

BONNER COUNTY COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 1

Profile of Bruce Hollett 

By Cameron Rasmusson
Reader Staff

Editor's Note: Bruce Hollett is running as a Republican for Bonner County Commissioner, District 1.

Reader: Tell me a little about your history in North Idaho.

Bruce Hollett: I was born here, in Coeur d'Alene actually, raised on the same property where I live now on Dufort Road. I went through all of my school through high school in Priest River. After high school, I worked at a lumber mill for four years, then got involved with EMS with the Priest River volunteer ambulance service. Then I got into driving trucks after I left lumber. My ex-wife and I moved to West Virginia when Coldwater Creek moved, and while I was there, I worked for a local ambulance service and became a paramedic. My current wife and I and our kids moved back six years ago.

SR: What inspired you to run for office?

BH: I just thought it would be fun. No, really, inevitably changes are going to happen. However, I think there has been, in the last 15 years, changes going in the wrong direction. I think we need to get back to our hometown roots. We need to build and support our local communities. I see a lack of support from our local governments — not just county, but the cities as well. Our local governments don't support the people like we should.

SR: Can you be more specific? How would you do some things differently?

BH: This isn't necessarily government-wise, but with the timber industry disappearing, I don't see where there's been any kind of push to get another industry in here to take its place. As a matter of fact, I have found out since moving back here, there have been some that wanted to come here, industry wise, and local governments basically just shunned them off. I'll use Buck Knives for that example. They wanted to go to Priest River, and between Priest River city and our county, I don't know what they were needing to do — some kind of upgrade, to the water I think it was — but why did we let that get away? Now they got 200 employees sitting in Post Falls, plus the tourism they got going through there that we could've had up here. There's no way to stop the growth, but some of the growth

I've seen is a little disturbing ... so many farms are being subdivided and sold off into lots.

SR: If you were to pick three issues you feel strongest about, what would they be and why?

BH: The biggest one, and this comes from part of my background, is I don't see our local public safety personnel getting support that they need — sheriff's deputies, EMS, fire department, volunteer and paid. Some of them are just being supported. Others, like law enforcement, we need to be paying them to keep them. We train them for two years and they leave for better pay. I don't blame them for that, but what do we need to do to prevent that turnover that's actually costing us money? Another issue is our roads, our rural roads especially. There needs to be some upgrading on our road systems. And the maintenance of those roads. I'd have to see numbers, and see what the cost effective would be. If we paved more, my thought is, the lack of maintenance on dirt roads would pay for that. The biggest issue is jobs. We need industry jobs of some sort. And manufacturing. We need something here that, as our kids are growing up, they can have careers and stay home, they don't have to go somewhere else to go find supportive work.

SR: Let's go through a few local issues and see where you stand on them. Let's start with the proposed silicon smelter in Newport.

BH: My first thought is, it's in Washington, that's Pend Oreille County. As much as we want to hoot, holler and whine, they're the ones doing the permits, not us. They can tell us to go pound sand if they want to. I do think it would be a good boost in the arm, maybe not just for Sandpoint, but Ponderay and Bonner County. I don't know enough yet about the process to know if it's worth diving into. From what little I do understand, I think it's not the devil that people are trying to make it out (to be). I don't see the pollution that some people are trying to put out there, mainly because of oversight that comes with that. The EPA has pretty strict guidelines. Washington DEQ is way stricter. I also think people, when they hear smelter, they think of Silver Valley and the pollution that went on there 50 years ago. I don't see that happening in this day and age.

SR: How about the proposed wilderness designation for Scotchman Peaks?

BH: Being that our area is historically timber, I fall on: We take care of our land. I don't see the need for the federal government to tell us it's off limits for us to take care of it. Historically, the people of our area have taken good care of our own land. I'm not in favor of having that be a wilderness.

SR: How about the Natural Resource Plan?

BH: I don't know much about that. If it's what I'm thinking it is, there was a big to-do where a lot of people in county thought the city of Sandpoint was overstepping on natural resource issues. Again, I fall back on our people and our area take care of our own stuff. We don't need federal and state government stepping in and telling us how to take care of it. We don't go through and destroy our lands and waters and do the best we can with what we have.

SR: What about the proposed second rail bridge over Lake Pend Oreille?

BH: I say build the bridge. ... A lot of our citizens don't like waiting at train crossings for a half hour at a time. That bridge would eliminate a lot of that bottlenecking. Is another bridge going to create more risk for derailments? No. We already have the trains going through, but right now they are stopping and waiting at each side. What some people don't realize is the tracks running through our area is the main east west of the northern part of the United States. And it's the main north south for Union Pacific coming out of Canada. It's a crossroads and as long as economy grows, freight has to move. If it's not on trains, they gotta have more trucks. They were decided that access across the lake before Idaho was a state.

SR: Bonner County has taken a little bit of criticism this past year regarding decisions to the planning and zoning department. Do you think it's important to have a strong P&Z department with building regulations in place, or should there be less regulation?

BH: A combination of both, I guess. To me, if you own your property, you should be able to do just about whatever you want. If you want to build a barn on your place, build a barn. Does there need to be some regulation? Yes, there does. To what extent, I think we've gone overboard. We've gone back to being too overboard from what I think we should be.

The permitting process has gotten godawful expensive. I need to do more research, but I know here recently, Kootenai County did away with a lot of theirs. I think we should look at what they did and follow suit.

SR: Conservation easement issues have popped up in the news this year. There was Clagstone Meadows, Schweitzer, the Pine St. Woods. Where do you stand on land easements? Is it a private property issue, or do we have a say in what they do with their land?

BH: Those easements, to my understanding, aren't cut and dry. Every different one they have their own guidelines for what they set up. I've seen some where it could still be used. That's up to that property owner. It's their personal property. If Schweitzer wants to make a conservation easement, it's their land and their business. If they lose business over it, okay. It's their call. I know some bigger ranches around the area also have some easements, and it's the same thing. They still farm it, raise their cows on it. But future generations of their family can not subdivide it and sell it.

SR: Is there anything you'd like to add that we haven't covered?

BH: I think that in this day and age, as much as I like Sandpoint, we have a lot of folks who, when they think Bonner County, they think Sandpoint. We have a lot of other areas: Clark Fork, Hope, Blanchard, Careywood, Priest Lake, Priest River. These areas really don't get represented as much as they should. ... One of my downfalls is, through the campaign season, we're going to be hot and heavy on the forums. There are several that I can't make it to, because I work full time, versus other folks that are running for office. I work to support the family, to keep things going. Another thing, our 4H program and fair desperately needs support and help from our commissioners. We've had too many years of the commissioners with the mindset of, "That needs to make money," and they're trying to make too much money from the backs of our 4H families, which are typically



the poorer families in the county. As a school board member, I've been trying to pull an FFA program for the county. We've got to get our fair built back up so our kids have something to do. They don't just learn agriculture, they learn everything from survival to welding to mechanics and electronics. Right now, the way things have been going, it's gotten so low, so far down, people don't want to go. It needs (to be) supported. I don't know about money thrown into it, but it needs support. We had some commissioners some years ago that tried to completely do away with it. Not the current group — it was a couple years back. But that's unacceptable.

**Bruce Hollett
AT A GLANCE**

AGE: 43

BIRTHPLACE AND RESIDENCE: I currently reside on Sandy Ridge Rd. off of Dufort Rd. in Sagle.

GOVERNMENT SERVICE: Trustee on West Bonner Co. School Board and 25 years of working as an EMS.

PROFESSION: My fulltime job is with Interstate Asphalt doing construction. During the winter months I work as a paramedic for Shoshone County.

EDUCATION: High school in Priest River, class of 1993. West Virginia University for my paramedics license.

FAMILY: Wife (Lisa), who is an R.N. at the hospital. Two kids — one goes to Panhandle Special Needs on Boyer, the other goes to the House of the Lord School in Oldtown.

FUN FACT: We have horses, sheep, chickens and we keep our farm going between working. My grandparents bought where we live now in 1960. It was already a working farm.