

FUTURE FISHERIES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

SUMMER 2020

Date: June 11, 2020

Attendees: Bill Semmens (virtual), Bill Wichers, Chuck Dalby (virtual), Clint Peck, Jim Stone, Nancy Winslow, Terry Chute (virtual), Bill Mytton, Karin Boyd, Tony Cate, Bruce Farling, Ivan Kloberdanz

FWP staff: Michelle McGree, Eric Roberts, Kim Wedde (virtual)

Applicants and others in attendance:

In Person: Casey Hackathorn, Ryan Kreiner, Jarrett Payne, Ryan Neudecker, Patrick Uthe

Virtual: Beth Gardner, Shannon Blackburn, Mike Ruggles, Will McDowell, Paul Hooper, Quincey Johnson

Panel business (before project review):

- The agenda was approved.
- FWP recommendations were presented.
- Program balances were reviewed. The funding available (unexpended and uncommitted) is:
 - RIT \$ (native species): \$112,000
 - License \$ (General Future Fisheries Program): \$153,000.00
 - Grand Total \$ available: \$265,000.00 (Summer 2020 and Winter 2021 grant cycles)

Panel business (after project review):

- Project balances were reviewed. Terry Chute was chosen as the panel representative for the prioritization. The prioritization committee met June 11, 2020 (immediately after the Panel meeting).
- The decision was made to keep funding levels as recommended, and not change based on prioritization.
- The Fish & Wildlife Commission will meet August 20, 2020 to finalize funding awards.
- Winter meeting date, as well as field tour, to be determined with follow-up email.
- There were suggestions to add a requirement for a project area map to the application. Michelle will look into as part of her application updates.

Application discussions and funding recommendations:

1) Flint Creek riparian restoration (014-2020)

Amount Requested: \$29,100

FWP Recommendation: We recommend fully funding this project (**\$29,100**) but request that the applicant clarifies how this project fits in the overall, larger project timeline and construction objectives. The conceptual design report references a wide range of restoration activities, and it would be helpful to understand the sequencing of this project within the larger restoration plan.

Project Representative: Casey Hackathorn (Trout Unlimited)

Discussion Items:

- Project is about 10 miles to the Clark Fork, near Hall.
- High priority area. Working on the highest priority projects first.
- Will it transport sediment? Designed to do so, comfortable moving fines. Project won't address sediment supply. River Design Group (RDG) did the design, trying for scalable design approach.
- Will coordinate with MDT for wetland mitigation and permanent protections. MDT supports the project.
- Boulder Creek is 10 miles up. There is public access with permission and access from a nearby bridge.
- There will be offsite water using the ditch system. Grazing will be upland with some potential for future flash grazing in the riparian area.
- What about mercury? Making progress on that issue.
- Fish screen on neighboring property.

Motion: Motion made to fully fund \$29,100

Motion Made by: Bill Wichers

Motion Second by: Jim Stone

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimous)

Amount Approved: \$ 29,100

2) Hall Creek fish barrier removal (015-2020)

Amount Requested: \$9,000 (budget sheet \$8,500)

FWP Recommendation: We recommend fully funding this project at the level of the budget sheet (**\$8,500**).

Project Representative: Beth Gardner (USFS)

Discussion Items:

- Barrier is currently stable and not compromised, but it will fail eventually. Trout can't pass.

- Needs \$9,000, had a budget mix up. Panel discussed interest in having landowner provide some support, even though they just gave permission for the project. The landowner is not interested in contributing to the cost, but they do support the project. The landowners see the project as a government project.
- Beth will retire, and the project would be stalled if it is not completed.
- On Federal property, but a state (FWP) project. Originally a partnership. Discussion of the responsibilities for removal.
- How much would sediment affect the project during removal? Not much, will be dewatered. If it were to wash out, there would be a large sediment release and there is interest in preventing that. Concern over leaving it in place.
- Is there a way to repair the riparian around it? Make the barrier functional? Considered, but there are higher value conservation areas for native species.

Motion: Motion made to fund \$8,500

Motion Made by Jim Stone

Motion Second by: Tony Cate

Panel Action: Motion passes; 6 Yes, 4 Nay

Amount Approved: \$ 8,500

3) Lake Elmo fish habitat enhancement (016-2020)

Amount Requested: \$172,600

FWP Recommendation: We recommend **partial funding**, to be allocated for the highest priority habitat structures. To that end, we ask the applicant to provide additional information on the proposed habitat structures, the priority and cost, and the species benefits.

Project Representative: Shannon Blackburn and Mike Ruggles (FWP)

Discussion Items:

- Channel Catfish are a high priority species. Frequently targeted by anglers and natural recruitment could help support the population and fishing opportunities.
- Currently there is minimal complex habitat and the fishery is maintained by stocking (bass, trout, catfish). The goal is to just have to stock trout.
- The structures would be installed over two and a half years, October 2021-2022. A lot of work could be prepped during the fall 2020 partial drawdown. The Eagle Scouts would help build catfish condos and volunteers could also help build structures. Could do some work in the wet.
- Dewatering is planned to freeze the Asian clams.
- Structures are based on work done in NE and IA. Could also add woody debris. Structures are expected to last decades, especially those that are plastic.

- Sediment loading? Some loading at the inflow, planning a stilling basin to collect sediment. Will excavate to improve capacity.
- Noted that this is a great opportunity to improve kids fishing opportunities.
- Permitting has been considered. Dredging permit is expected to be relatively easy to obtain. Will be more difficult to permit the jetties.
- Discussed opportunities to partner with local irrigation companies or look for recycled parts / donations. Have started looking into this and will keep looking for discounted products.
- Partial funding would likely lead to a return ask, but will keep looking for other grants. It was noted that there were no letters of support.
- Highest priorities are the fishing jetties, followed by PVC habitat structures, Christmas trees, catfish condos, and spawning substrate.
- Some concern for public perception. The irrigators are not concerned.
- Some discussion regarding the reason for \$40,000 ask. Applicants will take what they can get.
- Important to demonstrate interest in Eastern Montana.

Motion: Motion made to fund \$40,000

Motion Made by: Bill Wichers

Motion Second by: Bill Mytton

Panel Action: Motion passes; 9 Yes, 1 No

Amount Approved: \$ 40,000

4) **Little Gold Creek fish passage (017-2020)**

Amount Requested: \$29,475

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding (**\$29,475**).

Project Representative: Will McDowell (Clark Fork Coalition), Paul Hooper (USFS)

Discussion Items:

- Few fish are above the culvert based on some USFS sampling. There is evidence that the fish will move up into this reach.
- What are the genetics of westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) above the culvert and in the Boulder? Not sure, but there are WCT in the watershed. There are brook trout at the mouth of Little Gold Creek, as well as some brown trout, bull trout and brook trout x bull trout hybrids. There are also rainbow trout x WCT hybrids in the Boulder Creek drainage.
- Discussion of barriers and passage priorities on the west side vs. east side of the divide.
- The design shows a long culvert, but it seems to work for passage. It is accounting for the amount of fill over the culvert.
- Some concern about brook trout moving up with passage reconnected. May not be high on the prioritization list for use of Future Fisheries funds.

Motion: Motion made to fully fund \$29,475

Motion Made by: Bruce Farling

Motion Second by: Nancy Winslow

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimous)

Amount Approved: \$29,475

5) **Big Hole Divide fish barriers (013-2020)**

Amount Requested: \$10,420

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding (**\$10,420**), but requesting applicant provide current condition (before) photos of the project sites.

Project Representative: Ryan Kreiner

Discussion Items:

- Why use a wood structure? The expected life span is 30-50 years. Cost for a permanent barrier is prohibitive and this puts more protection on the ground.
- Could you create a splash pad with native rock? Concrete is a more permanent protection.
- Target to secure 500 miles of habitat in SW Montana.

Motion: Motion made to fund \$10,420

Motion Made by: Bill Wichers

Motion Second by: Karin Boyd

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimously)

Amount Approved: \$ 10,420

6) **Long Creek aquatic habitat enhancement (018-2020)**

Amount Requested: \$27,750

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding (**\$27,750**) but request applicant describe whether grazing will be allowed on the property.

Project Representative: Ryan Kreiner, Jarrett Payne (FWP)

Discussion Items:

- How did it go from the old channel to the current channel? Not sure, could have been from grazing or just an avulsion. There could have been drift from herbicide spraying for sagebrush (that killed willow).
- Is there anything else on The Nature Conservancy (TNC) land to do? Working with irrigators at another section downstream that would take the restoration to the border of TNC lands.
- There are non-native brook trout present.
- Will routing flow to the old channel lead to a backwater that fills with sediment over time? It is expected that the channel will maintain flow and sediment transport. It is a snowmelt dominated system and can be flashy. May have been a multiple channel system.

- No support letters from neighbors or irrigators. The neighbors are supportive and are enrolling into the CCAA (Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances); the USFWS is on board under a Memorandum of Understanding, and TNC works with others nearby. The Centennial Valley Watershed Group is in support.

Motion: Motion made to fully fund \$27,750

Motion Made by: Bill Mytton

Motion Second by: Jim Stone

Panel Action: Motion passes; 9 Yes, 1 Abstain (Boyd)

Amount Approved: \$27,750

7) Lower French Creek riparian restoration (019-2020)

Amount Requested: \$10,000

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding (**\$10,000**) but request that the applicant:

- Clarify the budget and unit descriptions
- Describe livestock and fencing

Project Representative: Jarrett Payne (FWP)

Discussion Items:

- Minimal work is needed to activate the side channels.
- There are some mistakes in the budget, but the numbers were based off of a general bid and an experienced operator will be doing the project. Fairly cheap at \$10/foot. Did use a competitive bidding process.
- Mount Haggin WMA does a grazing lease. Grazing does not seem to be a problem on the banks. They will use 5+ years with no grazing to allow vegetation to establish. For livestock and watering they are open to management and grazing options.
- What is the cause of channel incision? Lateral erosion attributed to irrigation, grazing, and non-native vegetation. The issue is no longer grazing, but non-native vegetation. The inside banks are connected to the floodplain.

Motion: Motion made to fully fund \$10,000

Motion Made by: Bill Wichers

Motion Second by: Bruce Farling

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimous)

Amount Approved: \$10,000

8) Madison River Storey Ditch riparian restoration (020-2020)

Amount Requested: \$15,548.62

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding (**\$15,548.62**) but ask that the applicant:

- Considers an exclusion closer to 5 years in duration.

- Provides a support letter from the FWP aquatic biologist.
- Provides information on weed maintenance.
- Clarifies the budget

Project Representative: Quincey Johnson (Madison River Foundation; MRF)

Discussion Items:

- How does Hebgen Dam impact the work? Designing the project with that in mind; bank treatments will work with controlled flow.
- No evidence that lack of shading is impacting the fishery; lots of exposed banks on the Madison. Would like to see education of landowners.
- Ice or ice jamming issues are not expected at this site.
- MRF (not BLM; landowner) will be doing monitoring and maintenance of project.
- Discussion of the impacts of elk and the potential for permanent enclosure. The MRF will monitor for browse resistance.
- Are the improvements likely to affect the fish population? Not going to solve issues of Madison but it is a start. Value as a pilot project on the Madison.
- Some interest in encouraging the MRF to educate landowners.

Motion: Motion made to fully fund \$15,548.62

Motion Made by: Chuck Dalby

Motion Second by: Nancy Winslow

Panel Action: Motion passes; 9 Yes; 1 No

Amount Approved: \$15,548.62

9) Poorman Creek restoration phase 2 (021-2020)

Amount Requested: \$58,000

FWP Recommendation: We recommend full funding the project (**\$58,000**).

Project Representative: Ryen Neudecker, Patrick Uthe

Discussion Items:

- Limited but viable bull trout population.
- How much improvement needs to be made here? Looks complex already. The system is entrenched, and the work is focused on eroded areas. There is no recruitment of cottonwoods or native vegetation. Looking to build stability while providing cover. There are some spawning gravels but no holding cover.
- Debris jams are not considered barriers, but may impact fish at low flows (conceptual design calls them barriers).

Motion: Motion made to fully fund \$58,000

Motion Made by: Bill Wichers

Motion Second by: Nancy Winslow

Panel Action: Motion passes (unanimous)

Amount Approved: \$58,000