

Priest River Watershed Group Steering Committee Meeting Notes

December 7, 2023 from 4:30 – 6:30 pm

West Bonner County Library

Members Present: Erin Plue (TU); Sean Stash (boating); Jennifer Ekstrom (ICL); Paul Sieracki (IETF); Amy Anderson & John Quinn-Hurst (SCA); Pam Duquette (PR); Allan Songstad (PL); Kyle Maki (IWF); Hank Jones & Jeremy Patterson (fishing guide); Better Gardner (PR); Ken Hagman (Priest Lake Community); Mike Lithgow & Eric Berntsen (Kalispel Tribe)

Opportunities: The group started with a brainstorm of “opportunities” in the basin.

- High elevation waterways
- Opportunities for connection to the outdoors for adults and children
- The area isn't already over exploited, in a position to manage use on the front end
- Access opportunities.
- Opportunities for building relationships with users of the system, educational opportunity
- Restoration opportunities – cold water springs, shade addition, bank improvement, fish passage, non-native fish management,
- Flow regime management opportunities.
- River is in one state and all in the US.
- The majority of the river miles are federal and state managed – more restoration opportunities
- Wetland restoration
- Floodplain to work in
- Kalispel tribal territories
- Technical support around the basin
- Opportunities to collaborate and influence work around the river
- This group forming
- Funding opportunities exist
- Research opportunities
- Existing monitoring
- Wildlife
- Cold water refuge habitat improvement opportunities – cold water intrusions
- There is the possibility of improved water clarity and reduced aquatic invasive species
- Opportunity to restore connection

BOR Grant: Erin gave an update on the grant that is currently allowing for PRWG operation. The PRWG is currently funded with a Bureau of Reclamation grant that funds the start-up of the watershed groups and offers a second round of funding for successfully functioning groups. Erin explained that she will put in for the next round of funding through BOR in September and she described the activities that were designated for completion in this round of funding and the activities that could be funded in the next round as laid out below.

Tasks Listed out in Proposal 2023

Task A: Watershed development activities

- Use the recently completed situation assessment as guidance to identify and engage stakeholders
- Develop a communication and outreach plan and outreach materials and complete outreach to stakeholders.
- Develop a system for storing and filing data accessible to stakeholders.
- Develop organizational structure and operational procedures
 - Create meeting schedule, develop and adopt bylaws, establish committees
- Develop mission statement, vision statement, and goals
- Retain a facilitator to lead meetings, record meeting notes and ensure remote participation in meetings
- Retain a contractor for website development

Task B: Watershed restoration planning

- Review and compile existing data and studies
- Identify and prioritize the major challenges to the Priest River cold-water fishery
- Develop strategies for filling any identified data gaps

Interview watershed group members and stakeholders to identify potential restoration projects

Opportunities for Next Round of CWMP Funding

Task A: Watershed Group Development: Watershed group development activities include, but are not limited to:

- Developing a mission statement, vision statement, and goals for the watershed group.
- Developing articles of incorporation, bylaws, and business practices
- Conducting outreach activities including, but not limited to, development of informational materials about the watershed and the purpose of the watershed group community (e.g., brochures, advertisements, website, videos), creation of an outreach plan, conducting stakeholder meetings to establish broad-based and diverse membership, hiring a facilitator to assist with outreach and coalition building, tabling at community events, targeted outreach to specific groups and individuals (e.g., attending meetings of other groups, meeting with individual land owners, and tours of past watershed management projects).
- Gathering information about issues and needs related to water quality, water quantity and restoration needs within the watershed (e.g., through literature research and talking to government agencies, local universities, and stakeholders).
- Conducting pre-planning activities, including outlining a watershed restoration plan, reviewing existing plans related to the watershed, and collecting baseline information.

2. Task B: Watershed Restoration Planning: Watershed restoration planning activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Completing a watershed restoration plan, updating an existing restoration plan.
- Developing general watershed management project concepts or performing an analysis of the watershed to identify and prioritize watershed management projects. For example,

creating a matrix within the watershed restoration plan that outlines and prioritizes watershed management projects.

- Conducting monitoring activities (e.g., water quality studies, water quantity studies, vegetation surveys, invertebrate surveys) needed to provide baseline information about the current condition and needs of the watershed to inform a broader watershed planning effort (see Section C.4.2. Eligibility of Monitoring, Measurement, and Field Work for additional information).
- Conducting mapping and other technical analyses, including obtaining data, performing modeling, or developing goals and benchmarks for the watershed restoration plan.
- Obtaining project management services or software technology required to formulate the watershed restoration plan.
- Interviewing watershed group members and stakeholders to gain an idea of projects that would improve the watershed.
- Working with watershed group members, landowners, Federal agencies, and state or local governments to determine how the watershed can be improved.
- Reviewing watershed-specific best management practices established by Federal, state, and local government agencies.

3.Task C: Watershed Management Project Design: Project design activities can include, but are not limited to:

- Completing an analysis to identify specific project locations.
- Completing site-specific project design and engineering, including but not limited to:
 - Preparing design drawings and specifications for the construction of the project.
 - Developing a basis of design document (a report that documents the major design criteria and includes recommended project elements, planning level drawings, preliminary schedules, and cost estimates.)
 - Analyzing the means and methods for construction at the project site and identify constraints (necessary equipment, site access, etc.)
- Developing project timelines and milestones.
- Researching what type of site-specific environmental compliance will be necessary to implement a project, particularly if the applicant intends to seek Federal funding to implement the project in the future (e.g., under The WaterSMART Environmental Water Resource Projects or Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Projects). We recommend contacting your local Reclamation office (www.usbr.gov/main/offices.html) as part of such research, to discuss the required environmental and cultural resource compliance and costs associated with potential projects.

Website: Erin explained that the PRWG website is down to a fatal error that she made while trying to edit the free site that was being used. There is money designated to pay for the development of a new site so she recently went through a cost analysis and hired Big Blue Hat Studios to build a new site that will be laid out in a similar way as this site: <https://littlesalmonriverwatershedcollaborative.com/>. All of the videos and other material from the old website is still available and will be hosted on the new site.

Facilitator Update: Erin updated the group on the hiring process for the new facilitator. The RFP was released in early November and closes on Dec. 8, 2023. A ranking committee including Erin Plue, Allan Songstad, Amy Anderson and Eric Berntsen is scheduled to rank the proposals next week. Ideally the facilitator will join the January 11 meeting, and be running the show by February.

Watershed Groups: The group broke into small groups to look at different watershed group's websites, strategic plans, watershed restoration plans and then discuss the different groups. Conversation ensued that included discussion about many things including:

- the importance of outreach and education to our efforts
- the difference between a Department of Environmental Quality Watershed Advisory Group (WAG) and a stakeholder led grassroots watershed group like the PRWG currently is.
- Storymaps – including current and recent project sites, monitoring sites, before and after landowner project sites, pictures...
- Website layouts
- Watershed Restoration Plans, specifically the [Sun River Watershed Plan](#) developed by the [Sun River Watershed Group](#)

The group elected to hold the January 11, 2024 meeting through zoom.

General Information:

- Examples of Watershed Groups -
 - Lake Pend Oreille Nearshore WAG – strategic planning worksheet
 - Little Salmon River Watershed Collaborative – <https://littlesalmonriverwatershedcollaborative.com/>
 - DEQ's Priest River WAG – Remnants of their website, agendas, notes...
 - American River Basin Collaborative - <https://www.valleyfoothill.org/arbc/>
 - Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group - <https://lowerclarkforkwatershedgroup.org/> - two watershed restoration plans on the website
 - Seattle City Lights – Boundary Dam Fisheries and Aquatics Work Group – FERC relicensing
- Montana Watershed Coordination Council: <https://www.mtwatersheds.org/> - an umbrella organization for all of the 60+ Montana watershed groups.
- Examples from WaterSMART of completed watershed plans - <https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/cwmp/plans.html>