

## **2024 Fall WRTAC Meeting Notes**

August 27, 2024, 10:00 am (MDT)

Avista Noxon Multipurpose Room

### **WRTAC representative attendees:**

Avista – Eric Oldenburg

Idaho Department of Fish and Game – Ken Bouwens

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality – Chantilly Higbee

Kalispel Tribe – Joe Maroney (conference line)

Lake Pend Oreille Idaho Club – David Gillespie (conference line)

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

Noxon Cabinet Shoreline Coalition – Rick Robinson

Panhandle Chapter Trout Unlimited – Bill Love

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

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – Carter Fredenberg

### **Other attendees:**

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

Avista Grant Writer – Susan Drumheller

Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group (LCFWG) – Sarah Poiesz

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks – Travis Rehm

NorthWestern Energy – Andy Welch and Jon Hanson (conference line)

### **Welcome and introductions:**

Eric Oldenburg welcomed those in attendance and discussed the purpose and agenda of the meeting. The purpose is to update the WRTAC on the progress of the 2024 implementation efforts and identify any issues and/or actions that need to be forwarded to the Management Committee for their September 24, 2024, Fall Meeting.

### **Other business:**

- Consent Mails
  - There were no aquatic consent mails since the winter meeting.
- Instructions for the development of 2025 project plans and 2024 Annual Work Summaries
- Review of properties purchased and held by Avista in support of the CFSA at 5- and 10-year intervals
  - Arthur Potts provided an update.
- Avista Grant Writer update
  - Susan Drumheller provided an update.

- Clark Fork Heritage Resource Program (Appendix R) update
  - Lisa Johnson provided an update.
- Winter Meeting Date
  - Wednesday, January 22, 2025 was selected for the WRTAC meeting.
- General updates:
  - Property taxes
    - Eric Oldenburg provided an update.
  - Commercial use at boat launches
    - Eric Oldenburg and Arthur Potts provided an update. This topic will be handled through the TRTAC or a to-be-formed subgroup. If anyone would like to participate in this process, they should contact Arthur.
  - Changes to the aquatic team
    - Monica Ott provided an update that Eric Oldenburg has transitioned into the Aquatic Programs Manager role, Sean Moran will be transitioning into managing the Downstream Transport Program, and Paul Kusnierz will be the PM&E Coordinator for Appendix F4.

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

Ken Bouwens provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix A for 2024.

Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.

- Habitat Restoration and Acquired Property Maintenance and Monitoring Allocation
  - Ken is working on receiving a bid for Antelope Lake road work from Elk Creek Contracting. The Sullivan Springs clean up work was completed.
- Priority Native Salmonid Habitat Acquisition and Conservation Allocation
  - Ken is working on getting additional support from APLE on identifying potential acquisition opportunities.
- Idaho Field Station Operation and Maintenance
  - The Clark Fork Hatchery has now sold.
- Trestle Creek Habitat Enhancement Project Phase I
  - The paving project is scheduled for 2025 and Ken has been involved with the planning process.
- Rattle Creek Habitat Enhancement Project Design
  - About 170 trees were fell over the 2-mile reach and the monitoring plan is now in place.
- Grouse Creek Stream Channel Restoration Project
  - The USFS re-rout of the road is complete but the next phase of the project has been delayed until 2025 due to contractor availability.
- Fish Resource Monitoring, Enhancement, and Management Plan
  - The round three (15-year) report will be available soon.

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

Travis Rehm provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix B for 2024. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.

- Redd Surveys in Montana Tributaries
  - The 2023 report was completed in March.
- Stream Gage Monitoring
  - Megan Tarmicheal will be the new lead for this project.
- Crow Creek Bull Trout Investigation
  - The report will be finalized soon.
- Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group Project Coordination
  - A draft report is anticipated to be sent out for review later this fall.
- Habitat Restoration, Property Acquisition, and Conservation Easement Contingency Allocation
  - Travis provided an update on the potential to trade the uplands of the recently-acquired parcel up Graves Creek for the riparian area of the neighbor's parcel. As part of the overall plan, we are also looking into re-routing part of the road away from Graves Creek to provide and expanded riparian buffer. This concept is currently being appraised.
- Vermilion River Restoration Projects 4 - 6 Survey and Design
  - The restoration design package for the Grouse Reach is complete.
- St. Paul Trailhead Improvement Project
  - Design and permitting for this project have been finalized.
- Noxon Reservoir Boat Ramp Improvements
  - Travis updated the group that we will likely submit a request this fall to continue the project for extending the Flat Iron boat ramp. The goal is to make the ramp usable under all water surface elevations and make the dredging process more effective and efficient. This project will likely be proposed as a 50:50 cost share between appendices B and H.
- Managing Aquatic Invasive Plants on Noxon and Cabinet Gorge Reservoirs
  - 13.7 acres were treated during 2024.
- Dreissenid Mussel Sampling on Noxon and Cabinet Gorge Reservoirs
  - This project is ongoing and thus far no Dreissenids have been detected.
- Noxon Reservoir Bathymetry Update
  - All survey transects have now been completed.
  - We will likely submit a project plan to undertake a similar effort on Cabinet Gorge Reservoir as part of the 2025 AIP process.
- Lower Clark Fork River Pathogen Survey
  - The survey is complete and we are awaiting results.

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

Shana Bernall provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix C for 2024. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.

- Upstream Fish Passage Program
  - Bernall provided an update on the project. The plan is to continue to operate, monitor, and evaluate CGFPF performance through implementation of the M&E plan.
- Native Salmonid Restoration Plan Five-Year Plan
  - Sean Moran is working with Stakeholders to update the last 5-year plan with inclusion of all aquatic PM&Es. A draft plan is expected later this fall.
- Tributary Trapping and Downstream Juvenile Bull Trout Transport Program
  - Sean Moran will transition into taking over this program.
  - The mobile fish handling trailer being returned because the wrong size was ordered. The new goal is to have the new trailer purchased, retrofitted, outfitted, and operational in early 2025.
  - Bernall noted that someone cut down some trees adjacent to the gate and the EFBR trap access road site. Avista staff worked with the USFS and placed boulders in this location to prevent people from driving around the gate.
- PIT-Monitoring Station Operation and Maintenance
  - Bernall noted that a number of antennas, nodes and batteries were replaced during 2024.
  - We are currently working on creating a more formal PIT lead/coordination role in recognition of how this program has grown.
- Fish Capture Facilities Operation, Development, and Testing
  - Monica provided an update. Avista continues working with the original contractor and engineer of record to address warranty items.
  - Bernall explained that the CGFPF subgroup met and discussed the summarization of any information pertaining to the potential for Bull Trout to be entrained downstream of Noxon Rapids Dam. The plan is to compile a list of available data, summarize those data, and share with the subgroup. This information will help inform future research that may be needed to guide discussion regarding whether or not additional fish passage is needed at Noxon Rapids Dam.
- Graves Permanent Wier Trap Enhancements
  - The traveling screen component of this project has been deemed as not being feasible. Thus, this component will not be pursued further and this project is now complete.
- Cabinet Gorge Fish Passage Facility Minor Modifications
  - Shana will be asking CGFPF subgroup for additional funding for the underwater camera system, funds to construct an air bubbler system in the forebay to prevent

ice buildup near the intake screens, and funding to begin testing an air bubbler option to scare fish away from the Vee trap prior to fish lifts.

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

Sean Moran provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix D for 2024.

Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.

- Montana Bull Trout Education Outreach Support
  - Sean has been working with appropriate landowners to get a sign installed on the Bull River at the 7-mile bridge on Highway 56.
- Montana Game Warden Support
  - Eight trail cameras have been purchased to help monitor sensitive Bull Trout areas.
  - No Bull Trout violations have occurred August 1.

#### Appendix E: Watershed Councils Program

Sean Moran provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix E for 2024.

Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.

- Pack River Watershed Council and Bonner Soil and Water Conservation District
  - The proposal to reconnect Grouse Creek with 2,500' of its historical floodplain may be postponed until next year due to the lack of available contractors.
- Lower Clark Fork Watershed Council Projects
  - The LCFWG submitted a proposal to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for continued Vermilion River restoration funding (was accepted with announcement in November).

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

Paul Kusnierz provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix F1 for 2024.

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

Paul Kusnierz provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix F2 for 2024. The report titled “Noxon Reservoir Stratification & Mobilization 2023 Stratification Sampling Results” was sent out to the WRTAC on August 13, for review prior to the meeting. There were no suggested changes to the report. Paul informed the WRTAC that Avista’s intent was to discuss the report with the Management Committee and seek approval that the Appendix F2 obligation has been met for the term of the License and approval for Appendix F2 to be omitted from the future Annual Implementation Plans and Annual Reports beginning in 2025.

#### Appendix F3: Aquatic Organism Tissue Analysis

Paul Kusnierz provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix F3 for 2024.

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

Eric Oldenburg provided an update of Appendix F4 for 2024 and noted that there was presently nothing on his radar that would require him to enact the Water Quality Protection and Monitoring Plan.

- Davina will email Rick Robinson the link to Noxon and Cabinet Gorge water surface elevations.

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

Paul Kusnierz and Ken Bouwens provided an update of all the projects proposed within Appendix F5 for 2024. Specific projects for which there was meaningful discussion are noted below.

- Total Dissolved Gas Monitoring
  - The TDG shore-based system was upgraded this year.
- Box Canyon Reservoir Northern Pike Suppression
  - Relative abundance has been maintained at a low level.
- Lake Pend Oreille Experimental Walleye Angler Incentive Program
  - Spring numbers were relatively low with an increase in July and August.
- Lake Pend Oreille/Clark Fork River Walleye Population Assessment
  - Walleye and pike numbers have increased.
- Lake Pend Oreille Tributary PIT-Monitoring Station Operation and Maintenance
  - All of the PIT-monitoring stations are fully operational.
- Lower Clark Fork River Genetics Evaluation
  - Thus far, 426 samples have been collected.
- Gas Supersaturation Control Program Total Dissolved Gas Abatement
  - The modification report is complete.

#### Appendix T: Project Operations Package

Eric Oldenburg provided an update on Appendix T for noting that the final budget adjustments for the one-time, one-million dollar funding commitment will be reflected in the budget table of the 2024 FERC report.

**The meeting adjourned at 3:07 pm (MDT).**