

## **2024 Winter WRTAC Meeting Notes**

January 16, 2024, 10:00 am (MST)

Avista Noxon Multipurpose Room

### **WRTAC representative attendees:**

Avista – Eric Oldenburg

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality – Chantilly Higbee

Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) – Ken Bouwens

Lake Pend Oreille Idaho Club – David Gillespie

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) – Jason Blakney

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation – Valerie Kurth (Conference line)

Departed 11:00 (MST)

Noxon-Cabinet Shoreline Coalition – Chuck Harrington (Alternate)

Rock Creek Alliance – Diane Williams (Conference line) Departed at lunch 12:00 (MST)

U.S. Forest Service (Cabinet) – Chris Rossel

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – Carter Fredenberg (Conference line) Departed 1:50 (MST)

### **Other attendees:**

Avista – Monica Ott, Shana Bernall, Paul Kusnierz, Sean Moran, Ben Birdsall, Darren Pickthorn, Arthur Potts, Davina Brown, Tyler Zumwalt, and Lisa Johnson (Conference line)

Avista Grant Writer – Susan Drumheller

Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group – Sarah Busmire

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks – Travis Rehm

### **Welcome and introductions:**

Eric Oldenburg welcomed those in attendance and discussed the purpose and agenda of the meeting. The purpose is to review the draft 2024 aquatic Annual Implementation Plans (AIPs) and provide recommendations to the Management Committee (MC). As such, the emphasis will be to discuss those projects that are new, need to be ranked, or carryover projects with meaningful changes proposed.

### **Other business:**

Consent Mails:

- There were no aquatic Consent Mails between our fall 2023 meeting and this meeting.

Grant writer update:

- Susan Drumheller provided an update on grants.

Fall meeting date:

- Tuesday, August 27, 2024, was selected for the fall WRTAC meeting.

## **Review of draft 2024 Annual Implementation Plans:**

### **Appendix A: Idaho Tributary Habitat Acquisition and Fishery Enhancement Program**

- Ken Bouwens provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix A for 2024. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.
- Habitat Restoration and Acquired Property Maintenance and Monitoring Allocation
  - Oldenburg noted that we would be adding a line item to the budget for this project plan to cover property taxes for lands purchased through Appendix A.
- Trestle Creek Habitat Enhancement Project Phase 1
  - Continuing project with no changes to the scope proposed but a deadline extension requested.
- Rattle Creek Habitat Enhancement Project
  - The design work for this project was previously ranked by the WRTAC; however, the WRTAC chose to re-rank because the current proposal is for implementation.
  - The WRTAC ratified the preliminary ranking scores for this project.
- Grouse Creek Stream Channel restoration Project (new)
  - The WRTAC ratified the ranking scores for this project.
- Fish Resource Monitoring, Enhancement, and Management Plan
  - Ben Birdsall presented proposed modifications to the monitoring schedule. The WRTAC supported the proposed modifications.
- *The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix A Project Plans as written with the aforementioned modifications (addition of property taxes).*

### **Appendix B: Montana Tributary Habitat Acquisition and Recreational Fishery Enhancement Program**

- Travis Rehm provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix B for 2024. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.
- Upper Prospect Creek LWD Project
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed. The final report in review.
- Habitat Restoration Monitoring, Maintenance, and Contingency Allocation
  - Rehm noted that we would be adding a line item to the budget for this project plan to cover property taxes for lands purchased through Appendix B.
- Sims Meander Stream Floodplain and Restoration Project
  - The only remaining task associated with this project plan is to finalize the as-built monitoring report. If Avista receives the report soon, this project will be final and the 2024 project plan removed.
- Vermilion River Restoration Projects 4–6 Survey and Design
  - Continuing project. The project is currently behind the originally proposed schedule.

- Noxon Reservoir Boat Ramp Improvements
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed. The remaining task is to install access gating at Thompson Falls State Park.
- Noxon Reservoir Bathymetry Update
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed. The hope is to finish survey transects in 2024.
- Lower Clark Fork River Pathogen Survey (new)
  - We are considering this a new project; however, similar efforts have been periodically funded through Appendix B.
- *The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix B Project Plans as written with the aforementioned modifications (addition of property taxes).*

#### Appendix C: Fish Passage/Native Salmonid Restoration Plan

- Shana Bernall provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix C for 2024. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.
- Upstream Fish Passage Program
  - Continuing project with a couple noteworthy changes proposed: (1) Cabinet Gorge Fish Passage Facility (CGFPF) Subgroup decided to discontinue night electrofishing to collect additional Bull Trout to tag and help evaluate the CGFPF. But may decide to night electrofish to collect additional Westslope Cutthroat Trout when the CGFPF is shutdown or if there are extended periods of unexpected trap shutdowns. (2) Westslope Cutthroat Trout transported upstream of Cabinet Gorge Dam will be released near Bull River Bay in Cabinet Gorge Reservoir (instead of Big Eddy boat launch).
- Westslope Cutthroat Trout Transport Evaluation
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed.
- Native Salmonid Restoration Plan Five-Year Plan
  - Continuing project with one noteworthy change. Additional PM&Es (Appendices D, E, and F1-4) will be added to the 5-yr plan which is requiring more time to draft to new plan.
- Tributary Trapping and downstream Juvenile Bull Trout Transport Program
  - This is a continuing project with three noteworthy changes being proposed: (1) only check traps six days per week when it is prudent to do so from operational and fish health perspectives, (2) eliminate spring screw trapping in the East Fork Bull River (we haven't captured Bull Trout using this method in the past two years and fall electrofishing has become much more effective), (3) Oldenburg will add a line item to the budget table for property taxes at the Graves Creek permanent weir trap site.
- PIT-Monitoring Station Operation and Maintenance
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed.

- Graves Creek Bull Trout Translocation Project
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed. Assuming the decision is made to move this project forward, the first translocations are anticipated to occur in 2025.
- Fish Capture Facilities Operation, Development, and Testing
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed.
  - CGFPF subgroup plans to meet to begin discussions on what additional information may be needed prior to reinitiating discussions on a permanent fish passage facility below Noxon Rapids Dam. We will have more details to share at the summer WRTAC meeting.
- Graves Creek Permanent Weir Trap Enhancements
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed. Oldenburg explained that a number of challenges have been identified that could prevent this project from moving forward. This will be figured out in the first half of 2024.
- *The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix C Project Plans with the aforementioned modifications (addition of property taxes).*

#### Appendix D: Bull Trout Protection and Public Education Project

- Sean Moran provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix D for 2024. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below. Oldenburg noted that this appendix is proposing more than budget allows for, nothing to be done now. Appendix D working group level discussion to do. Food for thought for WRTAC.
- Montana Game Warden Support
  - Continuing project for which MFWP has not requested financial support for a few years. This year, they are requesting funding to purchase new trail cameras for surveillance of sensitive Bull Trout areas.
- Trout Unlimited Bull Trout Education Outreach
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed. Bouwens updated the group that IDFG and Trout Unlimited developed a Memorandum of Understanding so that Trout Unlimited personnel can tow the trailer.
- *The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix D Project Plans as written.*

#### Appendix E: Watershed Councils Program

- Sean Moran provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix E for 2024.
- Lower Clark Fork Watershed Council Projects
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed. The next meeting will occur in mid-February.
- *The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix E Project Plans as written.*

#### Appendix F1: Clark Fork River Water Quality Monitoring Program

- Paul Kusnierz provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix F1 for 2024.
- Water Quality Monitoring
  - Continue project with no meaningful changes proposed.
- *The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix F1 Project Plans as written.*

#### Appendix F2: Monitoring of Noxon Reservoir Stratification and Mobilization of Sediment Nutrients/Metals

- Paul Kusnierz provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix F2 for 2024.
- Noxon Stratification and Sediment Monitoring
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed. Kusnierz noted that the final monitoring event is complete and we are awaiting the final report. At that time, Avista's Appendix F2 obligation will be fully met.
- *The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix F2 Project Plan as written.*

#### Appendix F3: Aquatic Organism Tissue Analysis

- Paul Kusnierz provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix F3 for 2024.
- Noxon Mercury Study
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed.
- *The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix F3 Project Plan as written.*

#### Appendix F4: Water Quality Protection and Monitoring Plan for Maintenance, Construction, and Emergency Activities

- Eric Oldenburg provided a summary of Appendix F4 for 2023 and noted that there was presently nothing on his radar that would require him to enact the Water Quality Protection and Monitoring Plan.
- *The WRTAC recommended the MC approve Appendix F4 as written.*

#### Appendix F5: Dissolved Gas Supersaturation Control, Mitigation, and Monitoring

- Paul Kusnierz and Ken Bouwens provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix F5 for 2024. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.
- Mapping the Potential for Fish to Compensate for total Dissolved Gas in the Lower Clark Fork River
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed; however, additional funding is being requested to extract data from the recently developed HEC-RAS model.

- Temperature Monitoring Data Compilation
  - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed; however, the requested budget has been slightly reduced.
- *The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix F5 Project Plans as written.*

Appendix T: Project Operations Package

- Eric Oldenburg provided a summary of the projects proposed within Appendix T for 2024. The one-time one-million dollar financial commitment to Appendix T has now been fully expended.
- *The WRTAC recommends that the MC approve the Appendix T Project Plan as written.*

**The meeting adjourned at 2:35 pm (MST).**