

Idaho Shared Stewardship Advisory Group (SSAG) Meeting—Hybrid Meeting
IDL Director's Office in Boise and via Zoom Online Conferencing
1/17/24

Meeting Notes by Ara Andrea, IDL Statewide Shared Stewardship Coordinator

Members attending in Boise IDL Office

- Kelley Orr (**member**, Deputy Regional Forester, USFS Region 4)
- Tim Garcia (**member**, Deputy Regional Forester, USFS Region 1)
- John Robison (**member**, Idaho Conservation League, Conservation NGO)
- Sherry Maupin (**member**, County Commissioner, Valley County)

IDL Staff and Key Partners attending in Boise IDL Office

- Dustin Miller (**member**, Director, IDL)
- Ara Andrea (**member**, Idaho Shared Stewardship Coordinator, IDL)
- Craig Foss (State Forester, IDL)
- Jeff Lau (North Idaho Shared Stewardship Coordinator, Idaho Panhandle National Forests and IDL)
- Brian Davis (South Idaho Shared Stewardship Coordinator, Payette National Forest and IDL)
- Jon Songster (Good Neighbor Authority Bureau Chief, IDL)
- Archie Gray (Forestry Assistance Bureau Chief, IDL)
- Linda Jackson (Payette National Forest Supervisor, USFS)
- Josh Uriarte (presenter, Idaho Office of Species Conservation)

Members attending Online via Teams

- Tom Schultz (**member**, Idaho Forest Group, Large Forest Manufacturing)
- Doug Okuniewicz (**member**, Idaho State Senator, District 3)
- Greg Becker (proxy for Curtis Elke, **member**, State Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service)
- Kurt Dyroff (**member**, National Wild Turkey Federation, Conservation NGO)
- Anna Torma (**member**, PotlatchDeltic, Industrial Forest Landowner)
- David Easley (**member**, Idaho Forest Owners Association, Family Forest Landowners)
- Matthew Ward (**member**, Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership)
- Tim Christopherson (**member**, Associated Logging Contractors)
- Sage Dixon (**member**, State Representative, Idaho House of Representatives)
- Knute Sandahl (**member**, State Fire Marshal, Idaho Lands Resource Coordinating Council)

IDL Staff and Key Partners attending via Zoom

- Dirk Mendive (Rep. Fulcher's Office)
- Robert Jaeger (Forest Stewardship Coordinator, USFWS)
- Dennis Becker (Dean, College of Natural Resources, University of Idaho)
- Shawn Keough (Associated Logging Contractors)

Members Not Present:

- Brett Bennett (**member**, Bennett Lumber, Small Forest Manufacturing)

Vacant Member Seats

- Tribal Representative (*in process of being filled*)

Notes:

- (*A snow storm the night before this meeting led to heavier participation via Teams.*)
- Jamie Neill, Chair of SSAG, was unable to attend this meeting and sent his regrets to the committee. Dustin Miller, Director of IDL, welcomed committee members and initiated roundtable introductions.
- New committee members were welcomed, including Sherry Maupin (Valley County Commissioner), Doug Okuniewicz (Idaho State Senator, District 3), Kelly Orr (Deputy

Regional Forester, USFS Region 4), and Matthew Ward (Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership).

- Ara Andrea, Jeff Lau, and Brian Davis presented an overview of cross-boundary project accomplishments statewide ([presentation attached](#)). Highlights of 2023 accomplishments included:
 - The USFS, NRCS and IDL received a \$1.48 million award from the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership competitive grant to expand treatments to an additional 4,500 acres on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests and on nearby private forestlands in our Scattered Lands cross-boundary focal area in north Idaho. We are waiting on notice of a second Joint Chiefs award that will extend needed treatments into Boundary County, eastern Bonner County, and Kootenai County—with a goal of treating another 7,800 acres with almost \$4.9 million.
 - The boundary of the South-Idaho Shared Stewardship Priority Landscape was modified to more closely align with the USDA-designated Wildfire Crisis Strategy landscape (the Southwest Idaho Landscape, or SIL). Cross-boundary partners, including the National Forest Foundation, the USFWS, and Idaho Power are working together to apply for infrastructure funds through an NRCS RCPP grant application.
 - Four county GNA agreements were signed with Idaho, Adams, Valley and Boise Counties to further boost the counties' capacities to implement needed treatments on private forestlands—keeping administration at the local level.
 - IDL GNA work on national forests and BLM lands continues to expand—and new agreements were signed with the Salmon-Challis National Forest and the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, providing strong GNA partnerships with six of Idaho's seven national forests.
 - Looking at the Idaho Shared Stewardship Agreement goal to double the acres treated on Idaho's national forests by 2025, an analysis of yearly averages of all harvesting, thinning, precommercial thinning, mastication, prescribed fire, and other types of fuels-reduction treatments showed that the average acres “treated” per year on the seven national forests has risen from 68,190 acres per year (leading into 2018) to 104,948 acres per year (leading into 2023)—an increase of 54% since we started the Shared Stewardship Initiative in Idaho.
- Josh Uriarte, from the Idaho Office of Species Conservation (OSC) gave a presentation on the recent listing of the North American wolverine as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act ([presentation attached](#)). USFWS press release: [North American wolverine receives federal protection as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](#) . Presentation highlights: 1) the USFWS is currently developing streamlining tools for requisite agency consultations, 2) modeled habitat locations include almost every forested area of Idaho, 3) a 4(d) exemption may be put in place for some forest-management activities (i.e., determined to result in a non-threatening, low level of take), and 4) plans and agreements with IDFG or USFWS may be forthcoming with non-federal forest managers. The public comment period for this 4(d) interim rule—including an exemption for forest-management activities that reduce the risk or severity of wildfire—ends January 29, 2024.

- Tom Schultz asked about USFWS's efforts to address staff shortages—and its ability to provide needed consultation when field season gets into full swing.
 - USFWS is hiring new employees to help meet increasing consultation needs.
- SSAG members and partners watched a videoed address to the committee from Governor Little. The Governor thanked SSAG members for their service on the advisory group and conveyed that the work we are all doing together is helping to protect our landscapes and improve the lives of Idahoans. He conveyed initiatives and investments that Idaho has made into strengthening the resources combating wildfires and improving land management. Governor Little conveyed that preventing wildfires is a key priority of his administration, and that last month, he convened a wildfire roundtable, identifying four areas of focus: expanding RFPAs, bolstering emergency response in local communities, examining liability exposure in insurance policies, and ensuring all fire responders are communicating and sharing information. This roundtable committee will provide related recommendations to the Governor's Office in April. With significant investments in fuels reduction and fire suppression, including added funds to the state's fire suppression deficiency fund, he is confident that Idaho is being as proactive on wildfire as possible. Expanding WUI areas and increasing amounts of recreation in our forestlands make it critical that we can expand GNA and Shared Stewardship efforts—and the Governor stated that he looks forward to working with SSAG members to continue the good work across the state.
- Ara gave an overview of some policy issues and activities that are related to our Shared Stewardship goals, including:
 - The National Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission Report, and the recommendations sent by this committee to Congress promoting support for increasing the pace and scale of forest-resiliency and fuels-mitigation work ([On Fire: The Report of the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission, September 2023 \(usda.gov\)](#)).
 - Reauthorization of the Farm Bill, and the Western Governors Association (WGA) and the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) recommendations to Congressional committees, including extension of GNA Authorities to Counties and Tribes ([Farm Bill - National Association of State Foresters](#)) ([House NR tribal forest management WGA transmittal.pdf \(westgov.org\)](#)).
 - The State's efforts to grow the diminishing forest-sector workforce, including Superintendent Critchfield's efforts in high-schools to increase the capacity of Career Technical Education to meet regional industry and workforce needs, Governor Little's announcement of the associated LAUNCH program, and the University of Idaho's new two-year technical degrees—all working together to meet the increasing needs of "in-demand" careers, including jobs in the logging and forest-technician sectors. ([In-Demand-Career-List-Approved-9-13-2329.pdf \(idaho.gov\)](#).)
 - Dennis Becker, Dean of the UI College of Natural Resources, gave an overview of the new forestry and fire technical degrees, technical certifications, and cooperative work with high schools.

- Brian Davis and Jeff Lau gave a summary overview of strategies we are employing to best equip counties and local collaborative groups to sustainably supply the technical and financial assistance necessary to continue needed fuels-reduction treatments *long-term* (past infrastructure funding). Strategies included:
 - Finalizing County GNA agreements with four counties, relaying infrastructure funds to local counties programmatically to hire or contract needed staff and provide increasing amounts of technical assistance and marketing to private landowners.
 - Providing IDL-contracted assistance to counties to complete requisite Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs), assist in grant-application development, contract development and administration, and project inspections.
 - Providing IDL help to local counties/communities in creating new contracts, new agreements, and drafting new MOUs to convey monies more efficiently—and to assist with drafting *more competitive* grant applications.
 - Incubating initial efforts—such as creating more demonstration-site projects—by successfully applying for larger competitive grants, like the Joint Chiefs proposal (in north Idaho), and the NRCS RCPP project funds (in south Idaho).
- Tim Garcia noted that most (Northwest) states have university-based forestry extension agents—which are well equipped to give counties and local collaboratives relevant, usable information and educational sessions.
 - Craig Foss pointed out that IDL and the UI College of Natural Resources have entered into an agreement to support two wildland fire coordinators—acting in the fire-mitigation realm like extension agents—to help educate and equip local counties, communities, and landowners to perform forest-resiliency activities and understand the “*why*” behind these treatments. These positions will be advertised soon.
- Tim Garcia asked the question of how much stronger the tie between Shared Stewardship efforts and Forest Stewardship goals should be. The nexus between Idaho’s Shared Stewardship initiative (No Boundaries Forestry) and Idaho’s Forest Stewardship Program was very strong in the past—when the Forest Stewardship Program coordinator was completely integrated into the original cross-boundary projects. Since that IDL position became vacant, this connection weakened. There is now a newly hired Forest Stewardship coordinator, Jay Clark—so IDL is hopeful for a strengthened relationship between the two related programs.
- Committee members also discussed the need to broaden the nexus between Idaho’s Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program and our Shared Stewardship fuels-reduction efforts. IDL explained that this relationship is being strengthened as more grant/infrastructure funds are going toward fuels-mitigation—and “fire-scaping”—projects in urban forests in the rapidly expanding Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). There are also increased federal funds for communities to complete urban tree inventories and city tree-health assessments—further enhancing forest resiliency in the WUI.
- Committee members noted the need for a one-page summary of grant opportunities (e.g., Western States Fire Managers grants, Landscape Scale Restoration grants, and Community

Wildfire Defense Grants (CWDGs)). IDL explained that we have an interactive “Forestry and Fire Grants” webpage that gives information and proposal deadlines for all of the grants that IDL has access to—as well as an additional webpage, “Resources for Grant Seekers,” that contains a downloadable 42-page reference guide to all forestry and fire grant opportunities, as well as recorded grant webinars. ([Forestry and Fire Grants - Department of Lands \(idaho.gov\)](https://www.idaho.gov/forestry-and-fire-grants))

- Shawn Keough asked for information on grant-funding opportunities that could help loggers/operators develop competitive applications and acquire new equipment. She noted that ALC members *want* to apply for grants that can help them expand.
 - Ara discussed the current IDEQ-led Gem State Air Quality Initiative, where multiple state agencies and NGOs will be applying for a large EPA implementation grant to provide expanded fuels-reduction treatments in efforts to lower greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sinks.
- John Robison added that counties/communities/collaborative groups need a variety of “on ramps”—a complete guide that explains how to get engaged with any of these programs or grant opportunities—and how they can take part in these efforts to reduce fuels and increase forest health in their areas. John suggested that Shared Stewardship staff employ local (national forest) Collaboratives to help “spread the word” of this kind of guidance—and that Brian/Jeff/Ara give short presentations to the Collaboratives to best prepare them to do that.
- Committee discussions then focused on the collaboration—and added capacity—that non-profit NGOs can offer in our goals of working on all forestlands across Idaho.
 - The benefits of Keystone Agreements were discussed, like those the USFS has with National Wild Turkey Federation, The National Forest Foundation, Trout Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy. (*USFS 2023 announcement of Keystone Agreements: [Achieving our mission through keystone agreements | US Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/achieving-our-mission-through-keystone-agreements)*).
 - Kurt Dyroff noted that the National Wild Turkey Federation employees, through these agreements, are currently leading treatments on private lands. Ara will schedule a discussion with Kurt to discuss options for using NWTF employees to implement cross-boundary project work on private forestlands in Idaho.
- Tom Schultz asked about the potential of a Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) designation in and around the Idaho Panhandle National Forests—creating a second alignment of WCS landscapes with our Shared Stewardship Priority Landscape (like the overlap that exists between the WCS Southwest Idaho Landscape and the South-Idaho Shared Stewardship Priority Landscape). Tim Garcia responded that the USFS is not planning any phase-3 rollouts of WCS designations. Tom noted that SSAG members, the Governor, and the Regional Foresters were all in alignment with the high-risk assessment of the North-Idaho Shared Stewardship Priority Landscape—and that USDA needs to be presented these data to show the need for a WCS landscape to be designated in that area.
 - It was pointed out that the northern Idaho panhandle does contain part of the WCS Kootenai Complex Landscape, and that our recent expansion of cross-boundary work into Boundary County includes working with the Kootenai National Forest to implement treatments in this area.

- Matthew Ward relayed that he had heard there would be additional priority firesheds with separate streams of funding pointing to them. Tim Garcia responded that there would be extra high-risk fireshed funding, primarily around underserved communities.
 - Since the meeting, the USDA announced an additional dispersal of IRA hazardous-fuels funds through the Collaborative Wildfire Risk Reduction Program (CWRRP)—with an additional \$100 million to expand WCS work outside of the designated WCS landscapes. These funds are for use on the national forests inside the WUI. ([Collaborative Wildfire Risk Reduction Program | US Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/land-management/wildfire-risk-reduction/cwrrp)).
- Kelly Orr suggested that Idaho reach out to collaborative/community efforts in neighboring states to see what their best-management practices are—and how they are working to increase work on all ownerships of forests.
- Brian Davis announced that the *Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition* is hosting online seminars that will focus on successful collaboration, building conservation partnerships, and increasing the use of prescribed fire—starting in March. Brian will send SSAG members this seminar schedule. Recordings of past webinars can be found at: [Webinars — Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition \(ruralvoicescoalition.org\)](https://www.ruralvoicescoalition.org/webinars).
- Robert Jaeger (USFWS) explained our massive spatial database needs—discussing how badly we need to store and organize multiple agencies’ data. Dustin Miller agreed; we need to be telling the *complete* stories of cross-boundary work to elected officials and lawmakers.
- Dirk Mendive (Rep. Fulcher’s Office) relayed that the current Farm Bill has been extended (through September 2024)—and that the (reauthorized) Farm Bill might be passed this year, but the dragging out of Continuing Resolutions (CRs), now extended through March 1st, is pushing back Congressional work on the Farm Bill. Currently, the total cost of the reauthorized Farm Bill is projected to be about \$1.5 trillion.
 - The Farm Aid website states that “*Policy experts guess that if Congress doesn’t pass a Farm Bill before the end of June, we’ll likely see it kicked down the road until after the 2024 elections.*”
- Ara will send out polls to SSAG members to determine the best time to gather for the next SSAG meeting.
- Meeting adjourned at noon.