

Priest River Watershed Group
Steering Committee Meeting
March 7, 2024
3:30-6:30pm
West Bonner County Library



Meeting Goals:

- Conduct a SWOT Analysis (using Group survey results)
- Work together to begin assembling the Strategic Planning Framework
- Prep for next Strategic Planning Session
- Review Housekeeping Items

Members Present:

Amy Anderson, Selkirk Conservation Alliance
Pam Duquette, Priest River Watershed
Allan Songstad, Stop the Priest Lake Siphon
Sean Stash, Boating and Access on Priest River
Kyle Maki, ID Wildlife Association & Sportsmen
Conservation *
Jon Quinn Hurst, Selkirk Conservation Alliance*
Erin Plue, Trout Unlimited
Eric Bernstein, Kalispel Tribe *
Paul Sieracki, Inland Empire Task Force

Mike Lithgow, Kalispel Tribe
Jennifer Eckstrom, ID Conservation League +
Ken Hagman, Priest Lake +

Facilitators:

Hannah Anderson, Lead Facilitator
Karen Wilmoth, Facilitation Support

**Indicates Proxy*

+Indicates Joined Online

Minutes

Welcome and Overview

Hannah Anderson, Facilitator, welcomed the group and reviewed the agenda and goals for the day.

Season and Regulations (Erin)

Erin Plue gave a brief update on behalf of the Fishery Task Force as follows:

- The Task Force established a preliminary list of comments on the development of Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game's (IDFG) 2025-2027 Panhandle Region's Fishery Seasons and Rules, which were provided to the PRWG for review and feedback.
- The Task Force will meet again on Friday, March 8 to begin working on comments for the development of the IDFG 2025-2030 Management Plan.
- The Task Force will review these and come up with a system for collection of Group feedback.
- The Group discussed the desire for feedback and a vote before finalizing. Erin pointed out that comments and vote may need be done thru email because of time constraints.
- Overall, the Task Force process has been working well so far and sets a good precedent for this format to be effective for the PRWG in crafting recommendations/comments on future items.

Schedule

The facilitator provided an overview of the anticipated Strategic Planning schedule to last through June 2024. She emphasized that the initial sessions (March-May) would be a brainstorm in format, with no firm decision to be made. As an iterative process, each subsequent month will build upon the Group's progress towards crafting their Strategic Plan. In the final session, the Group will vote to adopt the preliminary Strategic Plan.

- The March meeting would be primarily focused on beginning the strategic planning process, including establishing a draft Value Statement and Mission Statement. Time permitting, the Group would begin brainstorming Goals as well.
- At the April PRWG Steering Committee meeting, the Group will identify Goals and Objectives.
- The May PRWG meeting will tentatively involve inviting key technical experts to assist the Group in further refining their draft Strategic Plan, primarily collecting feedback on the draft Goals.
- The group will target the June meeting for final review, public comment, and tentative vote to adopt the Plan.

SWOT Analysis

The facilitator gave a brief recap of the SWOT Analysis Process, explaining that it is a tool used to help identify factors relevant to the group's success including trends, resources, advantages, and potential challenges. Including everyone's perspectives is key to the SWOT Analysis process. As such, the group was sent a SWOT Survey following the February session, to provide insight and feedback. Members were given the option to submit their responses anonymously.

The facilitator provided a summary of the group's collective survey responses/feedback for each of the 4 SWOT categories. For each, a bulleted list of feedback was provided by theme, followed by a word cloud, representing the frequency of key words used by members in their survey responses. For each category, the group then engaged in discussion and review. Key discussion points are as follows:

Strengths

- Generally, the group agreed the summary was accurate

Weaknesses

- As a relatively new group, we don't have an established history of success, which may affect morale/self-esteem as we try to begin making progress
- As the group begins to make more formal decision, we will want to be attentive to ensuring members relay information to their constituents
 - In the meantime, primes/proxies need to keep each other informed (share info)
- The group agreed they needed a "process" for group emails and communication between meetings to balance keeping momentum and sharing information while being sensitive to the difference in each individuals' schedules and non-PRWG related workloads.
 - BASECAMP-or other online sharing platforms could be useful
 - It may be helpful to assign "levels" of importance by topic to identify when something should be sent with priority, vs more passive availability for review
 - The group generally agreed about the importance of staying connected

- It is natural that conflicting priorities will arise in working together; it will be important to handle these discussions with care in order to seek agreement on key issues

Opportunities

- The group has a lot of tools to “force” some of the restoration (legal tools were mentioned, and Bull Trout Restoration)
- There is a majority of land managed by people/agencies interested in working with Group
- “Press/Media Coverage” was discussed at length
 - How to get news/info about group out to the public-media/press
 - How to raise awareness of the issues the PRWG was established to address
- Subcommittees:
 - Potentially to include: Communications, Geographic, Legislative, Treasurer, Education & Outreach
 - Generally, subcommittees are a good way to delegate labor based on members unique skills and interests
 - Communication Subcommittee
 - Social Media
 - Information can be prepared by the subcommittee, but should be reviewed/approved by the group before being released to the public
 - How to create subcommittee’s needs to be approved by group, and can be discussed as an Objective under the Goal for Internal Processes
 - Members expressed interest in being on certain subcommittees
 - Communications: Jennifer, Erin
 - Information Gathering / Legislative: Paul

Threats

- Time was a largely recognized threat for a variety of reasons
 - There is a sense of urgency
 - Individual members have varying amounts of time they are able to commit towards participating due to jobs, volunteer time, etc.
 - It is in the PRWG’s best interest to be timely in responding to issues
 - Establishing consensus on sensitive topics may be difficult and could threaten quick/efficient action by the PRWG
- Consensus:
 - True/full consensus is required in PRWG voting/decisions, as established in the PRWG protocols
 - If true consensus is not reached, but the group moves forward with majority consensus, those representatives with the minority opinion are entitled to act/speak/comment in a manner that may be contradictory to the PRWG’s official statements, in order to ensure their representative group is not misrepresented
 - Some members of the group expressed a desire for majority consensus instead
 - The strength of collaborative groups is in providing consensus recommendations to “show of force” a comprehensive community opinion

- Recommendations made by PRWG that do not have true consensus are weakened, and thus the image of PRWG may be weakened
- We won't always have a consensus because we are diverse
- It may be more lucrative to determine on a case-by-case basis whether majority or true consensus is more appropriate
- This conversation was tabled, with the recognition that the group currently does not have consensus on whether true-consensus or majority consensus should be standard in protocol.
- Strategic plans are intended to be "living" documents which are updated as needed when items are accomplished, or new issues arise. Decisions on PRWG protocols such as Consensus/Voting can be revisited and may be incorporated once the group has found agreement.

In conclusion of the SWOT Analysis process, the facilitator shared a word cloud showing members responses to the prompt "Why is the Priest River Watershed important to us?" The group reflected on their shared interest in the Watershed.

Break

Strategic Planning: Vision and Mission Statements

The facilitator provided a quick review of the Strategic Planning Process and its importance, highlighting the following:

- Ensure we're on the same page, and being guided by our common interests
- Organize and prioritize our efforts, creating a usable and actionable framework
- Strategic Plans are intended to be "living" documents which are updated over time
- An established plan will help the PRWG in pursuit of funding opportunities, and demonstrating progress related to maintaining funding

Mission Statement

The facilitator provided a couple of examples of Mission Statements, and presented the traditional definition and intention of a Mission Statement within Strategic Plans:

"Describes the purpose for the project's existence by explaining WHAT you do, WHY you do it, HOW you do it, and for WHOM."

The facilitator recognized that portions of the PRWG's current Purpose Statement and Principles (which are established in the Protocols) meet this definition of a Mission Statement. In the spirit of seeing not reinventing the wheel, the group reviewed their current Purpose Statement and Principles, and discussed whether to 1) RENAME these to be the Mission Statement, 2) RETAIN Purpose and Principles as is, and create new Mission Statement in addition, or 3) REPURPOSE by using portions of the Purpose and Principles to create a new Mission statement.

The group discussed different portions of the current Purpose and Principles, trying out different iterations and options. Ultimately, they decided to RETAIN the original Purpose Statement and Principles as is and crafted a new draft Mission Statement.

***DRAFT MISSION STATEMENT:** PRWG works collaboratively to safeguard and restore the Priest River Watershed, with a primary focus on improving water quality, quantity, and aquatic and riparian habitat in the main stem of the Lower Priest River.

**This is subject to change and will be revisited later in the strategic planning process.*

Vision Statement

The facilitator provided a couple of examples of Vision Statements, explaining their intention as a long-term vision of success. She gave the following definition for what Vision Statements are within Strategic Plans:

“A summarization of long-term core aspirations, values, and inspiration.”

The group worked together to build a draft Vision Statement, as follows:

***DRAFT VISION STATEMENT:** To foster a thriving watershed for current and future generations for all species.

**This is subject to change and will be revisited later in the strategic planning process.*

Strategic Planning Next Steps

The facilitator discussed the next steps in the Strategic Planning Process.

Technical Experts: The group discussed the inclusion of technical experts in the remaining steps of the Strategic Planning Process, including when would be the most appropriate session(s) to invite experts to based on the above schedule.

- As a part of the survey, steering committee members submitted recommendations for technical experts that they believe would be helpful for guiding the PRWG in strategic planning
- The role of technical experts:
 - Answering questions, providing insight and guidance
 - Will not vote or fill a decision making role
- When selecting technical experts, we should recognize the gift of their time and attention, and not invite folks that may not have a meaningful relevance to the topics
- The group discussed whether the April session or May session would be more appropriate for expert attendance
 - Some felt strongly that the group needed more “brainstorming” time to hash out ideas in a less structured way before inviting experts to join
 - Some felt technical experts may help the group to be more efficient in exploring/brainstorming goals initially, as to what is possible or not possible
 - Ultimately, the group felt that having some organization / clarity to what major themes the goals will fall into will help the group decide if certain experts should come to the April/brainstorming session
 - Because the survey responses were anonymous, goals provided in the survey are not able to be shared with the group until permission is given by each member

- The group discussed the possible format of inviting a short list of experts to attend / present during the first half of the meeting, then be dismissed, for the group to convene a private session to discuss and identify desired goals.
- The group agreed that a good format for the May meeting, is to have a “panel” style of technical experts for the PRWG to ask pre-determined questions of. Technical experts will be sent the questions ahead of time. Some experts may be sent the questions for response via email if it more appropriate/considerate of their time.
- Next Steps:
 - The facilitator will send each member the goals they provided in the survey.
 - Members will give the facilitator their edits or permission to share goals with the whole group.
 - The facilitator will organize the full list of goals into about 5ish main themes, and send those to the group for review.
 - Based on that summary and identification of themes, the group will be able to better discuss and identify which technical experts would be appropriate

Housekeeping (general discussion)

The group re-visited the Task Force Update topic. Erin read the suggested comments (including changes from the last iteration), and the group voted whether to approve the comments for submission.

VOTE: PASSED (11 = thumbs up; 1 = thumb sideways)

The Task Force will discuss the Management Plan and areas of focus further at their next meeting and will follow up with the group.

Adjourn