

FUTURE FISHERIES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

WINTER 2023

Date: December 15, 2022

Review Panel Attendees:

In Person: David Cope, John Goodwin, Mike Newton, Clint Peck, Ron Pierce, Bob Schroeder

Virtual: Karin Boyd, Michael Johns, Bill Mytton, Rep. Brian Putnam, Bill Semmens, Nancy Winslow

Absent: Richard Lane

FWP staff:

In Person: Michelle McGree, Trevor Watson, Valisa Milligan

Applicants and others in attendance:

In Person: Adam Strainer, Will Trimbath, Gary Burnham, Ashley Brubaker, Tess Scanlon, Ryen Neudecker

Phone/Zoom: Dustin Graf, Robert Sain, Brita Olson, Rob Roberts, Christine Brissette, Adam Switalski, Jed

Whiteley, Katie Vivian

Panel business (before project review):

- Welcomes, good-byes. Rep. Brian Putnam's term has ended and John Goodwin will be leaving for college after a vacation in June. Nancy Winslow, Bill Mytton and Bob Schroeder were reappointed through 2024. Karin Boyd, David Cope, Michael Johns, Richard Lane, Mike Newton, Clint Peck, Ron Pierce and Bill Semmens' terms will be up for renewal July 2023. Legislative appointments will be made in the 2023 Legislative Session.
- The agenda was approved.
- Review Future Fisheries balances; \$500,000 available this cycle.
- Overview of funding sources and discussion of authority and funding. Explanation of application review process.
- Explanation of FWP staff recommendations.

Panel business (after project review):

- Project balances were reviewed. Nancy Winslow was chosen as the panel representative for the prioritization. The prioritization committee planned to meet Monday, December 19, 2022.
- The decision was made to keep funding levels as recommended, \$471,419.50.
- Discussion on when and where to hold FFIP summer meeting and field tour; decided to schedule for June 15-16, 2023, in the Big Hole.

Application discussions and funding recommendations:

1) Prickly Pear Creek Simmental fish screen (010-2023)

Amount Requested: \$43,000

FWP Recommendation: We recommend partial funding (\$33,606.50), without the contingency costs.

Project Representative: Will Trimbath, Pat Barnes Chapter of Trout Unlimited; Adam Strainer, FWP; Gary Burnham, Landowner

Discussion Items:

- Discussion on the old structure: Will it remain? Can it be repurposed? The fish ladder could potentially be repurposed, will look into what can be done with it. Discussion of the measuring device.
- Landowner will handle maintenance of screen. Landowner or ranch manager is at site almost daily. They are confident about screen function and troubleshooting.
- Adam will be highly involved in the project.
- The landowner has good water rights, last one to pull the water out. Has seen a lot of improvements in the stream over the years.

Motion: Motion made to fund the project at the FWP recommendation of \$33,606.50

Motion Made by: Nancy Winslow

Motion Second by: Bob Schroeder

Panel Action: John Goodwin abstains, motion passes (unanimous; Mike Newton absent)

Amount Approved: **\$33,606.50**

2) Little Boulder River restoration (005-2023)

Amount Requested: \$30,870

FWP Recommendation: We recommend partial funding, without the cost of monitoring and piezometers (\$26,125). We ask the applicant to clarify why the use of piezometers is a necessary part of the project scope, and request that the landowner leaves a sufficient riparian buffer between the stream and the wildlife habitat food plots. Please clarify the cost of willow stakes and wattles (typically stakes cost \$1-\$1.50/stake) and provide detail on the high "general labor" costs.

Project Representative: Dustin Graf, Landowner; Robert Sain, TroutWater Restoration

Discussion Items:

- Discussion on grazing concerns. Landowner has been approached and asked about grazing, but they have recently cleared riparian area and replanted with native trees, shrubs and grasses and don't plan on allowing grazing yet. The Review Panel emphasized fencing if they do plan to graze in the future. Landowner does not plan on grazing because they want to restore the area.
- The Review Panel discussed the feasibility of working on a downstream reach if the upper reach is hammered (i.e., prevalence of grazing on USFS land upstream).
- The property is just downstream of National Forest and other downstream landowners may be interested in future restoration projects.

- Clearing in the riparian area is a combination of taking out non-native plants and bringing in native grasses and plants (e.g., ryegrass and willows) to target local wildlife with food plots. Browse protectors were recommended.
- Discussed riparian buffer. The Review Panel emphasized the need for a riparian buffer and to keep the food plots out of the riparian buffer.
- Concern over the floodplain integrity, as it was recently scrubbed; worried about the stream accessing the floodplain without roughness. The consultant plans to add roughness, and if done right, velocities should be decreased.
- The proposed treatments were explained in more detail.
- Landowner will maintain and monitor the project.

Motion: Motion made to fund the project at \$26,125 with contingency that if grazed, area will be fenced.

Motion Made by: Bob Schroeder

Motion Second by: David Cope

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimous)

Amount Approved: \$26,125

3) Granite Creek fish passage (004-2023)

Amount Requested: \$85,000

FWP Recommendation: We recommend fully funding (\$85,000)

Project Representative: Adam Switalski, Clark Fork Coalition

Discussion Items:

- Discussion on road BMPs. They will be site specific, but plan to use sediment retention basins, dips.
- Discussion on bull trout status. Have presence with eDNA, but there are no recent electrofishing data showing bull trout.
- Funding 4 of 8 culverts because of their proximity to the stream. Asking for funds for fisheries benefits.

Motion: Motion made to fund the project at \$85,000

Motion Made by: Ron Pierce

Motion Second by: Bob Schroeder

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimous)

Amount Approved: \$85,000

4) O'Brien Creak Meadows stream restoration (009-2023)

Amount Requested: \$43,888

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding (\$43,888)

Project Representative: Jed Whiteley, Clark Fork Coalition

Discussion Items:

- O'Brien is a westslope cutthroat trout stream, and also has bull trout.

- Ron worked here in the 90s, finally getting there in terms of restoration. Discussion on ownership of water rights. Ownership of water rights is good. Diversion in the area will be removed with the project.
- Where is new bridge related to the mouth? Will it impinge upon this project? Bridge on South Ave will have its alignment changed so it will not impact the Bitterroot confluence.
- Sediment is in reach 2; will be treating it by moving the stream away and building a brush bank.
- Will there be access to the public? No. There are spawning fish moving up and down the creek and in the Bitterroot, and it is basically inaccessible anyway. The project is intended to improve fishing in the Bitterroot.

Motion: Motion made to fully fund the project at \$43,888

Motion Made by: Mike Newton

Motion Second by: Bob Schroeder

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimous)

Amount Approved: \$43,888

5) Bull River riparian function restoration (002-2023)

Amount Requested: \$30,000

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding (\$30,000)

Project Representative: Brita Olson, Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group

Discussion Items:

- Discussion on getting rid of reed canary grass and experience in the Bull River. Containerized stock from the DNRC nursery is more expensive but it is larger and has better survival.
- History of the project area and combating reed canary grass. Discussed conifer recruitment; regeneration has happened because shading occurs more year round. Cedar, Englemann Spruce, other shade species are desired. They are trying to get first successional species which will lead to the second successional species.
- Discussion on landowners and summer shading and mowing. The applicant is tracking; there are high survival rates but lots of variability between sites. Cautioned investing time in mowing, not mowing too close to the stream. Panel members noted that burning and spraying with roundup works with 12' wide fabric and fencing for large areas. However, applicant noted that large fence has been used and was found to be a maintenance burden with long term issues – including beaver, that can get into the fence and compromise the plot.
- Does it work to burn without planting species? No.
- Discussion on cost of contractors. They use MCC crews. Six people for a week at about \$30/hour per person, but they are equipped and are trained.

Motion: Motion made to fund the project at \$30,000

Motion Made by: David Cope

Motion Second by: Mike Newton

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimous)

Amount Approved: \$30,000

6) Brackett Creek habitat improvement and erosion control (001-2023)

Amount Requested: \$26,000

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding (\$26,000) but ask the applicant to clarify the design example 1 (in particular, describe the barrier)

Project Representative: Ashley Brubaker, Upper Yellowstone-Shields Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Discussion Items:

- Discussion on the riparian buffer. It is very thin in places; the landowner wants to minimize loss and doesn't want to lose more. Will hire a consultant to design the project, which will hopefully address the concerns. Panel members emphasized that a wider buffer would be beneficial long term. Concern over the incised creek and if it will improve over time, attaining project goals.
- Design example 1 is just an example of what could be used. Will hire a consultant to do the plans for the design.
- Discussion on water lease. Trout Unlimited has water lease with the property, but unsure if it was paid for or donated. Unsure if there is active irrigation.
- There is no public access, not any good places for public access, but landowners do see a "big picture" benefit to the watershed and to improve fishery throughout. Not sure if landowners would allow fishing with permission.
- The landowner contribution is \$26,000 cash and \$15,000 in vegetation donated in-kind.
- Panel members have concerns with not having a more developed design and having no public access on such a large parcel near a county road. The Review Panel would like to see a more thorough, integrated project plan and learn more about public access. They noted enthusiasm for the project.

Motion: Motion made to table application and encouraged the applicant to come back with a tighter design and budget. Consider a better buffer with the adjacent hay field.

Motion Made by: Bob Schroeder

Motion Second by: Mike Newton

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimous)

Amount Approved: \$0

7) Flint Creek riparian restoration phase 2B (003-2023)

Amount Requested: \$39,000

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding (\$39,000)

Project Representative: Tess Scanlon, Trout Unlimited

Discussion Items:

- Public access is not available onsite (except with permission), but there is access downstream at Hall and the project will help fisheries downstream. Hall Creek road is less than 2 miles away, and probably 1.5 miles from the project. The Review Panel expressed concern with public access limitations.
- Discussed the pre-project photos. The banks are ok in places, but the stream is too wide.

- Discussed grazing, landowner plans to graze, working on a grazing agreement. They plan to exclude livestock. The landowner is donating \$3,000 as well as purchasing and installing the fence to protect the restoration. The Review Panel discussed having funding contingent on the grazing plan to give more strength to it.
- Discussion on restoration of more of the creek. There are plans to do a 5 mile reach, likely working on 3 miles of it. Restoration from Hall to the confluence is a bigger bite that TU is trying to be strategic with, using a premeditated approach. The lower section is dewatered as well and that is being considered by TU.
- Overall, most of 15 miles of Flint Creek need help. The landscape is changing and more people are interested in keeping cattle off of the creek.

Motion: Motion made to fully fund if a grazing agreement between landowner and Trout Unlimited is achieved. (\$39,000)

Motion Made by: Karin Boyd

Motion Second by: Rep. Brian Putnam

Panel Action: Motion passes (11 yes, 1 No)

Amount Approved: \$39,000

8) **Nevada Creek restoration phase 6 (007-2023)**

Amount Requested: \$103,000

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding (\$103,000) and ask the applicant to identify the location of the beaver dam analogues (BDAs) referenced in the design sheets.

Project Representative: Ryen Neudecker, Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Discussion Items:

- Discussed the canal and entrainment. FWP doing fish rescues, considering getting fish screen. Concerns with restoration not being comprehensive without the fish screen. Some adjustments were made to the stream channel, which reduced entrainment – not sure why.
- The Douglas Canal is a major canal. Addressing the canal is on the wish list, but its hard to get traction on the project.
- Discussion on grazing and fencing plan. Will have a plan in place that will be exclusion and off-site water. Will run the plan by DNRC because of the canal. Not currently grazing but still will have a plan. Fencing will cover approximately 1.5 miles. Discussion on whether or not funding recommendations should include grazing contingency to be consistent between applications.
- The closest public fishing access is on the Stitt property, but there are county bridges onsite.
- The landowner is providing materials (sod, fill, etc.) in-kind.
- Discussion on design and floodplains. Project will relocate the stream channel and will mine out of the old channel. Will leave the old channel for a bit while construction occurs. The applicant feels good about the design with the floodplain connection and design flows. Question: The channel is fairly consistent in size and planform, are you going to feed the floodplain in certain areas? Yes, will look for opportunities for bank storage. Will have floodplain complexity and will not fill wetlands where possible.

- Will the use of wooden structures vary throughout the project? Yes, the channel is steeper at the top, then becomes less steep and grade control is not needed as much.

Motion: Motion made to fully fund project at \$103,000

Motion Made by: Mike Newton

Motion Second by: Bob Schroeder

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimous)

Amount Approved: \$103,000

9) **McKinley Lake dam removal (006-2023)**

Amount Requested: \$30,000

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding (\$30,000). Please provide additional information on the \$40,000 lump sum of "labor"

Project Representative: Rob Roberts, Trout Unlimited

Discussion Items:

- The high labor costs are associated with MCC Crews; \$5k a crew
- The rainbow trout are going away; is it going to convert to a marshy cirque? Yes. Rainbow trout won't be able to sustain themselves.
- Will the project airlift excavators for work? Yes. Some small equipment will be transported via airlift, and other equipment will be transported using the MCC crews. There is a USFS easement in place to access the project.
- Why is the City of Missoula donating so little? The City spent a lot of money on municipal water supply, leaning on stakeholders because of the fisheries benefits. In-kind time is big, but not included in budget. Would like to see more money.
- Why remove the dam? Not a big recreational lake, and the dam is high hazard.

Motion: Motion made to fully fund the project (\$30,000).

Motion Made by: David Cope

Motion Second by: Bob Schroeder

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimous)

Amount Approved: \$30,000

10) **North Burnt Fork Creek fish passage reconnection (008-2023)**

Amount Requested: \$39,970

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding (\$39,970)

Project Representative: Christine Brissette, Trout Unlimited

Discussion Items:

- Is the project on a golf course? No, it is in the middle of a refuge. The applicant has been in contact with the golf course and they've been involved with the project as neighbors.

- Concern that the Metcalf Refuge would open ponds and let bass into the river. The conversation of management has come up and the understanding is that things have changed and that would no longer happen. It is a waterfowl area.
- What does the Refuge do to work on those wetlands? Not sure, not part of project.
- Is the bridge ADA accessible? Yes. Trying to enhance it as well, to meet both compliance and provide a good experience.
- Discussion of dewatering downstream of site, above the Supply Ditch.
- To address reed canary grass they will use removal, willow trenches (scraping bank the bank and planting).

Motion: Motion made to fund the project at \$39,970

Motion Made by: Bob Schroeder

Motion Second by: Rep. Brian Putnam

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimous)

Amount Approved: \$39,970

11) Spring Coulee Creek culvert replacement (011-2023)

Amount Requested: \$40,830

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding (\$40,830) but ask the applicant to provide rough cost estimates for the culvert options. Additionally, the source of matching contributions was not included in the application and should be provided.

Project Representative: Katie Vivian, FWP

Discussion Items:

- Discussed how the project began and why the project area was not done properly originally? During the time of the 2018 floods, there were vacancies and poor decisions made. Used emergency action and used culverts too small for what was needed.
- Costs are high. Received 10 different estimates with culvert and riprap. Budget includes natural stream bed material in bottom of culvert. Not sure if dump truck is going to get gravel elsewhere or onsite.
- Match is labor being done by road department.
- Are County Commissioners involved to prevent future issues? Not really, just starting. Hoping to use project as a stepping stone.
- Discussed the potential benefit to fisheries. Beneficial to replace even though installed poorly. Lots of work done on Muddy Creek, would send a positive message to help relationships. Considerable benefit to the county, but feel replacement should be done if needed. In emergencies things happen fast and fisheries are often the last consideration.

Motion: Motion made to fund project at \$40,830

Motion Made by: Ron Pierce

Motion Second by: John Goodwin

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimously; Michael Johns absent)

Amount Approved: \$40,830

