitat (Burned 2015) Mixed conifer, aspen riparian, spring fed ponds.
- High quality ungulate winter range and know migratory corridor
- Enhanced landscape connectivity and public access (large tract of DNR land to the west and south.)
- Currently for sale.

BT—This has been on the market for a while. Lots of 20-acre parcels there that would create challenges for us. It ties together a big contiguous block of public lands. Sharp tails have been seen here. Plus is really high quality for elk and deer use it in the winter. There's no known farming or grazing here. It's pretty steep. Super conducive to wildlife. Conservation Northwest brought it to our attention.

AH—A single owner owns all those parcels?

BT—Yes. It's set up so it can be chopped up pretty quickly. 43 parcels.

CB—Currently has public access?

BH—There's also a parking space at the north end.

BT—There isn't any housing on the land.

CB—That's one of the reasons we increased the minimum parcel size.

#4 Happy Hill

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners August 19, 2024 AM

- Happy Hill—Scotch Creek
- 1,371 acres
- Recovering shrubsteppe habitat (burned 2015) mixed conifer, aspen riparian, spring fed ponds
- Sharp-tailed grouse active (likely nesting and brook rearing, possible winter use as well) WGS
- High quality mule deer winter range and migratory corridor
- Enhance landscape connectivity and public access (DNR land to the West and South)
- House adjacent to road
- Currently for sale.

An active ranch. Ponds still with water now in August. Elk and mule deer use this. Grazing has been managed well. One yellow flag—there's a house on the piece. The seller isn't interested in selling it separately. We'd rather not have the house.

AH—How long on the market?

BT—About a year. Asking price is about \$1,200,000 I think.

BT—Maybe we could use the housing for employees' use.

BH—The challenge with an inholding is when there's no road. But this one's got a county road going right by.

#5 Big Valley

- Methow—Big Valley
- 141 acres
- Riverine, floodplain, mixed riparian woodland, and wetland habitats along Methow River Corridor.
- Spring Chinook, steelhead, bull trout, western gray squirrels, sandhill cranes
- High quality woodland, riparian, side-channel and wetland habitats
- Biodiversity corridor that enhances landscape connectivity and protects vital spawning, rearing and foraging ESA fish habitat
- Seller wants WDFW to acquire, but willing to sell on public market
- Potential life estate.

BT—Really good habitat for these two parcels. One has a little structure on it.

BT—Sandhill cranes nesting nearby for the last four years.

BT—Very biodiverse area.

BT—Seller would like to retain some access to it. They'd like to be able to camp on it for their lifetime. It's very near a heavily parking area and recreation area. We'd like to continue to work with the family to see if they would just sell it.

CB—The rest of the public couldn't use it and that could cause problems.

BH—Yes. That's the management problem.

CB—The habitat value, under the PHS (Priority Habitats and Species) program, we have an obligation to regulate these priority habitat areas. Just a thought for the other commissioners.

AH—It's the parcel on the bottom that doesn't make sense to me. I know that terrain and it seems like a weird little chunk to buy.

BT—There's a house or something up there. We'd like to consider options—conservation easement, another conservation partner? We don't have the details worked out of their life estate yet. We'd need to talk to our tech team in depth first. We can come back to you when we've got all the details worked out.

AH—That sounds like a good idea.

CB—You have a public comment period?

BT—October through November.

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners

August 19, 2024 AM

CB—I'd go back and look at goals and objectives in the Land 2020 document to make a comment. And a big concern for the county is always—will the state pay the PILT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes)? Lots of people enjoy fishing and hunting and using habitat.

BH—It's a continual conversation. Not one and done. All these projects are connected to each other. Other county commissioners have said—When is enough enough? We need to build a map of what we'd like to keep preserved to keep these species at the level they are now.

BH—The Lands 2020 process. This is just the process to get something suggested to the director. Sometimes land can stay in the list to go to the director for several years.

AH—We talk about what are we trying to do when we protect this land. We never link (*inaudible*) need to our Comprehensive Plan or Critical Areas Ordinance. Commissioners aren't identifying good habitat for grouse or whatever. You do that. (AH is very hard to hear.)

CB—The data that they use is from the priority species habitat. When we talk about grouse, we should be looking at the same map.

CB—When they did the first critical areas act, they looked at mule deer in the Methow Valley. One thing identified was fragmenting of habitat—properties with dogs and other things that break up the corridor. The public seemed to agree. Mule deer habitat is part of the county's economy. I agree we should be looking at the same map.

CB—My constituency includes a lot of hunters, and I think that's what you're doing. We have to address the PILT issue, but with more and more hunters, some property owners won't allow them anymore. And there are clubs that you have to join to hunt on them. Counties, WDFW and other land managers are in a cooperative effort.

BH—I think we already do that, but don't talk about it. One picture is worth 1,000 words. You can look at an aerial photo and see what would be good habitat. I can envision a map that shows conservation easements, etc. We've got to do a better job of telling our story.

BH—Also, there are people who reach out to us to sell our property and we say no, because they don't fit very well. We didn't use to do that, and that's how we got all the little parcels way out on their own. We don't do that anymore. I think BT did a good job of explaining how we see these areas fit into our conservation needs.

BT—I've got one more.

#6 Chewuch River

- Methow-Chewuch River
- 89 acres
- Riverine floodplain, mixed riparian woodland, and wetland habitats along Chewuch River Corridor
- Spring Chinook, steelhead, bull trout and western gray squirrels.
- High quality woodland, riparian side-channel (oxbow) wetland, Chewuch mainstem river habitat
- Biodiversity corridor that enhances landscape connectivity and protects vital spawning, rearing and foraging ESA fish habitats.
- Seller wants WDFW to acquire, but willing to sell on public market.
- Private inholding.

BT—It's on the exact same wildlife and fish benefit as the last one. Really diverse. There's one cabin in the middle. The family doesn't want to manage the whole piece anymore, but still does want five acres in the middle with a house on it. That's a big problem. We're trying to get rid of inholdings. With your permission, I think we could work with the family. They approached us. I see an opportunity for shared stewardship. Maybe we'll offer—all or nothing. They're still willing to talk to us.

BT—It's the least desirable in terms of management.

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners

August 19, 2024 AM

AH—Talking about safety in the Big Valley, and I see how this one would be even harder. I don't know how much money from tags goes to purchasing land, but I don't like any of my money going to a place where you can't hunt.

BT—I'm trying to think of ways to safely hunt there.

CB—The land that's to the north—who owns that?

BT—The Confederated Colville Tribes. It was the Wagner Ranch before they bought it. The river basins have a lot of hunting value.

CB—White tail deer.

BT—Yes. Lots of white tail.

AH—Hey! Don't tell my secrets!

BH—That's the last property I have. It's noon. If you've got time, I could update you on some other things.

JN—We've got time.

BH—Cooperative prescribed burn with DNR in Sinlahekin. Scotch Creek is working on showing kids around the areas. Collaborating with the Conservation Districts. The Methow has acquired several towers to help control grazing. Sharp tailed grouse is up 70% because of it. They've been able to relocate some of the grouse to other areas. Also working on removing trees along roads because so many fires start along roads.

BH—Forest Health treatments in the Methow. And we're doing lead abatement at a shooting range in the Methow. We want to provide shooting ranges, but we also want lead abatement.

AH—On Scotch Creek, they're grazing cattle, but the grouse population is up 70%?

BH—Yes. They got hit hard in the hard winter two years ago, plus the water birch is coming back. They've learned how crucial the birch is, and they remove the aspen.

AH—I get questions about radio collars for cattle. They have about a seven-mile radius. Can other people utilize those towers for their properties?

BH—Yes. We'd like to get them where there are other, private places that can tap into the towers. That's a big benefit. Reduce the barbed wire on the land and makes it a lot less costly for the ranchers.

BT—They've established this in Douglas County. Conservation Northwest helped.

BH—You have to pay a small fee.

CB—I see Conservation Northwest doing real useful stuff and making friends with ranchers.

BT—We need to be right there with them, leaning in to find solutions.

BH—The Forest Service is using the towers already and hope to do more.

BH—My takeaway is that there are some issues we need to talk with the tech team and try to get a solution that fits with us, the property owners and the county.

BH—Thanks for hearing us. We appreciate your time.

AH—I can zoom in tomorrow.

CB—We had a question about the resolution for the prosecutor's software. The resolution didn't match the paperwork.

Discussion of this issue.

JN—DY had a final-ish proposal for the three vehicles that comes to \$85,000.

Discussion of what budget the money would come from.

Adjourned for the day at 12:25.