

## **2023 Winter WRTAC Meeting Notes**

January 18, 2023, 10:00 am (MST)

Avista Noxon Multipurpose Room

### **WRTAC representative attendees:**

Avista – Eric Oldenburg

Green Mountain Conservation District (GMCD) – Sarah Busmire

Idaho Department of Fish and Game – Ken Bouwens

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality – Chantilly Higbee

Lake Pend Oreille Idaho Club – David Gillespie

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

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

Panhandle Chapter Trout Unlimited – Bill Love

U.S. Forest Service (Cabinet) – Chris Rossel

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – Kevin Aceituno

### **Other attendees:**

Avista – Monica Ott, Shana Bernall, Lisa Johnson, Paul Kusnierz, Sean Moran, Drew Ransom, Arthur Potts, Davina Brown

Avista Grant Writer – Susan Drumheller

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality – Bob Steed

Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group – Brita Olson

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks – Travis Rehm

NorthWestern Energy – Jon Hanson

Noxon Cabinet Shoreline Coalition – Chuck Harrington

U.S. Forest Service (Kootenai) – Josh Boyd

### **Welcome and introductions:**

Eric Oldenburg welcomed those in attendance and discussed the purpose and agenda of the meeting. The purpose is to review the draft 2023 aquatic Annual Implementation Plans (AIPs) and provide recommendations to the Management Committee (MC). As such, the emphasis will be to discuss those projects that are new, need to be ranked, or carryover projects with meaningful changes proposed.

### **Other business:**

Consent Mails:

- There were no aquatic Consent Mails between our fall 2022 meeting and this meeting.

Grant writer update:

- Susan Drumheller provided an update on Grants.

Fall meeting date:

- Tuesday, August 29, 2023, was selected for the fall WRTAC meeting.

Project Evaluation and Ranking Criteria:

- Eric Oldenburg provided an overview of the purpose and history of the Project Evaluation and Ranking Criteria for appendices A, B, and F5. Specifically, he explained how the ranking process used to require a special WRTAC meeting annually. In 2017, the WRTAC indicated they would like to modify the ranking procedures and criteria to make the process more efficient and eliminate the need for the special meeting. As a result, the MC designated a subgroup to modify the procedures and criteria. This was accomplished and the MC approved the resultant procedures and criteria. The primary functional change was that the Aquatic Implementation Team (AIT) was to initially evaluate and provide tentative ranking scores to the WRTAC that they would then modify or ratify. Oldenburg suggested that the new process has been very efficient and achieved the desired outcome; however, he expressed concern that one unintended result was perhaps now there was too little robust discussion among all the stakeholders during the WRTAC meeting. Oldenburg posed the question to the WRTAC as to whether they would like to continue having the AIT pre-rank proposals or revert to the old procedure. The WRTAC provided mixed opinions on the matter and decided to table the discussion until the end of the meeting after this year's projects had been ranked. As the last order of business, the WRTAC re-engaged in this discussion. Numerous ideas were proposed but generally speaking the WRTAC did not want to lose the ability to use the AIT for that purpose if/when needed. The idea to change the procedure language from, "...the AIT **will** discuss and initially rank..." to "...the AIT **may** discuss and initially rank..." was discussed as a potential solution to allow that flexibility. The WRTAC decided to table the discussion for the time being, noting it could be discussed during the fall meeting. It was noted that the Project Evaluation and Ranking Criteria would be assessed and included as part of the update to the Native Salmonid Restoration Plan 5-year Plan.

### **Review of draft 2023 Annual Implementation Plans:**

Eric Oldenburg provided an overview of the project plan review portion of the meeting noting the goal was to arrive at a consensus recommendation of the WRTAC for every project. He also noted that carryover values in project plan budgets would likely change and that technical mistakes would be corrected prior to the MC mail out; however, nothing of substance would change without specifically being called to the attention of the MC. Oldenburg noted that there were 72 aquatic projects to discuss and suggested that we implement the 30-minute rule, if necessary.

#### Appendix A: Idaho Tributary Habitat Acquisition and Fishery Enhancement Program

- Ken Bouwens provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix A for 2023.
- The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix A project plans as presented.

#### Appendix B: Montana Tributary Habitat Acquisition and Recreational Fishery Enhancement Program

- Travis Rehm provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix B for 2023. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.
- Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group Project Coordination
  - The WRTAC agreed to add a budget line item for Avista support developing the stream restoration summary report as well as updating project contacts for numerous project plans to reflect the staff transition within the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group.
- Prospect Creek Bull Trout Salvage Evaluation
  - The WRTAC ratified the preliminary ranking scores for this project.
- Vermilion River Restoration Projects 4–6 Survey and Design
  - Following the project overview, it was noted that MFWP, USFWS, and Avista had engaged in further discussion with the project proponents regarding the desire to integrate language that would ensure CFSA stakeholders would have the opportunity to stay informed and provide input as design advanced. The USFS agreed to set up a meeting among the project proponents, MFWP, USFWS, GMCD, and Avista with a goal of addressing the concern so that the project would carry the full recommendation of the WRTAC.
  - The WRTAC modified one of the preliminary ranking scores for this project. The score for criterion C was changed from 3 to 2.
- St. Paul Trailhead Improvement Project
  - The WRTAC ratified the preliminary ranking scores for this project.
- Upper Thompson River Connectivity Project
  - Chris Rossel requested a copy of the recreation site visitation report which Arthur Potts committed to providing.
- The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix B project plans as presented pending consensus among the project proponents, MFWP, USFWS, GMCD, and Avista regarding Vermilion River Restoration Projects 4–6 Survey and Design, and with the addition of a budget line item for Avista support under the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group Project Coordination Project Plan.

#### Appendix C: Fish Passage/Native Salmonid Restoration Plan

- Shana Bernall provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix C for 2023. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.

- Native Salmonid Restoration Plan Five-Year Plan
  - The WRTAC decided to add a budget of \$10,000 to this project plan to enable the facilitation of the effort.
- Cabinet Gorge Fish Passage Facility Minor Modifications
  - Bernall explained that Amendment number one to the CFSA defined the up-to amount to be made available for the purpose of minor modifications to the Cabinet Gorge Fish Passage Facility as \$500,000 or 5% of construction costs for the Fish Passage Facility itself, whichever is greater. She noted that Avista is still pulling together the final cost of construction.
  - Bernall explained that following discussions with MFWP, IDFG, and USFWS, the thought is to request the MC authorize the Fish Passage Subgroup (presently comprised of USFWS, MFWP, IDFG, Kalispel Tribe, and Avista) to approve expenditures for the purpose of minor modifications. The WRTAC agreed with this approach and the intention was to seek MC approval through the consent mail process prior to the spring meeting.
- The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix C Project Plans with the aforementioned modification to the Native Salmonid Restoration Plan Five-Year Plan budget.

#### Appendix D: Bull Trout Protection and Public Education Project

- Sean Moran provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix D for 2023.
- The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix D Project Plans as written.

#### Appendix E: Watershed Councils Program

- Sean Moran provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix E for 2023.
- There was discussion thanking Brita Olson for all she has accomplished through the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group noting that Sarah Busmire is transitioning into that role.
- The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix E Project Plans as written.

#### Appendix F1: Clark Fork River Water Quality Monitoring Program

- Paul Kusnierz provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix F1 for 2023.
- The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix F1 Project Plans as written.

#### Appendix F2: Monitoring of Noxon Reservoir Stratification and Mobilization of Sediment Nutrients/Metals

- Paul Kusnierz provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix F2 for 2023.

- The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix F2 Project Plans as written.

#### Appendix F3: Aquatic Organism Tissue Analysis

- Paul Kusnierz provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix F3 for 2023.
- The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix F3 Project Plans as written.

#### Appendix F4: Water Quality Protection and Monitoring Plan for Maintenance, Construction, and Emergency Activities

- Eric Oldenburg provided a summary of Appendix F4 for 2023 and noted that there was presently nothing on his radar that would require him to enact the Water Quality Protection and Monitoring Plan.
- The WRTAC recommended the MC approve Appendix F4 as written.

#### Appendix F5: Dissolved Gas Supersaturation Control, Mitigation, and Monitoring

- Paul Kusnierz and Ken Bouwens provided a summary of all the projects proposed within Appendix F5 for 2023. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.
- Temperature Monitoring Data Compilation
  - Chris Rossel noted that it would be worthwhile to coordinate to ensure data is not being unintentionally double collected among partners. Paul Kusnierz agreed and noted that this project plan presents one opportunity for folks to coordinate in that regard.
- Lower Clark Fork River Genetics Evaluation
  - The WRTAC ratified the preliminary ranking scores for this project.
- Gas Supersaturation Control Program Total Dissolved Gas Abatement
  - Bob Steed asked about future maintenance needs for the spillway baffle blocks. Paul Kusnierz responded the thought is they will be low maintenance but that this would be discussed among the Gas Supersaturation Subcommittee should the need for maintenance arise.
- The WRTAC recommended the MC approve the Appendix F5 Project Plans as written.

#### Appendix T: Project Operations Package

- Eric Oldenburg provided a summary of the projects proposed within Appendix T for 2023.
- The WRTAC recommends that the MC approve the Appendix T Project Plans as written.

**The meeting adjourned at 3:08 pm (MST).**