

2026 Winter WRTAC Meeting Notes

January 21, 2026, 10:00 am (MST)

Avista Noxon Multipurpose Room

WRTAC representative attendees:

Avista – Eric Oldenburg

Cabinet Resource Group – Kim Matthew

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality – Bob Steed

Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) – Rob Ryan

Lake Pend Oreille Idaho Club – David Gillespie (Conference line) joined 2:11 pm

Kalispel Tribe – Jason Olson (Conference line)

Montana Department of Environmental Quality – Keenan Storrar (Conference line)

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

Noxon-Cabinet Shoreline Coalition – Rick Robinson

Rock Creek Alliance – Diane Williams (Conference line) departed 11:16 am

U.S. Forest Service (Cabinet) – Megan Mellott

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

Other attendees:

Avista – Monica Ott, Shana Bernall, Lisa Johnson, Sean Moran, Ben Birdsall, Davina Brown, Will Bass, and Paul Kusnierz

Avista Grant Writer – Susan Drumheller

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

NorthWestern Energy – Jon Hanson (Conference line)

U.S. Forest Service (Cabinet) – Mike Fieger (Conference line)

Public – Robert Flansaas

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 2026 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:

- Consent Mail (none since the fall meeting)

Grant writer update:

- Susan Drumheller provided an update on grants.

Clark Fork Heritage Resource Program update:

- Lisa Johnson provided an update on Appendix R.

Fall meeting date:

- Wednesday, August 26, 2026 was selected for the fall WRTAC meeting.

Review of draft 2026 Annual Implementation Plans:

Appendix A: Idaho Tributary Habitat Acquisition and Fishery Enhancement Program

- Rob Ryan provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix A for 2026. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.
- Habitat Restoration and Acquired Property Maintenance and Monitoring Allocation
 - Rob updated the group on proposed 2026 activities under this project plan: weed control, paying property taxes, law enforcement monitoring.
- Idaho Field Station Operation and Maintenance
 - Project covers ongoing operation and maintenance
- Pack River Watershed Management Plan Addendum
 - Draft report is complete.
- Rattle Creek Habitat Enhancement Project Monitoring
 - Year one of post project monitoring will start following spring runoff.
- Grouse Creek Stream Channel Restoration Project
 - Kavin Davis is submitting permit applications and construction is scheduled to occur this year.
- Pend Oreille Basin Tributary Non-native Suppression Project (*new*)
 - Rob provided an update on the goal for this project. This project aims to increase the available habitat for native salmonids.
 - The WRTAC ratified the proposed ranking criteria scores.
- Fish Resource Monitoring, Enhancement, and Management Plan
 - Project covers ongoing tributary monitoring, rotational monitoring, temperature monitoring and Bull Trout redd counts.

The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix A Project Plans as written.

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 2026. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.
- Habitat Restoration Monitoring and Native Salmonid Abundance Monitoring Plan
 - This is a continuing project with no significant changes
- Redd Surveys in Montana Tributaries
 - This is a continuing project with no significant changes
- Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group Project Coordination

- No changes proposed; continue coordination with Avista Grant Writer
- Habitat Restoration Monitoring, Maintenance, and Contingency Allocation
 - This is a continuing project with no significant changes
- Habitat Restoration, Property Acquisition, and Conservation Easement Contingency Allocation
 - Due diligence toward this easement has been completed.
- Prospect Creek Bull Trout Evaluation
 - This ongoing project seeks to determine whether Bull Trout salvaged into Crow Creek successfully reproduced and what percentage are emigrating.
- Lower Clark Fork Bull Trout Life History Evaluation
- Monitoring Effectiveness of the Vermilion River Restoration
- Upper Prospect Creek Fish Passage Project (*new*)
 - Installation of steel baffles and back fill materials, with costs allocated on a 50:50 cost-sharing basis
 - The WRTAC ratified the proposed ranking criteria scores.
- The Genetic Basis of Migration and Implications of Human-Mediated Translocation for Bull Trout in the Lower Clark Fork River (*new*)
 - This research proposal was provided to AIT meeting and is subject to modification based on feedback, questions, and concerns that arise.
 - The WRTAC ratified the proposed ranking criteria scores.
- Vermilion Grouse Revegetation Implementation and Monitoring (*new*)
 - Planting cottonwoods and willows to occur early spring
 - The WRTAC modified ranking criterion A from “2” (Bull Trout or Westslope Cutthroat Trout) to “3” (Bull Trout and Westslope Cutthroat Trout)
- Cabinet Gorge and Noxon Reservoir Fisheries Monitoring Plan
 - This is a continuing project with no significant changes
- Mountain Lake Fisheries Monitoring Project
 - All field and lab work have been completed. The project completion report due date has been extended to December 31, 2026.
- Lower Bull River Day Use Boat Access Site Operation
 - Continue to maintain site for the 2026 recreation season
- Managing Aquatic Invasive Plants on Noxon and Cabinet Gorge Reservoirs
 - This is a continuing project with no significant changes
- Dreissenid Mussel Sampling on Noxon and Cabinet Gorge Reservoirs
 - Continuing project with increased sampling
- Noxon Reservoir Bathymetry Update
 - The map is fully updated with all transect data. Costs associated with developing this information in publicly available formats, Will be proposed for 2027 or by consent mail in later 2026
- Cabinet Gorge Reservoir Bathymetry Update

- Finish surveys in 2026 and work towards developing this information in publicly available formats, Will be proposed for 2027 or by consent mail in later 2026
- Stimson Timberlands Legacy Conservation Project
 - Upcoming work includes scoping the project, completing the Environmental Analysis, holding a public hearing, and presenting the project to the FW Commission for approval. If the project is approved by the FW Commission, project partners anticipate the project will close late in 2026.
- Noxon Largemouth Bass Spawning Investigation (*new*)
 - No ranking required
- Avista Boat Launch Assessment and Prioritization (*new*)
 - Working on permitting and contracts for budget now; consent mail we be sent out for actual work

The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix B Project Plans as written with the aforementioned modifications

Appendix C: Fish Passage/Native Salmonid Restoration Plan

- Shana Bernall provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix C for 2026. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.
- Upstream Fish Passage Program
 - Similar to last few years the primary tasks associated with this project plan are capturing BLT and WCT downstream of CGD and transporting them upstream to Montana
 - We plan to operate the CGFPF and monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this facility similar to previous years.
 - Will sent out a draft of the 2024 M&E Plan update for the CGFPF subgroup review and is starting to analyze data collected during 2025 operation. We are meeting with the CGFPF subgroup in February to discuss results and determine how we want to operate the facility in 2026.
 - A quick update: PM work (including visual inspections) at the Cabinet Gorge Fish Passage Facility was completed in October and the equipment including the siphon pipes supports looked good, so there is very little maintenance needed prior to start up in 2026.
- Tributary Trapping and Downstream Juvenile Bull Trout Transport Program
 - Sean Moran is the lead for this continuing project and there are no major changes proposed for 2026.
 - A couple of modifications and new and/or backup equipment are planned for the Graves Cr permanent weir trap including: a new winch and pulley, backup pump, more fish-friendly modifications to the interior of the trap box and installing an IR camera.
- PIT-Monitoring Station Operation and Maintenance
 - Continuing project with no proposed changes for 2026. It is noteworthy that we

do have some damage that was caused by the December flooding. We are still assessing the damage but anticipate some amount of downtime for certain antennas and that we will need to replace some hardware once conditions allow.

- **Graves Creek Bull Trout Translocation Project**
 - This is a continuing project that was originally approved in 2023. Travis Rehm, Carter Fredenberg, Eric Oldenburg, Josh Shulze and Rob Ryan are the project leads.
 - Travis has been investigating the translocation recipient system. He is working on a final report, and initial results show that there may be too many barriers and other limiting factors that would impede the success of this effort, so this project likely won't move forward.
- **Database Management Scoping**
 - This is a new project and Dylan Gollen and Eric Oldenburg are the leads.
 - After 25 years of CFSA implementation, we have a mountain of data that have been collected through research and monitoring. We currently have seven relational databases as well as a number of datasets in spreadsheets. We are to the point where the quantity and complexity are pushing the limits of what Microsoft Access alone can handle.
 - The purpose of this project is to take a holistic look at our database needs and identify the path forward for database management. Specific objectives are to develop a system that includes user-friendly data entry, integrates robust QA/QC measures, provides close to real-time availability for most datasets, links all the data, and meets the needs of stakeholders.
 - To accomplish this, we have started working closely with a contractor to identify the long-term solution. The plan is to work iteratively between the contractor and interested stakeholders until we arrive at the preferred solution. Once identified, we will solicit proposals from a minimum of three potential contractors and then come back to the MC for approval to move forward with the preferred contractor to implement the solution.
- **Cabinet Gorge Fish Passage Facility Minor Modifications**
 - At the fall MC meeting, the MC approved the remaining money in this fund be available for the CGFPF subgroup to allocate for approved projects.
 - Since the fall MC meeting, the CGFPF subgroup approved \$4,500 for a davit crane base extension to improve the angle of lifting for our vee trap/stop log system and an additional \$10,000 to investigate the feasibility of drilling a well near the CGFPF to provide cold water for Bull Trout attraction during summer/fall. We plan to get a well driller onsite to help us determine the best location for a well and to provide a detailed cost estimate, so we can get funds approved to move forward with this project.
 - Siphon Vibration Study: contractor performed testing in November and obtained data related to vibration, stress and temperature in the siphon pipes. There will be a workshop scheduled in Feb. to discuss the results of this test and to go over potential alternatives that could be implemented to resolve the vibration issue in the siphon system.
 - (\$512,590.32 allocated of the \$938,741. So, \$426,151 still available)

No Aquatic PM&E Five-year Plan 2026 Project Plan because:

- It went out to the MC for review in mid-November,
- No comments were received, and
- The version that went out in mid-November will be going out in the spring MC meeting packet for the MC to approve at the meeting.
- Change the date range: 2026-2030

The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix C Project Plans as written.

Appendix D: Bull Trout Protection and Public Education Project

- Sean Moran provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix D for 2026. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.
- Idaho Bull Trout Protection and Education Officer Support
 - There was a change in IDFG staff for the warden position, Dustin Masin took another position, and Dakota Smith is the new warden.
- Trout Unlimited Outreach Coordination
 - An addition to the 2025 Plan is for Amy Anderson to investigate and coordinate reinstituting the Kootenai County Water Festival in 2025 for 2026 implementation.

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 2026.
- Pack River Watershed Council, Bonner Soil and Water Conservation District
 - Jessica Erickson is working to complete the Pack River Native Salmonid Habitat Plan.
- Lower Clark Fork Watershed Council Projects
 - The LCFWG is in the process of hiring a new Coordinator

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 the proposed Appendix F1 project for 2026.
- Water Quality Monitoring
 - Continuing project with no meaningful changes proposed.

The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix F1 Project Plans as written.

Appendix F3: Aquatic Organism Tissue Analysis

- Paul Kusnierz provided a summary of Appendix F3 activities proposed for 2026.

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

- Paul Kusnierz provided a summary of Appendix F4 for 2026 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 Rob Ryan provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix F5 for 2026. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.
- Gas Supersaturation Control Program Total Dissolved Abatement
 - No new work has been proposed. Bob Steed would like to review the budget at the upcoming GSCP meeting.
- Total Dissolved Gas Monitoring
 - This is an ongoing project.
- Analysis of Gas Bubble Disease Monitoring Data
 - Sampling did not occur in 2025
- Temperature Monitoring Data Compilation
 - Temperature data will be entered in 2026. DEQ was provided with the requested data.
- Box Canyon Reservoir Northern Pike Suppression
 - Monitoring and netting will continue this spring.
- Lake Pend Oreille Walleye Angler Incentive Program
 - Most heads to date
- Lake Pend Oreille Lake Trout Angler Incentive Program
 - Overall catch is down, catch rate has declined
- Idaho Protection and Education Officer Support
 - Increase cost share with appendix D
- Lake Pend Oreille Tributary PIT Monitoring Station Operation and Maintenance
 - Interested in evaluating Lightning Creek
- Clark Fork River Pollution Monitoring
 - Abundance monitoring to occur this fall
- Lake Pend Oreille Nearshore Index Netting
 - Report to be out soon
- Lake Pend Oreille/Pend Oreille River Creel Survey
- Lower Clark Fork River Genetics Evaluation
 - Waiting for final revision to be completed soon.
- Lake Pend Oreille Basin Westslope Cutthroat Trout Population Monitoring and Evaluation (*new*)

- Describe and evaluate the LPO basin Westslope Cutthroat Trout metapopulation
- The WRTAC ratified the proposed ranking criteria scores.
- Evaluation of the Genetic Association to Bull Trout Migration Run Timing (*new*)
 - Determine if genetic associations determine migration run timing in BLT in the CFR and LPO
 - The WRTAC ratified the proposed ranking criteria scores.

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 2026.

Appendix M: Explore wetland enhancement opportunities

- Prioritize and evaluate

The WRTAC recommends that the MC approve the Appendix T Project Plan as written.

The meeting adjourned at 2:15 pm (MST).