

## **2025 Fall WRTAC Meeting Notes**

August 26, 2025, 10:00 am (MDT)

Avista Noxon Multipurpose Room

### **WRTAC representative attendees:**

Avista – Eric Oldenburg

Idaho Department of Fish and Game – Rob Ryan

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality – Bob Steed

Kalispel Tribe – Jason Olson (conference line)

Lake Pend Oreille Idaho Club – David Gillespie

Montana Department of Natural Resources – Keenan Storrar (conference line)

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

Noxon Cabinet Shoreline Coalition – Rick Robinson

Panhandle Chapter Trout Unlimited – Bill Love

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

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – Carter Fredenberg

### **Other attendees:**

Avista – Monica Ott, Shana Bernall, Lisa Johnson, Paul Kusnierz, Sean Moran, Ben Birdsall,

Davina Brown, Will Bass (conference line)

Avista Grant Writer – Susan Drumheller

Cabinet resource Group – Colleen Hinds

Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group (LCFWG) – Sarah Poiesz (conference line)

Idaho Department of Fish and Game – Dakota Smith

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks – Travis Rehm, Mike Hensler (conference line)

### **Welcome and introductions:**

Eric Oldenburg welcomed those in attendance and discussed the purpose and agenda of the meeting. The purpose is to update the WRTAC on the progress of the 2025 implementation efforts and identify any issues and/or actions that need to be forwarded to the Management Committee for their September 23, 2025, Fall Meeting.

### **Other business:**

- Consent Mails
  - Stimson Conservation Easement
- Instructions for the development of 2026 project plans and 2025 Annual Work Summaries
- Review of properties purchased and held by Avista in support of the CFSA at 5- and 10-year intervals
  - Graves Creek Steep River Ranch – Monica provided an update.

- Avista Grant Writer update
  - Susan Drumheller provided an update.
- Clark Fork Heritage Resource Program (Appendix R) update
  - Lisa Johnson provided an update.
- Winter Meeting Date
  - Wednesday, January 21, 2026 was selected for the WRTAC meeting.
- General updates:
  - Department shoreline clean-up day held on July 9, 2025
  - Rob Ryan was introduced as the new PM &E coordinator for appendix A
  - Bull River Celebration – September 14, 2025.
  - Management Committee meeting is on September 23 with tours on 24<sup>th</sup>.

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

Rob Ryan provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix A for 2025. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.

- Habitat Restoration Scoping Allocation
  - No action this year
- Habitat Restoration and Acquired Property Maintenance and Monitoring Allocation
  - Rob is working with a contractor to remove a pile of debris at Twin Creek. The Sullivan Springs clean up work has been completed.
- Priority Native Salmonid Habitat Acquisition and Conservation Allocation
  - Retained support for land transactions and market evaluations. Supported Kaniksu Land Trust- conservation easement assistance.
- Idaho Field Station Operation and Maintenance
  - Star Link internet service was installed.
- Pack River Watershed Management Plan Addendum
  - The Completion report to be finalized this fall.
- Rattle Creek Habitat Enhancement Project Monitoring
  - This is the first year of post- implementation monitoring. Plan to re- monitor 2027.
- Grouse Creek Stream Channel Restoration Project
  - The USFS re-rout of the road is complete but the next phase of the project has been delayed until 2026 due to contractor availability. Forest Service has selected a contractor, however not able to start until 2026.
- Fish Resource Monitoring, Enhancement, and Management Plan
  - Annual monitoring continues

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

Travis Rehm provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix B for 2025. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.

- Habitat Restoration Monitoring and Native Salmonid Abundance Monitoring Plan
  - On going monitoring
- Redd Surveys in Montana Tributaries
  - The 2024 report was completed in July.
- Stream Gage Monitoring
  - Micheal Fieger will be the new lead for this project. Valerie Kurth put in contact with hydro people, with possible real time data in future.
- Crow Creek Bull Trout Investigation
  - The report will be finalized soon.
- Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group Project Coordination
  - Mid-year report finalized. Sarah will be taking another position in end of 2025.
- Habitat Restoration, Property Acquisition, and Conservation Easement Contingency Allocation
  - Travis provided an update of the recently-acquired parcel up Graves Creek for the riparian area of the neighbor's parcel.
- St. Paul Trailhead Improvement Project
  - Design and permitting for this project have been finalized.
- Lower Clark Fork River Bull Trout Life History
  - Genetic parentage analysis are being collected.
- Monitoring the Effectiveness of Vermilion River Restoration
  - USGS project. Phase 3 of sampling efforts with Sarah Eldridge as point of contact.
- Cabinet Gorge and Noxon Reservoir Monitoring Plan
  - Ongoing project
- Mountain Lakes Fisheries Monitoring Project
  - Report to be finalized
- Lower Bull River Day Use Boat Access Site Operation
  - New Mobile Trailer to be installed this fall.
- Noxon Reservoir Boat Ramp Improvements
  - This project is a 50:50 cost share between appendices B and H. Gates were installed and completed in June
- Managing Aquatic Invasive Plants on Noxon and Cabinet Gorge Reservoirs
  - 27 acres were treated during 2025.
- Dreissenid Mussel Sampling on Noxon and Cabinet Gorge Reservoirs
  - This project is ongoing and thus far no Dreissenids have been detected.
- Noxon Reservoir Bathymetry Update
  - All survey transects have now been completed.

- Maps have been instructed but for internal use only. Releasing publicly digital/paper in future. Legal loops hole still to go through.
- Cabinet Gorge Bathymetry Update
  - Pairing effort with the Noxon Bathymetry.
- Stimson Timberlands Legacy Conservation Project
  - Consent mail sent out 7/10/25 and approved 7/28/25. Funds requested through App B would serve as a portion of the non-federal match.

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

Shana Bernall provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix C for 2025.

Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.

- Eric provided an update on Annual Operations Fund financial overview.
- Upstream Fish Passage Program
  - Bernall provided an update on the project. The plan is to continue to operate, monitor, and evaluate CGFPF performance through implementation of the M&E plan.
- Westslope Cutthroat Trout Transport Evaluation
  - The project completion report has been finalized.
- Native Salmonid Restoration Plan Five-Year Plan
  - Sean Moran is working with Stakeholders to update the last 5-year plan with inclusion of all aquatic PM&Es. A draft plan is expected later this fall.- Final draft will be finalized this winter.
- Tributary Trapping and Downstream Juvenile Bull Trout Transport Program
  - Sean Moran is the Lead for this program.
  - Work continued on outfitting the new mobile fish handling trailer this summer with the intention of using it at various sites this fall.
- PIT-Monitoring Station Operation and Maintenance
  - Dylan and Oldenburg are Lead- Bernall noted minor maintenance including firmware updates, battery replacements and other troubleshooting occurred in 2025. All PIT antennas are currently operational and working well.
- Graves Creek Bull Trout Translocation Project
  - Travis Rehm, Carter Fredenburg, Eric Oldeburg, Josh Shulze and Rob Ryan are the project leads.
  - Completion of the Bull Trout translocation plan, M&E objectives, and M&E plan have all been delayed in order to complete the ongoing investigation of the translocation recipient system. Surveys began in 2023 with barrier and fish passage surveys and deployment of temperature monitoring equipment to better identify areas of groundwater upwelling within the proposed project area. Continued surveys in 2024 included fisheries, macroinvertebrate, and habitat monitoring. Analysis and compilation of data collected during these investigations is currently occurring and will be presented in a report in early 2026.

- Cabinet Gorge Fish Passage Facility Minor Modifications
  - This project plan was developed to describe funds available and the process for improving “minor modifications” to CGFPF.
  - Following the spring MC meeting the CGFPF subgroup approved \$2,000 in funds to construct a strobe light system to move fish out of the area between the swing gate and vee trap prior to a fish lift. The lighting system in combination with the air bubbler are effective at scaring fish out of this area, but we believe we can make some additional improvements prior to next season
  - The CGFPF subgroup also approved \$260,000 to hire a hydraulics engineering consultant to monitor the siphon system at the CGFPF and determine the root cause of the vibration in the siphon system and propose alternatives that could be implemented in the future to reduce vibration. We plan to implement installation of monitoring equipment for this project following the shutdown of the CGFPF in mid-October, and then we will restart the siphon and operate it for a few days in order for the contractor to collect pressure, vibration, and temperature data that will be used to develop a computational fluid dynamics (CFD) model of the siphon system. Once that data is collected and they complete the modeling the contractor will provide information on the root cause of the vibration in the system and propose alternatives. We expect to have details on proposed alternatives prior to next season, but depending on the proposed alternative and the cost of the alternative modifications may not happen prior to next season. We will keep the CGFPF subgroup updated on the progress of this project.
  - As a reminder there are \$938,751 dollars available in the Cabinet Minor Modifications Fund. The MC approved \$500,000 of these dollars for the CGFPF subgroup to allocate toward CGFPF modifications in 2023. The CGFPF subgroup has currently allocated over \$498,000 (\$498,090.32) of the \$500,000 toward minor modifications to the CGFPF. Avista will be asking the MC to approve the remaining \$438,751 to be available for the CGFPF subgroup to allocate as needed for future projects.
  - Future projects will likely include modifications to the siphon system to reduce vibration, and the current engineers’ estimate for installing a chiller at the CGFPF is over \$165,000.

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

Sean Moran provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix D for 2025.

Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.

- Idaho Protection and education Officer Support
  - Dakota Smith started as new Bull Trout Officer
- Montana Bull Trout Education and Communication Support
  - The Bull Trout identification test is up and running.
- Montana Game Warden Support
  - MFWP is in the process of re-hiring local Warden

- Patrols and video surveillance by Jonathan Obst and Sawyer Johnson noted no Bull Trout violations have occurred through August 1.
- Trout Unlimited Bull Trout Education Outreach
  - Kootenai County Water festival was held in May 29, 2025.
- Pend Orielle Water Festival
  - 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Water Festival was held on May 14 and 15, 2025.

#### Appendix E: Watershed Councils Program

Sean Moran provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix E for 2025.

Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.

- Pack River Watershed Council and Bonner Soil and Water Conservation District
  - Jessica worked with USFS to develop a project proposal to reconnect Grouse Creek with 2,500' of its historical floodplain. The USFS has completed the reroute of approximately 2.03 miles of FSR#280 out of the Grouse Creek floodplain. Channel reconstruction and floodplain revegetation are scheduled to be completed in 2026. The PRWC will help coordinate volunteers for the revegetation phase.

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

Paul Kusnierz provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix F1 for 2025.

#### Appendix F3: Aquatic Organism Tissue Analysis

Paul Kusnierz provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix F3 for 2025.

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

Paul Kusnierz provided an update of Appendix F4 for 2025 and noted that there was presently nothing on his radar that would require him to enact the Water Quality Protection and Monitoring Plan.

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

Paul Kusnierz and Rob Ryan provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix F5 for 2025. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.

- Total Dissolved Gas Monitoring
  - Relatively low water year, little discharge.
- Project Scoping Allocation
  - Develop a plan to bring lower Clark Fork River HEC-RAS model in-house.
- Analysis of Gas Bubble Disease Monitoring Data
  - No sampling was conducted in 2025 due to lack of spill.
- Mapping the Potential for Fish to Compensate for Total Dissolved Gas in the Lower Clark Fork River

- Report was completed
- Temperature Monitoring Data Compilation
  - On going
- Trophic Monitoring in Lake Pend Oreille and Pend Oreille Idaho
  - State funded new boat. Results of sampling that occurred in June, July and August are available.
- Box Canyon Reservoir Northern Pike Suppression
  - Netting in the spring went as planned. Relatively reduced numbers.
- Lake Pend Oreille Experimental Walleye Angler Incentive Program
  - Highest return to date. 1,363 Walleye caught in July alone.
- Lake Pend Oreille/Clark Fork River Walleye Population Assessment
  - Walleye and Pike numbers have decreased
- Lake Pend Oreille Lake Trout Angler Incentive Program
  - Participation and head returns are comparable to recent years.
- Lake Pend Oreille Lake Trout Netting Program
  - Completed Spring Gillnetting with 2,570 Lake Trout removed.
- Lake Pend Oreille Bull Trout Population Monitoring and Evaluation
  - Bull Trout dynamic rates changed with rate increase in growth and decrease in age and size.
- Lake Pend Oreille Tributary PIT-Monitoring Station Operation and Maintenance
  - All of the PIT-monitoring stations are fully operational.
- Lower Clark Fork Population Monitoring
  - Stable numbers found in Westslope Cutthroat, Rainbow Trout and Mountain Whitefish with an increase in Brown Trout
- Lake Pend Oreille Nearshore Index Netting
  - Decline in fish capture
- Lake Pend Oreille/Pend Oreille River Creel Survey
  - ongoing
- Gas Supersaturation Control Program Total Dissolved Gas Abatement
  - Met July 30<sup>th</sup> - Minimal discharge
- New project concepts
  - Lightning Creek PIT array
  - Pend Oreille basin Westslope Cutthroat Trout population monitoring and evaluation

#### Appendix T: Project Operations Package

Eric Oldenburg provided an update on Appendix T. The original purpose of this measure was simply to outline the General Operating Limits for Noxon and Cabinet Gorge dams.

- There was a one-time, one-million-dollar contribution to Appendix T through which three projects were implemented. That obligation has now been fully met so now Appendix T

outlines and states that we will maintain the General Operating Limits and follow the Appendix F4 plan when we cannot and also has a task of coordinating flow information with the Corps at Albeni Falls. Monica, Shana, and Eric toured Albeni Falls this summer to better understand their operational constraints to ensure we are effectively communicating.

**Other:**

2 potential projects for next year through terrestrial measures.

- Reservoir Boat ramp assessment
- Explore wetland enhancement opportunities

**The meeting adjourned at 3:31 pm (MDT).**