

Priest River Watershed Group
Steering Committee Meeting
May 1, 2025
3:30-6:30pm
West Bonner Library



Present Members

Amy Anderson, Selkirk Conservation Alliance
Allan Songstad, Stop the Priest Lake Siphon
Betty Gardner, Priest River
Cathy Gidley, Trout Unlimited
Eric Bernsten, Kalispel Tribe
Eric Johnson, Priest Lake Cabin Association*
Erin Plue, Trout Unlimited
Hank Jones, Fishing Guides on the Priest River*
Jennifer Ekstrom, Idaho Conservation League
Jon Quinn-Hurst, Selkirk Conservation Alliance
Kyle Maki, Idaho Wildlife Federation
Paul Sieracki, Inland Empire Task Force
(Environmental)
Sean Stash, Boating on Priest River

*Joined Virtually**

Technical Experts

Michelle Richman, IDWR
Amy Cassel, IDWR
Francine Meija, USGS
Todd Higgens, IDEQ
Rob Ryan, IDFG
Merritt Horsmon, IDFG
Brandon Glaza, USFS
Colton Finch, IDL

Facilitators

Hannah Anderson, Lead Facilitator
Tracy Ortiz, Facilitation Support

Meeting Goals:

- Review housekeeping and routine agenda items
- Receive an update on Binarch Creek project
- Learn from Idaho Dept. of Water Resources on Operational Decision Making at Outlet Dam
- Host a collaborative workshop to increase Steering Committee education on water temperature monitoring, and determine PRWG objectives

Meeting Minutes

PRWG Steering Committee Meeting - Welcome and Overview

Hannah Anderson, Facilitator, welcomed the group and reviewed the agenda and goals for the day. She introduced the structure of the meeting and the ground rules for the workshop panel and discussion.

PRWG Internal Steering Committee Meeting

Communication Plan

The education and outreach committee presented the revised version of the Communication Plan, including incorporation of steering committee edits. Jennifer led the group through discussion of unresolved edits and comments. The group discussed who would be an appropriate alternate spokesperson for the PRWG. Members had differing opinions on who should be an alternative spokesperson representative, but agreed that having a clearly designated alternate would be important to ensure streamlined and consistent communication with external parties. The steering committee

PRWG Steering Committee meetings are open for public observation. To ensure efficiency of agenda items, discussion will be reserved for PRWG steering committee members with priority.

agreed to revisit the discussion at the July meeting after the education and outreach committee could revisit the suggestions.

The group discussed how to improve procedural efficiency regarding document review. It was decided that a good expectation should be for materials that will have a dedicated agenda item for discussion to be sent to the steering committee at least one week prior to PRWG monthly meetings.

PRWG Brochure

Jennifer and the education and outreach committee presented the draft copy for a PRWG brochure. The group made minor suggestions to the text of the brochure. It was suggested to include a QR code on the brochure that would lead to the PRWG website, which could host a future public survey. Action items include:

- Jennifer will put together a preliminary set of questions for the survey.
- The education and outreach committee will continue to work on the brochure and the PRWG should provide any additional feedback via direct email.

PRWG Power Point Presentation

The group asked the education and outreach committee to develop a presentation that can be taken to other groups or organizations to help raise community and stakeholder awareness of the PRWG. Action items include:

- The communication plan should include an objective to create this powerpoint presentation.
- The education and outreach committee will begin to develop the presentation and will share it with the full group when a draft is ready.

Annual Work Plan

The 2025 Annual Work Plan was proposed for adoption by the PRWG steering committee. The work plan was approved unanimously, with *9 in-person thumbs up*.

Report out from Tasks Forces

Each of the task forces were asked to provide a quick report to the group.

- Dam Management Plan for IDWR
 - Will meet after the presentation to debrief the information provided.
- Evaluating Recreational Use
 - Next steps: set a meeting date and time.
- Project Assessment and Ranking Matrix Creation
 - Next steps: set a meeting date and time.

June PRWG Meeting Planning – Kalispel Tribe, East River Planning Process

The group discussed the agenda, goals, and planning needs for their next monthly PRWG meeting. It was agreed that the June meeting would be skipped, and monthly meetings would resume in July. Action items include:

- Eric Bernstein will come up with the outline for the assessment and matrix using the Kalispel Tribe's matrix as a reference for the model.
- Questions to consider going into the meeting:
 - What will the criteria for the matrix include?
 - Would the group want to bring in Dan Brown from IDL?

PRWG Steering Committee meetings are open for public observation. To ensure efficiency of agenda items, discussion will be reserved for PRWG steering committee members with priority.

- Dan could help provide context for projects that the PRWG can participate in.
 - The group could also consider inviting Rob Ryan and Colton Finch.
- The meeting should be 2 hours, with
 - 1 hour for presentation and
 - 1 hour for debriefing.

Approve PRWG meeting minutes (February and March)

The February and March PRWG meeting minutes were proposed for approval by the steering committee. The meeting minutes were approved unanimously with *9 in-person thumbs up*.

Break

The group took a 15-minute break while the facilitators transitioned the room to accommodate the workshop panel.

PRWG Steering Committee Meeting - Welcome and Overview

Hannah Anderson, Facilitator, welcomed the full group and reviewed the agenda and goals of the public portion of the meeting.

Binarch Creek Update, Rob Ryan, IDFG

Rob Ryan provided an update on Binarch Creek. Rob reviewed the goal of projects in the area, and went over some of the area-specific challenges and the objectives that would be focused on.

- Rob shared the areas of interest where trout are found
 - On the map free flow of trout areas are in blue
 - On the map areas that are dewatered are in red
 - On the map areas with complex wetlands are in green
- Rob shared the two treatment methods that would be done in the project area to help lower populations:
 - A chemical method to limit reproduction
 - Introducing supermale trout into the ecosystem
- The project timeline was shared
- For more information or questions contact Rob Ryan

Water Temperature Monitoring Panel – Introductions

Hannah gave a brief overview of the Water Temperature Monitoring Panel and its goal to fill internal data gaps by collaboratively learning how water is monitored in the watershed from technical experts. Hannah asked each of the panel members to introduce themselves and answer one or more of the following questions:

- How is water (in the Priest Basin) monitored by your organization/agency?
- How is monitoring used in decisions your agency makes? Or how do you see it informing actions or decisions?
- What is the most interesting thing you've discovered in monitoring water in the basin?

PRWG Steering Committee meetings are open for public observation. To ensure efficiency of agenda items, discussion will be reserved for PRWG steering committee members with priority.

Panelists included:

- Michelle Richman, IDWR
- Amy Cassel, IDWR
- Francine Meija, USGS
- Todd Higgens, IDEQ
- Rob Ryan, IDFG
- Merritt Horsmon, IDFG
- Brandon Glaza, USFS
- Colton Finch, IDL

Operational Decision Making at Outlet Dam, Michelle Richman & Amy Cassel, IDWR

Michelle Richman & Amy Cassel from IDWR presented on the decision-making process for outlet dam operations. They discussed the goals of the outlet dam and the provided context for the projects happening in and around the dam. The presentation included addressing questions that were sent to Michelle by the PRWG prior to the meeting. Michelle's presentation can be found on the PRWG website.

Collaborative Discussion & Workshop

The group transitioned into a collaborative discussion workshop session with the technical expert panelists. Each PRWG steering committee member took turns asking a question or offering a comment to the panelists for discussion. The goal of the discussion was to collaborate with technical experts to identify PRWG's next steps and action items.

The following prompts were shared ahead of time with the panel and PRWG members:

- What do we need to monitor to capture and track this year's impacts?
- How can the PRWG help with water monitoring?
- Where are the opportunities for partnership?
- What are our next steps?
- Questions for panelists on information presented.
- What do we need more information on?

Q&A - Discussion was as follows:

- How can PRWG Help with water monitoring?
 - PRWG can help to provide temperature and flow data to technical experts, organizations, or agencies.
- Can clarity be provided on when the water level can be lowered and let into the river?
 - Based on the Priest River Basin Plan the lake is lowered after October 1.
- What is the water reduction time for the lake?
 - A lake study has been done, and Todd or Brandon can help provide that information to the PRWG (to be added to the PRWG resource database).
- Who determines whether a year is classified as dry or wet?
 - An IDWR hydrologist in Boise uses the forecast for April through September paired with a weather forecast and drought monitoring. The reports typically come out the first of the month during springtime.
- During wet years, why is the minimum water flow brought up to 3.5?
 - That is the standard flow set in the Priest River Basin Plan and cannot be changed without changing the Plan.
- Can a wet or dry year be reclassified?

PRWG Steering Committee meetings are open for public observation. To ensure efficiency of agenda items, discussion will be reserved for PRWG steering committee members with priority.

- It can be flexible but, in most cases, a reclassification may be too late to have effect.
- Who holds the 1997 water right?
 - The Water Board holds the rights.
- Is there going to be a CE done in Binarch Creek?
 - There is an MOU with the Forest Service, as fish are wards of the State and the State will make those decisions.
- Could the PRWG help with an update of a Priest River Basin Management Plan?
 - Currently there is no plan to open the Priest River Basin Plan and update it.
- Could a story map be developed that shows who has temperature loggers and where, to collect that data in a coordinated way with everyone who is monitoring?
 - Yes, Todd Higgins is working on that now; to learn more connect with him.
- Request for data.
 - Send any data that can be shared to Francine Mejia.
- Send any information about thoroughfare(s) to Michelle.
- It was suggested that the PRWG host a 3-hour meeting with technical experts focused on the topic of managing the lake and the river, so the group can work together to discuss and identify what still needs to be done.

Adjourn