

Yakima Bull Trout Working Group

April 8, 2020, Web meeting.

AM Session on YBIP Funding Recommendations

Attendees:

Alex Conley and Angus Brookes (YBFWRB); Richard Visser, Pat Monk, and Clint Wertz (BOR); Mitch Long and Melissa Speeg (KCT); William Meyer, Scott Kline, Perry Harvester, Marc Divens, Josh Rogala, Maureen Small, and Cassandra Weekes (WDFW); Todd Newsome Russ Byington (YN); Michael Callahan (Ecology); Emily Smith and Connor Parrish (MCFEG); Jason Romine and Craig Haskell (USFWS); Kathryn Furr (USFS); Joel Freudenthal (Yakima County); Stuart Watson (Forterra); and Ann Lewis (concerned citizen)

The call started at 10:10 AM

After introductions and a welcome, Alex reviewed the YBIP funding recommendation budget the group developed in 2018 for the 2019- 2021 biennium. The group agreed it made sense to use the same approach for the 2021-23 budget recommendations. The group then reviewed the request for proposals that went out prior to the meeting and the spreadsheet of proposals received. This list exceeds the \$1.7M recommendation by \$2.3M, so the BTWG will need to develop a smaller list by May to provide the YBIP Habitat Subcommittee. The group then reviewed each proposal, with project sponsors giving a brief presentation and replying to questions:

SF Tieton Bridge Replacement:

Joel updated the group on the status of design and permitting for the replacement of the SF Tieton bridge, noted that the project should be ready to construct in 2021, and that the estimated construction budget is 2 to 2.4 million. The group agreed that it is a high priority project but that the funding required exceeds the entire bull trout allocation. The group agreed to revisit possible funding for this project in May and directed the sponsor and others to determine if other funding is available to match any recommended funding from the bull trout allocation.

KCT Gold and Kachess:

Melissa explained that the Kachess River project is at 30% design now and is on track to install ground water test wells/pumps this summer to finalize options for groundwater fed project elements. Currently KCT is working with USFS on NEPA; they are doing an EA instead of a CE now as they hope to use some thinned trees from old clear-cuts in the project.

Mitch spoke to the Gold Creek project; the project is in its public scoping period for NEPA, and KCT is releasing an RFP for a NEPA contractor to follow scoping. KCT will be staggering implementation for Gold and Kachess. They noted most of the funding for Gold Creek will not be required until after the target biennium, once NEPA, designs and permitting are complete, but that the Kachess Project is ready for phased implementation funding starting next year. They are requesting any funds that the group sees appropriate. The group agreed to discuss funding levels for other projects have been reviewed.

Ann Lewis raised concerns that climate change, and not Gold Creek Pond, is the driver of dewatering in Gold Creek and that should be acknowledged before committing further funding.

Yakama Nation Bull Trout Restoration and Monitoring:

Todd informed the group that the Yakama Nation has been successful raising captured bull trout in its hatchery, but they have lost a lot of fish from the Kachess tank due to cannibalism. Next year the number of fish in each tank will be reduced. They request the same \$200K funding that was requested in the last biennium. The group expressed support for ongoing funding at this level.

Bull Trout Task Force:

Connor explained that the 2 field leads have been hired for the 2020 season. The \$190K requested will support a status quo program with 2 years of field work, outreach, education, organization, etc. Increasing that funding by \$60K would allow a crew lead to stay on year round and assist WDFW with data management and other tasks during the off season. The group requested a clear definition for the deliverables from any extra funding and recommended that Connor look at the possibility of a 9 month permanent seasonal position instead of a 12 month position. The group agreed to support the base request and to revisit the additional request once more information on funding needed for other requests is available.

YBFWRB Yakima Bull trout Working Group Support:

Alex explained that the base funding the YBFWRB receives from ecology keeps the group moving forward with meetings and coordination, and funds staff time and project development to support BTWG priorities. The group agreed on the value of this funding and expressed support for the request at the status quo level of \$70K.

WDFW Senior Bio:

William Meyer's noted that his work on YBIP -related Upper Yakima bull trout projects (technical support, document review, and project management) is funded using YBIP bull trout funds. WDFW is requesting \$150K for the biennium, which represents a moderate increase due to raised overhead and cost of living. The group expressed support for funding at this level.

BOR Reservoir Bed Channel Study:

Joel and Richard described the proposed study of river/reservoir bed interactions and how it could inform future management of fish passage and habitat in priority bull trout areas. The current proposal is focused on understanding stream/reservoir interactions in the Kachess watershed, with the hope that that could create a framework for future discussions at other sites. The group requested more detail on the study design and how it could be scaled prior to further discussion in May.

Teaway Brook Trout eDNA:

Connor explained that the proposed Teaway brook trout distribution work is an essential precursor to the Yakama Nation's proposals to suppress/eradicate brook trout in the Teaway in preparation for future reintroduction of bull trout. He noted that the proposed work is scalable. It will cost \$2.1K to rerun current samples for brook trout; also collecting and running new samples from all forks raises the cost to \$23k, while the full cost also covers having a team electrofish areas where brook trout are identified to evaluate their density.

Darland Property acquisition:

Stu Watson reviewed Forterra's proposal for Gold Creek property acquisition. The group agreed that protection of the four parcels West of Gold Creek Pond that include parts of the creek is a high priority but asked about the certainty that the project could be completed. Stu noted that Forterra has spoken with the owner several times, but now might be a good time to re-inquire. The property was last appraised at \$2M, but owner requested \$7-8M. The group noted that uncertainty around the proposal made it hard to plan funding for. Members noted that the YBIP lands subcommittee might be able to commit some money, as may RCO. Forterra noted that \$50-100K would go a long way in allowing Forterra to do their due diligence and determine what it would take to move this project forward. The group recommended that Forterra and partners meet with Jeff Tayer and the Lands Committee to discuss options, and report back to the BTWG in May. Ann Lewis noted that she felt it was inappropriate to strategize about how the COVID situation might make the landowner more willing to sell.

Development of Draft Recommendations to YBIP Habitat Subcommittee:

The group reviewed the spreadsheet of proposals and organized them into a) those proposals the group recommended go forward as requested, and b) others for which additional information is needed prior to making a recommendation in May. The group agreed to present the revised draft list to the afternoon meeting of the full BTWG.