WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I Grants

Fiscal Year 2023

Funding Opportunity Announcement No. BOR-DO-18-F005

Project Planning for Water Quality and Aquatic Resiliency in the Lower Clark Fork Watershed, MT

December 5, 2023

Proposal submission from the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group

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Technical Proposal and Evaluation Criteria

Executive Summary

Date: December 5, 2023

Applicant: Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group, Trout Creek, Sanders County, Montana

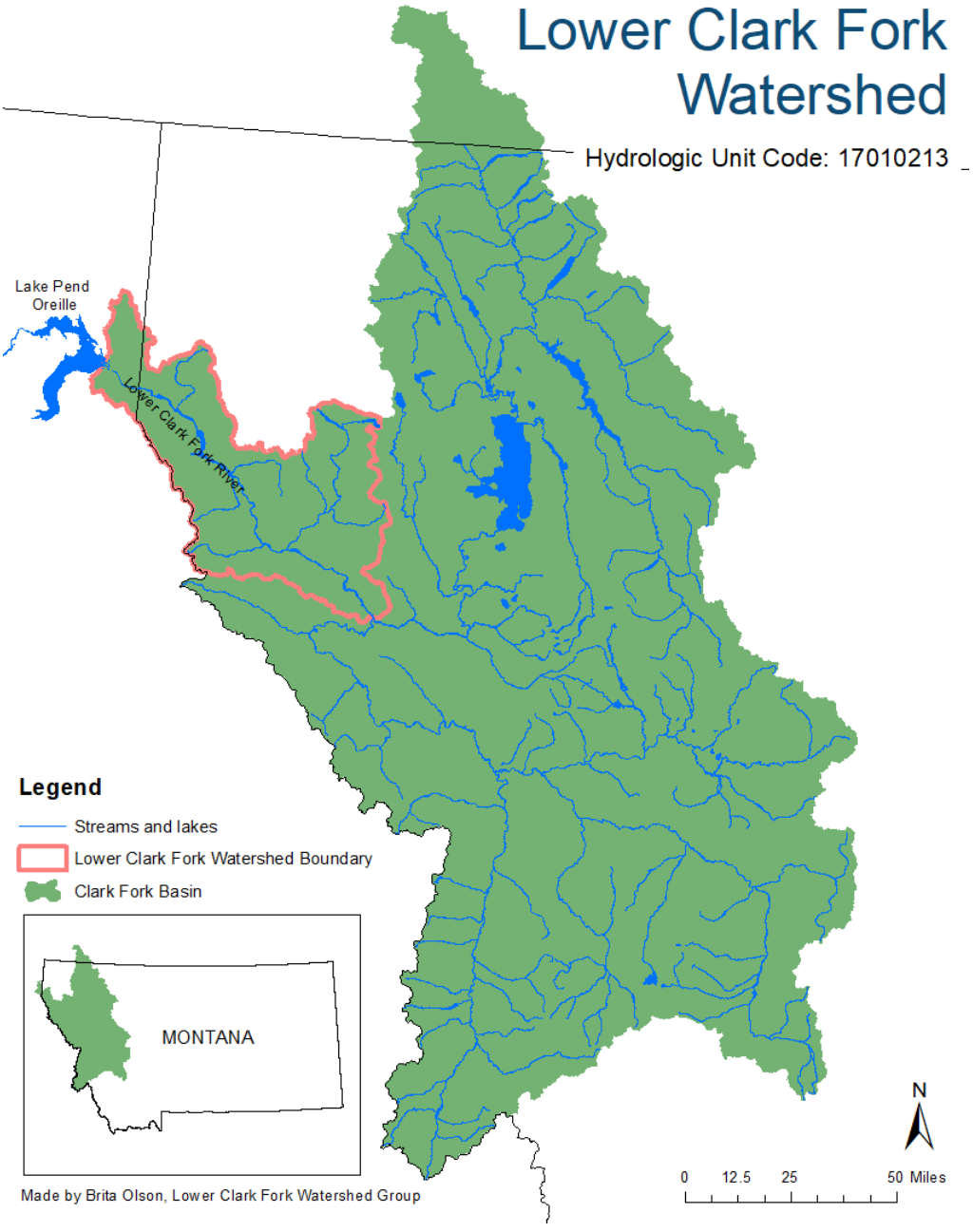
The Lower Clark Fork Watershed (LCF) of Western Montana sits at the headwaters of the Colombia Basin. It is a landscape typical of the West where large areas of forested, public land have great potential to support resilient aquatic ecosystems. However, the cumulative effects of decades of resource extraction, damming, infrastructure development and warming stream temperatures have had severe impacts on water quality and the continued persistence of Bull Trout (an ESA-threatened species) and Westslope Cutthroat Trout (Montana Species of Concern). The Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group (LCFWG) was formed in 2003 to carry out a coordinated and collaborative ecosystem approach to watershed management and restoration. This proposal will leverage previous watershed planning efforts and activities developed under a 2019-2021 Cooperative Watershed Management Program (CWMP) grant to (1) Develop "shovel ready" projects to address sediment, temperature, and fish passage issues in priority sub-watersheds and (2) Continue the development of a complex, stakeholder driven project to reduce road impacts to the Thompson River, a Bull Trout stronghold in the region. These projects were developed in coordination with two National Forests, state resource agencies, county government, private landowners, and hydropower providers Avista Corporation and Northwestern Energy. Many of the projects will occur on National Forest lands, though none will occur on a federal facility. Work under this proposal will take place between January 2025-December 2027.

Project Location

The Lower Clark Fork Watershed (Hydrologic Unit Code: 17010213) is the downstream-most portion of the Clark Fork Basin, composed of all the area (2,336 sq miles) draining into the Clark Fork River between its confluence with the Flathead River downstream to Lake Pend Oreille (see Map 1 below). The watershed is located on the Montana/Idaho border, the majority in Sanders County. A small area in the northern extent of the Thompson River sub-watershed falls in Lincoln and Flathead counties, and the most downstream extent falls in Bonner County, Idaho. Major tributaries include the Thompson River (drainage area: 634 sq miles), Vermilion River (drainage area: 106 sq miles), Bull River (drainage area: 142 sq miles) and Prospect Creek (drainage area: 180 sq miles).

The LCFWG actively works throughout much of the watershed. Map 1 shows the LCF watershed boundary. The areas where the LCFWG is active and the major land ownership and land management boundaries in the watershed are shown on Maps 2 and 3 in the Watershed Group Diversity and Geographic Scope section, on pages 13-14.

Map 1. *The Lower Clark Fork Watershed is the downstream-most portion of the Clark Fork Basin located on the Montana/Idaho border.*



Applicant Category

The LCFWG is an existing watershed group with the mission to facilitate collaboration among watershed stakeholders and to coordinate efforts to maintain, enhance and restore the ecological integrity of tributaries to the lower Clark Fork River. It was formed in 2003 to carry out a coordinated and collaborative ecosystem approach to watershed management and to maximize administrative, technical, and financial resources along the lower Clark Fork. The group was initially founded as an umbrella organization for eight watershed councils, composed of local landowners and interested residents, that formed in the mid-1990's. The LCFWG provides organizational and technical support to these individual watershed councils, while maintaining a basin-wide perspective to prioritize management and restoration efforts. Other key members include representatives from local, state, federal agencies, and corporations such as Avista (owner of the Noxon Rapids and Cabinet Gorge dams) and NorthWestern Energy (owner of the Thompson Falls Dam). LCFWG staff and projects are supported by a range of funders including federal, state and private, as well as hydropower corporations who provide funds as conditions of their hydropower licenses.

Biannual meetings of the LCFWG provide a venue for coordination, and as activity and enthusiasm from individual landowners and watershed council members waxes and wanes, the continued existence of the LCFWG has allowed for consistent momentum for 20 years. The group has sponsored watershed assessments for tributaries all along the river, including the Watershed Restoration Plan for the LCF Tributary TMDL Planning Area (2010), the Thompson River Watershed Restoration Plan (2018) and the Lower Clark Fork Tributary Watershed Restoration Plan (2019). LCFWG staff also develop, fundraise for, and coordinate, on-the-ground restoration projects.

For most of LCFWG's history, our work has been limited to tributaries downstream of Thompson Falls (LCF Tributary Watershed Restoration Planning Area; see Map 2, p. 13). This also aligns with Avista's Clark Fork Project Area in Montana. In 2016, the group's efforts expanded to the Thompson River drainage under a new partnership with NorthWestern Energy, owner of the Thompson Falls Dam (Thompson River Watershed Restoration Planning Area; Map 2). The Thompson River is another important stronghold for threatened native fish populations in the lower Clark Fork, and a priority for our state and federal agency partners. The LCFWG's shift into the Thompson River watershed coincided with the LCFWG's previous CWMP grant which supported finalization of the Thompson River Watershed Restoration Plan, along with development of three projects in the Thompson watershed. It also aligned with a new partnership with Trout Unlimited, a national organization who brought technical capacity, project management and fundraising skills to LCFWG's project development and implementation work.

In the last four years (i.e., 2020–2023), with major planning efforts complete, and new technical and funding partnerships in place, the LCFWG and TU have substantially increased the pace and scale of watershed restoration projects in the basin. Our work includes everything from

revegetation projects on private land impacted by reed canary grass, to multi-phase channel and floodplain restoration projects on Forest Service land, to coordinating the stakeholder engagement and design of a major infrastructure project to reduce road impacts to the Thompson River. CWMP funds were instrumental in catalyzing this growth in 2019-2021. This proposal builds on the success of this work, supporting subsequent planning and design efforts in our highest priority watersheds.

Eligibility of Applicant

The Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group is a 501(c)3 nonprofit, with a board of directors elected by consensus from its watershed group members. It is a grassroots organization formed to meet the needs of local landowners, watershed councils, resources managers, and corporations in stewarding fisheries and water resources. While the LCFWG partners with government agencies that have regulatory authority, these entities do not serve on the LCFWG board and the LCFWG works only in voluntary restoration. Whenever possible, the LCFWG strives to make decisions through consensus with the full engagement of all its membership.

Project Description

LCFWG and TU will use CWMP funds to develop and design water quality and aquatic habitat improvement projects in priority Lower Clark Fork tributaries, with a particular focus on the Thompson River and Prospect Creek. Nineteen priority tributaries were identified through comprehensive Watershed Restoration Planning efforts in 2018 and 2019, based on native fish occupancy, water quality and habitat concerns, and stakeholder engagement. Specific projects within those tributaries were identified through those same planning efforts or have emerged, through collaboration with partners, since planning documents were completed. CWMP funds will support LCFWG and TU staff, as well as contracted engineering and design work. All proposed work falls under Task C: Watershed Management Project Design, as outlined below in Tasks C1 and C2:

Task C1. Water Quality & Habitat Project Development & Design

Our goal for this task is to design at least five priority water quality and habitat projects, bringing them from concept to "shovel ready" for implementation by the LCFWG and partners. A list of potential projects – including road decommissioning, culvert improvements, mine reclamation and riparian revegetation – are described in “Sub-criterion No. B2. Project Benefits” below. If CWMP funds are awarded, LCFWG and TU will meet with project partners (a combination of state, federal and private stakeholders) to determine which of these projects can be best supported by CWMG funds and LCFWG/TU capacity within the three-year grant period.

Under this task, LCFWG and TU staff will provide technical assistance and project development capacity, coordinating site visits with partners, developing basic design concepts, and completing permit applications. LCFWG and TU staff have extensive experience in this role, with a history of successfully preparing projects to improve riparian vegetation cover, add large

wood to streams, improve in-stream habitat and improve infrastructure all while coordinating partners to ensure that all stakeholder needs are met. Where more technical designs are required (e.g. culvert replacement), LCFWG will also subcontract design and engineering services.

While our scope covers the 19 priority watersheds identified in recent planning efforts, we will focus on Prospect Creek and the Thompson River, two major tributaries where LCFWG and partners have invested heavily in projects and initial project planning and where Lolo National Forest has initiated or completed NEPA review for several projects. Similarly, LCFWG has a long history of engagement in the Bull River and Vermilion River watersheds, both crucial Bull Trout streams with restoration opportunities and the need for capacity support.

Figure 1 Wood being placed for habitat in Fishtrap Creek, a tributary to the Thompson River. Planning, design and permitting for this project was completed under a previous LCFWG-TU grant through the CWMP.

This task is modeled after the success of a similar task in 2019-2021 CWMP Phase I grant, which resulted in final design and permitting of five impactful, stakeholder-driven projects (Figure 1). BOR funds were essential to coordinating, planning, designing, and permitting projects, steps that are often difficult to fund but imperative to project implementation. With plans in hand, the LCFWG was able to apply for implementation funding from non-BOR sources and build all these projects within two years. This model of catalyzing numerous on-the-ground projects is the motivation for Task C1 in this proposal. There is no shortage of impactful project work to be done in the Lower Clark Fork, and CWMP funds will be instrumental in developing and eventually implementing the next round of meaningful restoration work.

Task C2. Lower Thompson Dual Road System - Project Planning, Design & Stakeholder Engagement

One major deliverable of the LCFWG's 2019-2021 CWMP Grant was a memo summarizing resource damage and restoration potential of a dual road system along the Thompson River (Figure 2). The Thompson River supports a migratory population of federally threatened Bull Trout, Western Pearlshell Mussels (federally listed species of concern) and Westslope Cutthroat Trout (Montana species of concern), making it a high priority for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), as well as state agencies. The most significant threat to the mainstem Thompson River is the road system, with two major roads running parallel to the river along most of its approximately 45-mile length (PPL Montana, 2013). For decades, consolidation of this redundant road system has been identified by regional agencies as an ambitious, but highly impactful project that would offer substantial benefits to the Thompson River, LCF River and

migratory Bull Trout (PPL Montana, 2013; USFWS, 2015). While several assessments, plans and alternatives have been developed by the Lolo National Forest (the major land manager in the area) over the years, each project has stalled or been abandoned. The memo developed by LCFWG and TU, supported by 2019-2021 CWMP funds, summarized previous efforts and pitfalls and provided an initial analysis of road consolidation alternatives to re-initiate the conversation among stakeholders.

Figure 2. Two roads parallel the Thompson River for most of its length, increasing sediment and temperature while limiting habitat complexity for native Bull Trout and Westslope Cutthroat Trout.

That memo catalyzed a series of stakeholder meetings in 2021-2023 to collect feedback on the draft alternatives from the major landowners, land manager and entities with road jurisdiction, as well as natural resource professionals. The response to the memo and its alternatives was overwhelmingly positive, with stakeholders from the Forest Service, county, state and private timber lands providing excellent suggestions and agreeing to pursue the next step of analysis. Motivated by the overall stakeholder support, Lolo National Forest proceeded to contract a private engineering firm to provide a basic feasibility assessment and cost analysis of these alternatives, which will be complete in May 2024.

Task C2 is, therefore, a direct outgrowth of our previous work and the ongoing participation of project stakeholders. Funds from this CWMP proposal would support the next level of planning and design, including ongoing stakeholder engagement, contracted engineering services to further develop alternatives, contracted resource specialist to assist in pre-NEPA planning, and staff support of LCFWG and TU to continue to coordinate this complex project.

Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criterion A—Watershed Group Diversity and Geographic Scope

Sub-criterion No. A1. Watershed Group Diversity

Watershed Group Diversity Stakeholders in the LCF watershed include residents, landowners, industry and land managers, as well as those who recreate, use, and value water resources along the lower Clark Fork River. Key stakeholders include:

- Public land managers: In a rural area where nearly 70% of the land is public (4,226 acres), local, state, and federal agency natural resource managers are a key component in watershed management. The Lolo National Forest manages approximately 36% of the

total watershed, while the Kootenai National Forest manages another approximately 31%. The Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC) also manages the Thompson River State Forest; while Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks maintains a total of ten state parks, fishing access sites, and wildlife management areas throughout the drainage.

● Hydropower: Hydropower production plays a significant role in the lower Clark Fork. Three dams are located along the mainstem Clark Fork, all of which have legal responsibilities to mitigate the impact of these dams on natural resources.

● Timber: In the Thompson River watershed, Green Diamond Resource Company (a major timber company) is one of the primary landowners, owning close to half of the land in the drainage. Other private timber lands are common throughout the LCF watershed.

● Agriculture: The primary agriculture activities in the drainage are primarily cattle ranching and hay production. In the Thompson River, multiple grazing allotments are managed by the Lolo National Forest and a cooperative between the Lolo National Forest, Weyerhaeuser, and DNRC that issue joint grazing licenses, which are managed by DNRC.

● Mining: Beyond small mining claims owned and maintained by individuals in the lower Clark Fork tributaries such as the Vermilion River and Prospect Creek, one large mining company, Hecla, owns multiple mining claims on the Kootenai National Forest and is actively trying to develop the Rock Creek and Montanore mines.

● Tribal partners: The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (Flathead Reservation) also borders the Thompson River drainage and the edge of the areas of the watershed were the LCFWG is active.

● Anglers: The Thompson River is a popular fly-fishing destination for anglers in Northwest Montana and North Idaho, and other tributaries of the Clark Fork River are also important to this stakeholder group.

● Private residents: Landowners (who largely reside in the valley along the Clark Fork River and its tributaries) play an important role in maintaining riparian health on a local level.

Formal LCFWG membership currently includes:

● Local Watershed Councils: Bull River, Elk Creek, Little, Beaver Creek, Pilgrim Creek, Prospect Creek, Rock Creek, Trout Creek, and Whitepine Creek Watershed Councils;

● Green Mountain Conservation District;

● Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP);

- Kootenai National Forest - Cabinet Ranger District;
- Lolo National Forest – Plains/Thompson Falls District;
- Natural Resources Conservation Service;
- Avista Corporation; and
- Northwestern Energy.

These members participate in regular meetings to discuss projects and provide direction and guidance to the work of the LCFWG. Decisions to engage in a project are based on the consensus of the stakeholder group and the availability of funding and other resources. Any requests for new memberships are decided upon by the group. The LCFWG is governed by a board of directors that sets policies and procedures and oversees the financial welfare of the organization. The board members are chosen to represent a cross-section of interests and perspectives within the watershed and are elected by consensus.

Beyond formal membership, the LCFWG welcomes all interested parties to attend bi-annual meetings and participate in watershed planning activities. Representatives from the following have all participated in watershed group meetings and activities:

- Sanders County (i.e. the county planner, a commission, etc.);
- Eastern Sanders County Conservation District;
- Montana Department of Environmental Quality;
- Montana Department of Natural Resources;
- Kaniksu Land Trust (local nonprofit);
- Clark Fork Coalition (a basin-wide nonprofit);
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana (a statewide nonprofit);
- Trout Unlimited (a national nonprofit);
- Bonneville Power Administration (which maintains a powerline corridor through the Prospect Creek drainage);
- Green Diamond Resource Company (private timber);
- Hecla (mining company who owns multiple claims in the watershed); and
- Interested landowners and residents (not necessarily involved in local watershed councils).

While the LCFWG is represented by diverse interests, much of the involvement and participation in the group has largely come from only those entities interested in and directly engaged in on-

the-ground watershed restoration, specifically agency staff. The LCFWG plays a crucial role in casting a wider net to engage a more diverse group reflective of all interests in the watershed, to develop/strengthen non-agency partnerships, and to increase collaboration with existing participants.

One key area where the LCFWG plans to improve stakeholder outreach with the support of this grant is through our work to reduce the impact of the Thompson River dual road system (Task C2). Success of this work will require engagement and buy-in from Lolo National Forest, Green Diamond Resource Company, Sanders County Road Department, Montana Department of Natural Resources (timber lands) and the general public. It is a complex, and potentially controversial project with major benefits to natural resources, public recreation, and long-term maintenance.

Outside of this grant proposal, the LCFWG will engage the public by:

- Developing website content (www.lowerclarkforkwatershedgroup.org), hosting informal and formal public outreach events to discuss work in the LCF watershed and other marketing materials (press releases, mailings, etc.) to inform public about the watershed, resources concerns, and planning and restoration activities;

- Seeking public engagement and involvement in the watershed restoration planning process; and

- Actively informing and pursuing additional involvement from other community groups, clubs, and collaboratives (such as the Sanders County Flycasters).

Additionally, this funding and the proposed activities will allow the LCFWG to continue strengthening a budding partnership with Trout Unlimited. Beyond the technical benefits that this partnership would bring to the watershed, Trout Unlimited also provides an avenue for increased coordination and collaboration with additional entities. For example, the LCFWG has had limited involvement with tribal partners, despite bordering the Flathead Reservation and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT). Trout Unlimited has a well-established relationship with CSKT and could foster a stronger relationship between the CSKT and LCFWG. Trout Unlimited also has longstanding relationships with the USFWS and can engage anglers through the local TU chapter membership.

Sub-criterion No. A2. Geographic Scope

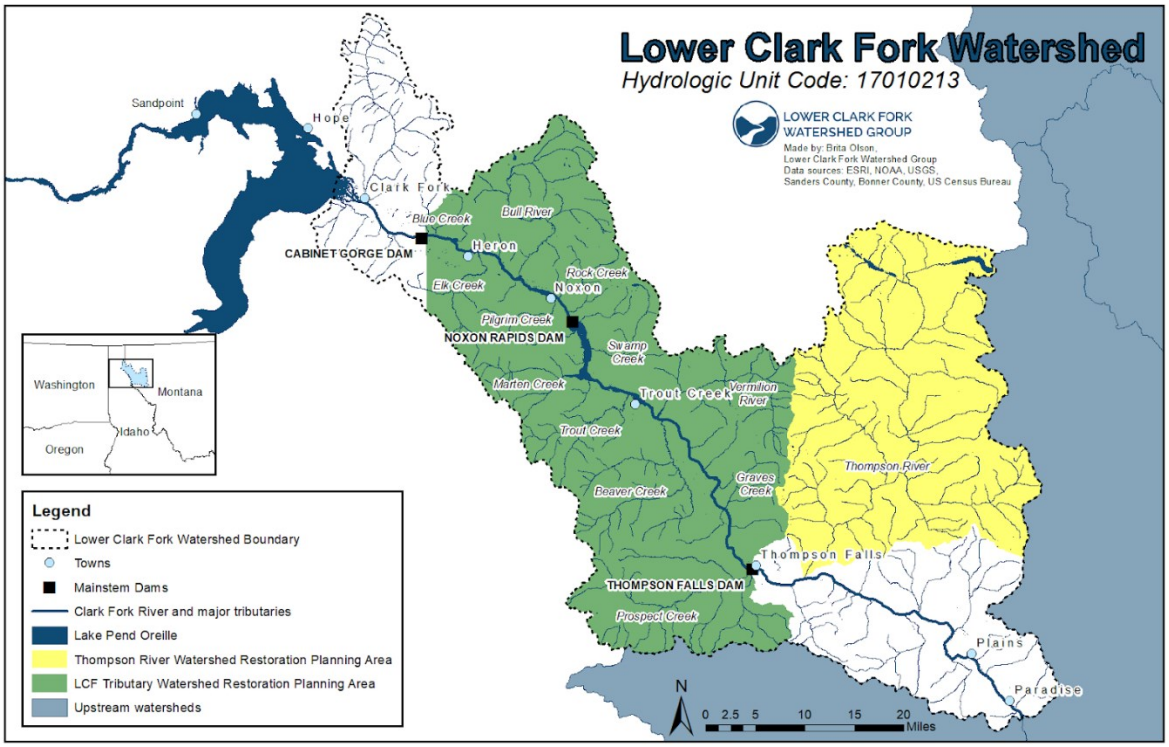
Tasks C1, C2 propose funding for technical assistance, stakeholder coordination and project planning/design to develop the highest priority projects identified in previous planning efforts and through stakeholder collaboration. Additional project development will occur in the lower watershed including the Bull and Vermilion rivers.

LCFWG projects generally occur on tributaries to the mainstem river (generally 12-digit HUC's with 150-600 sq mile drainage areas, labeled in both Maps 2 and 3) and are sources of both ecological resilience and impairment for the broader watershed. These rivers and streams

provide essential spawning/rearing habitat for threatened aquatic species, natural storage to support late-season flows downstream, and natural filtration to improve the quality of water for use by humans and wildlife. Yet, with the exception of Blue Creek and Trout Creek, all labeled tributaries to the lower Clark Fork shown on Maps 2 and 3, are not fully supporting the aquatic life beneficial use and have been identified by Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) as the major sources of impairments in the watershed (DEQ 2016). Sediment loading from road systems, timber harvest and agriculture is the primary impairment in the LCF, with negative impacts to fish, aquatic organisms, and human infrastructure (DEQ 2014; DEQ 2016; USFWS 2015). Metal loads from historic mining (lead and arsenic) also exceed state standards in some tributaries, with impacts to fish, aquatic organisms and drinking water sources (DEQ 2009). These pollutants are carried downstream and have impacts throughout the watershed. LCF's work in watershed since 2003 has attracted members and stakeholder engagement from across the full geographic scope, all of whom are interested in addressing these concerns to improve the ecological health of the watershed. The diversity of membership helps us make sure we are inclusive of all stakeholders while having the largest impact in the most important tributaries to the LCF.

Similarly, habitat fragmentation for threatened fish is a basin-wide problem with point-based solutions. The migratory life history of these species relies on contiguous habitat for varying needs (e.g. forage, overwintering, spawning). Bull Trout residing in Lake Pend Oreille are known to travel over 100 miles to spawn in the upper tributaries of the Thompson, Bull, and Vermilion rivers and with assisted transport around hydropower dams. Targeted restoration of a degraded tributary habitat can reconnect isolated populations and provide habitat for reproduction and population recovery. By strategically addressing the highest priority causes of impairment, and opportunities for recovery in tributary streams, we reduce negative impacts and improve ecological resiliency throughout the broader watershed.

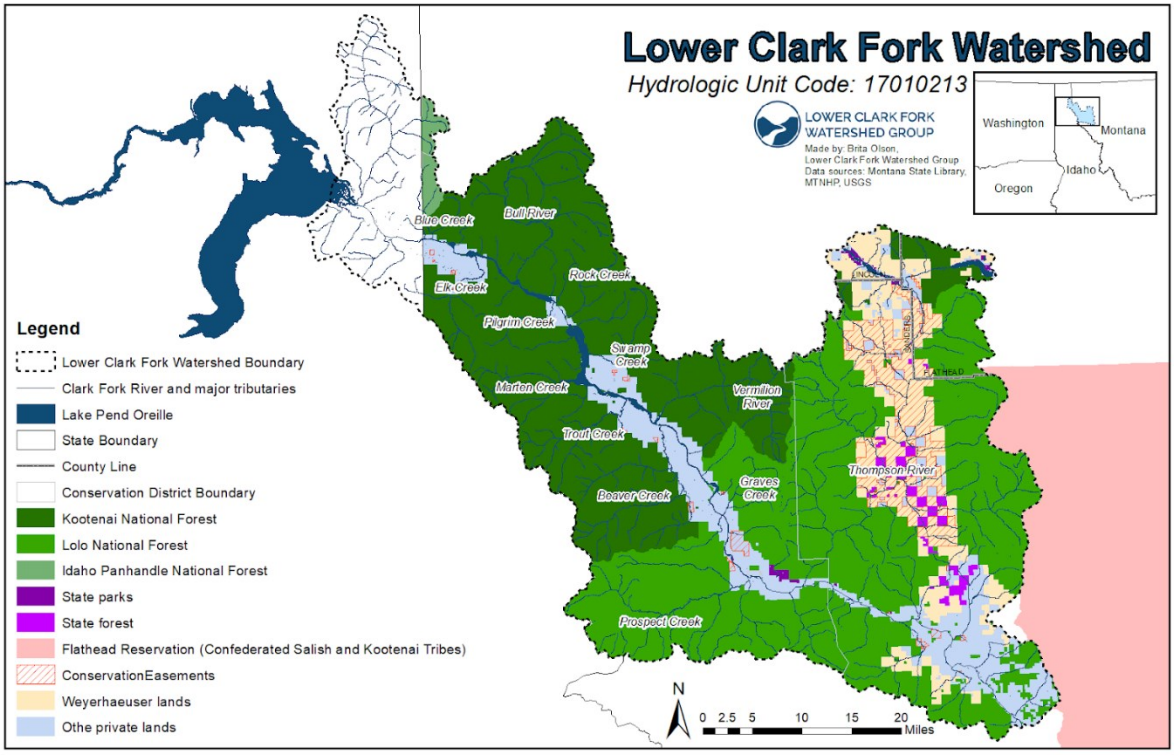
Map 2. *The LCFWG is active and has led planning and project prioritization efforts in approximately 75% of the Lower Clark Fork Watershed, highlighted in green and yellow.*



Many of our key stakeholders are largely present throughout the watershed, with the exception of geographically-based land managers (such as distinct U.S. Forest Service boundaries and state forest lands) and hydropower providers. NorthWestern Energy's project area for the protection, mitigation, and enhancement of Bull Trout impacted by the Thompson Falls Dam is upstream of the dam, with an emphasis on the Thompson River. Avista's project area includes the entire watershed below the Thompson Falls dam. Therefore, Avista will likely not be involved in the stakeholder discussions surrounding the Thompson River, while NorthWestern Energy will be very involved. Map 3, below, shows land management boundaries and ownerships. The individual watershed groups that are members of the LCFWG also operate in their own watersheds, insofar as they are active.

Stakeholder outreach and recruitment will vary depending on the project area. For instance, Thompson River landowners, fly fishing enthusiasts, and members of neighboring communities will be the target of outreach for the Thompson River collaborative discussions under Task C2. Under Task C1, the target audience will depend on the specific sub-watershed where the proposed project is located.

Map 3. *Major land ownership and land management boundaries in the Lower Clark Fork Watershed.*



Evaluation Criterion B— Developing Strategies to Address Critical Watershed Needs

Sub-criterion No. B1. Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

The Lower Clark Fork faces three primary aquatic resource concerns, outlined below. These concerns were identified through planning efforts and assessments by several agencies including USFWS, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the USFS, DEQ and FWP. The WRPs written for the LCF basin are the culmination of these efforts, aimed at addressing critical watershed needs through restoration. CWMP grant funds will be used to develop the restoration opportunities listed with each resource concern:

1. Water Quality

- *Resource Concern:* The mainstem LCF and many of its tributaries exceed Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for one or many impairments, as defined by the Clean Water Act. Sediment is the most prevalent impairment, caused by dense road networks, streambank erosion, mining, agriculture and timber harvests. Excess sediment has degraded aquatic habitat and poses a threat to infrastructure (dams, irrigation diversions). TMDL exceedance for metals (antimony, lead and arsenic) have been documented in the Prospect Creek drainage, a major tributary to the LCF, due to historic mining (DEQ, 2009). These heavy metals pose a threat to aquatic life and drinking water

supplies. Finally, temperature TMDL exceedance in the basin occurs primarily due to road/utility corridor encroachment on streams, limiting riparian shading.

2. *Federal and State listed Native Fish*
   - *Resource Concern:* The LCF and its tributaries are home to Bull Trout (federally threatened) and Westslope Cutthroat Trout (State of Montana species of concern). While select portions of this watershed maintain healthy populations of these species, they are overwhelmingly in decline due to limited habitat connectivity and habitat degradation. This presents a prime opportunity for conservation and restoration in the LCF, bolstering these present but threatened populations. Migratory Bull Trout populations have been supported by active non-native fish suppression in Lake Pend Oreille and trapping and transporting around dams. These efforts have both yielded positive responses from Bull Trout (K. Aceituno, personal communication). However, spawning and rearing habitat, essential to reproduction and long-term species survival, is severely limited due to sediment and temperature impairments in headwater streams (PPL Montana, 2013; USFWS, 2015). Road systems deliver excess sediment to streams burying spawning gravels and limiting reproduction. These same roads also reduce riparian shading and LWD recruitment, degrading habitat. Dam operators and agencies are already working together to limit dam impacts to native fish (trapping and transporting trout around dams and population and genetic monitoring to evaluate dam impacts to fisheries), and, often in partnership with the LCFWG, also engage in offsite mitigation, such as tributary habitat restoration to further bolster impacted fish populations. Our proposed activities for this grant focus on the latter activity – restoring and enhancing trout spawning habitat to support existing populations. Our work will target key stream reaches that have been identified by USFWS, FWP and others to maximize connectivity between isolated habitats for viable populations.

3. *Declining Ecological Resiliency*
   - *Resource Concern*: Existing impairments, combined with regional population growth, and more variable climate conditions have a compounding effect on our water resources. There are 14 direct tributaries to the lower Clark Fork River that are impaired, according to Montana DEQ, and state and federal agencies have documented a decline in threatened Bull Trout and State-listed Westslope Cutthroat Trout. Human influence on stream channel form (confinement, straightening, vegetation removal, etc.), limits a stream's ability to self-regulate. For example, straightening a channel will generally coarsen the streambed (through increased sediment transport), limit habitat complexity and encourage downcutting. Once on this trajectory, healthy stream processes of sediment sorting, and overbank flooding often cannot be re-established without further human intervention. The ecological impacts of these changes are also cascading, increased temperature and loss of spawning gravels limit trout reproduction, with severe impact to the local food web. Downcutting lowers the water table, drying floodplain wetland habitat and reducing natural water storage to support late-season flows. A healthy channel form and riparian area is the foundation of stream ecological resiliency and is the focus of our restoration work.

Sub-criterion No. B2. Project Benefits

The proposed activities will directly address water quality and habitat impairments identified in previous, comprehensive watershed planning efforts. The impacts to watershed issues and expected benefits of each task are outlined below.

Task C1. Water Quality & Habitat Project Development & Design

Impacts to Critical Watershed Issues

This task will develop five or more projects to address water quality and aquatic habitat for native fish and aquatic ecosystems. Projects will focus on reducing sediment loads and stream temperatures, increasing riparian cover, and improving fish passage. Together, these efforts all aim to increase the overall resiliency of aquatic systems.

Expected Benefits

Project benefits will depend on the specific projects selected to pursue (see list of potential projects in the following section). Projects such as roach decommissioning and road relocation will reduce sediment inputs to streams and improve wood and food recruitment for instream habitat. Riparian revegetation projects will provide shade, reducing water temperatures, and improve root structure on streambanks, reducing sediment inputs. Additionally, several projects aim to improve native fish populations by selectively opening fish passage to support fish migration where migratory life histories have been limited.

Stakeholders Benefiting

The stakeholders benefiting will depend on the specific projects selected to pursue. Partners like Lolo National Forest and FWP were instrumental in identifying the majority of our proposed projects but rely on the capacity of outside groups like LCFWG and TU to plan and execute work to meet their agency goals. Area utilities (Avista Corporation and NorthWestern Energy) benefit by cooperative projects that enhance tributary habitat identified as conditions for their respective hydro-electric project licenses. Private landowners benefit from outside council on how to manage their stream resource, with accommodation for their needs. Anglers and tribal partners benefit from improved fish abundance and fish health. Additionally, because the LCFWG represents the interests of a broad range of stakeholders, as outlined in the Watershed Group Diversity section, connections with local stakeholders will be emphasized. While these entities may not be direct beneficiaries of the proposed projects, our approach is mindful of their interests and involvement in the watershed.

Task C2. Lower Thompson Dual Road System - Project Planning, Design & Stakeholder Engagement

Impacts to Critical Watershed Issues

This task will address the most immediate watershed health issue in the mainstem Thompson River, the dual road system. If implemented, this project will improve water quality habitat for native fish, including Bull Trout and Westslope Cutthroat Trout.

Expected Benefits
Reduction of the dual road system along the Thompson River, through consolidation and/or realignment, will have several major benefits: 1) Reduction of sediment by reducing the length of stream-adjacent road and creating riparian buffers to trap sediment before it enters the stream; 2) Reduction of river temperatures by encouraging riparian vegetation where roads are pulled away from the river margin; 3) Improved native fish habitat through increased wood recruitment to the stream (riparian vegetation regrowth will eventually create in-stream wood as naturally trees die), improved macroinvertebrate populations that are the basis of native fish diets, and the improved water quality described above.

Stakeholders Benefiting
Natural resource stakeholders benefitting include resource agencies (Lolo National Forest, FWP, USFWS), anglers, and advocates for healthy fisheries and clean water.

This project could also greatly reduce road maintenance costs, benefiting members of Sanders County and the Sanders County Road Department.

Recreational benefits may include improved fishing, camping and ORV access, benefiting a wide range of stakeholders.

Projects proposed for activities under Task C: Watershed Management Project Design

LCFWG and TU will use CWMP funds to develop and design water quality and aquatic habitat projects in priority Lower Clark Fork tributaries. CWMP funds will support LCFWG and TU staff, as well as contracted engineering and design work.

Task C1. Water Quality & Habitat Project Development & Design
Our goal for this task will be to pursue at least five of the projects listed below to bring them from concept to "shovel ready" for implementation by the LCFWG and partners. Under this task, LCFWG and TU staff will provide technical assistance, coordination, permitting and fundraising capacity. LCFWG will also subcontract design, engineering and pre-NEPA services. An initial list of potential projects is outlined below to demonstrate the type of work proposed. If CWMP funds are awarded, LCFWG and TU will meet with project partners to determine which of the projects below can be best supported by CWMG funds and LCFWG/TU capacity within the grant period.

Prospect Creek

- **Cherry Creek Road Decommissioning** - Support Lolo National Forest with restoration planning and design to decommission a portion of stream-adjacent road, restore stream crossings while improving an ORV loop route. Benefits to water quality (sediment reduction) for Westslope Cutthroat Trout.

- **Crow Creek Passage Improvement Project** - Assess options to restore streamflow and fish passage connectivity in an area with excessive woody debris due to powerline maintenance. Benefits to Bull Trout passage and habitat quality.
- **Upper Prospect Culvert Improvement** - Work with Department of Transportation, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and Lolo National Forest to design a project to improve fish passage through an existing culvert (install baffles). Benefits to Bull Trout passage.
- **Dry Creek Fish Barrier –** Work with Lolo National Forest and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to plan and design a fish barrier, as part of a major road improvement project, to protect native trout from non-native competition.
- **Clear Creek Water Quality and Habitat** - Work with Lolo National Forest and MFWP to develop and design a project to reduce sediment through road realignment and stream restoration in the Clear Creek drainage.
- **Cox Gulch Restoration -** Work with Lolo National Forest to develop culvert and stream restoration design in a drainage impacted by historic mining and roads, with benefits to genetically pure Westslope Cutthroat trout and water quality.

Upper Thompson and Thompson Tributaries

- **Little Thompson Riparian Revegetation** - Assess grazing allotments in Little Thompson for riparian fencing and restoration opportunities. Identify and develop projects across land ownerships (Green diamond, USFS, DNRC). Benefits include sediment and stream temperature reductions.
- **Upper Thompson Riparian Revegetation** - Identify and develop projects to improve riparian habitat in the Upper Thompson, particularly in areas dominated by reed canary grass. Benefits include sediment and stream temperature reductions.

Other Priority Lower Clark Fork Priority Tributaries

The LCFWG will also pursue project development as opportunities arise within our other nineteen priority watersheds. For example:

- **Bull River:** Continue expanding efforts to increase native tree and shrub diversity and reduce densities of reed canary grass on private land. The LCFWG has completed over 50 acres of riparian planting over the last 15 years. Benefits include increased shade, cover and bank stability.

Figure 3. The LCFWG has reduced invasive reed canary grass cover and established native trees and shrubs on 12 private landownerships on the Bull River. CWMP funds would support planning on additional Bull River lands, as well as expanding the program to the Thompson River watershed.

- **Vermilion River:** Continue LCFWG involvement in Vermilion River restoration, including stakeholder coordination, fundraising and implementation planning. Benefits include improved water quality, instream habitat and riparian habitat along 1.5 miles of river. To date, major stream channel and floodplain restoration restorations efforts conducted by the Kootenai National Forest in cooperation with many stakeholders notably MFWP, Avista, NRCS and others, have addressed sediment sources and areas of channel instability in this critical Bull Trout drainage.

Task C2. Lower Thompson Dual Road System - Project Planning, Design & Stakeholder Engagement

Task C2 will support the next level of planning, design and stakeholder outreach for the Thompson Dual Road System Consolidation including:

- Stakeholder engagement (e.g. land managers, landowners, natural resource specialists) to review the feasibility and cost analyses and make revisions. Revised alternatives will feed into 30-50% alternative design.
- Contracted engineering services to further develop alternatives (30-50% design minimum, up to 75% design expected).

- Contracted GIS and resource specialists to assess resource benefits and costs of alternatives. Results will feed into future alterative selection and pre-NEPA analysis.
- LCFWG and TU staff capacity to coordinate project development.
- LCFWG and TU staff capacity to coordinate stakeholder outreach and engagement.

Benefits to this project, once completed, include substantial reductions of sediment and stream temperature and improved instream habitat for Bull Trout, Westslope Cutthroat Trout and numerous other aquatic species. Immediate benefits of this three-year planning and design effort include a coordinated, stakeholder-driven plan for road reduction along the Thompson River, with up to75% design and pre-NEPA resource documentation. Together, these deliverables will form the basis for a formal NEPA process led by Lolo National Forest.

Evaluation Criterion C—Readiness to Proceed

The LCFWG has reviewed the program requirements and can comply with all requisite timeframes and reporting, as demonstrated in our previous CWMP grant. Our budget request has been split between the three funding years, as required, and can be completed within the three-year timeframe (see schedule below). The LCFWG has experience managing large grants and has allocated funds within these budgets for grant oversight and reporting. The attached letters of support also indicate the willingness of stakeholders to support our efforts and their confidence that our proposed activities are feasible.

C1. **Water Quality & Habitat Project Development & Design** (January 2025-December 2027)

Task	**Milestones**
Develop Year 1 water quality and habitat projects	- Meet with LCF stakeholders to review list of potential projects, discuss engineering and coordination needs, select projects. (LCFWG/TU, Jan-March 2025) - Contract engineering services as needed. (LCFWG/TU March – Sept 2025) - Coordinate site visits with partners. (LCFWG/TU March-Sept 2025)
Develop Year 2 water quality and habitat projects	- Meet with LCF stakeholders to review list of potential projects, discuss engineering and coordination needs, select projects. (LCFWG/TU, Jan-March 2026) - Contract engineering services as needed. (LCFWG/TU March – Sept 2026) - Coordinate site visits with partners. (LCFWG/TU March-Sept 2026) - Assess engineering deliverables from Year 1 &2 contracts, as applicable. (LCFWG/TU Jan-Dec 2026)

	- Develop permit and funding applications for Year 1 & 2 projects, as applicable. (LCFWG/TU Jan-Dec 2026)
Develop Year 3 water quality and habitat projects	- Meet with LCF stakeholders to review list of potential projects, discuss engineering and coordination needs, select projects. (LCFWG/TU, Jan-March 2027) - Contract engineering services as needed. (LCFWG/TU March – Sept 2027) - Coordinate site visits with partners. (LCFWG/TU March-Sept 2027) - Assess engineering deliverables from Year 1, 2 & 3 contracts, as applicable. (LCFWG/TU Jan-Dec 2027) - Develop permit and funding applications for Year 1, 2 & 3 projects, as applicable. (LCFWG/TU Jan-Dec 2027)

C2. Lower Thompson Dual Road System - Project Planning, Design & Stakeholder Engagement (January 2025-December 2027)

Task	**Milestones**
Stakeholder Coordination	- Meet with Thompson Stakeholders to review feasibility study and cost estimates. (LCFWG/TU, Jan-March 2025)
Contract Engineering & Pre-NEPA Services	- Develop and release Request for Qualifications for Engineering and Pre-NEPA analysis. (LCFWG/TU, Jan-March 2025) - Review responses, select contractor(s) and develop scope of work and contract. (LCFWG/TU, Jan-June 2025)
Design and Pre-NEPA Contract implementation	- Oversee with Engineer and Pre-NEPA contractors throughout development of deliverables. (LCFWG/TU, June 2025-Dec 2027) - Coordinate stakeholder meetings to review and iteratively provide feedback to contractors throughout design process. (LCFWG/TU, Jan-June 2025-Dec 2027)

Evaluation Criterion D—Presidential and Department of the Interior Priorities

Climate Change

The LCFWG and TU actively seek to mitigate climate change impacts to watersheds through restoration. We do this in several ways.

- Building aquatic ecosystem resiliency: Our projects aim to reduce or remove stressors to aquatic ecosystems. While some stressors like warming water or changing hydrographs are difficult to address directly, we know that it is the cumulative impact of climate stressors, along with non-point source pollution and connectivity barriers, that truly imperils species. By removing immediate, local stressors, we build resiliency into our watershed ecosystems.
- Project prioritization: Our projects are prioritized based on a number of factors, including sensitivity to climate change. Our tactic is to work in places where cold-water species - those most sensitive to warming water and changing hydrographs associated with climate change – are likely to survive, but where other factors such as pollution are limiting their potential.

Benefits to Disadvantaged, Underserved, and Tribal Communities

Sanders County is described as disadvantaged in the White House Council on Environmental Quality's interactive Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool based on:

- Low income
- PM2.5 in the air (air quality)
- Heart disease
- Legacy pollution from abandoned mines

The most tangible benefit of our work to address these challenges is in the creation of economic opportunities. Sanders County was, and still is to a lesser extent, a timber community. As timber harvest has decreased, so have economic opportunities. LCFWG and TU intentionally hire local contractors whenever possible, building a local economy based on ecological restoration. The five projects planned under the CWMP 2019-2021 award resulted in over $200,000 in contracts across five small businesses once they went to construction. These contractors have since been hired for additional project work, growing their resumes in stream and habitat restoration. We expect similar outcomes for this proposal.

Less direct, but equally relevant, is the increasing recreation and tourism economy in the Lower Clark Fork which hinges on clean water and healthy fisheries, both goals of this proposal.

Tribal Benefits

The Lower Clark Fork forms the ancestral lands of several tribes, with tribal interests today primarily represented today by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe (CSKT) whose reservation land is just east of the Lower Clark Fork. The Hellgate Treaty of 1885 endowed Tribes with off-reservation hunting and fishing rights in across their historic territory, which includes the Lower Clark Fork (Séliš u Qlì spé Culture Committee 2019). The CSKT has an ongoing interest in efforts to restore the Lower Clark Fork fishery to sustain the resource for continued exercise of off-reservation fishing. In addition, as part of the water compact with the State of Montana and the Federal government, the CSKT holds instream flow rights in the Clark Fork River. Restoring fish passage in the Clark Fork will add ecological value to the CSKT instream

water rights. As such, CSKT Tribal staff have been involved in meetings related to projects and serve on funding panels that are likely to provide match funding to these projects.

The proposed project does not support a Reclamation Activity with a tribe.

Project Budget

Total Project Budget

The total proposed project costs are $299,158. Because non-federal match is not required under the CWMP Phase I grant, no match is officially proposed. That said, LCFWG and TU regularly secure federal and non-federal match for our work. Notably, NorthWestern Energy and Avista Corporation provide reliable, non-federal funds for watershed restoration and coordination projects as part of their mitigation responsibilities associated with owning dams in the mainstem Clark Fork River. Table 1, below, lists common non-federal funders for LCFWG. While no monetary value is committed, we anticipate at least $150,000 in planning and coordination funds from non-federal sources over the 3-year grant period.

Table 1. Non-federal and CWMG Program funding sources over 3-year grant period

FUNDING SOURCES	**AMOUNT**
Non-Federal Entities commonly supporting LCFWG	$0
1. NorthWestern Energy	
2. Avista Corporation	
3. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	
4. Private	
Non-Federal Subtotal	$0
REQUESTED RECLAMATION FUNDING	
CWMP Phase I Grant Request	$299,158

Budget Detail and Budget Narrative

Please see the *Budget Detail and Narrative* spreadsheet and attachments, submitted with this application.

Compliance, Permits, Disclosures and Attachments

Environmental and Cultural Resources Compliance

The proposed planning activities are exempt from compliance as they do not involve any on-the-ground activities that could impact natural or cultural resources.

Required Permits or Approvals

No permits or approvals are required for the proposed activities.

Overlap or Duplication of Effort Statement

The LCFWG has not submitted any proposals that duplicate efforts proposed in this application. We currently have several proposals for work in 2024 that will lay the groundwork for the activities presented in this application.

Conflict of Interest and Lobbying Disclosure Statement

No conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest exist. In addition, the LCFWG does not engage in lobbying.

Uniform Audit Reporting Statement

A single audit report was not required to be filed in 2023.

Letters of Support

Please see attached appendix containing the following Letters of Support submitted by these project partners and supporters:

- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Lolo National Forest
- Kootenai National Forest
- NorthWestern Energy
- Avista Corporation

Official Resolution

See attached.

References

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DEQ - Montana Department of Environmental Quality (2010) Lower Clark Fork Tributaries sediment TMDLs and Framework for Water Quality Restoration

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Kreiner, R., and M., Terrazas. In Prep. Thompson River Fisheries Investigations: A Compilation Through 2017. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Thompson Falls, MT.

Miller (2010) Watershed Restoration Plan for Lower Clark Fork Tributary TMDL Planning Area. Doc. No. 2010-0453, Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group

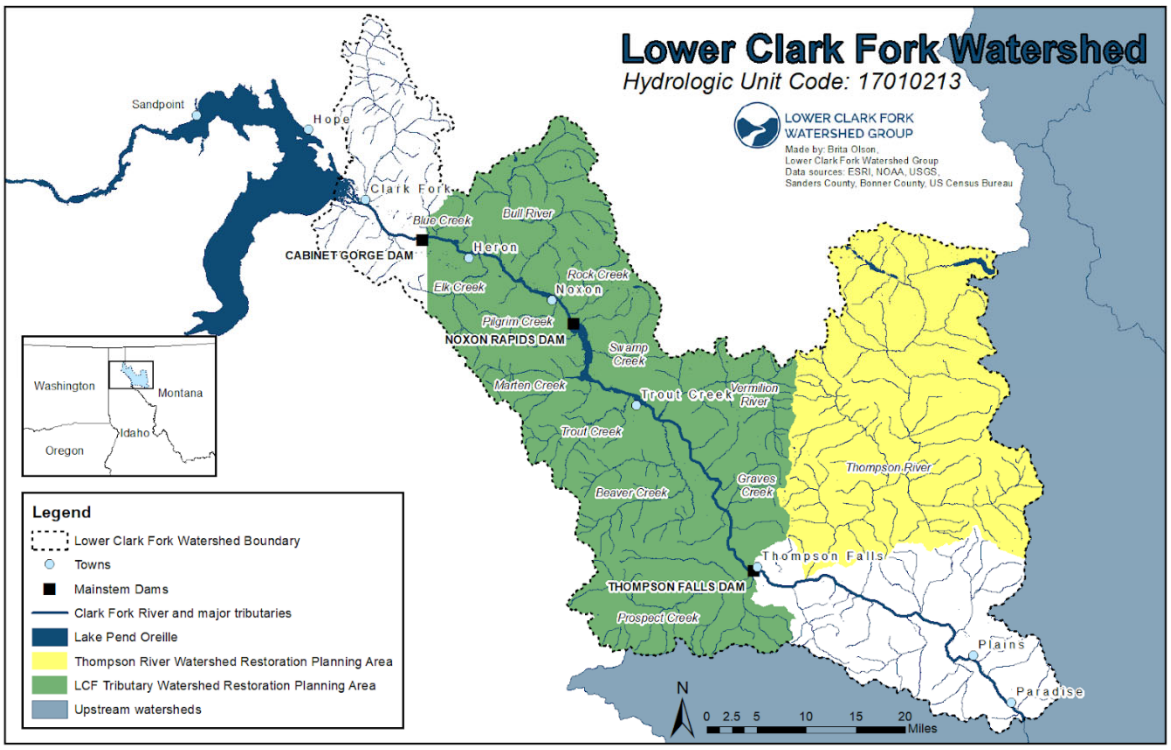
MTNHP -Montana Natural Heritage Program (2018) Environmental Summary Report for Latitude 47.27471 to 48.37917 and Longitude -114.77197 to -115.98167. Retrieved on 1/23/2018.

PPL Montana (2013) Thompson River Bull Trout Enhancement and Recovery Plan

Séliš u Qlị spé Culture Committee. 2019. Ncq ʷelṡ tétkʷ : Flint-stuck-in-the-ground waters. The Upper Clark Fork River and the Séliš & Qlị spé People. Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Archived at: https://plateauportal.libraries.wsu.edu/

USDA - US Department of Agriculture, US Forest Service (2013) Conservation Strategy for Bull Trout on USFS lands in Western Montana

USFWS - US Fish and Wildlife Service (2015) Columbia Headwaters Recovery Unit Implementation Plan for Bull Trout. Montana Ecological services office, Northern Idaho field office, Eastern Washington Field office



Map of the Lower Clark Fork Watershed (Hydrologic Code: 17010213) in reference to the inland Northwest. This map shows the affected towns, counties and states through this project.

LOWER CLARK FORK
WATERSHED GROUP

BOARD RESOLUTION

At the meeting of the Board of Directors of the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group (LCFWG) on November 15, 2023, the following resolution was proposed and approved by the board:

WHEREAS the mission of the LCFWG is facilitate collaboration among watershed stakeholders and to coordinate efforts to maintain, enhance and restore the ecological integrity of tributaries to the lower Clark Fork River;

WHEREAS the proposed activities in the prepared application supports the mission of the LCFWG;

WHEREAS the Board of the LCFWG have reviewed the above-mentioned application;

WHEREAS the LCFWG has the staff capacity and broad support from its members and partners to carry-out the direct and indirect tasks proposed in this application;

Be it resolved:

(1) That the LCFWG Board is in full support of the funding application, entitled "Project Planning for Water Quality and Aquatic Resiliency in the Lower Clark Fork Watershed, MT", to the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I Grants for Fiscal Year 2023, a program of the Bureau of Reclamation;

(2) That LCFWG Coordinator Sarah Busmire is authorized to submit this application (via www.grants.gov) on behalf of the LCFWG; and

(3) That LCFWG board and staff will work with the Bureau of Reclamation to meet all established deadlines for entering into a grant or cooperative agreement and necessary for the completion of proposed activities.

Signed:

Sean Moran
LCFWG Board President

Region One
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 752-5501
REF # LA19-23
October 17, 2023

Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group-Trout Unlimited
PO Box 1356
Trout Creek, MT 59874

RE: Letter of support for Cooperative Watershed Management Program Grant Application from the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group and Trout Unlimited

To the Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant review committee,

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) would like to express our support to the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group's (LCFWG) application for the Bureau of Reclamation's Cooperative Watershed Management Program (CWMP). The fund would help with the development of stream restoration and fisheries enhancement projects in tributaries to the lower Clark Fork River, Montana.

The LCFWG has been a key partner of with FWP in implementing stream restoration projects in lower Clark Fork River tributaries since 2004, and we anticipate continued success in improving fisheries habitat because of our partnership over the coming years. We recognize the value of stakeholder coordination in the development of collaborative stream restoration and habitat enhancement projects in the Lower Clark Fork drainage and have historically supported LCFWG's habitat projects in the Thompson River drainage where they have been developing stakeholder relations and a Watershed Restoration Plan since 2016.

As state and federal funding fluctuates, the ability of the LCFWG to attract diverse resources and partners to our area is a crucial component to advance watershed restoration efforts and ultimately on-the-ground projects that benefit Montana's fish and wildlife resources. One limiting factor we have observed in the recent past is access to technical skills and experience in restoration design and engineering. Federal partners (Forest Hydrologists) are often stretched to capacity and outside consultants are expensive. In recent years we have worked with Trout Unlimited (TU) to carry out cost effective native fish focused restoration projects in including Graves Creek large woody debris addition, Fishtrap Creek road realignment and habitat enhancement and Prosect Creek large woody debris addition. The planning of these projects relied on a 2019-2021 CWMP grant that was awarded to the LCFWG and TU.

Partnership with the LCFWG and TU resulting from this funding opportunity would improve the ability to design and implement successful projects for the benefit of native fish and recreational fisheries. We have several potential projects in the Thompson River and Prospect Creek drainages that we hope to implement with partners in the coming years. These projects, including barrier construction to protect native fish from non-native colonization, improved fish passage at road crossings, streamside road realignment or decommissioning and riparian habitat improvements would help address many habitat issues that threaten native and recreational salmonid populations and are consistent with the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks 2023-2026 statewide fisheries management plan.

The LCFWG and TU have a proven track record of planning well-conceived projects, working with area partners, and successful completion of stream restoration projects. We are excited to see the LCFWG and TU transfer the momentum from watershed restoration planning toward design and implementation of aquatic habitat projects. Once again, FWP supports the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group's application for the Bureau of Reclamation's Cooperative Watershed Management Program

Thank you for your consideration,

Lee Anderson

Lee Anderson
Region 1 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Montana Ecological Services Office
585 Shephard Way, Suite 1
Helena, Montana 59601

November 29, 2023

Dear Grant Review Committee,

On behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), I would like to express support for the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group's (LCFWG) application to the Bureau of Reclamation's Cooperative Watershed Management Grant Program.

The Service's 2015 Columbia Headwaters Recovery Unit Implementation Plan for Bull Trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) (RUIP) identified sediment and riparian habitat degradation as primary habitat threats to bull trout in the Lake Pend Oreille Core Area. The LCFWG's proposal will support actions identified in the RUIP to address these habitat threats to designated critical habitat for bull trout within the Thompson River and Prospect Creek watersheds. Actions include consolidation of the Thompson River road network, the removal of man-made fish barriers, and the revegetation of deficient riparian areas. By addressing primary habitat threats to the Lake Pend Oreille Core Area, the LCFWG's proposal will contribute to bull trout recovery in the Columbia Headwaters Recovery Unit. As, such, the Service emphatically supports their application.

If you have questions or require clarification regarding this letter of support, please contact Carter Fredenberg of my staff at carter_fredenberg@fws.gov or (406) 758-6878.

Sincerely,

Jacob M. Martin
Acting Office Supervisor

USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Lolo National Forest | Building 24, Fort Missoula
Missoula, MT 59804-7297
406 329-3750

November 20, 2023

RE: Cooperative Watershed Management Program (CWMP) Grant: Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group (LCFWG) Application

Dear CWMP Grant Review Committee:

Please accept this letter as the Lolo National Forest's endorsement of the LCFWG application to the Bureau of Reclamation's CWMP grant to fund watershed restoration planning and project design in the Lower Clark Fork watershed. The LCFWG is a vitally important and valued partner in efforts to protect and restore water resources on lands administered by the Lolo National Forest. Our cooperative partnership with the LCFWG (and Trout Unlimited) in recent years is marked by the planning and implementation success milestones of the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Tributaries Restoration Plan, Thompson River Road Consolidation Memo, and habitat enhancement projects in Fishtrap, Graves, and Upper Prospect creeks. The impressive pace and scale of this watershed restoration would not have been possible without past CWMP support for planning and project design.

If successful, the current grant application would similarly provide crucial planning and development support for future water quality and aquatic habitat projects where the goal is to have several shovel-ready options for when implementation resources become available. For example, the Lolo has completed NEPA in Clear Creek, Cherry Creek, and Cox Gulch and made substantial investment into the Thompson River Road Consolidation work; all these future watershed restoration projects need additional planning and design work through LCFWG/TU partnership to become a reality.

Because funding for planning and design of these projects will result in a healthier and more resilient watershed, we urge you to support this application.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/ Traci Sylte

Traci L. Sylte, PE/hydrologist
Watershed Program Manager
Lolo National Forest

/s/ Josh Schulze

Josh Schulze, Fisheries Biologist
Fisheries Program Manager
Lolo National Forest

Forest Service | Kootenai National Forest

Cabinet Ranger District
Kootenai National Forest
2693 MT Highway 200
Trout Creek, MT 59874-9503
406-827-3533

File Code: 2530 Watershed Management **Date:** November 20, 2023

Subject: Cooperative Watershed Management Program (CWMP) Grant Application for the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group and Trout Unlimited

To: CWMP Grant Review Committee

Please Accept this letter of support from the Kootenai National Forest for the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group's application to the Bureau of Reclamation's Cooperative Watershed Management Program for funding for watershed restoration planning and project design in the Lower Clark Fork Watershed.

The Kootenai National Forest has worked with the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group (LCFWG) on multiple water restoration projects over the history of our partnership, to include but not limited to:

- Vermilion River Channel and Floodplain Restoration on over one river mile the Vermilion River impacted by historic placer mining;
- Over five miles of road decommissioning implementation in watersheds impacted by excess sediment input;
- Bull River Riparian and Floodplain restoration seeking to improve hardwood recruitment and future down log replacement.

The LCFWG has a proven track record for planning and implementing well-conceived projects, working well with area partners, and seeing stream and watershed restoration projects through to effective and successful completion. The Kootenai National Forest looks forward to partnering with them again on future efforts to improve and protect the water resources in the Lower Clark Fork Basin.

If this grant application is funded, the LCFWG will continue to support a comprehensive, broad scale restoration program across many different land ownerships. Program-implemented projects, among other benefits, support restoration work benefiting Threated bull trout that are native to and reside within the Lower Clark Fork Basin. Funding associated with this grant proposal will accelerate the pace and scale restoration work by supporting key data collection and analysis, accelerated project development and design for high priority projects. Their efforts will ensure the Kootenai National Forest and other partners have relevant data and information, well designed and implementable restoration projects, and support to ensure projects are successfully implemented with the Lower Clark Fork Basin. Finally, this investment will support and further leverage the acquisition of other grant and partner funding support for the implementation of the work planned.

Please feel free to contact me if you need any further information pertaining to the LCFWG and their work on the Cabinet Ranger District. I can be reached at michael.feiger@usda.gov or 408.827.0714.

Thank you for your consideration of this worthy proposal.

MICHAEL D. FEIGER
District Ranger

NorthWestern Energy
Delivering a Bright Future

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program

November 16, 2023

Dear Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant review committee,

NorthWestern Energy (NWE) and other agency resource partners have spent considerable time and resources in the Lower Clark Fork Watershed developing stream restoration and fisheries enhancement projects in important tributaries. A key component of getting this work done is support needed to plan and design these ongoing efforts. Non-profit groups like the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group (LCFWG) and Trout Unlimited (TU) are essential in planning and implementing watershed improvement projects.

NWE and partners have worked with LCFWG and TU to carry out cost effective native fish focused restoration projects; including Graves Creek large woody debris addition, Fishtrap Creek road realignment and habitat enhancement and Prospect Creek large woody debris addition. The planning of these projects relied on a 2019-2021 CWMP grant that was awarded to LCFWG and TU.

NWE fully supports the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group's application for the Bureau of Reclamation's Cooperative Watershed Management Program (CWMP) and is confident that these funds would go towards quality projects, in key tributaries like Thompson River and Prospect Creek. LCFWG and TU have an excellent track record of working with partners and cost effectively taking projects from the planning stage through implementation.

Sincerely,

Jon Hanson

Hydro License Compliance Professional
Missoula, MT
406-542-5961
Jon.hanson@northwestern.com

November 10, 2023

RE: Cooperative Watershed Management Program Grant Application from the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group

To the CWMP Grant Review Committee:

Please accept this letter of support for the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group's application to the Bureau of Reclamation's Cooperative Watershed Management Program for a grant to fund watershed restoration planning and project design in the lower Clark Fork River Watershed.

As a non-profit organization that coordinates and supports local watershed councils, the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group (LCFWG) has received annual funding from Avista under the Clark Fork Settlement Agreement (CFSA). The CFSA was developed during the re-licensing of Avista's two dams on the lower Clark Fork River in 1999. Watershed councils are an important cooperator in the CFSA through their assistance in protecting and enhancing stream habitat along tributaries of the lower Clark Fork River. Tributary habitat protection and enhancement is an important component of Avista's continuing commitment to the CFSA.

Since its inception, the LCFWG has been essential in coordinating a diverse group of private entities, state and federal agencies, and diverse funding sources, to help plan, administer, and implement a variety of stream restoration and habitat improvement projects in the lower Clark Fork area. This grant would be of great importance in developing "shovel ready" stream and riparian improvement projects in multiple local tributaries, as was done with the previous Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant. In addition, adding the technical capacity and experience of Trout Unlimited, enabled by this grant, would bring additional planning and project design resources to bear on a variety of stream restoration projects including the further development of road routing alternatives in the Thompson River drainage. Additionally, this grant would make projects better positioned to attract additional funding that is typically required for implementation.

Avista has been cooperatively involved with stream restoration efforts with diverse stakeholders through the CFSA and believes that this grant would greatly add to our continued efforts in protecting and improving tributary habitat resources in the lower Clark Fork area.

Monica Ott

Monica Ott
Clark Fork License Manager, Avista