Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project

Submitted by:

The Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork

Bureau of Reclamation
WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I for FY 2023-24
Notice of Funding Opportunity No. R23AS00362

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List of Common Abbreviations

CFC	Clark Fork Coalition
cfs	Cubic feet per second
DLVCD	Deer Lodge Valley Conservation District
BSB	Butte Silver Bow County Government
DNRC	Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
FWP	Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
MHCD	Mile High Conservation District
Montana Tech	Montana Technological University
MBMG	Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology
MHCD	Mile High Conservation District
NRDP	Montana Natural Resource Damage Program
Powell County	Powell County Government
CSKT	Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
Streamflow Group	Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group
TU	Trout Unlimited
UCF	Upper Clark Fork River Watershed
UM	University of Montana
USFS	United States Forest Service
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
WRC	Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork

Executive Summary

This proposal to the Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I for FY 2023-24 is being submitted December 5, 2023 on behalf of the Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group (Streamflow Group) by the Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork (WRC), a nonprofit organization in the city of Deer Lodge in Powell County, Montana that is an active member of the Streamflow Group. The Streamflow Group is a collaboration of diverse stakeholders with a mission *to pursue solutions that support and balance the water needs of the Upper Clark Fork River (UCF) watershed communities* in western Montana. Participants in this group, who are also the partners on this project, include private agricultural producers and irrigators in the Deer Lodge Valley, WRC, Clark Fork Coalition, Trout Unlimited, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Montana Natural Resource Damage Program, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology, the University of Montana, Montana Tech, and the Atlantic Richfield Corporation. The goal of the *Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project* is to address water use challenges in the UCF by sustaining, growing, and increasing the capacity of a trusted forum to collaboratively identify priorities for flow restoration, and to implement timely solutions to chronic dewatering challenges that serve multiple stakeholders. This goal stems from group participants identifying UCF dewatering as a direct threat to aquatic resources, livelihoods, community well-being, Tribal interests, and the success of Superfund remediation of this this heavily mining-impacted subbasin. Primary project activities are: 1) expand awareness of and participation in the group through targeted outreach; 2) increase capacity and formalize group structure through strategic planning; and 3) make tangible progress toward increasing water availability and reliability by advancing on-the-ground flow restoration projects in high-priority areas. These activities will advance flow restoration efforts by ensuring the essential stakeholders, including water rights owners, Tribes, and government decision-makers are at the table, informed of current conditions and opportunities, and actively engaged in crafting and implementing win-win solutions. The project will run from January 2025 through December 2027 (with pre-project activities in 2024). This project will take place primarily on non-federal land and property, though planning and potential projects will include water resources located within the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest.

Project Location

The 2,800-square mile Upper Clark Fork River watershed (UCF) is located in western Montana in an area spanning northwest of Butte and southeast of Missoula and flowing through portions of Silver Bow, Deer Lodge, Powell, Granite, and Missoula Counties (see map, Figure 1). Within this watershed, this project focuses especially on the watershed upstream of the Clark Fork River's confluence with the Little Blackfoot River near Garrison. This reach encompasses Deer Lodge, the Deer Lodge Valley, and the headwaters of the UCF in the Butte and Anaconda area. (See Figure 3 in Sub-criterion A2 for a detailed map of the project focus area.) This proposal includes planning for one or more site-specific projects (details of which are to be determined through strategic planning and prioritization processes in Years 1 and 2 of the project) that will likely be located on one or several tributaries and/or the mainstem river in the Deer Lodge Valley.

Applicant Category

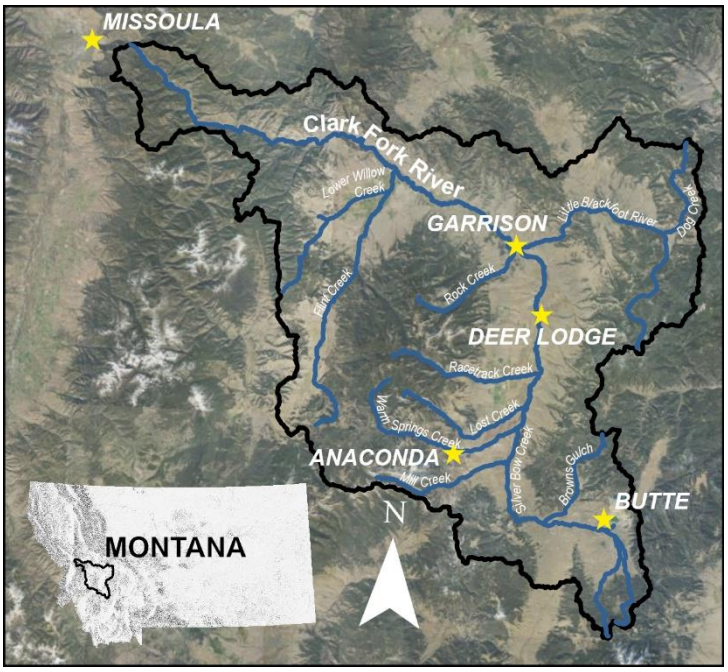

Figure 1: The Upper Clark Fork River watershed

The applicant, the Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork (WRC), is an established 501c3 organization that is an active member of the Upper Clark Fork Streamflow Group and is applying on its behalf. The WRC serves irrigators and landowners in the Deer Lodge Valley who rely on the Upper Clark Fork River and its tributaries for agriculture, recreation, and other livelihoods. The Streamflow Group is an existing watershed group, but has not registered as a 501c3 organization or other legal entity. Although the group is still relatively new and is seeking support to create a more formal structure and increase its capacity, it is applying as an *Existing Watershed Group* because it has been meeting regularly since September 2021; has drafted a mission statement, objectives, group norms and principles for engagement; and has engaged a wide range of stakeholders in collaborative discussion around prioritization of flow issues in the UCF.

The Streamflow Group formed in 2021 after multiple years of severe drought impacted flows in the UCF watershed. Montana Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP), in coordination with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), invited a diverse array of water users, including other state agencies, conservation organizations, irrigator groups, industry, and others to participate in a series of facilitated discussions on how to collaborate to improve flow conditions in the basin.

Interest and participation in the group was and continues to be high (Chaffin 2022), and its 2.5-hour meetings every other month continue to be lively and well attended – typically ranging from 35-45 attendees. In the early organizational phases of the group (2021), group members engaged in an initial facilitated planning process (see Figure 2 in Evaluation Criteria A) to identify activities and projects that group members could pursue to leverage their collective capacity. Many of these activities – including a review of the potential for split-season irrigation leasing projects and an investigation of the cost-benefit of headwaters storage projects in the UCF – have already been pursued, though with limited success. The group continues to share updates from participants and host guest speakers on relevant science, flow projects, and ongoing research in the UCF at each meeting. (One of these projects – the *Racetrack Creek Water Reliability Project,* which would upgrade infrastructure on Racetrack Lake to increase storage capacity for instream flow and irrigation – was the focus of WRC's recent application on behalf of the group to the BOR EWRP funding opportunity. The project was not funded, but

headwaters storage remains a strong interest among group members.) Members of the group are proud of their accomplishments since 2021, excited about the potential this group holds for navigating conflict over limited water resources, and are now interested in building on these successes through group development and diversification, and more meaningful strategic planning leading to project implementation.

Applicant Eligibility

The applicant, WRC, is a 501c3 nonprofit organization located in Deer Lodge, Montana, and has participated in and provided support for the Streamflow Group since its inception in 2021. WRC has supported, and continues to help sustain, the development of the Streamflow Group by actively engaging in meetings, advocating for funding to provide professional facilitation for the group, and submitting and supporting applications for funding to implement projects endorsed by the group.

Project Description

The goal of the *Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project* is to address water use challenges in the UCF by sustaining, growing, and increasing the capacity of a trusted forum to collaboratively identify priorities for flow restoration, and to implement timely solutions to chronic dewatering challenges that serve multiple stakeholders.

Since 2021 this collaborative group, made up of local irrigators, conservation organizations, Tribal representatives, state natural resource agencies, researchers, industry, local government, and other key stakeholders across the UCF, have come together across political, economic, and social divides to find win-win solutions to address chronic dewatering problems in the watershed. In this arid subbasin, agriculture is the dominant livelihood, but the UCF is also highly valued for its fisheries and outdoor recreation opportunities, and it has a long history of mining that continues to the present day.

Access to clean, reliable, surface water supplies is essential for sustainability and persistence of *all* these interests. Conflicting values and resulting disagreements over the use of limited water sources have prevented progress toward flow restoration and conservation in recent decades. As a "coalition of the willing," the UCF Streamflow Group has made great strides in overcoming these differences, providing a safe and productive forum where members can respectfully disagree while also finding ways to collaborate to address the UCF's severe and chronic dewatering challenges.

Although the UCF Streamflow Group has met regularly for over two years and has a shared statement of purpose, priorities, and engagement, it has intentionally chosen not to formalize its structure. This choice has allowed individual Group participants to preserve their autonomy and therefore strategically leverage the capacity of their respective organizations for collective benefit of the Group, and by extension, the UCF watershed. However, the lack of formal structure and a cohesive, long-range plan has also limited the group's impact. Further, one of the clear contributions to the initial success of the group has been its professional facilitator, but funding for this facilitator is limited and subject to annual renewal, creating some uncertainty for the group.

These factors, coupled with the lack of a designated budget for group development, strategic planning, and project implementation, have hindered the Group's capacity at a time when dewatering challenges in the watershed are worsening, climate impacts are more severe, and when flow restoration efforts by agencies and NGOs are proving to be insufficient on their own. In addition, in April 2025, a recently negotiated instream flow water right co-owned by the CSKT and FWP (the "Milltown Water Right," which is part of the CSKT Water Rights Compact, a Federal-Tribal water rights settlement agreement - CSKT 2021) will come into effect, impacting the legal availability of water in the UCF, and challenging the viability of some water users in the watershed.

While the group currently represents a broad diversity of interests in the watershed, important constituencies, especially major water rights holders on key tributaries (including industry, local government, and certain private landowners) are under-represented, as are representatives of local government and local recreational user groups, both commercial and private. The group has articulated a need to identify and reach out to these key water users, whose engagement in innovative collaborations between conservation interests, water users, government, and Tribes has the potential to significantly improve watershed conditions.

This project will greatly boost the capacity and effectiveness of the Streamflow Group, which in turn will aid natural resource agencies, conservation NGOs, irrigators, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and others in effectively addressing water availability and reliability challenges in the watershed. To enable us to reach our project goals we will carry out the activities detailed below under each of the three CWMP Task Areas. To prepare for project implementation in January 2025, we will also continue Streamflow Group activities, specifically carrying out a suite of planned activities (not funded by this proposal) in 2024 to ensure we can be as effective as possible when grant-funded activities begin.

Pre-Award Activities (2024)

Note: Financial support for work in 2024 will be provided by the Montana Natural Resource Damage Program, which has invested in the Streamflow Group since its inception. Estimated costs are $35,000 for 2024 for professional facilitation, travel, and meeting supplies, with additional support provided through in-kind contributions from Streamflow Group members.

Objectives: 1) Continue the momentum of the Streamflow Group as a trusted, transparent platform through which participants can share information about their work to restore flow in the UCF; and 2) Prepare group members for formalization of the group

Activities:

- Hold 6 bimonthly meetings of 2.5 hours each that will include: 1) a one-hour guest presentation on new science and/or research about UCF issues; 2) one hour of discussion on business and potential project development; and 3) 30 minutes of information-sharing and updates from group members
- Conduct one field tour of a flow restoration project

- Organize a field trip to visit the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes to hear from Tribal elders and Tribal Council about the historical and contemporary cultural importance of the Clark Fork to the Tribes
- Host a summer BBQ to build trust, familiarity, and camaraderie among Group members

Task 1: Watershed Group Development

Why this task: As noted above, while Streamflow Group participants represent diverse interests and participation has grown since 2021, the group feels that some individuals and organizations that are key to water use solutions, or who are located in high-priority drainages in the UCF, are underrepresented. Through this Task we aim to increase group impact, capacity, and the potential for collaboratively-prioritized flow restoration projects to succeed at the appropriate scale and in the most strategic locations.

Objectives: 1) Expand the scope and diversity of the Streamflow Group, targeting key UCF stakeholders who are critical to flow restoration efforts (e.g., irrigators, industry, local government, and recreational user stakeholders in high-priority drainages with large water use rights); 2) Increase public awareness of the UCF Streamflow group as a trusted venue for win-win solutions between conservation, agriculture, and Tribal interests in the watershed; 3) Increase group capacity by pursuing additional funding opportunities and preparing for a formal strategic planning process.

Activities:

A. Target key water users and water rights holders (industry, private landowners, recreational user groups, and municipalities, including Butte-Silver Bow) in high-priority drainages that are critical to instream flow in the UCF (Warm Springs Creek, Lost Creek, Racetrack Creek, Dempsey Creek, and Cottonwood Creek – see map, Figure 3), and bring these stakeholders to the table to increase the overall reach of the Streamflow Group in the watershed:
    i. Attend Deer Lodge Conservation District and Mile High (Butte-Silver Bow) Conservation District meetings (which our targeted major water users attend), to meet key players in person and share information about the Streamflow Group
    ii. To reach individual landowners from key drainages and recreational users, table and provide informational materials about the Streamflow Group at the Anaconda Farmers' Market and community events in the Deer Lodge Valley
    iii. Conduct informal follow-up meetings with individuals and groups from our target audiences to learn more about their needs and create opportunities for them to ask questions
B. Continue to hold regular, bi-monthly Streamflow Group meetings (format and meeting content described above):
    i. continue to provide presentations of useful and timely information about flow project potential in the UCF and an annual field trip to an active or potential project or similar site

ii. provide travel stipends to cover attendance costs and to lower barriers to participation for existing and new group members

iii. dedicate at least one meeting to preparation for a strategic planning process in Year 2 (such as reaffirming or revisiting the mission and vision statements, especially as new members join the group)

C. Invite as guest speakers experts from other basins in the region who have been successful in building watershed groups, have completed watershed planning, and/or are recipients of CWMP grants (specifically: Yakima, and watershed groups in Colorado, Washington, Oregon, and other areas of Montana – this strategy includes offering stipends to cover travel and related costs for these guests)

D. Create communications materials (PDF and print) for the UCF Streamflow Group to use in outreach efforts noted above, including a brochure about the group (what we do and why), factsheet on UCF issues, a mini-report on activities and progress to date, and map.

E. Create a website to serve as a hub of information for the group, for stakeholders targeted through outreach activities, and to share information and reports with those outside of the Streamflow Group (site would be housed with the WRC website, which will be updated and refreshed to accommodate this addition)

F. Research funding for group activities, planning, and project development and implementation; develop and submit proposals and applications as opportunities arise

Task 2: Watershed Restoration Planning

Why this task: Numerous state and federal agencies and conservation organizations have published UCF-focused research and/or restoration plans, many of them focused in whole or in part on instream flow restoration. However, few if any of these plans have been prioritized or endorsed by a diverse stakeholder group representing the breadth of water use interests in the watershed, so plan implementation often falters or is delayed, as key stakeholders have not been involved in their creation.

Given the wealth of expertise in the UCF and the abundance of restoration plans, the Streamflow Group does not believe it needs to write its own restoration plan. However, it would greatly benefit the stakeholders in the group to have a summary and synthesis of the comprehensive set of UCF plans so that they can review possible projects and come to agreement on which should be prioritized. (Note: Through this activity the group is interested in reviewing and synthesizing restoration plans for the watershed, not in compiling or synthesizing data about ecological conditions. Compiling and using that data is the focus of a Streamflow Group-supported BOR WaterSMART Applied Science proposal recently submitted by the Clark Fork Coalition, an active Streamflow Group member.)

Objectives: 1) Create a matrix of proposed flow restoration priorities endorsed by the Streamflow Group to provide structure and direction to the group's future planning and project implementation; 2) With these project priorities serving as a common goal (or set of goals), draft a five-year strategic plan for the Streamflow Group.

Activities:

A. Review and analyze the numerous existing watershed plans (created primarily by agencies and conservation organizations) and synthesize into a holistic and publicly

accessible set of group-endorsed priorities focused on increasing water availability and reliability. (Table 1 provides a summary of some of documents that will be reviewed.)

i. With the aid of a UM graduate student, compile, review, and identify overlap in these plans; consolidate goals; and find synergies and challenges among them

ii. As part of regular group meetings, review findings and conduct a facilitated, collaborative process to identify high priorities and a set of endorsed projects

iii. Create matrix of projects endorsed by the collective Streamflow Group

iv. Create a GIS visualization or online story map that reflects selected goals, priorities, and endorsed projects, as well as past projects in the watershed so that group members and others have a comprehensive view of all flow-related work, past, present, and (potential and planned for) future

B. Use the matrix of endorsed projects and priority areas as the basis for a five-year strategic planning process to be facilitated during regular group meetings

Table 1: Existing UCF Watershed Restoration Plans and Investigations

Year(s)	Document, Plan, and/or Key Findings
1950s	Surveys from FWP and USGS revealed that the UCF was essentially devoid of aquatic life due to water quality impairments from heavy metals
1980s	The State of Montana collected significant amounts of data quantifying and describing the impairments to the upper Clark Fork River in preparation for a series of Superfund settlements with ARCO in the 1990s and 2000s
	FWP publishes instream flow reservations for the UCF establishing flow targets for individual reaches of the mainstem and several tributaries
1995	The Montana Legislature closed the UCF to new water appropriations
2000	Under the ESA requirements, the State of Montana released a bull trout recovery plan for the Clark Fork and Kootenai River Basins *(http://www.flatheadtu.org/indexFiles/WebDocs/BT5.pdf)*
2007	NRDP releases its first Aquatic and Terrestrial Restoration Plan for the UCF *(https://dojmt.gov/wp-content/uploads/010308-CFR-Restoration-Plan-no-append.pdf)*
2010	Montana DEQ publishes TMDLs and framework for water quality resolution *(https://deq.mt.gov/files/water/wqpb/CWAIC/TMDL/C01-TMDL-02a.pdf)*
2011	CFC publishes an Aquatic Restoration Strategy for the UCF outlining the organization's restoration priorities and strategies *(https://clarkfork.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/CFC-UCF_AquaticRestStrat_2011.pdf)*
	DEQ approves WRC's Watershed Restoration Plan for the Upper Clark Fork River Tributaries *(https://deq.mt.gov/files/Water/WPB/Nonpoint/Publications/WRPs/UpperClarkFork_WRP_Final_12142012.pdf)*
2014	DEQ publishes UCF Phase 2 Sediment and Nutrients TMDLs and Framework Water Quality Improvement Plan *(https://deq.mt.gov/files/water/wqpb/CWAIC/TMDL/C01-TMDL-04a.pdf)*
2015	The Water Compact between the CSKT and State of Montana was ratified by the Montana Legislature, impacting water appropriations in the UCF watershed (MCA 2021)
2015	DNRC publishes a Water Supply Report for the UCF basin (relates to the CSKT compact) *(https://dnrc.mt.gov/_docs/water/Hydro_science_data/clark_fork_water_supply_report_1_water_availability1.pdf)*
2016	CFC releases an updated Aquatic Restoration Strategy for the UCF utilizing a BOR WaterSMART planning grant *(https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/cwmp/docs/plans/ClarkForkWRP.pdf)*
2019	NRDP releases its final Aquatic and Terrestrial Restoration Plan for the UCF

	(https://dojmt.gov/wp-content/uploads/02.27.2019_UCFRB-AT-Restoration-Plan-Update_FINAL_with-Gov.-signature.pdf)
2023	The State of Montana releases a Strategic Plan that integrates remediation and restoration actions on the UCF mainstem (relates to Superfund cleanup) *(https://dojmt.gov/wp-content/uploads/CFR-Strategic-Plan-with-Appendices-March-2023.pdf)*

Task 3: Watershed Management Project Design

Why this Task: After nearly three years of meetings, the Streamflow Group has made great strides in keeping communication lines open, increasing collective understanding of UCF water use issues, and exploring solutions. With climate change, frequent drought, and other stressors increasing their impacts on the watershed and local communities, the group is now anxious to implement on-the-ground projects on a meaningful scale. Tasks 1 and 2 will prepare the group for this Project Design Task, although as of this writing, the group cannot predict the type or location of any specific projects (though it is likely to be on a known, high-priority tributary in the Deer Lodge Valley).

Objectives: Make tangible progress toward implementing 1-2 of the projects prioritized by the group under Task 2 (and identified in the group's five-year plan) that directly address water management, use, availability, and reliability challenges in the watershed.

Activities:

A. Working with the group facilitator, collaboratively identify and come to agreement on which projects to pursue for design and engineering
    - Possibilities include headwaters storage projects; nature-based water storage solutions, such as Beaver Dam Analogs; or other flow restoration projects identified during the restoration plan review process and follow-up planning and prioritization sessions
B. Complete competitive bidding process for and hire engineering firm to complete design and engineering on selected project(s)
C. Complete designs & engineering for 1-2 projects
D. Raise funds to support project implementation
E. Research and, as needed, secure approvals and permits for project implementation

Evaluation Criteria

Criterion A: Watershed Group Diversity and Geographic Scope

Sub-criterion A1: Watershed Group Diversity

Background

The UCF Streamflow Group was initiated in September 2021 by NRDP, DNRC, FWP, and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes as a forum for discussing flow issues in the UCF watershed, and to leverage collective capacity to increase streamflow during critical dewatering periods. Motivation for forming the group stemmed from the ongoing desire of the agencies and Tribes to ensure that there was adequate flow in the UCF river to 1) protect the tenuous fishery in the heavily mining-impacted water, 2) protect water quality, and 3) fulfill the pending

instream flow water right negotiated by the Tribes, and co-managed with MT FWP, as part of the Tribes' 2021 Water Rights Compact settlement (MCA 2021).

Participation in the Streamflow Group was strong at the outset (20-30 participants) and has grown steadily. Over the past several years, the Streamflow Group has encouraged and recruited participation from most of the major water use and water management stakeholders across the watershed (see Table 2). Bi-monthly Streamflow Group meetings regularly include 35-45 participants, roughly half participating in-person in Deer Lodge, Montana, and the other half participating via Zoom.

Participants representing various organizations (see Table 2) – state agencies, Tribes, conservation NGOs, industry, and irrigator/agricultural/landowner groups – participate because each of their organizations and members has a *clear* stake in restoring flow to the UCF during critical dewatering periods, and/or ensuring that the UCF maintains adequate seasonal flows. State agencies are working to protect public trust resources, including intact fisheries and water quality; conservation NGOs are pursuing their missions to protect aquatic resources and communities; Tribes are protecting the integrity of their historic territories as well as their vested instream flow interests to protect culturally-important species such as bull trout; industry is interested in continued economic viability in the watershed; and irrigators' groups are protecting their livelihoods and the persistence of agricultural in western Montana. Every Streamflow Group participant has a strong reason for participating and recognizes that there are many opportunities to pursue streamflow restoration projects that are beneficial for multiple parties, if not all stakeholders in the watershed.

Table 2. Upper Clark Fork Streamflow Group Organizational Membership and Participation

Organizational Participants	Sector	Regular Participants	Letter of Support
Atlantic Richfield Corporation	Industry/Mining	1	
Butte-Sliver Bow City-County Government	Local Government	1	
Clark Fork Coalition (CFC)	Conservation NGO	2-3	Yes
Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)	Tribal	2-3	Yes
Conservation Districts (Deer Lodge/Mile High)	Conservation District	2-4	Yes
Montana Bureau of Mines & Geology (MBMG)	State Government	2	Yes
Montana Department of Natural Resources Conservation (DNRC)	State Government	1-2	Yes
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)	State Government	1-2	
Montana Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP)	State Government	3	Yes
Pioneer Technical	Industry/Restoration	1	
Trout Unlimited (TU)	Conservation NGO	2	Yes
University of Montana (UM)	University	1-3	Yes
Watershed Restoration Coalition (WRC)	Irrigator NGO	3-4	*

**Applicant*

Group Meetings

Streamflow Group meetings are held every other month both in Deer Lodge, MT and virtually via Zoom. Meetings are generally 2.5 hours long and professionally facilitated by a Streamflow Group member from the University of Montana. Facilitation includes agenda-setting and meeting logistics, email invitation and reminders, technology set-up and access, notetaking and distribution, required follow with group members, and maintaining an online archive of notes, presentations, and other resources presented or shared by group participants.

A typical meeting generally includes an invitation from the group to a participant or outside expert to present a project, research, or other information relevant to Group interests' in increasing, restoring, and protecting streamflow in the UCF. Topics presented to date include split-season irrigation leasing projects, irrigation efficiency projects, discussions of agricultural operations, yearly state of the UCF fishery, beaver mimicry and beaver dam analog projects, Tribal priorities in the watershed, and more.

Figure 2: Streamflow Group members participate in a prioritization exercise in 2021 to identify potential project sites in the UCF.

The second half of Streamflow Group meetings are reserved for discussions of proposals and projects that group participants are actively pursuing, such as this WaterSMART CWMP proposal by WRC. This is an important function of the group: participants use this time to share their organizational priorities and projects in the watershed, seek willing partners, and receive valuable feedback on their work. Just this year (2023), a relationship between DNRC and a WRC irrigator in Gold Creek was forged at a Streamflow Group meeting that produced a state-supported grant proposal to investigate early-season aquifer recharge research on the irrigator's private land. This is the type of relationship and capacity building the Streamflow Group hopes to expand with support from this CWMP grant.

The end of each Streamflow Group meeting is a structured roundtable "share out" of information from each of the participants in attendance. This process further helps foster collaborative relationships and supports transparency across various missions and organizational priorities in the watershed.

Group Structure

The UCF Streamflow Group has actively discussed formalizing over the past year. The group consensus has thus far been to operate as a "coalition of the willing" – members of organizations coming together voluntarily to support each other and leverage collective capacity to pursue streamflow restoration and conservation projects in the UCF watershed. In these discussions, participants have described both a need to maintain organizational affiliations, and a desire to work together on mutually beneficial projects.

Although lack of formal structure or formal membership criteria has not inhibited participation in the group thus far, it has hindered group progress toward pursuing projects that have tangible streamflow benefits. Group decisions on collective projects to pursue are made by consensus, and discussions have been led by the facilitator, who has expertise in collective group deliberations, watershed group development, and collaborative governance (e.g., Chaffin et al. 2010, 2014, 2015). Consensus is often tough to achieve, even when facilitated with deliberate dialogue, and without a formal structure and decision making processes, the Streamflow Group cannot formally speak with one voice. Although, the Streamflow Group does not have plans to formalize as a 501c3 nonprofit or other type of organization, the Group will actively pursue an *agreement in principle* that details norms of engagement, terms of organizational participation, and group decision making processes if this grant request is funded.

Increasing Group Membership and Diversity

Although the UCF Streamflow Group has engaged many of the major affected watershed stakeholders such as Tribes, agencies, irrigators, and conservation groups (see Table 2), there are stakeholders not currently at the table (or under-represented) who are critical for furthering the success of the group and achieving its collective mission, such as industry, local government, and recreational users. As noted in our Activities under Task 1 above, we specifically hope to gain participation from major water rights holders in key areas, and water users in high-priority basins through strategically-targeted outreach (attending Conservation District meetings and reaching out for one-on-one meetings for major water rights holders; and tabling at public events in the Deer Lodge Valley to reach irrigators and other water users in high-priority areas).

To support this outreach we will produce and distribute (PDF and print) a brochure, UCF factsheet, a map, and a mini report on the Streamflow Group's history, mission, and accomplishments. We will enlist the help of a UM graduate student, the facilitator, and group members for some of this outreach. We will also create a website to share resources and information about the group and the watershed, and to provide a means for people to get in touch, learn more, and participate in meetings. We will also upgrade our AV equipment (projector and screen), provide travel reimbursement for members attending in person, and purchase a Meeting Owl to ensure all members, whether in-person or attending virtually, can participate fully. Our outreach plan also includes continuing our annual BBQ, which is an excellent way for members to build trust and learn more about each other.

Sub-criterion A2. Geographic Scope

The geographic scope of this project is the HUC-8 (17010201) watershed encompassing the Upper Clark Fork River basin upstream of Drummond, Montana and including headwaters tributaries of the Clark Fork River west of the continental divide (see Figure 3 below). The UCF Streamflow Group currently engages many of the major water use and management stakeholder groups in this watershed, and our through our proposed outreach activities, we plan to target and include all major stakeholders in the watershed including missing or underrepresented constituencies such as industry, some irrigation individuals and communities, local governments, and recreational user groups.

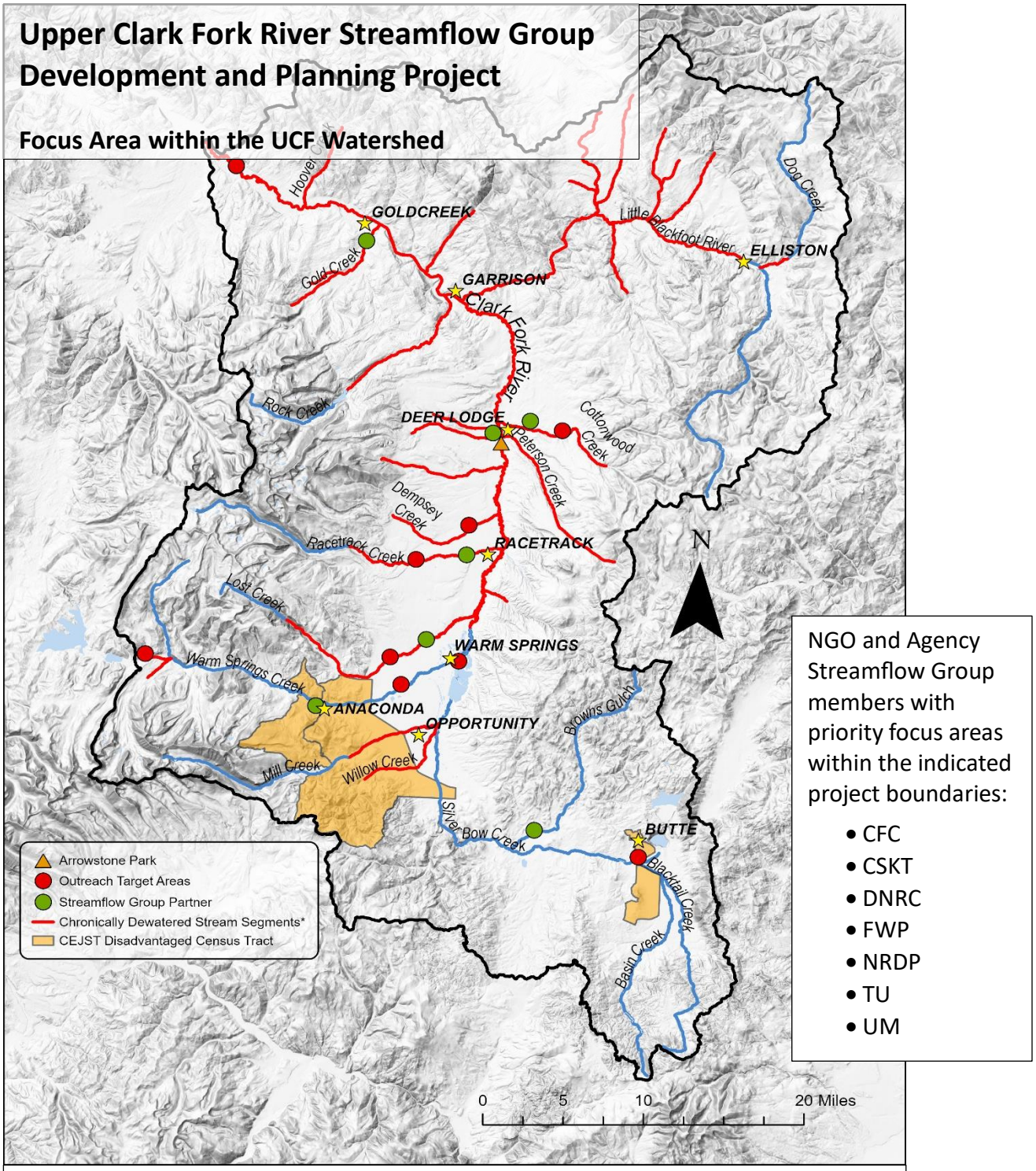

Figure 3: Project priority area within Upper Clark Fork watershed. As illustrated, chronic dewatering is a problem on nearly every tributary and much of the mainstem in the UCF, which is why we have selected this reach as our focus area. Current Streamflow Group members and outreach targets are spread across this landscape, including in CEJST-identified Disadvantaged Census Tracts. All waters on this map are subject to the legal requirements outlined under the CSKT Milltown Water Right.

Criterion B: Developing Strategies to Address Critical Watershed Needs

Sub-criterion B1: Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

Background

The Upper Clark Fork watershed sits squarely in one of the most important wildlife corridors in the western United States. Perched on the Continental Divide between the Missouri and Columbia basins, the UCF Basin encompasses not only the headwaters of the Clark Fork-Columbia River systems, but also connects some of the most diverse, wild, and intact habitat between the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem and the Crown of the Continent ecosystem (encompassing Glacier-Waterton International Peace National Park, and the Bob Marshall, Great Bear, Scapegoat, and other large wilderness areas). The UCF watershed and its ecosystem-rich riparian corridors support a diverse array of terrestrial megafauna and some of the most critical populations of aquatic native salmonids in the Clark Fork River system (FWP 2000). Two of the northern Rockies' most iconic and endangered species, the grizzly bear and bull trout, reside in the UCF, and the watershed is considered critical for future recovery efforts of both species. It is also an area of great cultural importance to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, as it lies at the heart of the ancestral lands of the Séliš-Qi̓ispé people for whom the bull trout, specifically, hold deep significance and are elevated as a Tribal priority for recovery and protection (Séliš-Qi̓ispé Culture Committee 2019, Smith 2022).

The UCF watershed also sits at the crossroads of intense biophysical, social, and ecological stresses. Unlike some other areas of the 14-million-acre Clark Fork Basin that often appear on the covers of fishing magazines, the Upper Clark Fork is the site of frequent contamination-driven fish kills, competition for limited remediation funding, and struggles stemming from increasing frequency, severity, and intensity of drought and over-appropriated water rights that lead to chronic stream dewatering.

The UCF watershed from its headwaters near Butte to its confluence with the Blackfoot River near Missoula is part of the largest federally-designated Superfund site in the country. The river corridor was severely contaminated as a result of a devastating flood in 1908 that spread heavy metals and other toxic mining wastes along 120 miles of floodplain stretching from the headwaters to Missoula. Those contaminants are still present in many places – from several inches to many feet deep – and continue to leach into the river. Its uplands in the headwaters are still laced with arsenic, lead, cadmium, zinc, and copper from more than a century of smelting activities in Anaconda. And intensive logging, road- and rail-building, and development of extensive irrigation systems left many tributaries altered, degraded, and dewatered.

Watershed challenges

These conditions severely limit the watershed's ecological potential. And while the UCF's mining boom and related rapid development of logging, rail, and agricultural industries fueled economic growth for Montana's white European settlers, they also left local communities disempowered and saddled with a massive cleanup burden and chronic water quality and quantity challenges that continue to threaten livelihoods and drive sociodemographic inequities. They also fuel tensions around Tribal water rights outlined in the Water Rights Compact (MCA 2021) and Federal-Tribal water rights settlement between the Confederated

Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the State of Montana, and the United States government, (ratified by the Montana Legislature in 2015, and the US Congress and CSKT in 2021) which includes legal requirements for instream flow in the mainstem river that have direct implications for water management throughout the UCF watershed (DNRC 2015).

In addition to the complex Superfund and related water quality management challenges, the geography of the UCF, as with many intermontane basins in southwest Montana, also drives severe water supply challenges due to frequent and persistent periods of chronic drought. Data from the Montana Climate Assessment shows that this area of the State will likely see an increase in the severity and intensity of drought periods in the future due to the impacts of climate change (Whitlock et al 2017).

The low flows and high water temperatures associated with chronic and severe drought are another challenge, and are a critical factor limiting the recovery of the aquatic ecosystem in the UCF (NRDP 2019). Over 87 miles of the UCF mainstem has been classified as severely dewatered by MT FWP, with dozens of UCF tributaries also identified as facing chronic water supply challenges (FWP 2015, CFC 2022) – see Figure 3. Streamflow in the most dewatered reaches of the UCF often falls well below established target flows and water temperatures, frequently exceeding biological thresholds for both native and non-native aquatic species. As recently as 2016 and 2021, streamflows on the UCF mainstem upstream of Deer Lodge have dropped to less than 10 cfs, well below the 40-90 cfs that is considered the bare minimum needed to sustain aquatic ecosystems (FWP 1986).

Further, during most irrigation seasons, the majority of the UCF's primary tributaries are heavily utilized for agriculture. As a result of this use, combined with other factors discussed above, Racetrack Creek, Dempsey Creek and Cottonwood Creek – three of the largest subbasins in the project area – are often reduced to a trickle, or are dewatered completely in some sections, during all but the best water years. Though not as severe, other high water yield tributaries, including Warm Springs Creek, Mill Creek and Lost Creek, also face chronic dewatering challenges.

The elevated water temperatures associated with chronic dewatering have a severe impact on the populations of native and wild trout and other sensitive native and endemic aquatic species found in the UCF. For example, the entire UCF mainstem is listed as critical habitat for bull trout, which are U.S. Endangered Species Act-listed cold water dependent salmonids that, according to MT FWP, need water temperatures generally below 15 °C to survive and thrive (FWP 2000). According to monitoring by FWP (2023) and CFC (2016), water temperatures in the Clark Fork in mid-summer regularly exceed 20°C, and during extreme droughts may exceed 23°C, which can be lethal for native trout.

The State of Montana, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and myriad other government agencies and NGOs have invested significantly in the watershed over the last decades to address these challenges. But lack of coordination among these many entities, limited stakeholder buy-in, and competition for scarce resources has led to stagnation in developing effective strategies that could improve ecological conditions instream. We are now at a major inflection point for the future of the watershed:

- The ecological condition of the UCF is in crisis mode, with trout numbers in the uppermost reaches at historic, 50-year lows despite the completion of some restoration and reclamation activities. This crash in the trout population over the last 10 years is unprecedented in both scale and magnitude and is a major source of local concern.
- The Superfund settlement funds from 20 years ago that have been driving conservation efforts in the basin are running out (Adams 2023), limiting the window in which the remaining resources can be leveraged to the greatest extent possible for ecological restoration.
- Community trust and buy-in related to conservation and restoration projects is waning after years of delay, distrust, and disappointment with the Superfund process. As a large percentage of the most severely impaired water resources in the UCF are located on private or municipal land, restoration success is not possible without community engagement and support.
- The CSKT Water Rights Compact, Tribal water rights settlement, and the associated instream flow water right at Milltown (co-owned by CSKT and MT FWP) will become enforceable in 2025 and has the potential to severely disrupt the water management paradigm that has dominated for the last century and a half in the UCF.

Current needs:

1. *More timely and impactful flow restoration results:* After more than two decades of overlapping restoration efforts in the UCF by natural resource agencies, NGOs, and universities, tangible progress has stagnated. This is due in part to competition for limited sources of restoration and remediation funding, as well as disparate priorities among these major players. While those challenges are beyond the scope of this proposal, our project focuses on other, related high-priority needs, including:
    - Increased community engagement in conservation and restoration efforts: This has been greatly limited due to decades-long cleanup timelines, re-emergent contamination, and a longstanding legacy contamination and its related health and economic impacts that have perpetuated environmental injustices especially in Deer Lodge, Anaconda, and Butte.
    - More unified and data-driven targeting for stakeholder outreach: Currently, outreach efforts are disparate, with some targeting only agricultural interests; some being highly technical and only focused on water quality and Superfund; and other efforts being limited in scope as they are driven by the internal priorities and funding sources of NGOs and agencies. Publicly available water rights data and GIS datasets have generally not been utilized to prioritize and identify water users for Streamflow Group outreach, or for restoration project identification or development.
    - Increased focus on key tributaries: Several key high water yield sub-basins, such as Warm Springs Creek, have not been fully integrated into broader water conservation efforts.

- Engagement of key user groups and water rights holders: Mining interests, other industries, and municipalities are some of the largest water rights owners in the watershed and their participation in flow restoration efforts is key. But they have largely been absent from collective water conservation discussions. (Also see #3 below.)
- Improved transparency and a forum to share information about the CSKT Water Rights Compact: Lack of transparency by the state related to the Compact has fueled distrust in the UCF agricultural community and led to the spread of misinformation.

2. *More deliberate and collaboratively-crafted efforts to mitigate climate change impacts:* Climate change exacerbates both acute and chronic drought challenges. While the UCF is no stranger to drought and extended dry spells (long-term climate reconstructions from tree rings and sediment cores indicate that persistent periods of drought have been a consistent feature on the landscape in southwest Montana for thousands of years [Whitlock et al. 2017]), climate impacts have accelerated over the last several decades and are expected to worsen:
    - severe drought in 1988 resulted in dry streambeds on the mainstem Clark Fork, Jefferson, and other ecologically critical streams throughout southwest Montana
    - during dozens of summers since 1988, flows in the UCF mainstem have been reduced to a trickle (as low as 3-7 cfs), including as recently as 2022
    - over the last 20 years, drought impacts have been exacerbated by rapidly rising temperatures and shifts in large-scale weather patterns
    - the term “flash drought” has recently become a common part of the local hydrologic nomenclature, with flash drought episodes documented in 2017, 2021, and 2022 (Jencso et al. 2019)
    - sufficient winter snowpack is no longer a safety net for summer instream flow: despite above-average snowpack in the UCF in 2017, an intense dome of high pressure and string of anomalously warm temperatures mid-summer resulted not only in one of the most severe fire seasons in Montana’s history, but also had drastic impacts on streamflow. Flows at the Deer Lodge USGS gage fluctuated from a high of over 1,600 cfs in spring (well over double the long-term average peak flow) to less than 60 cfs in the summer (less than half the long-term average baseflow)
    - data from the recently-released National Climate Assessment (2023) and 2017 Montana Climate Assessment (Whitlock et al. 2017) indicate that southwest Montana is expected to see a significant uptick in the number of days over 90 degrees over the next decade. Higher temperatures, a decrease in precipitation, and increases in evaporative losses during the summer are expected to magnify the severity of drought when it occurs

3. *Greater engagement from industrial interests and agricultural water users on high-volume UCF tributaries:* Both Warm Springs Creek and Lost Creek contain significant supplies of water and represent two of the most consistently flowing major tributaries in the UCF. Both streams support robust populations of wild and native salmonids, and Warm Springs Creek contains a critical population of the ESA-listed bull trout (FWP, 2000). Initial queries into the publicly available Montana water rights database revealed that there are substantial senior water users on both systems with the potential to contribute significant instream flow to the Clark Fork mainstem. However, senior and large-volume water users on these creeks are currently not represented in the Streamflow Group or in the leadership of the WRC. (One of the primary users on Warm Springs Creek represents a large industrial corporation, but past outreach efforts to that user have failed.)

4. *More inclusive group representation and increased capacity to jump-start progress on timely, high-impact flow projects in the UCF watershed:* Flow restoration strategies, such as headwaters storage and nature-based water conservation and restoration, have been discussed and supported by the Streamflow Group in the past, but tangible progress toward advancing on-the-ground projects has been limited. For example:
    - Silver Lake (a reservoir located five air miles northwest of Anaconda with the potential for more than 5,000 acre-feet of water storage) and the Silver Lake water system hold great promise for conveying significant volumes of cold, high-quality stored water directly into Warms Springs Creek and the Clark Fork River mainstem. Pilot projects in 2018 and 2021 to release stored water from this system resulted in measured increases in streamflows as far downstream as Deer Lodge, with augmented flow documented (Cast 2021) on more than 25 miles of the dewatered Clark Fork mainstem. The Silver Lake system is owned and operated by the city and county government in Butte-Silver Bow County (BSB). BSB has been involved in the Streamflow Working Group as an observer, but their participation has been limited, and state agencies' efforts to work with BSB on a long-term agreement for the use of stored Silver Lake water for dedicated instream flow have faltered.
    - Natural water storage provided by Beaver Dam Analogs (BDAs) and other methods could significantly benefit groundwater and surface water availability and reliability in the UCF. Analyzing existing datasets and using tools such as the GIS-driven Beaver Restoration Assessment Tool (BRAT) would allow us to identify suitable locations for natural storage projects in key UCF drainages and quantify storage potential. WRC has worked with willing landowners in the past on small-scale BDA projects, but those efforts have been driven largely by landowner willingness, rather than a more systematic, informed, and data-driven approach to BDAs and other natural water storage strategies.

Sub-criterion B2: Project Benefits

The Streamflow Group has been an ideal mechanism to bring all of the various water conservation interests together. This collaborative leadership niche (and ability to convene) was a critical missing piece for a long time. The group is now ready, and the time is now, to help the group move to a new level of effectiveness and impact in the basin. We have carefully identified the strategies and activities outlined in this proposal as the necessary – and doable – next steps to help the Steamflow Group reach its full potential at this stage in its development.

If activities are successfully carried out as planned, direct benefits of this project will include:

- The inclusion of additional water users in the Streamflow Group, which will build much-needed trust and conservation buy-in across a broader geography. Participation from additional users will also foster new project ideas and result in more potential water conservation opportunities.
- The assimilation and summarization of the disparate planning documents will help identify overlapping/competing priorities in the watershed in addition to pointing out missing or underrepresented opportunities.
- Natural and headwaters storage options have already been explored by this group as a win-win solution. This project will help turn those ideas into more tangible solutions that can eventually be implemented as UCF flow restoration projects. For example, an assessment of natural storage and BDA opportunities under the group's collaborative and transparent framework could create buy in for a large-scale project.
- More transparency around critical water management and water conservation discussions will help build broader trust in the water user community and other underrepresented stakeholders (such as industry and municipalities).

Benefits to stakeholders in the UCF watershed will flow from the overall project benefits:

- Irrigators, agricultural operators, and other water users (especially those on Warm Springs Creek, Lost Creek and Dempsey Creek) will eventually be able to count on more reliable water supplies, and in the short-term will have a trusted forum to turn to to brainstorm solutions when issues arise
- NGOs and partner organizations like CFC and TU will see their work, data, and resources leveraged more efficiently
- The Tribes will benefit as an expanded Streamflow Group will provide a way to counter disinformation about the Milltown Water Right, and also provide a forum for discussion if and when tensions rise after the Water Rights Compact comes into effect in 2025
- Butte-Silver Bow County could gain from an upgrade to the Silver Lake infrastructure as part of a headwaters storage flow restoration project
- Natural resource agencies (federal and state) will benefit as more synergy is built around their conservation efforts focused on native fish, such as bull trout and west slope cutthroat trout.
- Similarly, agencies responsible for Superfund activities in the UCF (including DEQ, EPA, and NRDP) as well as other groups involved in cleanup efforts, are likely to see improved

outcomes from reclamation and restoration activities if flow restoration projects can mitigate the impacts of drought and low flows on aquatic ecosystem recovery
- State agencies tasked with managing water rights and water resources will benefit from a stronger Streamflow Group that can be a venue for reaching out to a broad diversity of stakeholders – work that is typically resource-intensive and sees limited success due to distrust of governmental entities. Conflict with stakeholders may also be reduced as more information is provided and communications networks strengthened.
- Universities and students will benefit from opportunities to conduct on-the-ground research in the UCF, and will gain invaluable experience via mapping, restoration plan analysis, and outreach methods.

Benefits extending from project implementation under Task 3 are harder to quantify, as we do not yet know what those projects will be. We do assume, however, they will bring attention and resources to high-priority tributaries in the UCF, as most of the restoration plans the group will review focus on 8-10 of these key streams.

Criterion C: Readiness to Proceed

WRC and its project partners are prepared to proceed with proposed project activities immediately upon entering into a financial assistance agreement with BOR. To this end, as noted above, we are planning pre-award activities in 2024 to ensure the group is fully ready to take on the outreach, group formalization, and project implementation activities we have identified in this proposal. We are also confident in our abilities to complete all proposed activities within the three-year grant period (January 2025 through December 2027).

The project schedule is divided into quarters spanning the three-year grant period. The grid below summarizes the tasks and sub-tasks (which are detailed above under Project Description), timing, persons responsible, and milestones for this project. Please see Appendix A for a larger copy of this matrix.

Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project - Preliminary Project Schedule and Milestones														
	Year 1: 2025				Year 2: 2026				Year 3: 2027					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Who	Milestones
Task 1: Watershed Group Development														
Subtask A: Target key water users and water rights holders														
Attend CD mtgs													Facilitator, grad students, CFC staff	Create and track list of targets
Table at 1-2 community events													Members, facilitator	2 mtgs/yr for ea CD
Conduct follow-up mtgs													Grad student, CFC, facilitator, WRC ED	Aim for 2-3 new high-priority outreach target mtgs/yr
Subtask B: Continue to hold regular meetings														
Provide presentations, field trips, etc													Facilitator, CFC WRC ED	6 mtgs/yr; 1 field trip/yr
Provide travel stipends													WRC ED	All members needing assistance have received it
One mtg: strategic planning prep													Facilitator, group, CFC, WRC	Meeting outline and agenda created and approved by group
Subtask C: Invite guest speakers & experts													Facilitator, CFC, WRC ED	Start w/ outside experts yr 2. Goal: 1/year + stipend
Subtask D: Create communications materials													Facilitator, CFC, group participants as needed	Prepared by Summer 2025 for outreach
Subtask E: Create website / maintain site													WRC, web contractor, with input from facilitator & CFC	Start in year 2 - maintain & update as needed annually
Subtask F: Research/pursue funding for proj. development													Facilitator, CFC, WRC ED - group assists as needed	Aim for 1-2 possibilities in development by end of Yr 1; progress toward apps in Yr 2, apps in progress by Q3/4 in Year 3
Task 2: Watershed Planning														
Subtask A: Review/analyze watershed plans														
Compile plans, review, consolodate, report to group													Grad student + facilitator oversight.	Report finalize for group in Yr 1 Q3
Review findings with group, ID priorities													Facilitator & group	Facilitated prioritization process - track notes, feedback, follow-up
Create matrix of endorsed projects													Facilitator & group	Draft matrix by end of Yr 1 - may spill into Yr 2
Create GIS visualization or story map													Grad student + facilitator oversight.	Finalized by end of Q3 in Yr 2
Subtask B: Use matrix as basis for 5-year planning													Facilitator & group	Complete planning process by end of Y2, or Q1 of Yr 3 if needed
Task 3: Project Design														
Subtask A: Identify projects to pursue													Facilitator & group	Complete by end of Q2, Yr 2
Subtask B: Conduct & complete bidding process													Facilitator & CFC	Signd & executed contract by end of Q1, Yr 3
Subtask C: Complete project design & engineering													Engineering contractor	Completed design delivered to group y end of Q4, Year 3
Subtask D: Raise funds to support project implementation													Facilitator, WRC, CFC, and group as needed	2-3 leads by end of Yr 2; proposal developmt in Yr 3; requests submitted by Q3 of Yr 3
Subtask E: Research & secure permits/approvals													Facilitattor, CFC, and group as needed (may also include WRC)	Depends on projects -- ensure all research complete by end of Q2 Yr 3 and permits in place by Q4 Yr 3
Other Tasks:														
Finalize grant and financial agreement with BOR													WRC ED	Grant and financial agreement fully executed
Complete reports and annual grant review with BOR													WRC ED, CFC, facilitator	Annual rpts & review completed by Q4 of each year
Compile annual report (submit in early 2028)													WRC, facilitator, CFC	Complete by due date

Figure 3: Project Implementation Schedule, Tasks, and Milestones

Criterion D: Presidential and DOI Priorities

Sub-criterion D1: Climate Change

The Streamflow Group was created as a result of many years of severe drought in the UCF. Periods of drought in the UCF have occurred throughout its known history, but drought impacts are longer-lasting and more severe as climate impacts have increased in southwest Montana. As a result, nearly all of the activities of the group to date, and particularly the work planned through this project, will address climate change, primarily by increasing resilience in UCF aquatic systems. Specifically:

- Projects that result from this process will reduce climate impacts on streams, by increasing the supplies of water available instream (buffering ecosystem resilience and supporting the recreational economy).

- This project will help reduce impacts on producers and communities, as more reliable water and transparency around water supply will result in less climate-driven conflict.
- Building capacity and diversity in a directed and strategic way will bring about much-needed change more rapidly to address climate induced impairments: ie, by focusing on the drainages and users that matter and can move the needle in a tangible and significant fashion.
- Open dialogue around these vexing issues increases awareness of climate changes impacts on the biophysical environment and the communities (i.e. Butte, Deer Lodge and Anaconda).
- Increased group capacity for decision-making and more diverse representation at group gives assurance to agencies that they will be spending aquatic flow funds in the right places and in ways that are less likely to be opposed by stakeholders.
- More diversity in group means more stakeholders and water users exposed to science and research on climate-related issues in the UCF. This will combat misinformation and puts water users in the driver's seat on solutions, so they are more engaged.
- The project will help put additional supplies of cold and clean water into the Clark Fork system during the summer, which is what the UCF desperately needs to combat the impacts of climate change. Natural storage opportunities are ideal in that they can help buffer supplies late season and thermally regulate water temperatures.
- Transparency around water conservation project decision-making and measuring/quantifying project outcomes will help the Clark Fork be adaptively resilient into the future.

Sub-criterion D2: Disadvantaged, Underserved, and Tribal Communities

Disadvantaged and Underserved Community Benefits

This project will benefit three distinct disadvantaged census tracts according to the White House Council on Environmental Quality's Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST): a large tract encompassing the urban area of Anaconda, MT, and two tracks in Butte, MT (see Figure 3). Human health and environmental quality continue to be affected in these areas because of 19th and 20th century industrial mining activities. Our project will serve these disadvantaged communities by addressing water supply issues that cause chronic dewatering in segments of the Clark Fork River and tributaries in and near these census tracts. By restoring flow to these stream segments during critical periods for fish and aquatic ecosystems, this project will provide for important recreational opportunities for these communities, serving not only personal needs, but also providing opportunities for the expansion of economic opportunities such as guiding and tour operation on and around these waters. Further, the UCF Streamflow Group will provide opportunities for citizens of these areas to participate in Streamflow Group activities, including learning about the biophysical and social state of the watershed, watershed planning, and project prioritization. The UCF Streamflow will directly engage these communities through targeted marketing materials and in-person outreach and presence at events centered in these communities, as noted above.

Tribal Benefits

The proposed project is located in the historic territories of the Salish and Pend d'Oreille people currently residing on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) of the Flathead Indian Reservation in northwest Montana. The Tribes helped to initiate the UCF Streamflow Group in 2021 and have been active participants since. The proposed project will directly benefit CSKT both through their continued participation in the Streamflow Group, but also from benefits accrued from Streamflow Group projects and outcomes. Streamflow Group activities and prioritized streamflow restoration projects will support the Tribes' co-owned instream flow water right, known as the "Milltown Right," which legally ensures that 400 CFS is consistently measured at the USGS gage at Turah on the Clark Fork River downstream of the project area. The Tribes' instream flow right has a prior appropriation priority date of 1905, and the Tribes intend to assert this water right to protect habitat of potential use by bull trout, a culturally significant species to the Salish and Pend d'Oreille people (Smith 2022). Bull trout once flourished in the Upper Clark Fork River, and the Salish and Pend d'Oreille harvested bull trout in the area, as evidenced by the place names given to the Upper Clark Fork and its tributaries (Séliš u Qlispé Culture Committee 2019).

The CSKT have treaty rights that protect their ability to harvest culturally significant species such as bull trout in usual and accustomed places. This includes areas of contemporary public land, such as those along the headwaters of most UCF tributaries. Increasing the flow and habitat viability in the UCF and its tributaries in turn supports CSKT goals of restoring bull trout populations in their historic territories. The CSKT have taken an active role in water management in the Upper Clark Fork River basin, as Natural Resource Trustees in the Superfund reclamation and restoration processes, as co-owners of the Milltown Right, and as active participants in the UCF Streamflow Group. Through presentations at Streamflow Group meetings, Tribal representatives have made it clear that they intend to legally protect water in the UCF basin through the Milltown water right but are interested in pursuing win-win solutions with water users in the watershed that provide consistency and sustainability of streamflows in the UCF. Building the capacity and agency of the Streamflow Group through this funding source will enhance Tribal benefits through expanded partnerships and future flow restoration projects.

Project Budget

Budget Table 1 – Summary of Non-Federal and Federal Funding Sources

FUNDING SOURCES	AMOUNT
Non-Federal entities: None (no cost share requirement)	$0
Non-Federal subtotal:	**$0**
REQUESTED Reclamation funding	**$300,000**

Budget Narrative

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

Environmental and Cultural Resources Compliance

Required Permits or Approvals

No agency approvals or permits are required for this project.

Overlap or Duplication of Effort Statement

No activities, costs, or time commitment of key personnel related to this project overlap with other active or anticipated proposals. Further, this proposal does not duplicate any other project or proposal: no other applications for funding (federal or non-federal) are being submitted for this project, now or in the future.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement

The applicant and its project partners have no actual or anticipated conflicts of interest related to this potential federal award. In addition, the applicant, WRC, has in place internal controls, detailed in its by-laws, to identify, disclose, and mitigate or eliminate any potential or identified conflicts of interest. WRC acknowledges that, should it receive this federal award, it is responsible for notifying in writing the Financial Assistance Officer of any conflicts of interest that may arise by WRC or subrecipients under this potential award. In addition, the WRC does not engage in lobbying activities, whether using federal or nonfederal grant funds.

Uniform Audit Reporting Statement

The WRC was not required to submit a Single Audit Report in 2022.

Letters of Support

Please see Letters of Support Included in Appendix B from the following partners and stakeholders:

- Clark Fork Coalition
- Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes
- Mile High Conservation District
- MT Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation
- MT Natural Resource Damage Program
- MT Bureau of Mines & Geology
- Trout Unlimited
- University of Montana

Official Resolution

Please see WRC Board Resolution of November7, 2023 in Appendix C.

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Appendices

A. Project Schedule and Milestones
B. Letters of Support
C. WRC Board Resolution

Appendix A: Project Schedule and Milestones

Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project - Preliminary Project Schedule and Milestones

	Year 1: 2025				Year 2: 2026				Year 3: 2027					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Who	Milestones
Task 1: Watershed Group Development														
Subtask A: Target key water users and water rights holders														
Attend CD mtgs													Facilitator, grad students, CFC staff	Create and track list of targets
Table at 1-2 community events													Members, facilitator	2 mtgs/yr for ea CD
Conduct follow-up mtgs													Grad student, CFC, facilitator, WRC ED	Aim for 2-3 new high-priority outreach target mtgs/yr
Subtask B: Continue to hold regular meetings														
Provide presentations, field trips, etc													Facilitator, CFC WRC ED	6 mtgs/yr; 1 field trip/yr
Provide travel stipends													WRC ED	All members needing assistance have received it
One mtg: strategic planning prep													Facilitator, group, CFC, WRC	Meeting outline and agenda created and approved by group
Subtask C: Invite guest speakers & experts													Facilitator, CFC, WRC ED	Start w/ outside experts yr 2. Goal: 1/year + stipend
Subtask D: Create communications materials													Facilitator, CFC, group participants as needed	Prepared by Summer 2025 for outreach
Subtask E: Create website / maintain site													WRC, web contractor, with input from facilitator & CFC	Start in year 2 - maintain & update as needed annually
Subtask F: Research/pursue funding for proj. development													Facilitator, CFC, WRC ED - group assists as needed	Aim for 1-2 possibilities in development by end of Yr 1; progress toward apps in Yr 2, apps in progress by Q3/4 in Year 3
Task 2: Watershed Planning														
Subtask A: Review/analyze watershed plans														
Compile plans, review, consolodate, report to group													Grad student + facilitator oversight.	Report finalize for group in Yr 1 Q3
Review findings with group, ID priorities													Facilitator & group	Facilitated prioritization process - track notes, feedback, follow-up
Create matrix of endorsed projects													Facilitator & group	Draft matrix by end of Yr 1 - may spill into Yr 2
Create GIS visualization or story map													Grad student + facilitator oversight.	Finalized by end of Q3 in Yr 2
Subtask B: Use matrix as basis for 5-year planning													Facilitator & group	Complete planning process by end of Y2, or Q1 of Yr 3 if needed
Task 3: Project Design														
Subtask A: Identify projects to pursue													Facilitator & group	Complete by end of Q2, Yr 2
Subtask B: Conduct & complete bidding process													Facilitator & CFC	Signd & executed contract by end of Q1, Yr 3
Subtask C: Complete project design & engineering													Engineering contractor	Completed design delivered to group y end of Q4, Year 3
Subtask D: Raise funds to support project implementation													Facilitator, WRC, CFC, and group as needed	2-3 leads by end of Yr 2; proposal developmt in Yr 3; requests submitted by Q3 of Yr 3
Subtask E: Research & secure permits/approvals													Facilitattor, CFC, and group as needed (may also include WRC)	Depends on projects -- ensure all research complete by end of Q2 Yr 3 and permits in place by Q4 Yr 3
Other Tasks:														
Finalize grant and financial agreement with BOR													WRC ED	Grant and financial agreement fully executed
Complete reports and annual grant review with BOR													WRC ED, CFC, facilitator	Annual rpts & review completed by Q4 of each year
Compile annual report (submit in early 2028)													WRC, facilitator, CFC	Complete by due date

Appendix B:

Letters of Support

CLARK FORK COALITION

December 5, 2023

To: Dept. Of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Water Resources Planning Dept.
Re: WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I for FY 2023-24, Funding Opportunity Number: R23AS00362

Letter of Partnership for the Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork (WRC) project application, **The Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project**

The Clark Fork Coalition (CFC) is excited to support and partner with the Watershed Restoration Coalition on their proposal for a WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management grant (FY 2023). The CFC is a watershed group based in western Montana that was formed in 1985 and is dedicated to protecting and restoring the Clark Fork watershed. With a staff of 14, including 2 in the upper Clark Fork (UCF) watershed, the CFC is vested in ensuring restoration efforts in the upper watershed are successful. The CFC has been deeply involved in restoration efforts in the UCF watershed for over 20 years and has been partnering and assisting the Watershed Restoration Coalition (WRC) with their efforts for over a decade.

As an organization with longstanding ties to the UCF, the CFC believes that this opportunity with the CWMP will provide the critical capacity that is necessary to leverage the UCF Streamflow Group's potential. The CFC has been an active participant in the Streamflow Group since 2021 and have been impressed at the diverse conversations and representation of the larger collaborative. Professor Chaffin and the WRC have brought landowners and water users to the table to have honest discussion with water managers about both the intrinsic challenges and potential solutions to some of the vexing water challenges in the watershed.

The Streamflow Group has brought a diverse brew of users and managers to the table in the UCF but to truly move the needle the group needs capacity to plan and implement actionable deliverables. The Streamflow Group has generated some great thoughts on potential win-win solutions, like water leasing & options for natural storage, but needs capacity to fully evaluate the ideas and turn them into on the ground projects. The additional layer of Superfund in the UCF presents both challenges and opportunities. The overlapping jurisdictions, individualized priorities and competition over scarce resources is reflective of the massive restoration need in the watershed.

The Clark Fork has been called a "hard working river" and the communities that depend on it deserve an ecologically sound and resilient aquatic ecosystem. The CFC is excited to partner with the WRC and leverage the Streamflow Groups efforts and ensure the UCF watershed remains robust and resilient into the future. Thank you for this opportunity to support the WRC's efforts and please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

PO Box 7593
Missoula, MT 59807
T: 406.542.0539
F: 406.542.5632
www.clarkfork.org

Karen Knudsen

THE CONFEDERATED SALISH AND KOOTENAI TRIBES
OF THE FLATHEAD NATION
P.O. BOX 278
Pablo, Montana 59855
(406) 275-2700
FAX (406) 275-2806
www.cskt.org

A Confederation of the Salish,
Pend d' Oreille
and Kootenai Tribes

A People of Vision

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Tom McDonald - Chairman
Len Twoteeth - Vice Chair
Martin Charlo - Secretary
Ellie Bundy - Treasurer
Carole Lankford
James "Bing" Matt
Jim Malatare
Mike Dolson
Jennifer Finley
Terry Pitts

December 4, 2023

To: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Water Resources and Planning Office
ATTN: WaterSMART CWMP Application Review Committee

Re: WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I for FY 2023-24
Funding Opportunity Number: R23AS00362
Letter of Partnership for the Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork project application, The Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project

Dear Review Committee Member,

This letter is written to demonstrate the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) support for the Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork (WRC) WaterSMART grant application under the program noted above. The proposed project will build on existing efforts of the Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group and elevate that work by developing priorities and leveraging group capacity for flow projects in the watershed.

The CSKT have a strong connection to the Upper Clark Fork Basin, well established in the anthropological and historical record, as well as currently through their role as trustee in the upper basin superfund sites, their participation in the Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group, and significantly their Stevens Treaty-based water rights in the mainstem Clark Fork River and tributaries. The mainstem water right, commonly referred to as the Milltown Water Right, has a deferral period for implementation. The CSKT and water right co-owner Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks are working on an implementation plan to effectuate the water right. For the Tribes this proposal, and the outcome from the proposed work, are very timely given the need to prepare and execute on an implementation plan in a basin with a complex pattern of water use.

The CSKT appreciates the enhanced outreach, communication, strategic planning, and on the ground work that will result from this proposed project, and believes building trust and relationships through this work will contribute to successfully satisfying the Milltown Water Right.

We are excited to support the WRC's WaterSMART Cooperative Water Management Program proposal and will work collaboratively with WRC and our partners in the watershed to ensure that our goals are aligned with the goals of the grant proposal.

Sincerely,

Seth Makepeace
CSKT Compact Project Officer
Seth.makepeace@cskt.org

Eric Hull
CSKT Water Rights Specialist
eric.hull@cskt.org

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION

Water Resources Division
1424 9th Ave, Helena, MT 59620-1601 Phone: (406) 444-6601 Fax: (406) 444-0533

GREG GIANFORTE, GOVERNOR 1539 ELEVENTH AVENUE

STATE OF MONTANA

DIRECTOR'S OFFICE: (406) 444-2074
FAX: (406) 444-2684

PO BOX 201601
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-1601

December 4, 2023

To: Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Water Resources and Planning Office
Attention: WaterSMART Grant Application Review Committee

Re: WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program
Letter of Support for the Watershed Restoration Coalition project application, *The Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project*

Dear Members of Review Committee,

I am writing to express support for the proposed project, "The Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project," which the Watershed Restoration Coalition (WRC) is submitting on behalf of the Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group (Streamflow Group). The Streamflow Group is composed of diverse, collaborative stakeholders in the Upper Clark Fork Basin (UCF), and their mission is to support and balance the water needs of communities in the Basin.

DNRC helped initiate the Streamflow Group in 2021 in response to chronic dewatering in the Upper Clark Fork, and we continue to support it through staff time and our willingness to serve as their Category A partner on other WaterSMART grant applications. We are impressed at the persistence and enthusiasm demonstrated by the Streamflow Group's participants, and we are committed to supporting the group in the outreach, planning, and project activities described in this proposal.

DNRC's Water Resources Division promotes the sound utilization of the State's waters and protection of existing uses; however, planning for future water demand and adapting to uncertainty in supply due to climate change requires ongoing stakeholder engagement and support. In the UCF, the Streamflow Group has built productive relationships across agencies and water users, largely due to the unwavering commitment of its participants. The Streamflow Group exemplifies the type of collaboration that Montana needs to continue adapting to water management challenges, and its expansion under this grant will serve as a model for locally led, cooperative water management throughout the state.

In addition, this project will help implement key recommendations from Montana State Water Plan (2015), including the expansion of support for basin and community-based watershed planning and the encouragement of collaboration, coordination, and communication among agencies, governments, and water users.

Thank you for considering this important project.

Sincerely,

Valerie J. Kurth, Ph.D.
Water Planning Section Supervisor
Water Resources Division

MBMG
Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology

December 1, 2023

U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Water Resources and Planning Office
Attn: WaterSMART CWMP Application Review Committee, Funding Opportunity # R23AS00362

Letter of Partnership for the Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork (WRC) project application:

The Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project

To Whom it May Concern:

The combined efforts of scientists, land owners, government agencies, conservation organizations, and non-profit groups has been essential in developing flow restoration projects in the upper Clark Fork River, Montana and its tributaries. The collaborative efforts of the Upper Clark Fork Streamflow Group (UCFSG), a volunteer group, have been extremely beneficial in advancing projects that have benefited in-stream flow restoration. Their successes have relied on public out-reach that previously faced social resistance.

Land owner involvement, cooperation, and advice within the UCFSG has helped advance science-based improvements to flows by creating cold-water inputs during critical low-flow times. MBMG staff are involved in UCFSG meetings and have provided information to answer questions regarding groundwater/surface water concepts and potential research opportunities. The group's interests range from split-season leases, managed aquifer recharge (MAR), and seasonal flow retention to numerical modeling. The MBMG will continue to collaborate with efforts to beneficially increase water resources in the valley. The success of previous work has created a bridge for future groundwater and surface-water studies that benefits from the trust built with key stakeholders.

The ability to share successes and engage new partners in continued endeavors would help significantly in addressing the needs of the watershed including its rural communities and associated economies. Funding for applied research and outreach that expands community involvement is critical to continuing the invaluable work being done by the UCFSG in the valley. The MBMG looks forward to continued involvement with the UCFSG to advance flow restoration, ecology, and a better understanding of this important watershed.

Sincerely,

Ginette Abdo

Ginette Abdo

Ground Water Investigation Program Manager
Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology

Mile High Conservation District

P.O. Box 890
Whitehall, MT 59759
406-287-7875
jvmh57@outlook.com

Jack Kambich, Chair

Doug Butori, Vice-Chair
John Moodry, Sec/Treasurer
Pete Dallaserra, Supervisor

Don Ueland, Supervisor
Cam Balentine, Supervisor
Jack Joyce, Supervisor

November 29, 2023

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resources and Planning Office

Attn: WaterSMART CWMP Application Review Committee

RE: WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I for FY 2023-24
Funding Opportunity Number R23AS00362
(WRC) project application **The Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project**

The Mile High Conservation District (MHCD) would like to announce their support for this project to help bring private interest and community and agency goals together. The MHCD in the head waters of the Columbia River Basin has supported increasing water quantity and quality for many years and with the fact that the headwaters are a closed basin, and is an EPA super fund site, water issues are very important to the MHCD and the many users in Silver Bow County. Water rights issues are always at the fore front of every project and discussion to support those efforts is always on going.

The MHCD appreciates your support of this effort.

Sincerely,

John Moodry, Secretary
Mile High Conservation District

STATE OF MONTANA, NATURAL RESOURCE DAMAGE PROGRAM

U.S. Dept. of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resources and Planning Office

Attn: WaterSMART CWMP Application Review Committee

RE: WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I for FY 2023-24
Funding Opportunity Number: R23AS00362
Letter of Partnership for the Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork (WRC) project application, ***The Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project***

Dear Application Review Committee,

I am writing to express support for ***The Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project***.

Aquatic and riparian resources of the Upper Clark Fork River Basin have been injured by hazardous substances, released from mining and mineral-processing operations in the Butte and Anaconda areas. In 1983, the State of Montana (State) filed a lawsuit against the Atlantic Richfield Co., for injuries to the State's natural resources in the Upper Clark Fork River Basin. The State settled this lawsuit which established the Upper Clark Fork River Basin Restoration Fund. The UCFRB Restoration Fund are State of Montana funds, is administered by the Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) and must be used to restore, rehabilitate, replace, or acquire the equivalent of the injured natural resources as defined in our Upper Clark Fork River Basin Aquatic and Terrestrial Resources Restoration Plans (Restoration Plans).

The Restoration Plans prioritize water quantity as the top restoration priority; chronic dewatering continues to detrimentally impact both the aquatic ecosystems and fisheries. The NRDP initiated the Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group in September 2021 by funding a facilitator. This group's mission is "to pursue solutions that support and balance the water needs of the Upper Clark Fork Watershed Community." This group has met bimonthly since initiation and NRDP will continue to fund facilitation through 2024. This group has self-identified as a "coalition of the willing" and includes members from State agencies, conservation groups, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) and importantly, landowners, producers, and water uses in the Upper Clark Fork Basin. This group has been instrumental in bringing multiple stakeholders together, building trust, sharing information, identifying projects, and leveraging resources to achieve common goals. Although very successful, the group would benefit from expansion; we need more landowners at the table for agency and conservation groups to partner with.

Natural Resource Damage Program
State of Montana
P.O. Box 201425
1720 9th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620-1425
Phone: 406-444-0205
Fax: 406-444-0236
nrdp@mt.gov

STATE OF MONTANA, NATURAL RESOURCE DAMAGE PROGRAM

The NRDP is very supportive of this grant application to expand the capacity of the Streamflow Working group. We see the benefits of this grant to include:

- Providing third-party outreach to and engagement of key stakeholders in the Upper Clark Fork Basin.
- Providing a platform for collaboration on meeting ecological flow targets.
- Addressing ecological challenges in the basin through flow restoration while also addressing needs of the rural communities and associated economies.

Douglas H. Martin

Acting NRDP Manager
Natural Resource Damage Program

Natural Resource Damage Program
State of Montana

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1720 9th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620-1425

Phone: 406-444-0205
Fax: 406-444-0236
nrdp@mt.gov

December 4, 2023

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resources and Planning Office
Attn: WaterSMART CWMP Application Review Committee

Re: WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I for FY 2023-24, Funding Opportunity Number: R23AS00362, Letter of Partnership for the Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork project application, ***The Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project***

Dear Committee:

Trout Unlimited (TU) supports the Watershed Restoration Coalition's (WRC) WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program proposal "The Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project".

Trout Unlimited has been working to improve streamflow and habitat in the Upper Clark Fork (UCF) basin for the past two decades and has recently identified the UCF as a Priority Water in Montana for TU strategic action to care for and recover the native and wild trout fisheries in the watershed. Our Clark Fork River Basin strategic action plan specifically calls for improving instream flow and water temperatures in mainstem habitats and key tributaries of the Upper Clark Fork River to address chronic dewatering and concerning trends for native and wild trout populations in the basin.

Chronic dewatering and diminishing water supplies for agriculture have proven to be difficult issues to solve in the UCF due to the impacts of climate change, the complexities of water right administration, and the challenges of modern small-scale agriculture in Montana. Solutions that meet all stakeholder needs are not easy to come by without common goals and strong community support.

TU has been an active participant in the Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group since its creation in September 2021 and has found it a valuable forum for sharing information, developing shared purpose, building trust, and leveraging funding

Trout Unlimited: America's Leading Coldwater Fisheries Conservation Organization
321 East Main Street, Suite 411, Bozeman, MT 59715
cell: (208)407-6862 - email: morgan.case@tu.org
312 N. Higgins Ave, Suite 200, Missoula, MT 59802
cell: (406) 546-5680 - email: casey.hackathorn@tu.org

opportunities to address water conflicts in the UCF. To tackle streamflow challenges in the UCF, the activities in this proposal are critical next steps to build upon the early success of the group. An increased outreach effort will educate the community about the problem, expand participation from water users, and strengthen future efforts with more diversity of experience. Plan development will help identify mutual goals and prioritize projects that can be pursued by group participants. And finally, funding can be targeted to develop designs and to leverage additional resources to implement prioritized projects.

Trout Unlimited fully supports the WRC's proposal on behalf of the Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group. We look forward to working with our partners in implementation of the project. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Casey Hackathorn
Montana State Director

Morgan Case
Instream Flow Specialist

December 4th, 2023

To: Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Water Resources and Planning Office
Attention: WaterSMART Grant Application Review Committee

RE: WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I for FY 2023-24
Funding Opportunity Number: R23AS00362

Letter of Partnership for the Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork (WRC) project application, ***The Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project***

Dear WaterSMART CWMP Application Review Committee,

This letter is written in support of the "The Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group Development and Planning Project" grant application submitted to the Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program (CWMP) by the Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork (WRC) to assist the *Upper Clark Fork River Streamflow Group* in building capacity and sustaining momentum toward addressing chronic dewatering in the Upper Clark Fork River watershed (UCF). Chronic stream dewatering is perceived by Streamflow Group participants as a direct threat to aquatic resources, livelihoods, community well-being, Tribal interests, and the success of Superfund remediation in this heavily mining-impacted watershed. Over the past several years, the UCF Streamflow Group has become a trusted venue for information sharing and leveraging collective capacities of water use and management stakeholders toward win-win projects designed to secure reliable water flows during times of chronic stream dewatering without compromising important livelihoods in the watershed.

As part of my research and service work as an associate professor at the University of Montana, I am contracted by the MT Natural Resources Damage Program to facilitate the work of the UCF Streamflow Group, a coalition of state agencies, conservation organizations, Tribal water resource managers, industry, university researchers, and irrigators' groups working collaboratively to pursue solutions that support and balance the water needs of Upper Clark Fork River watershed communities. I write today in my capacity at the University of Montana *and* as Streamflow Group coordinator to express support for this project from both the University of Montana and the UCF Streamflow Group. This project *clearly supports* the Streamflow Group's explicit and co-developed goals which include (1) building a clear, collective understanding of the water use and streamflow challenges in the Upper Clark Fork River, (2) sharing information about ongoing activities pursued by participants to address water use and streamflow challenges, and (3) determining a suite of additional actions that could be initiated by Streamflow Group participants to augment flow during critical times.

I am excited to support WRC's WaterSMART CWMP proposal and will continue to work collaboratively with WRC and all of our partners in the Streamflow Group to ensure that the proposed project will result in tangible streamflow benefits that support the collective needs of stakeholders in the watershed.

Sincerely,

Brian C. Chaffin, Ph.D.

Coordinator, UCF Streamflow Group
Associate Professor, University of Montana
Associate Director, Montana Water Center

W.A. FRANKE COLLEGE OF FORESTRY & CONSERVATION
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

32 Campus Dr., Forestry 109 | Missoula, Montana 59812 | 406.243.6575 | brian.chaffin@umontana.edu

Appendix C:

WRC Board Resolution

Watershed Restoration
Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork
RESOLUTION
Board of Directors Meeting November 7, 2023

Approval of Application for Grant Funds from the Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I for Fiscal Year 2023

Funding Opportunity Announcement # R23AS00362

RESOLVED, that the Board of Directors of the Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork (WRC) identifies Ted Dodge, Executive Director of the WRC, as possessing the legal authority to enter the WRC into contractual agreements and financial and legal obligations associated with the receipt of an Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I for Fiscal Year 2023 award.

RESOLVED FURTHER, that if the WRC is selected to receive funds through the Cooperative Watershed management Program it will work with the Bureau of Reclamation to meet established deadlines for entering into a financial assistance agreement.

RESOLVED FURTHER, that the Board of Directors supports the application for the project, "Upper Clark fork Restoration Plan Development," as it furthers the WRC's mission to protect and restore the upper Clark Fork River Basin.

I John Hollenback, certify that I am the duly elected and acting Chairman of the Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork, a not-for-profit corporation organized under the laws of the state of Montana. I further certify that the resolution set forth above was adopted by the Board of Directors of the Watershed Restoration Coalition of the Upper Clark Fork at a duly noted meeting on November 7, 2023, and that said resolution has not been modified or rescinded.

Executed in Deer Lodge, Montana the 7th day of November 2023.

John Hollenback by SD

John Hollenback Chairman