

Scoping Information Package

Proposed Tex Creek Wildlife Management Area Instream Habitat Improvement Project in Bonneville County, Idaho

This information package summarizes a project proposal from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to install instream habitat structures on sections of Tex Creek and Indian Fork in the Tex Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) upstream from Ririe Reservoir in Bonneville County, Idaho. The IDFG manages Reclamation-owned lands in the Tex Creek WMA. These Reclamation lands are managed to offset the loss of fish and wildlife habitat caused by the construction and operation of the Teton Project. Up to 40 low-tech structures per kilometer [i.e., beaver dam analogs (BDAs) and post-assisted log structures (PALS)] would be placed along up to 23.9 kilometers of the Indian Fork and Tex Creek in the Tex Creek WMA. Within this larger project, IDFG is seeking approval for work on 8.6 kilometers on Reclamation land. The project goal is to improve stream habitat conditions to increase use by Yellowstone cutthroat trout and beaver.

Federal actions are analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences. Reclamation is asking for comments to better identify issues and concerns associated with this proposal.

Purpose and Need of Action

Reclamation's purpose and need is to respond to IDFG's request to install habitat structures to improve stream habitat in Tex Creek and Indian Fork. Currently, the creeks are severely incised and have little connection to the flood plain. The proposed instream structures would improve habitat that would attract beavers. The beavers would provide the long-term maintenance and habitat improvement that attracts Yellowstone cutthroat trout among other species.

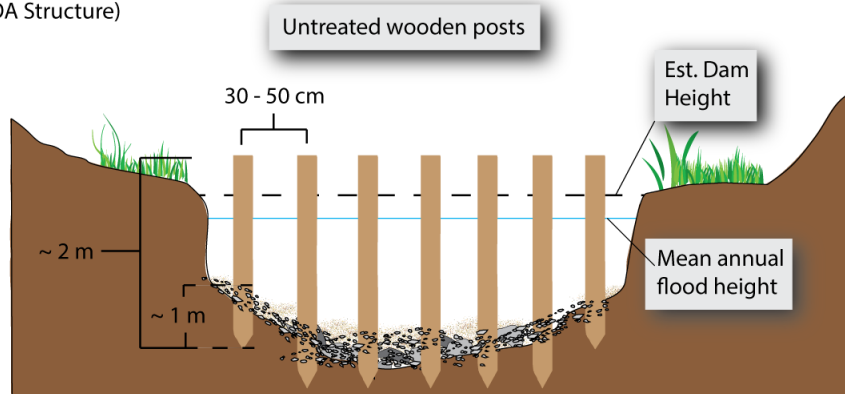
Proposed Action

Over the next 10 years, IDFG proposes to improve stream habitat on Tex Creek and Indian Fork in the Tex Creek WMA by using low-tech process-based restoration. Up to 40 low-tech structures per kilometer would be placed along 23.9 kilometers of Indian Fork and Tex Creek, 8.6 kilometers of which falls on Reclamation lands in the Tex Creek WMA. The habitat structures are intended to create a habitat that would support the expansion of beaver. The dam building of beavers would provide long-term maintenance for the project and support many other species including Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

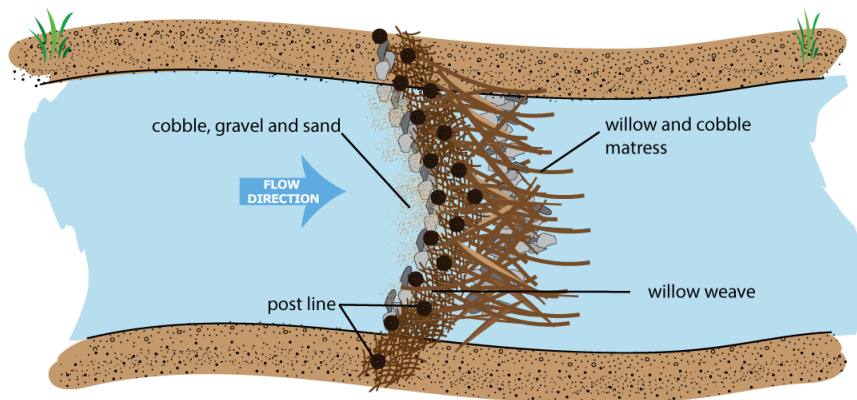
BDAs and PALS are constructed from natural materials to mimic natural processes during process-based restoration. BDAs are channel spanning structures built to mimic beaver dams up to 1 meter in height (Figure 1). Untreated wooden posts are driven into the stream bottom, branches from nearby trees/shrubs are woven among the posts, and rocks and dirt from upstream of the structure are used to seal the vegetation and allow for the collection of water. The intention of a BDA is not to impound water permanently but rather help create deep-water refugia that naturally-occurring beavers can use, as well as function as a sediment trap.

PALS are instream structures built to increase channel roughness and change current flow patterns (Figure 2). They can be channel-spanning, bank-attached, or mid-channel depending upon project needs. Untreated wooden posts are driven into the stream bottom to anchor pieces of woody debris as necessary for their function based on their location.

Cross Section View
(Generic BDA Structure)



Plan View
(Convex Primary Dam)



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Figure 1. Example cross section and overhead view of typical beaver dam analog.

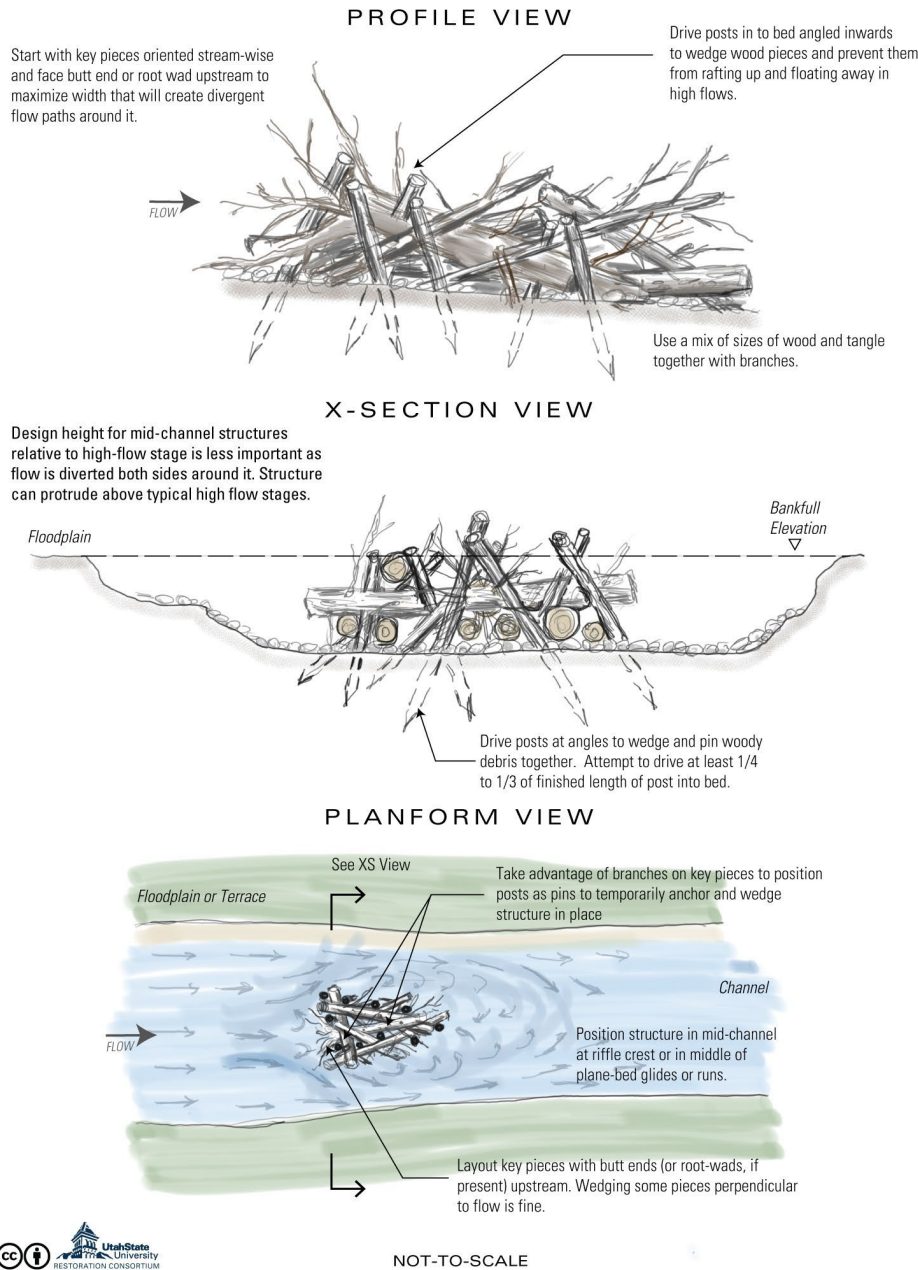


Figure 2. Example cross section and overhead view of typical post-assisted log structure.

Structures would be located throughout the project area following an assessment and design by Anabranch Solutions and IDFG staff. Up to 40 structures per kilometer would be placed along the 8.6 kilometers of the project area. This design mimics the maximum number of structures used by beavers in natural systems. Willow or red-osier dogwood cuttings would be used to stabilize banks and promote riparian revegetation as needed in areas that are devoid of riparian shrubs.

Location and Background

The Tex Creek WMA is a 34,269-acre reserve on the southern part of Ririe Reservoir. It was established to mitigate for the wildlife habitat lost when Ririe and Teton Reservoirs were constructed. Tex Creek WMA includes lands owned by Reclamation, IDFG, Bureau of Land Management, Idaho Department of Lands, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Tex Creek is managed by IDFG and provides important winter range habitat for elk and mule deer, as well as habitat for upland game birds.

In 2015, Reclamation and IDFG renewed a management agreement (#16-07-14-L0886) that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the two parties in relation to Reclamation-owned land in the Tex Creek WMA. The management agreement gives IDFG the authority and responsibility to manage habitat on Reclamation lands in the Tex Creek WMA.

The existing stream channels are mostly incised and disconnected from the flood plain (Figure 3). Beaver are currently present upstream of the project area. The structures being installed are intended to create a short-term benefit and encourage beavers to expand. The beaver activity would then increase the benefits and maintain the improved habitat long term.



Figure 3. A common view of a down-cut section of Tex Creek where the stream is disconnected from the flood plain.

Preliminary Alternative Development

The environmental assessment would include consideration of the Proposed Action Alternative and the No Action Alternative. Additionally, alternatives could be developed with the identified issues throughout the NEPA scoping process.

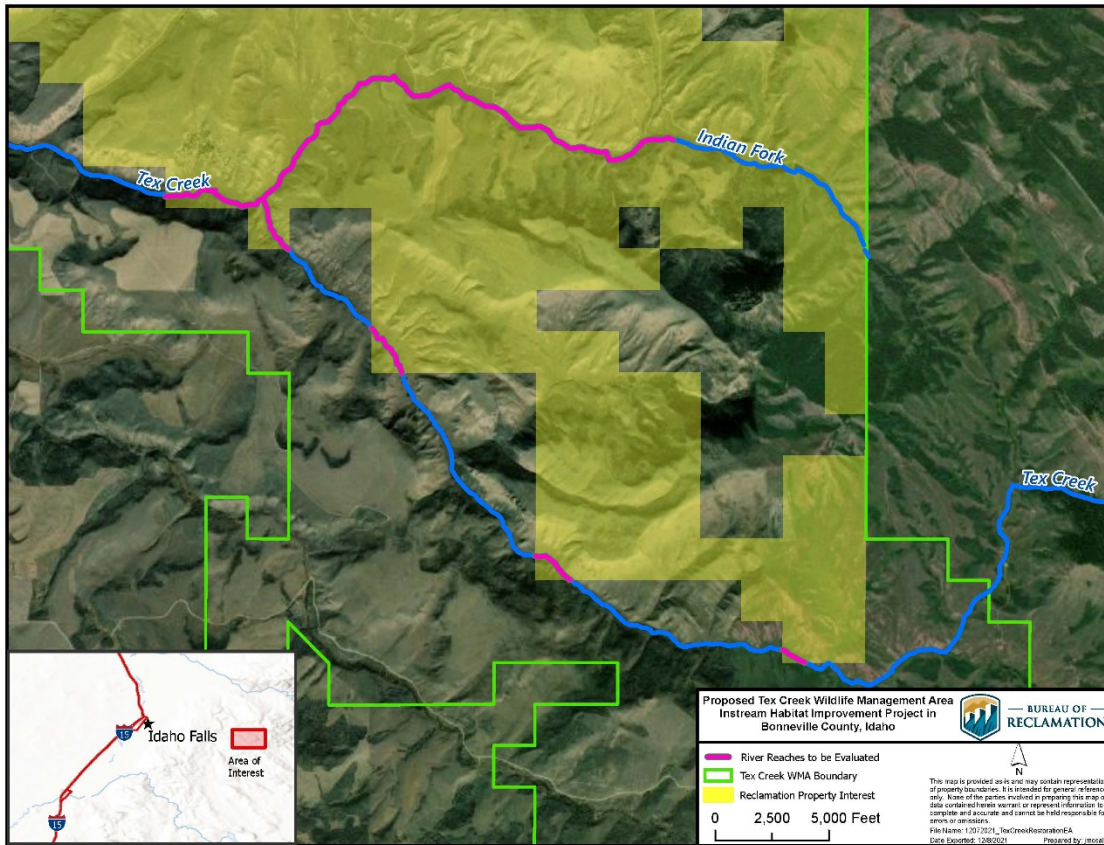


Figure 4. Project Location—Stream reaches where the project overlaps Reclamation land are highlighted in pink. Habitat structures would also be installed along other sections of Tex Creek within the Tex Creek Wildlife Management Area. Beaver already occur on the upper sections of Indian Fork.