WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program
PLANNING GRANT PROPOSAL

Priest River Watershed Group Restoration Planning:
Advancing Collaboration, Communication, and Planning for Water Quality Solutions in Northwestern Idaho

Sept. 3, 2024

Applicant and Project Manager:
Erin Plue, Trout Unlimited
North Idaho Program Manager
412 Pine Street, Sandpoint, Idaho 83864
Erin.Plue@tu.org
208-946-7397
Trout Unlimited EIN: 38-1612715

TROUT UNLIMITED

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary

Date: Sept. 3, 2024

Applicant Name: Trout Unlimited

City, County, State: Priest River, Bonner County, Idaho

Project Summary: The Priest River Watershed Group (PRWG) will support and enhance the native cold-water fishery and water quality in the Lower Priest River Watershed by improving human connection to the Lower Priest River through education and outreach; completing a watershed restoration plan for the East River, a critical tributary to the Lower Priest River; and developing broad scientific understanding of the Lower Priest River watershed. The Lower Priest River Watershed, located in the northwest Panhandle of Idaho, begins at the outlet of Priest Lake and flows 45 miles south to the Pend Oreille River, and the entire basin is federally listed as critical habitat for Bull Trout, S*alvelinus confluentus*. Record drought conditions, high water temperatures, decreasing Bull Trout redd counts, reduced flows, and fish kills in recent years have increased concern for, and brought new attention to, the river. The PRWG currently has a broad membership of stakeholders, including landowners, federal and state agencies, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians, local government, business and industry interests, outfitters, environmental groups, and other representatives from the Priest River and Priest Lake communities who are committed to collaboratively find solutions to support the Priest River Basin.

Length of Project: September 30, 2025 – September 30, 2028

Federal Facility: The U.S. Forest Service

2. Project Location

This project is located in the Priest River Subbasin, USGS Hydrological Unit 17010215, which is in the northwest corner of Idaho and contains 981 square miles. (Figure 1.) The closest incorporated city is Priest River, which is located at the mouth of the Priest River, the southern-most boundary of the watershed, where the Priest River joins the Pend Oreille River. The northern most reaches of the watershed cross into Washington State and Canada. The focus of the PRWG will be the Lower Priest River and its tributaries. The Lower Priest River begins at the outlet of Priest Lake.

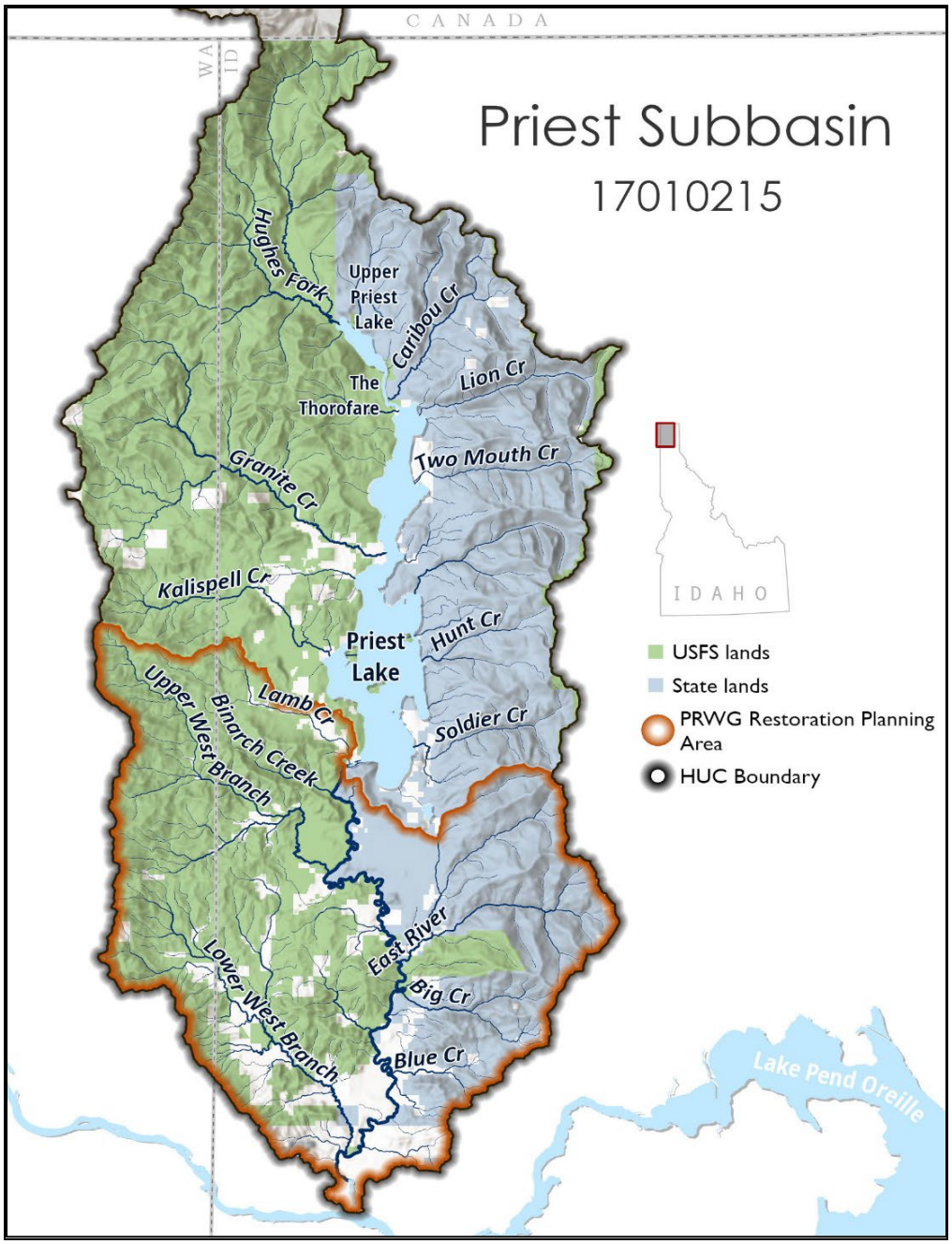

Figure 1. Priest River Subbasin with PRWG planning boundary indicated in red.

3. Applicant Category and Eligibility

3.1. Applicant Category

Trout Unlimited (TU) is applying as an Existing Watershed Group. TU received a WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Program grant in 2022 to establish the PRWG and has spent the last two years carrying out the activities funded through that proposal. If granted an extension, the current CWMP funding should take the PRWG into the summer of 2025. The PRWG now has a core

membership of diverse stakeholders in the basin and is applying under the Existing Watershed Group category to continue the work of building the organization and its internal structures, growing community awareness of watershed issues, developing a restoration plan for the East River and the foundation needed to write a Restoration Plan for the Lower Priest River Basin.

The PRWG was conceptualized in fall of 2021 resulting from building polarization amongst the Priest River watershed stakeholders due to a concept the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) had been evaluating to take cold water from the depths of Priest Lake and bypass it around the dam and into the Lower Priest River to improve the habitat for cold-water fish species downstream. Activities since the previous grant award include forming the PRWG with a diverse membership of stakeholders; adopting an organizational structure, a mission, a vision statement, and goals; creating a website; drafting a strategic plan; compiling existing data, planning documents and studies for a clearing house of planning resources; identifying major challenges for the coldwater fishery in the Priest River; identifying gaps in the existing data and information on the Priest River Watershed; and initiating group discussions regarding strategies to fill these data gaps and prioritizing resource challenges facing the fishery.

3.2. Eligibility of Applicant

TU is the nation's largest grassroots cold water conservation organization with the mission "to bring together diverse interests to care for and recover rivers and streams so that our children can experience the joy of wild and native trout and salmon." TU works to achieve this mission on a local, state, and national level through an extensive volunteer network and dedicated staff. Headquartered near Washington, D.C., TU is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1959 that currently has approximately 332 year round staff working in 40 offices from Alaska to North Carolina. There is an active local chapter of TU, the Idaho Panhandle Chapter, that has around 300 members who are kept informed of PRWG activities.

TU has an annual budget of $85 million and currently manages over 300 federally-sourced grants. During the past five fiscal years, TU has received $55.4 million of federal direct and pass-through funding. TU is subject to annual audits every year under the OMB's Uniform Guidance for federal grants. TU is a low-risk auditee and has received a clean federal grant audit the past three years with no reportable conditions. The fiscal aspects of the TU- BOR partnership are overseen by Jim Hughey, Chief Financial Officer. He oversees several national and regional accountants who handle essential fiscal and administrative tasks for federal grants including the WaterSMART CWMP.

TU has a long history of working with diverse entities including timber companies, ranchers, federal and state governments, tribes, and the aquatic recreation community to improve our waterbodies in the face of a legacy degradation, a shifting climate and rapidly expanding developmental pressure. The PRWG fits in well with this history.

TU will administer the CWMP grant, using a portion to support TU staff time and provide for indirect costs associated with the project. TU staff time will be required to manage and coordinate a multitude of project activities including facilitation support; information sessions, field trips; communications among project committees and task forces; filling of data gaps;

development of the mapping tool and compiling the restoration project clearinghouse; the subaward with the Kalispel Tribe; and overall grant management responsibilities.

4. Technical Project Description

In this grant cycle the PRWG will continue the work of building the organization and its internal structures, increasing broader community awareness of watershed issues, developing a restoration plan for the East River and creating the foundation needed to write a restoration plan for the Lower Priest River Basin.

4.1. Previous CWMP Phase 1 Grant

TU was awarded a previous CWMP Phase 1 grant in early 2023, which provided the bulk of the initial funding necessary to launch the PRWG. The scope of this Phase 1 grant continues a focus on Tasks A and B, however, the organizational work needed under Task A has changed from recruitment and start-up activities, such as procuring a facilitator, to bolstering the foundation of the group and fostering the sustainability of the organization through sound internal structures and continued trust-building.

Task A accomplishments under the previous CWMP grant includes:

- Hiring a facilitator (twice);
- Recruiting and maintaining a diverse membership of stakeholders;
- Establishing a website;
- Conducting extensive educational outreach to increase the collective knowledge of the PRWG and general public;
- Adopting an organizational structure, mission, vision statement, goals, and strategic plan;
- Finding consensus on three comment letters to state and federal agencies.

Task B progress under the previous CWMP grant includes:

- Creating a keyword searchable database of data, catalog, research and planning documents;
- Identifying the major challenges for the coldwater fishery in the Priest River;
- Beginning to identify data gaps in the body of work that studies and analyzes the water resource issues in the Priest River Watershed and strategies to fill those gaps;
- Initial discussion around more difficult tasks, including prioritizing challenges facing the fishery and identifying potential restoration projects.

Trust-building has and continues to be particularly important to the success of the group due to the contentious nature of the task at hand. Because of this tension and the loss of the initial facilitator, the PRWG made less progress than anticipated on the Task B milestones outlined in the previous grant, with much of the group's energy focused on Task A activities. More detail on the need for trust-building is provided under Sub-criterion B2, Project Benefits.

4.2. Goals

The following goals were arrived at through the PRWG's strategic planning process and workplan development. This proposal is to fund the work to achieve these goals:

- Establish the internal processes and long-term sustainability of the PRWG by defining and adopting structures and systems for self-governance, coordination, and administrative efficacy.
- Develop a broad scientific understanding of the Lower Priest River watershed to establish the foundation for PRWG's long-term goal of writing a restoration plan for the lower Priest River and tributaries.
- Improve human connection to the lower Priest River by developing a clear understanding and awareness of the use and issues affecting the watershed.
- Short-term goal: Create a focused Work Plan which outlines a strategy and specific actions the PRWG can take to improve the Priest River watershed with a focus on the Lower Priest River.
- Long-term goal: Develop a prioritized restoration plan for the lower Priest River.

4.3. Tasks and Activities

Activity 1: Organizational Development (TASK A)

TU and partners will continue to contract with a professional third-party facilitator to work with the PRWG to continue to build trust among stakeholders and guide dialogue that leads to collaborative decisions that benefit the watershed. The facilitator will assist the PRWG in refining, clarifying and improving the applicability of group protocols and steering committee structure. The PRWG will develop a long-term funding plan that identifies funding needs, potential funding sources, and includes a schedule. Another key Task A activity is to develop annual work plans to set goals, budgets, responsible parties and benchmarks for completion.

Figure 2. PRWG members and technical experts on a September 2023 field trip.

Activity 2: Stakeholder Education (TASK A)

In the spring of 2023, due to the loss of the initial facilitator and extremely contentious relations in the PRWG, the TU Project Manager shifted focus from shared decision making to creating shared understanding. This was done by hosting expert panels (aka "info sessions") and creation of a shared space for information (the website)

prior to development of a PRWG adopted communications plan. Now that the steering committee functions well and frequently reaches consensus, the PRWG will create and adopt a communications plan. The plan will produce specific goals, talking points, and a list of outreach opportunities that will likely include refinement of the PRWG website; creation of outreach materials; an estimated four more informational sessions; and annual field trips.

Activity 3: Research (TASKS A & B)

The PRWG has compiled a comprehensive set of data, planning documents, studies and online resources over the last two years, which are in the process of being organized into the newly developed "data catalog." The catalog is a keyword searchable database populated with links to resources and other key information, and will be publicly available on the PRWG website.

The process of cataloguing data also coincides with the ongoing work of identifying data gaps. As the PRWG learns, questions naturally arise through conversation. If they are not answered through the data catalog or conversations with the appropriate local experts, they are considered data gaps. The necessity of filling the gap is discussed within the group and if the information is essential to planning, the PRWG will plan to fill the gaps, which may require funding sources, partners and project managers to direct the research needed. Many data gaps have already been identified and are being filled via research that partners have committed to completing.

Another key research activity will be building a mapping tool/geospatial database to aid in assessments, planning and project prioritization. The Kalispel Tribe has offered to use their Natural Resources Department's Geospatial Viewer Database as the base map for this effort. Working in collaboration with the Tribe, a TU GIS Specialist will build additional layers to add to the existing map. Map layers will likely include land ownership, land use, access, wetlands, implemented projects, fish migration barriers and road crossings, temperature data sites, flow data sites, vegetation, wetlands and more. New layers will be created as needed. The TU Project Manager will replace the current map on the PRWG website with this tool for use by all stakeholders, which will serve as a key planning tool for the restoration planning.

Activity 4: Restoration Planning (TASK B)

The PRWG will identify and prioritize potential restoration projects to address the critical resource needs of this watershed. One activity under this task will be to assemble a clearinghouse of restoration project ideas informed by local resource managers, stakeholders and watershed experts, with an initial emphasis on the East River. This effort will build on the data catalog, combining all of the collective experience and knowledge to identify measures that improve water quality or have other resources benefits.

The Kalispel Tribe will serve as a subrecipient tasked with working with the PRWG to develop a ranking matrix to prioritize projects on the East River that follows the decision analysis approach described in Cipollini et al. (Cipollini, 2005). Criteria and ranking scores will be developed that incorporate whether the project addresses impairments to habitat forming processes and hydrologic connectivity, increases climate resilience by addressing future peak and low flows and temperature through promotion of environmental variability and spatial heterogeneity (Beechie, 2013); has cultural value; landowner support; cost; likelihood of obtaining funding;

certainty of project success; difficulty of design and permitting; and proximity to other projects and at-risk fish populations. Restoration actions will be identified, prioritized and incorporated into a restoration plan for the East River, a large tributary to the Priest River and only remaining tributary to the lower river that is documented to still have bull trout spawning in it. The Kalispel Tribe is the perfect team to lead this effort because they recently completed a Watershed Assessment for this important tributary and they've been involved in restoration efforts throughout the basin.

The East River Restoration Plan and ranking matrix will also serve as a model for drafting the Lower Priest River Watershed Restoration Plan. While the PRWG is working on the East River Restoration Plan, the Kalispel Tribe will be completing a watershed assessment for the Lower Priest River. That assessment is expected by early 2027. Once both the East River Watershed Restoration Plan and the Lower Priest River Watershed Assessment are complete, the PRWG will turn its attention to prioritizing restoration activities for the Lower Priest River.

5. Evaluation Criteria

5.1. Evaluation Criterion A – Watershed Group Diversity & Geographic Scope

5.1.1. Sub-criterion A1-Watershed Group Diversity

There are two main communities in the watershed, Priest Lake and Priest River. The watershed has year-round and seasonal homeowners, ranchers, farmers, fishing guides, resort and marina owners. The Priest River basin is a popular destination for outdoor recreation. Industry stakeholders include timber companies and hydropower. Several conservation, recreation and environmental organizations are active in the basin. Property ownership is heavily dominated by US Forest Service (USFS) lands and Idaho Department of Lands (IDL). There are numerous other state, federal and local managers and political representatives with interests in the basin. The Kalispel Tribe, whose reservation is nearby in Washington, has interest in the watershed as it is part of their traditional homeland and contains many resources upon which generations of tribal members depended. Accordingly, members of the timber industry, environmental organizations, fishing guides, and state and federal natural resource agencies and land managers all expressed interest in the formation of the PRWG, and many are involved in some capacity – as outlined in the table below. Under the 2022 CWMP Phase 1 award, TU reached out to these stakeholders to recruit members for the PRWG.

Steering Committee: The PRWG is governed by its Steering Committee, which typically meets monthly and makes decisions for the PRWG by consensus. Full unanimity is sought, and consensus is reached when everyone agrees they can accept what is proposed and every effort has been made to meet the interest of all participants. A formal vote using gradients of agreement (thumbs up, sideways or down) is taken for major decisions with only thumbs down considered dissent. Initial membership to the Steering Committee was limited to members of the public who requested to join and were able to commit to the substantial time it requires. The committee initially had 14 members, but two left due to their inability to attend the required amount of meetings (never missing more than two in a row). Interest from a potential new Steering Committee member has sparked discussion of formalizing the membership process and

limitations. The Steering Committee now has 12 highly committed members representing core stakeholder groups and interests in the basin, and is discussing a formal membership process f. Maintaining its diversity and balance of different interests is critical moving forward. Steering Committee members provide active and collaborative guidance to the watershed group and ensure communication and engagement with their communities. Six of the twelve members have an alternate individual who can step in and serve as a proxy for their organization.

Technical Team: There is no formal process for designating Technical Team Members, who are technical resource experts of the Priest River Basin and whose participation is critical to the success of the watershed group. Technical Team members are essential for building understanding of the basin and to provide restoration ideas. They are typically local resource managers who are welcome to attend the majority of PRWG meetings and are directly consulted for recommendations and information. The Technical Team currently does not meet separately from the Steering Committee or general meetings.

General Members: General members are considered anyone who has an interest in the Priest River and wants to stay engaged. General membership is informal, and available to anyone who attends a public meeting or signs up for the PRWG email list maintained by the TU Project Manager. Members are kept informed of meetings and activities through the email list, which currently has 126 email addresses. Open meetings typically have an attendance of approximately 30 to 40 people.

The bullets below provide more details on key members and participants in the PRWG;

Steering Committee Members (12 Members):

- The Kalispel Tribe serves on both the Steering Committee and the Technical Team and has provided a letter of support for this proposal. Mike Lithgow, Information and Outreach Coordinator for the Kalispel Tribe Natural Resource Department and Eric Berntsen, Water, Habitat and Environment Program Manager, represent the Kalispel Tribe on the Steering Committee. The Kalispel Tribe supports the PRWG in the following ways:
  - Informational presentations for the PRWG;
  - Offering the use of their Natural Resources Department's Geospatial Viewer Database as the base map for a mapping tool to serve the PRWG;
  - Sharing the Tribe's recently completed East River Watershed Assessment, which will be used by the PRWG to develop a ranking matrix for the East River. The Kalispel Tribe is listed as a subrecipient of a portion of the CWMP funds to provide technical assistance and PRWG guidance with this task.
  - Conducting a watershed assessment for the Lower Priest River using funding that was previously obtained separately from the PRWG. This assessment will be used down the line to develop the Lower Priest River Restoration Plan.
- ICL is a statewide environmental organization, and is represented by Jennifer Ekstrom, ICL's North Idaho Director, serving from the Sandpoint office, where her focus of work is protecting the water quality of North Idaho's lakes.

- Fishing guides are represented by Hank Jones, owner of Inland NW Fishing Guides and Jeremy Patterson, owner of Off-Grid Angler. Hank and Jeremy hold the only two permits to guide on the Lower Priest River and they have provided a combined letter of support.
- TU is represented by Erin Plue, who also serves as the administrator for the PRWG. Her alternate, TU North Idaho Project Manager Cathy Gidley, also attends stakeholder meetings. The local Idaho Panhandle Chapter of TU has provided a letter of support for this effort.
- Stop the Priest Lake Siphon (SPLS) is a community organization that formed in opposition to IDFG plans to create a cold-water bypass around the Priest Lake dam to provide cooler temperatures for the Priest River fishery. SPLS is represented by Allan Songstad, a Priest Lake resident. SPLS submitted a letter of support.
- SCA is an environmental group based in Priest River that focusses on protecting the natural resources, fish and wildlife of the Priest Lake Basin and the Selkirk Mountains. SCA is represented by Board Vice President Jon Quinn-Hurst and Executive Director Amy Anderson. SCA has provided a letter of support for this proposal.
- Recreational boaters are represented by Sean Stash, a retired US Forest Service fish biologist familiar with the watershed and an avid river rafter.
- IWF is represented by Kyle Maki, North Idaho Field Representative and Cody Montgomery IWF member. IWF is a non-profit organization that advocates for the conservation of Idaho's fish and wildlife, habitat, and outdoor heritage. IWF provided a letter of support.
- The Inland Empire Task Force is an environmental advocacy group focused on forestry practices, which is represented by Paul Sieracki, a local resident.
- The Priest River Community is represented by two local residents, Betty Gardner and Pam Duquette.
- The Priest Lake Community is represented by long-time resident and West Priest Lake Cabin Owners' member Eric Johnson and Priest Lake cabin owner Bill Neumayar.

Technical Team Members:

- IDEQ provides water quality expertise, informational presentations, and attends stakeholder meetings. IDEQ has provided a letter of support.
- IDL provides forestry, recreation and timber management expertise. IDL has provided informational presentations to the PRWG.
- The USFS provides information regarding fish, wildlife, climate, recreation and timber management on the lands they manage, which are primarily on the west side of the watershed. The USFS has provided information presentations for the PRWG.
- The POBC is an advisory board to the Idaho Governor on water quality and quantity issues on the Pend Oreille Basin, which includes the Priest Basin. The POBC attends PRWG meetings and serves as a conduit of information going out of the PRWG through the Commission's well-attended quarterly meetings.
- Avista, a hydropower utility with two dams on the Lower Clark Fork River, upstream of Lake Pend Oreille, has an interest in restoring Bull Trout as part of its protection,

enhancement, and mitigation responsibilities under its federal dam license. Avista supplies grant-writing support.

- The USFWS has provided information presentations, a letter of support and is committed to share existing research on the watershed with the group and to assist in future research.
- USGS has provided information presentations, a letter of support and is committed to share existing research and to assist in future research on the watershed.
- IDFG attends stakeholder meetings, provides informational presentations, and submitted a letter of support.
- The NRCS has provided informational presentations.
- IDWR is the agency responsible for the Outlet Dam on Priest Lake and provides informational presentations to the group.

The PRWG will continue with outreach activities focused on reaching the broader regional community, which will also serve as pathways to new, previously unidentified stakeholders.

5.1.2. Sub-criterion A2 -Geographic Scope

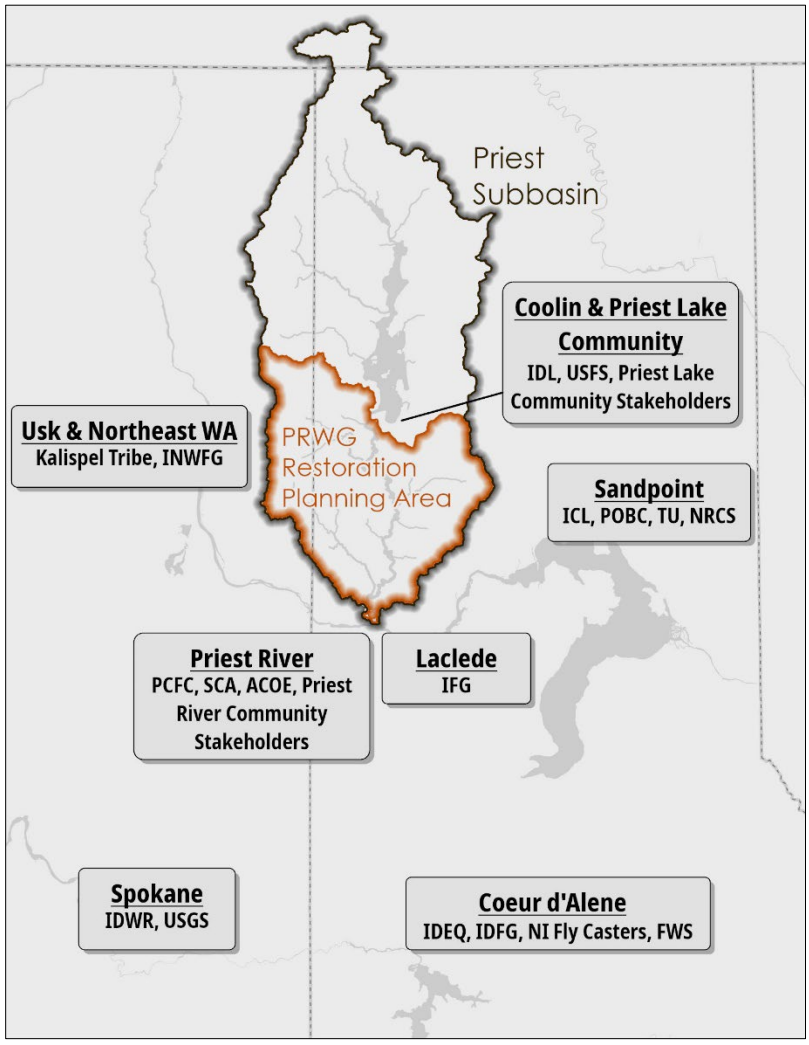

Figure 3: PRWG Stakeholder Map

The Priest River basin (HUC 17010215) is a 981 square mile area and located in the northwest corner of the Idaho Panhandle within Bonner and Boundary counties. The watershed is broken down into three identifiable areas in this proposal: The Northern Headwaters; Upper and Lower Priest Lake; and the Lower Priest River.

Stakeholders are from the entire Priest basin, but the primary planning focus is the Lower Priest River and its tributaries. (Figure 2.) This division of the basin for planning is because the Northern Headwaters and the Upper Priest River areas are characterized by mostly intact mature, inland temperate rainforest riparian habitat where human impacts are far fewer, and opportunities for restoration are limited. The Lower Priest

Lake has much higher use and faces more environmental challenges than the portions of the Basin to the north.

The stakeholders listed in Figure 2 are active at some level in the PRWG, either as a Steering Committee member, on the Technical Team or as a general member who attends informational meetings and receives email updates.

The Northern Headwaters

The northern headwaters of the Upper Priest River originate in the Nelson Mountain Range of British Columbia, and the Upper Priest River runs through Boundary County before flowing into Upper Priest Lake. Western headwaters of major tributaries originate in Washington State on a mountain crest that separates the Panhandle from the Colville National Forest in the Salmo-Priest Wilderness. Tributaries that originate in Washington State are contained in the jurisdiction of the Panhandle National Forest. The Selkirk Mountain Range rises on the east flank of the basin. All the lands outside of Bonner County are either in Canada, U.S. National Forest, or Idaho State Endowment lands. Stakeholders from this area are the USFS and IDL. Canada is not included as a stakeholder because there is very little area of the headwaters located there.

Upper Priest River (including Upper Priest Lake and Thorofare) and Lower Priest Lake

The Upper Priest River includes Upper Priest Lake and the Thorofare which connects Upper Priest Lake to Lower Priest Lake. Large portions of the Upper Priest River and Lake are in roadless areas. The Upper Priest Lake Basin is home to both Bull Trout and Westslope Cutthroat Trout, *Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*, in resident and migratory populations. The Upper Priest Basin is managed by IDFG differently than the Lower Priest Lake, because the native fishery has been better able to subsist in the Upper versus the Lower Priest Lake.

The Lower Priest Lake is larger than the upper lake and a popular summer recreation destination. The east shores of the lake are adjacent to Idaho State Endowment lands, with many private cabin sites along the shore. The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation operates two state parks on the east shores of the lake, and Dickensheet Campground along Priest River just downstream of Priest Lake. The community of Priest Lake, which includes gas stations, restaurants, a library, school, golf course and other businesses, is centered around State Highway 57. At the southern end of the lake is Coolin, a small unincorporated community with a motel, stores, restaurants, marina and a community hall. Several resorts and marinas encircle the lake on privately owned properties. Much of the western lakeshore is managed the U.S. Forest Service, which still leases cabin sites along the shore, and manages several campsites on the lower and upper lake. The Lower Priest Lake supports a vibrant summer economy based primarily off recreation on the lakes and the year-round resident population gets very small in the winters.

Lower Priest River and its Tributaries

The Lower Priest River begins at the outlet of the lower Priest Lake and Priest Lake's Outlet Dam is located about a quarter mile down from the outlet of the lake. The Lower Priest River travels a sinuous path about 45 miles long with several significant tributaries entering along its length. The town of Priest River is an incorporated community of about 2,000 people with deep ties to the timber industry. The Lower Priest River empties into the Pend Oreille River, on the

east side of town, next to a former sawmill. Stimson Lumber operates a stud mill on the southern shore of the Pend Oreille River opposite downtown Priest River.
The "community" of Priest River includes the town of Priest River and rural landowners along the Lower Priest River mainstem and tributaries. Land uses in this community mainly include timberlands, ranching, farming and residential homes. Most of the land along the Lower Priest River and tributaries is managed by the USFS and IDL. Up until recently recreational use of the Lower Priest River has been minimal with limited recreational fishing and boating.

5.2. Evaluation Criterion B – Developing Strategies to Address Critical Watershed Needs

5.2.1. Sub-criterion B1 – Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

Endangered Species

The Lower Priest River Basin is of high importance to the recovery of Bull Trout, a species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1998 (Figure 3). Bull Trout require cold clear water, intact migration corridors, and abundant complex forms of instream cover including woody debris, undercut banks, boulders and deep pools. Bull Trout do not compete well with other non-native chars such as Brook Trout *Salvelinus fontinalis* and Lake Trout *Salvelinus namaycush*. Bull Trout numbers have plummeted in Priest Lake, where Lake Trout are present. Bull Trout fare better in Upper Priest Lake, where IDFG practices Lake Trout suppression.

Bull Trout also migrate to the Middle Fork East River, which is a tributary of the Lower Priest River. Due to the timing of Bull Trout movement and the dam operations, Bull Trout are unlikely to pass above Outlet Dam at the Priest Lake outlet. The Lower Priest River is also home to native Mountain Whitefish, *Prosopium williamsoni,* and Westslope Cutthroat. Non-native fish, Smallmouth Bass *Micropterus dolomieu* and Brook Trout with more tolerance for warm water are found in the river. The only known Bull Trout spawning in the Lower Priest River Basin occurs in the East River, with the majority in the Middle Fork East River, which originates in the Selkirk Crest. The headwaters of the East River are home to a healthy population of Westslope Cutthroat, but the Lower Priest River is underperforming as a cold-water fishery overall, according to IDFG. The agency reports 0.02 Westslope Cutthroat Trout per 100 square meters in the Lower Priest River versus 1.93 cutthroat trout per 100 square meters in the comparable North Fork Coeur d'Alene River.

The Priest River Basin is included in the Clark Fork River Basin Recovery Unit of designated critical habitat for Bull Trout, designated by the USFWS. Lower Priest River is considered as supporting sub adult and adult rearing and is considered important for Bull Trout recovery. Yet, throughout the basin, Bull Trout numbers are low or absent. The adopted goal of the Clark Fork Recovery Unit Teams is a "sustained net increase in bull trout abundance and increased distribution of some local populations within existing core areas in this recovery unit …"[1] Recovery may require addressing habitat limitations, three of which are detailed below.

[1] Panhandle Bull Trout Technical Advisory Team (TAT). 1998. Priest River basin key watershed bull trout problem assessment. Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Div. Of IDEQ, Coeur d'Alene, ID.

Temperature

Elevated temperatures appear to be a limiting factor in supporting a thriving cold-water fishery in the Lower Priest River Basin. River segments with elevated temperatures include the lower 34.4 miles of Priest River from Upper West Branch Priest River confluence to Pend Oreille River, as well as tributaries Binarch Creek, East River, and the Middle and North forks of the East River. All are listed as failing to meet water quality standards to support cold water aquatic life on the most recent Section 303D list of the Clean Water Act because of elevated temperatures.

Bull Trout need water between 2°C and 15°C (36°F and 59°F) to thrive. Priest Lake outflow typically exceeds 70°F in summer, as the source is the epilimnetic waters of the lake. Below the dam, cold water input from tributaries, groundwater seeps, wetlands and springs cool the river's instream temperatures as the river flows downstream, according to data gathered by the Kalispel Tribe. While many tributaries and cold-water intrusions below the dam have a measurable positive influence on the Lower Priest River, several tributaries also have temperatures exceeding water quality standards. Data for East River shows this key tributary to be in violation of state Westslope Cutthroat Trout spawning and incubation criteria, as well as EPA and Idaho Bull Trout juvenile rearing and spawning criteria. Data from Binarch Creek shows exceedances of state standards for Westslope Cutthroat spawning and incubation. Temperature TMDLs have been developed for both these tributaries.

From 1993-2011, the mean August stream temperature of Lower Priest River was 19.53°C, according to NorWeST Regional Database and Modeled Stream Temperatures Website. Idaho's standard for Bull Trout juvenile rearing is 13°C for the warmest 7-day period of summer. A USGS temperature data logger at the river mile 3.8 gaging site showed that the state standards' numeric temperature criteria for Cold Water Aquatic Life (19 °C daily mean) was exceeded 44 % of the criteria days in 1998, and 27 % in 2000. This data led to the Lower Priest River 303D listing as impaired for water temperature.[2]

The situation will only be exacerbated by climate change. Projections anticipate temperatures in Idaho to increase by 3.7°C by 2069, with a 6% increase in precipitation.[3] But this basin is already experiencing the effects of extreme temperatures. A heat wave in early July 2021 killed 40-50 fish in one location of the Lower Priest River with smaller die-offs in other parts of the river, primarily impacting Mountain Whitefish and some Westslope Cutthroat Trout. This recent incident and climate projections have added urgency to the state's objective to improve the cold-water habitat of Lower Priest River.

Lack of shade, combined with shallower, wider streams compounds the problem of elevated temperatures. While the Lower Priest River has many pools and is wider and deeper than some

[2] Idaho Department of Environmental Quality. Priest River Subbasin Assessment and Total Maximum Daily Load, 2016 Temperature Addendum. Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

[3] A. Kliskey, J. Abatzoglou, L. Alessa,C. Kolden, D. Hoekema, B. Moore, S. Gilmore and G. Austin. 2019. Planning for Idaho's Waterscapes: A review of historical drivers and outlook for the next 50 years. Environmental and Science Policy 94: 191-201.

comparable but colder rivers in the Northwest[4], its north-south alignment and the elevated temperatures of water from Priest Lake may counteract those instream advantages.

Sediment

Excess sediment is a concern in tributaries to the Lower Priest River. Sediment can fill pools needed as cold-water refugia for fish; fill in gravel spawning beds, preventing the successful development of fish eggs and larvae; and reduce the abundance of food available for fish.

Sedimentation TMDLs have been developed for Kalispell Creek and Reeder Creek (both of which flow into Priest Lake), East River mainstem, Binarch Creek and Lower Priest River. Some severe erosion has been observed during a 2000 riverbank survey in the Lower Priest River, which resulted in the development of a TMDL. A USFS survey in late '90s found a moderate to high percentage fines in many upper reach spawning gravels of a pure strain Westslope Cutthroat Trout population and poor pool quality due to filling in by sediment.

Figure 4. Men working a log jam on Priest River in 1911.

The soils in the basin are considered to have a high inherent hazard for surface erosion and moderate inherent hazard for mass failure. Another background source is wildland fire, which clears forest cover and the flooding that follows causes instream erosion.

Human causes of sedimentation include the watershed's long legacy of extensive timber management. In the Lower Priest River Basin, 50% is in federal ownership, 31% is state-owned, and 18 % is privately owned. Most of the federal and state lands are managed primarily for timber production and extraction. The 43,163-acre East River watershed is overwhelmingly (87%) in state ownership, with just 8% in federal ownership (the Priest River Experimental Forest), 2% in private industrial timberlands and 3% in other private lands. Sediment loads in the East River were 185% above background levels in 2001, according to IDEQ data.

Along with the clearing of tree stands, logging resulted in construction of railroad lines and spurs, flumes and chutes and a network of roads and skid trails, and stream crossings. In some riparian zones, clearcutting of cedar and hemlock resulted in unstable banks. Current timber harvest incorporates best management practices, but harvesting is still potentially contributing to sedimentation because of ongoing soil disturbance, road building, stream crossings and landings.

[4] F.H. Mejia, J.M. Connor, P.R. Kaufmann, C.E. Torgersen, E.K. Berntsen, and T.K. Anderson. 2021. Integrating regional and local monitoring data and assessment tools to evaluate habitat conditions and inform river restoration. Ecological Indicators 131: 108213.

Roads both for timber harvesting and other agency use also contribute to sedimentation due to surface runoff, undersized culverts and general wear and tear. Fill slopes and cut slopes are also prone to erosion. Road densities in the Priest River basin are significantly higher in the lower basin than the upper basin.

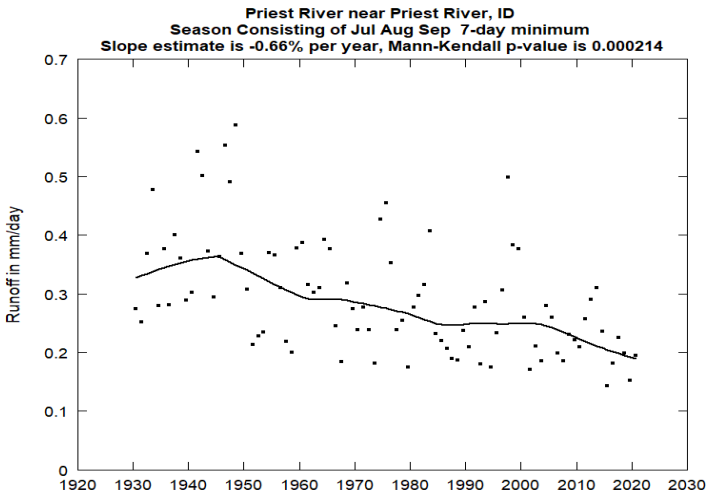

Figure 5: USGS stream flow data for Priest River shows mean monthly decline over time.

Stream flows, water availability

Stream flows in the Lower Priest River have ranged from 11,000 cfs to a low of 141 cfs at the USGS gage near the mouth of Priest River. Average precipitation in the Selkirk Mountains can reach 60 inches. Peak flows typically occur from mid- May to early June, when the high elevation snowpack rapidly melts. Low- to mid-elevations between 2,000-3,500 ft are subject to rapid snow melt and rain and can have high discharge rain-on-snow events, which are becoming more frequent and earlier with climate change.

The average mean monthly flow is on the decline for the river, according to stream gage data collected by the USGS since 1929 (Figure 6). Since the gage was installed in 1929, the average August flow is 494 cfs (based on monthly mean data) and 388 cfs for September. From 1929 until 1975, flows in August were 530 cfs on average and 424 cfs on average in September. In the next 46 years, that average monthly flow dropped significantly: 424 cfs in August and 353 cfs in September.

Stream flows in the Lower Priest River are controlled in part by the Priest Lake outlet dam, built in 1951 to benefit recreation uses. Idaho Statute requires that the lake level at the outlet gage be maintained at 3 feet for the recreational season. The dam gates usually remain open during spring run-off and fall release does not begin until October. Prior to the dam's construction, the average daily stage of the lake at the outlet ranged between 4 feet in late May to a half foot by September 1. Current minimum discharge requirement is 60 cfs, according to a minimum instream flow water right held by the State of Idaho. The two state requirements conflict during low flow years.

The Lower Priest River does benefit from tributaries below the dam. Only 5% of flow is lost through consumptive use between two gauging stations (Priest River near Coolin and Priest River near mouth). Overall, the flow increases by 25% between the two stations.

In 2018, IDWR completed the Priest Lake Water Management Study, which made several recommendations to address limited water supply and drought conditions, including temporarily raising the surface level of Priest Lake three to six inches during the recreation season of dry years, improving the outlet dam, and maintaining minimum flow requirements downstream of the outlet dam. In 2021, drought conditions resulted in reduced flows again, with early June water supply predictions based on lake inflows showing they would be 50% of normal. Gates were closed before spring runoff was over. The abnormally hot and dry summer worsened

conditions, resulting in the lowest river flows on record and very warm water accumulating at the outlet of the dam.

Even with increased storage capacity in Priest Lake, if drought conditions persist, the dam modifications are unlikely to resolve the conflict between these two state mandates. The state's Priest Lake Component of the State Water Plan acknowledges the impacts of the dam on native fish, stating, "The Priest River contains only limited populations of wild trout due to low stream discharges and elevated water temperatures during summer low-flows."

5.2.2. Sub-criterion B2 — Project Benefits

The mission of the PRWG is "to work collaboratively with the intention to safeguard and restore the Priest River watershed with a primary focus on improving water quality and quantity, aquatic and riparian habitat, and connectivity in the Lower Priest River." The organization's vision is to foster a properly functioning watershed with beneficial habitat that supports a healthy riverscape, its biological elements, and which meets the needs of the people who live, work, recreate, or are otherwise connected to the Priest River watershed.

Figure 4: Fish kill on Priest River in June 2021. Photo by Betty Gardiner.

The PRWG is still new, having been created under a previous CWMP award in 2023. The organization has successfully formed, and has a diverse membership, but is still working through organizational issues and building trust. The PRWG has yet to reach a level of shared understanding and trust to confidently dive into prioritizing the resource needs of the Lower Priest River Basin and creating a restoration plan.

The need for this group is evidenced by a recent history of conflict that has stymied advancement of resource restoration efforts to address the critical needs of improving water quality and securing adequate stream flows necessary for a healthy coldwater fishery.

Recent conflicts that demonstrate the need for this broad stakeholder collaboration include:

- The two state requirements to maintain the lake level at 3 feet at the outlet gage, and to maintain 60 cfs flow into the lower Priest River are in conflict. In 2015, North Idaho experienced a severe drought and IDWR considered shutting off all outflow to the river, and ultimately reduced the outflow below 60 cfs in order to maintain the state mandated summer pool for the lake. Cabin owners and resort owners and others have successfully advocated for consistent summer lake levels to extend the summer recreation season. But those interests conflict with the need to maintain a minimum discharge to the river.
- Because of the increased frequency of low water years and incidence of fish mortality due to elevated temperatures (Figure 7), the IDFG initiated a feasibility analysis of constructing a cold-water bypass to draw cold water from the hypolimnion layer of the lake to bring down in-stream temperatures in the lower Priest River. The proposal was

hotly debated between proponents who wish to see the river restored and people who fear negative impacts on the lake water quality and quantity.

- In January 2023, after the first meeting of the PRWG steering committee, a state legislative bill was passed that requires full Idaho Legislative support for any actions that involve modifying Outlet Dam. A number of potential water quality and connectivity projects that had been conceptualized for the Priest River involve dam modifications. Because some PRWG were involved in developing the bill without the knowledge of the rest of the PRWG, this increased distrust and tension amongst the PRWG members.

Given this background, a consensus-based watershed group, not dominated by one agency or interest group, is needed to provide a level playing field and an opportunity to gather, share and examine all relevant information in an open and interactive environment. This background also underscores the need for a professional facilitator who can cultivate a safe place for difficult conversations, trust building and open dialogue. Progress has been made toward trust-building and a shared understanding of the watershed, but more work is needed.

Benefits we anticipate from the proposed activities are:

Task A: Watershed Group Development: In order to advance meaningful restoration measures to address the complex water quality, quantity and other resource issues in the lower Priest River watershed, fortifying the foundation of the PRWG through organizational structure, annual work plans, shared understanding and building trusting relationships within the group is essential. Refining and clarifying the protocols and steering committee structure will improve the functionality of the group, allowing participants to focus on actions that will build capacity to work together toward addressing the resource concerns in the basin. Other Task A activities that more directly address the resource issues of concern are:

a. Using a facilitator: Having a skilled facilitator guiding discussions among the group will effectively allow the PRWG to develop a plan to address critical resources needs.
b. Gathering information and storing it in an easy-to-search data catalog, about issues and needs related to water quality, water quantity and restoration needs within the watershed: Having vetted sources of information is critical to developing a shared understanding of the current conditions and the conditions necessary to achieve the PRWG's vision and enable strategic and impactful decision making amongst resource planners.
c. Conducting outreach activities and stakeholder education according to the communications plan: These outreach activities will foster a shared understanding within the larger community, help expand membership, build coalitions and buy-in for future restoration activities, giving those efforts a greater chance of success.
d. Completing annual work plans and a long-term funding plan: These activities will help build sustainability necessary to achieve the mission of the PRWG.

Task B: Watershed Restoration Planning: The proposed planning activities are designed to lead to a completed restoration plan for the Lower Priest River completed a year following grant closeout. Among the benefits of a restoration plan for the Lower Priest River, is the ability to secure funding for projects to improve water quality by reducing sedimentation and summer stream temperatures, and actively address other resource concerns considered a priority by the

PRWG. Because the restoration plans have yet to be drafted, it is not possible to provide any metrics around the expected benefits to the resource. Benefits of activities include:

a) Developing a restoration plan for the East River:
   - Developing the ranking matrix and using this method to prioritize projects in the East River, a less contentious, smaller, but still essential drainage, will provide a less controversial test run for the Lower Priest River restoration planning effort.
   - The Kalispel Tribe has already completed a watershed assessment for the East River. The Tribe anticipates completing the Lower Priest River assessment sometime in early 2027. Tackling the East River Restoration Plan first will help keep the group's engagement and create a model for prioritizing projects in the Lower Priest River.
   - The East River is a critical tributary to the Lower Priest River and to the fishery. There are many needs documented on this drainage and all work in the East River will ultimately benefit the Lower Priest River as well.

b) Filling essential data gaps: Through discussion with stakeholders and resources experts, and reviewing the existing body of knowledge about the Lower Priest River, the PRWG will identify data gaps, and create a plan for filling those gaps. This data will be fed into the mapping tool, considered in the matrix for prioritization, and used by resource managers in their planning. Having robust data and information about the watershed will allow the PRWG to confidently move forward with strategic restoration planning that will offer maximum benefit to the watershed.

c) Compiling a clearinghouse of restoration activities and ideas: Because of a rich body of work already in existence - such as Priest River Total Maximum Daily Load and addendums developed between 2001 and 2016; FWS and IDFG fisheries management and recovery plans, and the 2018 Priest Lake Water Management Study – the PRWG does not have to start from scratch. The IDEQ does not have a Priest River Watershed Advisory Group (WAG) to implement the TMDLs, and IDEQ staff have indicated they see the PRWG as an opportunity to begin implementation. Meanwhile, under the IDFG's draft Fisheries Management Plan Objective to "Seek opportunities to improve the coldwater fishery in the lower Priest River," is the strategy to "Collaborate with the Priest River Watershed Group and other interested parties to identify broadly supported management actions for improving habitat for coldwater fishes in the lower Priest River drainage."[5] By consulting a committed, educated, diverse set of stakeholders, the prioritized projects will have more likelihood of being implemented.

d) Building a mapping tool/geospatial database: This tool will be hosted on the PRWG and the Tribe's websites where it can promote public use, transparency and increase shared understanding of the watershed. Obtaining or developing map layers will increase collaboration and coordination with local partners and planners. This tool will aid enormously in development of a Lower Priest River Watershed Assessment, restoration

[5] Idaho Department of Fish and Game. 2024. Draft Fisheries Management Plan for Public Comment. 2025-2030_fmp_public_comment_version_30072024.pdf (idaho.gov)

planning and will provide a much clearer picture of the "why" and "where" of projects which will be invaluable when it comes to prioritizing projects on the Lower Priest River.

e) The Lower Priest River watershed assessment: The Kalispel Tribe has funding for this effort and plans to complete it by early 2027. This work will set the stage for launching the Lower Priest River Restoration Plan effort. The Kalispel Tribe has and continues to be an essential partner in seeing the goals of the PRWG come to fruition. The increased coordination between resource managers offered by the PRWG venue is one of the greatest benefits for the Priest River watershed.

The stakeholders who will benefit from this work include residents of the Priest River Watershed who care about the water quality of the lake and the river, anglers, motorized and non-motorized recreational boaters, the Kalispel Tribe (whose interest in the Priest River Watershed is detailed below under Criterion D), the business community that relies on recreational tourists, and state, federal and non-governmental agencies whose mission is to protect and enhance the natural resources and fisheries in the basin. The work of the collaborative ultimately will benefit water quality, riparian areas, and the fisheries in the watershed, and also benefit the participants in the process by increasing their own knowledge and understanding of the resources, issues and opportunities, and cultivate a greater understanding of the other stakeholders and perspectives in the community.

5.3. Criterion C – Readiness to Proceed

The table below lays out the main activities and their associated tasks, milestones, timeframe and responsible parties.

Task	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Responsible Party
Activity 1: Organizational Development (TASK A)				
Task 1a: Continue refining, clarifying and improving group protocols and steering committee structure.	Effective and resilient protocols.	9/2025	Ongoing	Facilitator
1a Subtasks	• Develop a methodology for building and operating task forces and subcommittees. • Create subcommittee for protocol management/enforcement. • Develop an internal structure for self-governance that better distributes responsibilities and decision making amongst steering committee.			
Task 1b: Develop a long-term funding plan.	Funding plan developed.	ongoing	1/2026	Funding Task Force (coordinated by TU Project Manager)

	1b Subtasks	• Identify potential funding sources. • Develop schedule for funding proposals due dates. • Implement funding plan. (ongoing)			
Task 1c: Develop annual workplans to set annual goals, budgets, responsible parties, and deadlines.		Annual workplan completed.	9/2025	1/2026, 1/2027, 1/2028	Facilitation Consultant with TU Project Manager
Activity 2: Stakeholder Education (TASK A)					
Task 2a: Improve human connection to the Lower Priest River by fostering a better understanding of the watershed.		Communications plan developed, adopted and being implemented.	ongoing	11/2025	Communications Task Force with TU Project Manager
	2a Subtasks	• Compile a list of potential actions and materials, talking points, resources and contacts as part of communications plan. • Determine a priority list of actions (with costs and benefits) for public education on the lower Priest River as part of communications plan. • Maintain and update website. • Develop and distribute public outreach materials. • Host additional field trips and informational sessions.			
Activity 3: Research (TASKS A & B)					
Task 3a: Add to and refine data catalogue.		Existing data sourced and compiled into a publicly accessible and usable site.	Ongoing	3/2026	Facilitation Consultant with Kalispel Tribe
Task 3b: Fill essential data gaps.		Essential data gaps filled.	Ongoing	8/2027	TU Project Manager & Facilitator
	3b Subtasks	• Identify essential data gaps. • Develop a plan for filling essential data gaps including identifying funding sources, partners involved and project managers. • Implement plan to fill essential data gaps.			

Task 3c: Add layers on the Priest River watershed to Tribe's geospatial database to incorporate necessary data for planning.	Geospatial database expanded with new layers and shared on the PRWG website.	9/2025	10/2027	TU with technical support from TU GIS specialist & Kalispel Tribe
3c Subtasks	• Define layers for map: i.e. land ownership, land use, access, wetlands, implemented projects, fish migration barriers, road crossings, wetlands, temperature data sites, flow data sites, etc. • Create new layers where needed which may include data acquired through projects implemented to fill data gaps and add into the Kalispel Tribe's KNRD Geospatial Database Viewer.			
Activity 4: Restoration Planning (TASK B)				
Task 4a: Compile a list of potential restoration projects within the Priest River Watershed.	Developed a clearinghouse of potential restoration actions and projects.	Ongoing	10/2027	TU Project Manager & Facilitator
Task 4b: Develop a restoration plan for the East River.	Completed restoration plan for the East River.	9/2025	3/2027	Kalispel Tribe (Subrecipient)
4b Subtasks	• Create a subaward for the Kalispel Tribe to serve as subrecipient tasked with developing a ranking matrix in coordination with the PRWG steering committee, built from the existing watershed assessment, to prioritize restoration actions. • Develop a restoration plan for the East River using actions identified through ranking process.			
Task 4c: Prepare watershed assessment on the entire Lower Priest River.	Watershed assessment completed on the Lower Priest River.	9/2025	4/2027	Kalispel Tribe
Task 4d: Initiate a restoration plan for the Lower Priest River.	Restoration plan for in drafting phase.	10/2027	9/2028	TU Project Manager

5.4. Evaluation Criterion D – Presidential and Dept of Interior Priorities

5.4.1. Sub-criterion D1 – Climate Change

Two of the critical resource issues that prompted this proposal are directly related to climate change: temperature and stream flows. One task of the PRWG will be to explore options to lower in-stream temperatures and assist with implementation of the temperature TMDLs in the Lower Priest River basin. Any success with lowering in-stream temperatures will contribute to creating a cold-water refugia for native fish – including threatened Bull Trout – as the climate warms.

In addition, stream flows also appear to be impacted by climate change, as evidenced by the recent drought years and increased frequency of low flow years in the last two decades. As mentioned above, reduced flows also contribute to higher temperatures. Rain on snow events are likely to increase in frequency as well, resulting in scouring and erosion, and potentially increasing the sediment load to the system. Sedimentation, then, will be an indirect effect of climate change. As the PRWG moves into restoration planning work, it will identify the high-risk areas for erosion and sedimentation and explore opportunities for restoring those areas in a way that is more resilient to flashy runoff events. In short, the primary water quality issues that the PRWG seeks to address are interrelated to climate change and solutions will make the ecosystem more resilient as the climate warms.

5.4.2. Sub-criterion D2 – Benefits to Disadvantaged, Underserved Communities, and Tribal Communities

Disadvantaged and Underserved Communities

Priest River fits the definition of a disadvantaged community. It is surrounded by Census tracts that are disadvantaged and meets an adjusted low-income threshold, according to the Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool. According to 2020 U.S. Census data, the town of Priest River had a population of 1,696 people and a median income of $49,868. The state median income was $72,785 and Bonner County's was $61,816. The Priest River's poverty rate was 8.1 %, which was less than the state's poverty rate of 10.7 % and the county's poverty rate of 11.9 %.

While Priest River is still home to one sawmill, owned by Stimson Lumber, the workforce in the timber industry is far smaller than in logging's heyday. The volume of timber has significantly declined and mills have fewer workers. While manufacturing remains the largest sector of employment in the town, the next largest sectors are health care and social assistance, followed by accommodation and food services and agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting.

The PRWG will work with the community and stakeholders in the Lower Priest River basin to address water quality issues that impact their quality of life. Some residents draw their drinking water from the river, and others recall past good fishing in the Lower Priest River. The work of the PRWG may provide the opportunity for contracted work related to restoration projects. If the fishery were to return, it may provide job opportunities and economic initiatives related to the outdoor recreation industry, benefitting the overall economy of the community.

Tribal Benefits

The Priest River Watershed is extremely important to the Kalispel Tribe and is part of its Aboriginal Lands, which encompassed 2.37 million acres in Northeast Washington, North Idaho and Western Montana. Although the Kalispel Indian Reservation is located on 4,693 acres in and around Usk, Washington., a majority of the Tribe's Aboriginal Lands are located in modern day

Bonner County, Idaho. In order to support historic connections with this landscape, the Tribe has steadily been purchasing land for habitat, and now owns 1,685 acres in Bonner County.

The Tribe historically was organized around specific resource areas and the Priest Lake basin held many of the resources that were important to the Tribe's well-being, including mountain caribou, deer, waterfowl, and fish. The Tribe considers their quality life as intimately tied to quality space (habitat) and relationships (cultural/natural) and what occurs in the watershed eventually affects habitat, cultural, and natural connections within the Aboriginal Land area and specifically on the Kalispel Reservation. Because of the importance of this area, the Tribe's Department of Natural Resources is one of the leading research agencies providing information regarding the Priest River and its ecological health. The Tribe plays a critical role in the PRWG and has a major voice in the future restoration efforts of the basin.

Figure 5. Natural and cultural resources in the Kalispel Tribe's homeland.
Exhibit No. 64 in petition before the Indian Claims Commission, 1963.

According to a tribal representative, "The Tribe believes that we are all in this together, and that durable, long-lasting solutions to address water quality and quantity, accelerated soil erosion, and continued floodplain development and occupancy are best handled through a collaborative process. It's not lake vs. river, Idaho vs. Washington. It's one watershed."

6. Non-Project Narrative Items

6.1. Budget Proposal

Summary of Non-Federal and Federal Funding Sources

FUNDING SOURCES	AMOUNT
Non-Federal Entities	
1. N/A (In-kind support from PRWG Partners is not monetary)	$0
Non-Federal Subtotal	$0
REQUESTED RECLAMATION FUNDING	**$299,668**

Budget Narrative:

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

6.2. Compliance, Permit & Disclosures

Environmental and Cultural Resources Compliance

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

Required Permits or Approvals

No permits or approvals are required for the proposed activities.

Overlap or Duplication of Effort Statement

There is no significant overlap or redundancy between the proposed PRWG and any existing entity or planning effort. Nor is this duplicative of any other proposal that has been submitted for funding

Conflict of Interest and Lobbying Disclosure Statement

TU has internal control measures to ensure that federal funding is managed according to Uniform Guidance. All TU employees follow and are annually trained in federal compliance including procurement, identifying and avoiding conflicts of interest, reporting, grants administration, vendor screening and the grant life cycle. At the time of submission of this application, there has been no actual or potential conflict of interest identified. TU employees will follow procedures to identify and avoid potential conflicts of interest that could arise.

Uniform Audit Reporting Statement

Trout Unlimited, Inc. was required to submit a Single Audit report from the most recently closed fiscal year (2023). The report can be found on the Federal Audit Clearinghouse Single Audit Database website, Federal Audit Clearinghouse (fac.gov), under EIN#38-1612175.

6.3. Appendix A: Letters of Support

The following Letters of Support submitted by these project partners and supporters are compiled in Appendix A attachment:

- Idaho Department of Environmental Quality
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game
- Idaho Wildlife Federation
- Inland Northwest Fishing Guides/ Off-Grid Anglers
- Kalispel Tribe of Indians
- Selkirk Conservation Alliance
- Stop the Priest Lake Siphon
- Trout Unlimited/ Panhandle Chapter
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Geological Survey

2110 Ironwood Parkway
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814 • (208) 769-1422

Brad Little, Governor
Jess Byrne, Director

August 28, 2024

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
Attn: CWMP Grant Review Committee
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27133
Denver, CO 80225

Subject: Trout Unlimited's proposal regarding resource concerns in the Lower Priest River

Dear CWMP Grant Review Committee:

On behalf of Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) I would like to express our support for Trout Unlimited' s proposal to continue administering the Priest River Watershed Group (PRWG) to address resource concerns in the Lower Priest River.

DEQ's mission is to protect human health and the environment. DEQ has primacy of the Clean Water Act in Idaho and ensures Idaho's surface and groundwaters support beneficial uses and provide safe drinking water supplies by setting water quality standards, certifying project compliance, monitoring water bodies, reporting on water quality, developing and implementing improvement plans, issuing wastewater reuse and direct discharge permits, and providing grants and loans for drinking water and wastewater facilities (Title 39, Environmental Quality, Department of Performance Report State of Idaho 2 Chapters 1, 36, 66, 76, 79, 85, Idaho Code; Title 37, Chapter 21, Idaho Code; Title 50 Chapter 13 Idaho Code; Clean Water Act).

Priest River, a major tributary of the Pend Oreille River, is designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. It also once supported a healthy population of native Westslope Cutthroat Trout. However, the Lower Priest River is not meeting its potential as a cold-water fishery and is listed in Idaho as water quality impaired due to high temperature and sedimentation. In January of 2023, the Priest River Watershed Group (PRWG) convened and has held monthly meetings for the last year and a half with funding provided by the Bureau of Reclamation. During this time, the PRWG has maintained strong participation from 12 diverse member groups, built a website (www.priestriverwg.org), learned about the basin, developed operating procedures, and a strategic plan. Over the next three years, the PRWG aims to complete a restoration plan for the Lower Priest River Basin that will include a compilation of projects aimed at lowering river temperatures, improving aquatic habitat, and reducing sedimentation with the end goals of an improved fishery and recreational opportunities for the public.

DEQ has been actively involved in similar watershed restoration projects and has seen firsthand the positive impact these initiatives can have on local ecosystems and communities.

Our collaboration with watershed groups like the PRWG has further strengthened our efforts, and we believe that continued support for the PRWG will lead to significant improvements in the Lower Priest River's health and sustainability. The work of the PRWG aligns closely with our mission, and we are excited about the potential for long-term positive outcomes.

We look forward to participating in improving this important public resource and are available for any further discussions or questions.

Sincerely,

Robert Steed
Surface Water Quality Manager
Coeur d'Alene DEQ Regional Office

c: Todd Higens, DEQ Watershed Analyst, todd.higens@deq.idaho.gov

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
PANHANDLE REGION
2885 West Kathleen Avenue
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83815

Brad Little / Governor
Jim Fredericks / Director

August 30, 2024

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
Attn: CWMP Grant Review Committee
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27133
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Review Committee,

On behalf of Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), I would like to express our support of Trout Unlimited's proposal to continue to administer the Priest River Watershed Group to address resource concerns in the Lower Priest River.

IDFG is the state of Idaho's fish and wildlife management agency, with our mission (Title 36 Idaho Code) to "preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage" all of Idaho's fish and wildlife resources for the benefit of the people of Idaho. As such, we have a responsibility for, and keen interest in, working collaboratively with stakeholders to benefit these resources.

Priest River, a major tributary of the Pend Oreille River, is designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. It also once supported a healthy population of native Westslope Cutthroat Trout. However, the Lower Priest River is not meeting its potential as a cold-water fishery and is listed in Idaho as water quality impaired due to high temperature and sedimentation. In January of 2023, the Priest River Watershed Group (PRWG) convened and has held monthly meetings for the last year and a half with funding provided by Bureau of Reclamation. During this time, the PRWG has maintained strong participation from 12 diverse member groups, built a website (www.priestriverwg.org), learned about the basin, developed operating procedures and a strategic plan. Over the next three years the PRWG aims to complete a restoration plan for the lower Priest River Basin that will include a compilation of projects aimed at lowering river temperatures, improving aquatic habitat, and reducing sedimentation with the end goals of an improved fishery and recreational opportunities for the public.

IDFG has done a considerable amount of assessment work on the fishery dating back to the 1950s, documenting and monitoring the fishery resources, understanding the ecology of native fishes in the system, and identifying potential solutions for limiting factors to benefit native fishes and the

Priest River sport fishery and sharing that information with the public. We also have collaborated with the PRWG since the group was convened by providing technical information and expertise.

We look forward to participating in improving this important public resource.

Sincerely,

Carson Watkins
Regional Supervisor

CJW:AMD:lat

8/27/24

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
Attn: CWMP Grant Review Committee
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27133
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Review Committee,

On behalf of the Idaho Wildlife Federation (IWF), I would like to express our support of Trout Unlimited's proposal to continue to administer the Priest River Watershed Group to address resource concerns in the Lower Priest River.

IWF is Idaho's oldest statewide conservation organization, founded by sportsmen and women in 1936. Today, we represent a nonpartisan voice of 25 affiliate organizations and 19,000 individual supporters who desire to sustain and enhance Idaho's fish and wildlife, conserve their habitat, and maximize sporting opportunity for current and future generations. Our efforts advance "made in Idaho" solutions to the modern challenges of wildlife management.

The Priest River, a major tributary of the Pend Oreille River, is designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. It also once supported a healthy population of native Westslope Cutthroat Trout. However, the Lower Priest River is not meeting its potential as a cold-water fishery and is listed in Idaho as water quality impaired due to high temperature and sedimentation. In January of 2023, the Priest River Watershed Group (PRWG) convened and has held monthly meetings for the last year and a half with funding provided by Bureau of Reclamation. During this time, the PRWG has maintained strong participation from 12 diverse member groups, built a website (www.priestriverwg.org), learned about the basin, developed operating procedures and a strategic plan. Over the next three years the PRWG aims to complete a restoration plan for the lower Priest River Basin that will include a compilation of projects aimed at lowering river temperatures, improving aquatic habitat, and

reducing sedimentation with the end goals of an improved fishery and recreational opportunities for the public.

As one of the original members of the PRWG, we at IWF are committed to continuing our involvement with the group and working towards collaborative solutions to help the overall health of the lower Priest River. We would like to see this beautiful section of river once again thrive and support a robust fishery that not only sportsmen and women can enjoy, but also helps contribute to the surrounding communities and upland habitats.

Sincerely,

Kyle Maki

North Idaho Field Representative, Idaho Wildlife Federation
kmaki@idahowildlife.org

Inland North West
Fishing Guides

August 26, 2024

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
Attn: CWMP Grant Review Committee
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27133
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Review Committee,

On behalf of Inland Northwest Fishing Guides and Off-Grid Anglers, I would like to express our support of Trout Unlimited's proposal to continue to administer the Priest River Watershed Group to address resource concerns in the Lower Priest River.

Inland Northwest Fishing Guides (INFG) is a fly fishing guide service and was established in 2017. Operating primarily in eastern Washington and the Idaho Panhandle INFG is one of two licensed outfitters on the Priest River, the other being Off-Grid Anglers (OGA).

Priest River, a major tributary of the Pend Oreille River, is designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. It also once supported a healthy population of native Westslope Cutthroat Trout. However, the Lower Priest River is not meeting its potential as a cold-water fishery and is listed in Idaho as water quality impaired due to high temperature and sedimentation. In January of 2023, the Priest River Watershed Group (PRWG) convened and has held monthly meetings for the last year and a half with funding provided by the Bureau of Reclamation. During this time, the PRWG has maintained strong participation from 12 diverse member groups, built a website (www.priestriverwg.org), learned about the basin, developed operating procedures and a strategic plan. Over the next three years the PRWG aims to complete a restoration plan for the lower Priest River Basin that will include a compilation of projects aimed at lowering river temperatures, improving aquatic habitat, and reducing sedimentation with the end goals of an improved fishery and recreational opportunities for the public.

INFG and OGA have interest in improving the quality of habitat for coldwater fish species in the Lower Priest River as it is critical for the success of our business. However, both businesses have been active participants in local conservation efforts and see the health of the Lower Priest River important not just to our businesses but to the ecological balance of the region. Priest River has proven to be one of, if not the most important areas of Westslope Cutthroat Trout reproduction in the Pend Oreille watershed. Continuing to allow the Lower Priest River to decline will have devastating effects to the regional ecology.

The PRWG has been the only organization to make positive steps forward in addressing the ecological concerns regarding the Lower Priest River. Since its creation, INFG and OGA have had representation at nearly every PRWG meeting and are committed to this continued level of participation. Being that the PRWG is a collaborative effort of 12 diverse stakeholders in the, it is the belief of INFG and OGA that this group has the greatest potential to address the issues of concern on the Lower Priest River and develop solutions to these concerns.

We look forward to participating in improving this important public resource.

Sincerely,

Henry Jones
Inland Northwest Fishing Guides
10572 Westside Calispell Road
Usk, Wa 99180
(908) 310 5269
inwfishingguides@gmail.com

Kalispel Tribe of Indians
P.O. Box 39
Usk, WA 99180

(509) 445-1147
(509) 445-5302 *fax*
www.kalispeltribe.com

8/7/2024

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
Attn: Avra Morgan
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27133
Denver, Colorado 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Review Committee,

On behalf of the Kalispel Tribe of Indians Natural Resources Department (KNRD), I would like to express our support of Trout Unlimited's proposal to continue to administer the Priest River Watershed Group to address resources concerns in the Lower Priest River, an area that was once a vital part of the ancestral Kalispel subsistence economy.

KNRD is actively engaged in Lower Priest River-related studies, including Westslope Cutthroat Trout tributary monitoring, water quality and discharge monitoring, water availability analyses, and identifying potential aquatic habitat restoration options. We partner with numerous agencies, including the Panhandle Chapter of Trout Unlimited, the Idaho Panhandle National Forest, the US Geological Survey, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and Bonner County Soil and Water Conservation District. The Priest River Watershed Group has provided the ideal venue for these and other stakeholders to get together to address resources concerns in the Lower Priest River. We are hopeful that the Bureau of Reclamation continues to support this important collaborative work.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to further discuss our support.

Sincerely,

Deane Osterman
Executive Director
Kalispel Tribe Natural Resources Department

SELKIRK CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

KEEPING THE *Wild* IN THE SELKIRK ECOSYSTEM

August 27, 2024

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
Attn: CWMP Grant Review Committee
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27133
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Review Committee,

Selkirk Conservation Alliance (SCA) supports the continued work of Trout Unlimited (TU) administering and facilitating the Priest River Watershed Workgroup (PRWG) whose purpose is to conserve and restore the imperiled Priest River system in northern Idaho.

Selkirk Conservation Alliance (SCA) is one of north Idaho's oldest conservation organizations and has been working to protect and conserve the lower Selkirk Mountain ecosystems with a particular focus on the Priest Lake and Priest River Watersheds for the past 37 years. Priest River is in the heart of SCA's advocacy area and our members and supporters have witnessed her decline for decades.

Priest River is in dire need of protection and conservation and the visionary work of Trout Unlimited is helping to make this happen. Funding provided by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) will be critical for continuing this work and implementing the newly developed PRWG Strategic Plan.

Selkirk Conservation Alliance would like to thank the BOR for your thoughtful consideration of the TU proposal for continued funding support for the PRWG.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Anderson

Selkirk Conservation Alliance
Executive Director
Amy Anderson
anderson@scawild.org
(208) 448-1110

August 23, 2024
Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
Attn: CWMP Grant Review Committee
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27133
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Review Committee,

On behalf of the Stop The Priest Lake Siphon (STPLS) committee I would like to express our support of Trout Unlimited's proposal to continue to administer the Priest River Watershed Group to address resource concerns in the Lower Priest River.

STPLS was formed in response to a study conducted by Idaho Fish and Game to install a coldwater bypass system in Priest Lake to theoretically cool Priest River. The proposal would have had devastating consequences for the lake. The committee represented the vast majority of the lake residents and businesses. The STPLS was able to pass legislation to require Idaho legislative and governor approval of any bypass proposal. STPLS nevertheless recognizes that Priest River needs restoration.

Priest River, a major tributary of the Pend Oreille River, is designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. It also once supported a healthy population of native Westslope Cutthroat Trout. However, the Lower Priest River is not meeting its potential as a cold-water fishery and is listed in Idaho as water quality impaired due to high temperature and sedimentation. In January of 2023, the Priest River Watershed Group (PRWG) convened and has held monthly meetings for the last year and a half with funding provided by the Bureau of Reclamation. During this time, the PRWG has maintained strong participation from 12 diverse member groups such as STPLS, built a website (www.priestriverwg.org), learned about the basin, developed operating procedures and a strategic plan. Over the next three years the PRWG aims to complete a restoration plan for the lower Priest River Basin that will include a compilation of projects aimed at lowering river temperatures, improving aquatic habitat, and reducing sedimentation with the end goals of an improved fishery and recreational opportunities for the public.

STPLS, representing the lake interests , is interested in improving Priest River since it is an integral part of the watershed. It must do so without harm to the lake which is the major watershed asset and economic driver of the region. PRWG will play a significant role in improving the river and preserving the lake. Priest Lake has been referred to as Idaho's crown jewel.

We look forward to participating in improving this important public resource.

Sincerely

Allan Songstad
Member of the STPLS and PRWG.
STPLS
632 Hagman Rd
Nordman Idaho 83848

431 Idaho Panhandle Chapter of Trout Unlimited

PO Box 936, Sandpoint, ID 83864 • www.panhandletu.org

August 26, 2024

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
Attn: CWMP Grant Review Committee
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27133
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Review Committee,

On behalf of Idaho Panhandle Chapter – Trout Unlimited, we express our support of Trout Unlimited's proposal to continue financial support for the Priest River Watershed Group (PRWG) as it addresses resource concerns within the Lower Priest River Basin.

For over 60 years the mission of Trout Unlimited has been to conserve, protect and restore North America's cold-water fisheries and their habitats. The Idaho Panhandle Chapter of Trout Unlimited, representing over 300 members, considers the Priest River among our home waters and one of high importance.

Priest River, a major tributary of the Pend Oreille River, is designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. It also once supported a healthy population of native Westslope Cutthroat Trout. However, the Lower Priest River is not meeting its potential as a cold-water fishery and is listed in Idaho as water quality impaired due to high temperature and sedimentation. In January of 2023, the Priest River Watershed Group (PRWG) convened and has held monthly meetings for the last year and a half with funding provided by Bureau of Reclamation. During this time, the PRWG has maintained strong participation from 12 diverse member groups, built a website (www.priestriverwg.org), learned about the basin, developed operating procedures and a strategic plan. Over the next three years the PRWG aims to complete a restoration plan for the lower Priest River Basin that will include a compilation of projects aimed at lowering river temperatures, improving aquatic habitat, and reducing sedimentation with the end goals of an improved fishery and recreational opportunities for the public.

We appreciate your financial and technical assistance and look forward to participating in improving this important resource. We are united and committed at both the volunteer and staff levels of Trout Unlimited to restore and enhance the cold-water fishery and other beneficial uses of the Priest River Basin.

Sincerely,
Bill Love
Bill Love, President
Idaho Panhandle Chapter

United States Department of the Interior

U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Forest and Rangeland Ecosystem Science Center
Cascadia Field Station

26 August 2024

Cooperative Watershed Management Program
Bureau of Reclamation
Attn: Avra Morgan
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27133
Denver, CO 80225

Dear Ms. Morgan:

On behalf of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) Forest and Rangeland Ecosystem Science Center (FRESC), I would like to express our support of Trout Unlimited's proposal to form a Priest River Watershed Group to address resources concerns in the Lower Priest River.

USGS FRESC scientists capitalize on their diverse expertise to answer scientific questions shaped by the environments of the western United States. We collaborate with each other and with partners to provide rigorous, objective, and timely information and guidance for the management and conservation of biological systems in the West and worldwide.

Dr. Christian Torgersen and his team are currently assisting the Kalispel Tribe with Lower Priest River-related research, including identifying spatial and temporal water temperature patterns, assessing food quality for resident fish species, and placing the lower Priest River's channel incision and floodplain disconnection patterns, flow, sediment, and wood regimes into a broader regional context. Results from this research will help inform the Tribe and their partners with current and future management decisions with respect to water quantity and quality and aquatic habitat.

We look forward to participating in the Priest River Watershed Group to help identify basic research needs that will help address resources concerns in the Lower Priest River. Please be advised that this letter is not a commitment of Government resources but is written in support of the project's scientific and scholarly activities and mission relevance. Trout Unlimited's proposed work will be vital for improving this important public resource.

Sincerely,

Sue Phillips
Center Director, FRESC

777 NW 9th St., Suite 400, Corvallis, OR 97330
Phone: (541) 750-1030 Fax: (541) 750-1069
https://www.usgs.gov/centers/forest-and-rangeland-ecosystem-science-center

United States Department of the Interior
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Idaho Fish and Wildlife Office
1387 S. Vinnell Way, Suite 378
Boise, Idaho 83709
https://www.fws.gov/office/idaho-fish-and-wildlife

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
Attn: CWMP Grant Review Committee
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27133
Denver, CO 80225

August 21, 2024

Subject: USFWS Support for Trout Unlimited's "Priest River Watershed Group Restoration Planning 2024" Grant Proposal – WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program

Dear CWMP Grant Review Committee,

This letter transmits the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Idaho Fish and Wildlife Office's (IFWO) support for Trout Unlimited's proposal to continue to administer the Priest River Watershed Group (PRWG) to address resource concerns in the Lower Priest River Basin.

The Service is a Federal agency responsible for recovering threatened and endangered species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Our goal is to work collaboratively with Federal, State, Tribal, non-governmental, and private landowner partners to improve habitat health and ecological integrity for ESA listed species. To achieve this goal, we focus our efforts in areas of the State where we can build and leverage partner efforts to meet shared conservation targets; this includes enhancing populations of bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) in the Priest River Basin by working with our partners to identify and address threats.

Priest River, a major tributary of the Pend Oreille River, is designated as critical habitat for bull trout, a threatened species under the ESA. However, the Lower Priest River is not meeting its potential as a cold-water fishery and is listed in Idaho as water quality impaired due to high temperature and sedimentation. In January of 2023, the PRWG convened and has held monthly meetings for the last year and a half with funding provided by Bureau of Reclamation. During this time, the PRWG has maintained strong participation from 12 diverse member groups, built a website (www.priestriverwg.org), learned about the Basin, and developed operating procedures and a strategic plan. Over the next three years, the PRWG proposes to complete a restoration plan for the Lower Priest River Basin that will include a compilation of projects aimed at lowering river temperatures, improving aquatic habitat, and reducing sedimentation with the end goals of an improved fishery and recreational opportunities for the public.

The IFWO currently participates on several watershed working groups in north Idaho and is committed to continuing to help partners improve natural resources in the Lower Priest River Basin. The working group forum will enable us to collectively assess and prioritize specific conservation and restoration opportunities for bull trout and other species and will help us leverage future funds for implementation.

This letter offers the IFWO's support for this opportunity to collaborate to enhance the cold-water fishery in the Lower Priest River Basin. If you have questions, please contact Brittany Morlin (208) 510-6356 or via email at brittany_morlin@fws.gov.

Sincerely,

for Lisa Ellis
State Supervisor