May 19, 2026 Yakima Bull Trout Working Group Meeting

1:00 to 4:00 PM

Hybrid meeting; do RSVP if you plan to join at our office (1200 Chesterly Drive, Suite 280 in Yakima)

Time	Topic	Presenter(s)
5 min	Welcome and Introduction	All
35 min	Updates and Announcements -Brook Trout at Gold Creek -Box Canyon Rec Tour -Box Canyon Mouth Passage Project update -ScCS August 18-20 -Gold Creek updates -follow-up on post flood conditions -field calendar is available -Bull Trout signage update	All
60 min	YBIP Funding Updates and Recommendations	Alex C.
10 min	Break	
15 min	Rescue-Rear Genetic Results	David Dayan
15 min	Proposed Reclamation Permit Changes -Rescue methods - Trap and Haul	Craig / All
10 min	Angler Survey Question Review	All
15 min	BTAP Updates Next Steps	Aimee
5 min	July meeting reminder and topics	All

Welcome and Introduction

Virtual Attendees: Shawna Warehime, David Dayan, Joel H., Richard Visser, Todd Newsome, Connor Cunningham, Scott Revell, Justin Bezold, Jonny Lambert, Katy, Russ Byington, Mitch Long, Kory Graafstra, Joah Rogala, and Pat Monk.

Amber needs help with in-room attendance!

Updates and Announcements

• Alex Lopez reported from the field that a brook trout distribution and abundance survey is planned at Gold Creek this summer, followed by electrofishing. Interested participants were invited to join.

• Jeff Nelson (Forest Service) will lead the Box Canyon Recreation Tour, focused on recreation impacts and dispersed camping. The tour begins at 10:00 a.m. at Kachess Campground.

• Joel shared an update on the Box Canyon Mouth Passage Project. The group met about a month ago and is compiling project history and prior design work. Existing 60% designs from HDR and Reclamation were located. Mitch is expected to schedule the next meeting. Key discussion points included expiration of the cultural survey in three years, the cost of proposed modifications, whether short-term excavator work is feasible, and the lack of a clearly identified lead entity.

• The ScCS meeting will be held August 18–20 in Alberta. Aimee offered to help participants prepare travel requests for their employers.

• Mel provided Gold Creek construction updates. The site is now in full construction mode, with hard hats and safety vests required and the gate locked; attendees should request the access code and avoid locking out landowners. The area has been cleared, wood staging has begun, the fish exclusion structure is installed, and the turbidity curtain is in place. The team has captured 29 fish so far. Filling is expected to begin next week, and field fitting may affect final design details.

• Post-flood conditions were discussed, including shifted wood, altered water locations, a cut in the Little Naches, and the Deep Creek Bridge being out.

• The field calendar is available, and members were asked to sign up. Canva should now provide easier access for all. Mel noted that Gold Creek is already stranding fish in side channels, which may require earlier mobilization. Rattlesnake Creek temperature logger placement is being considered for Monday or Tuesday, either as an overnight trip or a long day trip.

• MCF received a grant to purchase permanent aluminum bull trout signs, including small signs for campsites and larger signs for roads. Installation is planned for this summer.

YBIP Funding Updates and Recommendations

Alex reported that Ecology has allocated $1.7 million of $11 million to the Bull Trout Task Force. Recommendations have already been submitted to Ecology, and priorities for the next two years are due before September, with decisions taking effect in July 2027. The most recent recommendation table was reviewed and updated for 2027 with Kevin's assistance. The "actual" column reflects currently contracted work; Gold Creek remains the main outlier. An additional $45,000 was added for fish passage and the Box Canyon flume. The group also discussed allocating remaining contingency funds by July for short-term projects.

The group discussed a low-, medium-, and high-funding matrix for the next request. One proposed change was to revise the WDFW staffing line from "Senior Biologist" to "Bull Trout Staff" to better reflect a full-time role with benefits and overhead. Danny noted that the Bureau contract has been completed and signed as a series of five annual contracts, with final equipment costs still being verified. Participants also noted that staffing capacity is strained, funding sources have shifted, and current team members have absorbed additional responsibilities while waiting for the next five-year contract to be finalized.

This is the group's first attempt to budget at this level while sustaining current capacity with less external grant support. Most requested funding would support field crews, with some off-season data analysis. Assumptions include 30% overhead, required camping for nighttime work, and annual 5% cost-of-living and merit increases. Participants noted that a full-program cost estimate should be shown as the high-end request. Other grant sources were reviewed, including Western Native Trout Initiative support at Indian Creek and prior National Fish and Wildlife Foundation support for volunteer coordination and outreach.

The group discussed whether additional Gold Creek funding is needed for night rescue work this season as construction begins. Current planning assumes a typical rescue cycle, which may be sufficient, but an earlier June session may be needed instead of waiting until July. Five or six salvage sessions are already scheduled.

The Recovery Board's role in convening the group was also discussed. Alex's time is funded from other sources, along with up to half of Aimee's time. The current action plan update will be completed under existing resources, but more funding would allow additional implementation. Participants emphasized that surveys and salvage operations require a minimum staffing level and that rising costs make sustained support for on-the-ground work increasingly important.

The group reviewed possible funding sources for Gold Creek, including a $1.2 million Streamflow request and a Bureau WaterSMART grant of up to $3 million, which would require a 25% non-federal match. The Habitat Committee was mentioned as another potential source.

The Starwater Drain project was discussed as a partnership with Trout Unlimited, with contingency funds potentially needed to complete feasibility and design work. A site visit with Trout Unlimited and landowners is scheduled for next Tuesday. Participants discussed staff capacity, engineering selection, coordination needs, and the possibility of moving quickly enough to pursue construction funding in the next biennium. The project may also be eligible for broader funding because it has stormwater and municipal infrastructure relevance in addition to fish conservation benefits. Kevin estimated that available contingency funding in July could be closer to $740,000.

Participants noted that a clearer drain budget is needed before contingency funds can be allocated.

The group also considered additional projects that could use Ecology funding in the next biennium, including South Fork Tieton and temporary passage at Kachess. Cost estimates and match requirements still need further development.

Participants asked whether the bull trout research facility is fully funded and on schedule. The current estimate indicates it is about $1 million short, although approximately $3 million is available to get started.

Pat raised the need for a PIT tag detection plan for the Easton ladder. Based on the Cle Elum example, the likely cost may be under $2 million, but it has not yet been budgeted. The issue affects both salmon and bull trout and may depend on electric service timing.

As next steps, the group agreed to prepare a clearer recommendation table and circulate it for feedback within one to two weeks, with the expectation of reconvening in mid-June. The goal is to confirm general funding recommendations rather than develop contract-level habitat and recreation budgets at this stage.

The South Fork Tieton bridge sign intended to address misinformation remains on track for installation in September.

The Clear Creek ladder remains a potential project within the next four years. Participants noted that Reclamation may need additional support with project and contract management recommendations.

The group discussed raising the low-end Gold Creek contingency amount to help ensure a WaterSMART match. Kevin believes the match can be met, while Mel noted that matching requirements are highly project-specific and that Streamflow funding may also contribute.

Rescue-Rear Genetic Results

David summarized concerns about genetic diversity in the rescue-rear program. Young-of-year fish appear to be more closely related than desired, highlighting the need to balance inbreeding risk with local adaptation and effective population size. For isolated local populations, the target effective population size discussed was roughly 50–100 fish, while larger overall populations may require closer to 1,000.

The discussion emphasized that adult census numbers and the ratio of captive to wild fish are key factors in managing effective population size. The rescue-rear approach generally produces a lower effective population size than rescue-release, and supplementation currently contributes an estimated 1–18 adult spawners. Participants agreed that increasing diversity in captive rearing is more important than increasing overall program scale, because lost genetic

diversity cannot be recovered. The group also discussed whether collections should be expanded in years with more redds, whether fish from perennial waters should ever be included, and whether active genetic management across disconnected populations should be considered in the future. Any broader genetic rescue strategy would require a different permitting pathway and would not be possible this field season.

Participants discussed whether expanding the geographic scope of rescue-rear efforts could improve genetic diversity. This raised the question of whether a broader effort would still qualify as rescue or begin to resemble a captive breeding program.

Several potentially relevant areas in Gold Creek that regularly dewater are not currently sampled, and participants noted that these reaches may be worth considering. At the same time, there was concern about taking fish from perennial water, since doing so could remove individuals that might otherwise survive naturally and reduce local population viability.

The group also asked whether populations may already be near carrying capacity and what density thresholds are needed for survival across different populations. Participants noted that available management tools are not site-specific and that young-of-year survival rates in perennial habitats remain poorly understood.

Another concern was that captive breeding and hatchery rearing may favor different traits and higher survival outcomes than would occur in the wild. Because effective population size calculations generally assume no selection, participants noted that reduced selection in hatchery settings is an important limitation. Overall, the group expressed greater concern about loss of genetic diversity in a program of this scale than about increasing total production.

The discussion also considered whether populations such as Gold Creek and Kachess Creek should ever be mixed, and whether active genetic management across currently disconnected populations should be pursued. Participants noted that this type of intervention has not been done with bull trout.

Three potential options were identified for further consideration:

- Collect fish from reaches that are also prone to dewatering but are harder to access.
- Collect fish from higher, perennial areas.
- Mix fish from different populations.

Participants noted that any true genetic rescue involving mixed populations would require a different permitting process and could not occur this field season. They also questioned whether current permits already allow capture from perennial water; the general view was that they probably do, and that this may not represent a major biological change.

Proposed Reclamation Permit Changes

The group mentioned proposed Reclamation permit changes related to rescue methods and trap-and-haul approaches. Additional detail was not captured in these notes.

Angler Survey Question Review

The group reviewed angler survey questions. Specific revisions or decisions were not captured in these notes.

BTAP Updates Next Steps

BTAP updates and next steps were discussed, but specific details were not captured in these notes.

Action Items

- Mitch to schedule the next Box Canyon Mouth Passage Project meeting.

- Alex and team to prepare and circulate an updated funding recommendation table for feedback within 1–2 weeks.
- Group to reconvene in mid-June to review funding recommendations.
- Members to sign up on the field calendar.
- Participants interested in the Gold Creek brook trout survey to follow up with Alex Lopez.
- Aimee to assist with travel request setup for the August ScCS meeting as needed.
- Project leads to clarify budget needs for Starwater Drain before contingency funds are allocated.

July meeting reminder and topics

The group briefly discussed reminders and possible topics for the July meeting. Specific topics were not captured in these notes.