MINUTES
Blaine County Levy Advisory Board
Regular Meeting
January 22, 2020
Old County Courthouse
206 S 1st Avenue, 3rd Floor Meeting Room
Hailey Idaho

I. Call to Order and Quorum Determination

The meeting was called to order by the Vice-Chair, Alan Reynolds, at 6:05pm.
The members of the Levy Advisory Board (LAB) were present as follows: Alan Reynolds, Lili Simpson, Nancy Linscott, Abby Rivin, Kurt Eggers, and Rob Santa.
Absent: LAB Chair Jim Phillips and LAB-members Jay Sevy and Denise Ford.
Also Present: Tom Bergin, Blaine County Land Use Department Director, Wendy Pabich, LWWP Program Administrator, Keri York, Director of Trout Unlimited (TU) representing the applicant, and Julie Cord, participating landowner

II. Public Comment

No members of the public were present to give comment.

III. Review of Full Application for the TU Bridge-to-Bridge River Restoration Project

Keri York, Director of Trout Unlimited representing the applicant, presented the Bridge-to-Bridge River Restoration Project to the LAB. Review of the Full Application had been continued from the LAB Regular Meeting of December 4th, 2019. York presented an overview of the project, addressed LAB comments and questions raised during the last meeting, and responded to concerns highlighted in the Staff Report.

York explained that the Big Wood River's meander bends, side channels, and floodplain are important for riparian health and ecological biodiversity. She presented the project's conservation goals to restore habitat, river functionality, and floodplain connectivity within this reach of the Big Wood River. York summarized the project's design methodology and described the treatments proposed for the restoration plan, which include rock toe, floodplain benches, channel realignment, vegetation planting, and streambank grading. York noted that the project had reduced in scope from work proposed on 6 private parcels to work on property owned by 2 private landowners.

York stated that the restoration plan designed by Biota proposes to address channel geometry, erosion and sedimentation, disconnected floodplain, and streambank vegetation. She explained the restoration plan's design and presented examples of similar treatments used in other projects within the Big Wood River Watershed.

York described the rock toe treatment and responded to LAB comments and concerns raised in the Staff Report regarding this streambank stabilization method. She explained that the rock toe treatment was selected for the project due to significant streambank erosion within this stretch of the river.

LAB-member Rob Santa asked about the size of rocks that would be installed for the proposed treatment. York responded that the in order to effectively stabilize the streambank, the rocks need to be large enough to withstand being carried off by in-stream flows. She specified that the rocks would range from 18 inches to 2 feet in diameter.

LAB-member Lili Simpson asked how the rock toe treatment will impact bank overflow during periods of high water. York described that the floodplain bench treatment will include the excavation of alluvium below the high-water mark. She explained that riparian vegetation would be planted as part of the streambank-stabilization treatment. She presented an example of this treatment from a recent restoration project and pointed out the willows that were planted perpendicular to the water flow.

York presented the project budget including the estimated project cost and the funding requested ($210,238) from the Land, Water, and Wildlife Program (LWWP). She stated that the project has secured matching funds from other grants including the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation and Trout Unlimited Embrace-a-Stream program. York explained that the applicant has obtained agreements from two landowners participating in the project as well as a right-of-way encroachment permit from the Idaho Department of Transportation (ITD). York provided an update on permits required for the scope of work, including the Streambank Alteration Permit (SAP) submitted to the Blaine County Land Use Department last fall.

York responded to concerns raised in the Staff Report. In response to concerns that the project's primary purpose is flood mitigation, York explained that a geomorphic assessment conducted before the floods in 2017 established this stretch as a priority area for restoration within the Big Wood River Watershed. In response to budget methodology concerns, she explained that the restoration and streambank-stabilization design had been revised in order to achieve the project's objectives. York emphasized the project's lasting conservation outcomes including the restoration of ecological processes within the riparian area and the enhancements to support regional biodiversity.

Julie Cord, one of the two participating landowners, commented that she has witnessed the changes in the flow of the river and streambank erosion occur over time. She expressed her support for the project and her appreciation for the restoration and streambank stabilization design plans.

Tom Bergin, Blaine County Land Use Department Director, distributed letters of support for the project written by adjacent landowners Julie Cord, Robert & Kathryn Gardiner, Michelle Ruzicka, and Robert Turner, which have been included in the record for the Full Application.

As the Turner's were not able to attend the meeting, York summarized their comments regarding the deteriorating condition of the streambank on their property and the ecological benefits associated with the reconnecting the river to its historic side channel.

Following the presentation, the LAB asked the applicant questions regarding the project. LAB-member Rob Santa asked the applicant to describe the results of a successful project for this stretch of the Big Wood River. York responded that if successful, the streambank stabilization and restoration project would restore river functionality, transport sediment, decrease erosion, improve stability, enhance fish and aquatic habitat, and reconnect the river to its floodplain.

LAB-member Nancy Linscott provided a synopsis of her understanding of the project from her consideration of the application material, the Staff Report, and the applicant's presentation. She summarized that the treatments proposed for this reach of the Big Wood River are critical due to its proximity to critical public infrastructure including the Highway 75 traffic bridge and St. Luke's Hospital. Linscott noted that streambank stabilization treatments can be counter to the dynamic activity of a healthy river. Linscott noted that the applicant has explained that the proposed treatments will not only protect critical infrastructure, but will also result in ecological benefits.

York explained that a geomorphic study conducted before the 2017 floods identified this stretch of river as a priority area for conservation and the most different from what would be desired and expected within a natural channel. LAB-member Linscott asked the applicant to elaborate on the causes of this difference. York explained that the existing infrastructure, upstream constraints, and lack of capacity to transport sediment all contribute to degraded river functionality. York emphasized that this stretch was not selected as a flood mitigation project due to the existing public infrastructure.

LAB-member Linscott asked why the river system in this stretch should not be allowed to migrate as it would naturally move over time. York responded that all stream restoration projects in the Big Wood River must work within existing constraints, which include public infrastructure and development on private property. She emphasized that this restoration project presents an opportunity to improve the ecological health of the river while working within this system of existing constraints. LAB-member Linscott summarized that the applicant has argued that the restoration and streambank-stabilization project needs to happen to prevent the hospital from flooding, protect the traffic bridge, and mitigate an ecologically degraded stretch of the Big Wood River.

Linscott commented that approving the Full Application without the third party review may be premature as the technical review may reveal potential concerns or problems with the plans as

currently proposed. York asked the LAB to consider funding the request without the technical review, but contingent upon the project receiving the required SAP. She noted that other funds have been secured for the project with contingencies that the applicant obtain all required permits for the project.

Bergin noted that the third party review for this project's SAP had been approved by the Blaine County Board of Commissioners (Board), but technical review had recently been suspended by the applicant. York explained the applicant chose to delay in order to observe the Board's response to the technical review for another SAP at the Cooper property downstream. York explained that observing the Board's deliberations for this downstream SAP would allow the applicant to anticipate what questions to answer or supplementary material to provide for the Bridge-to-Bridge SAP. Bergin noted that the Board continued the public hearing for the SAP at the Cooper property downstream in order for the applicant to resolve outstanding questions highlighted by Staff.

LAB-Vice-Chair Alan Reynolds stated that due to its problematic dynamics, this stretch of the Big Wood River needs the restoration treatments as proposed by the applicant. Reynolds asked if the Cardno study of the Big Wood River had reached conclusions regarding this particular stretch. Bergin responded that the Cardno study is expected to be released in February.

LAB-member Lili Simpson asked Staff to explain the Cardno's study scope of work for the benefit of LAB members who may not be familiar with the project. Wendy Pabich, LWWP Program Administrator, explained that the Cardno study will consider the riparian system holistically to identify the issues that most significantly impact the health of the Big Wood River. Pabich explained the Cardno study will generate an exhibit that overlays a map of high-risk flooding areas onto undeveloped parcels of land to prioritize opportunities to increase the river's flood-carrying capacity. She noted that a LAB-initiated project could result in response to the Cardno study's findings.

LAB-member Simpson stated that the LAB-members are volunteers without the requisite level of technical expertise of geomorphologists like Biota and Cardno to review this highly technical project. She emphasized that the LAB Program Guidelines state that funds may not be granted for a LWWP project until all necessary permits are secured. Simpson stated that without the SAP's technical review, the LAB has incomplete data to comprehensively assess the project and its impact to up- and downstream reaches. Simpson expressed that while she supports the project's efforts to enhance trout habitat within existing constraints, the LAB does not fund flood mitigation projects. She questioned why the ITD and the hospital have not been engaged as partners contributing funds to the project. Simpson highlighted the many opportunities that may be maximized through the project. She noted one example may be enhancing public access to the Big Wood River by improving access easements on private property, which is an explicit goal identified in the LAB Program Guide.

LAB-member Kurt Eggers asked the applicant why Biota was not present at the meeting to present the project. York responded that TU believed that Biota's presence was needed explain the technical review, but not necessary to present project's alignment with conservation goals and LAB criteria for funding. Eggers asked the applicant to clarify why this particular stretch of the Big Wood River was chosen for the project. York explained that this stretch was chosen out of seven reaches due to sediment deposition in a gravel bar, the verticality of the streambanks, and ongoing erosion. Eggers asked the applicant to explain the project's ecological benefits. York responded that the project would enhance fish habitat as the installed vegetation would cool down water temperature in the summertime to support juvenile fish and the connection to the historic side channel would maintain flows to enhance fish habitat.

LAB-member Eggers stated that after consideration of the application materials and the applicant's presentation, he understands that the project's benefits will include restoring river functionality and enhancing fish habitat. He expressed confusion as to why other stakeholders, including ITD, the Blaine County Recreation District, the hospital, the Sun Valley Water and Sewer District, the City of Sun Valley, and the City of Ketchum, wouldn't want to partner with TU on this project due to deteriorating conditions and threats to critical infrastructure.

LAB Vice-Chair Reynolds asked the applicant if ITD had commented on the project plans. York explained that ITD commented that an assessment conducted before the installation of the traffic bridge found that this stretch posed no threat. She explained that the hospital did not want to participate and had commented that measures undertaken during the 2017 floods were sufficient to protect the medical facility. York noted that Blaine County Emergency Services is supportive of the application. She stated that the while supportive, the Blaine County Recreation District felt the restoration and streambank stabilization project didn't fall within their scope.

LAB-member Simpson asked if the Flood District wanted to participate in the project. York responded that the district is interested in the project and that funding may be requested from the district depending on the LAB's determination on the Full Application.

Vice-Chair Reynolds emphasized the project's benefits, including improving river function through erosion mitigation and enhancing habitat in an important wildlife corridor. He stated his support for the application highlighting the project's benefits to land, water, and wildlife.

LAB-member Rob Santa expressed support for the project's ecological benefits including enhancing trout habitat, but explained that he would like to consider the technical review before finalizing his recommendation.

Linscott commented that as a new member to the LAB, she appreciated Simpson's background and overview of the LWWP guidelines. She called for a consideration of all opportunities to enhance habitat and improve river function within the constrained Big Wood River system and to maximize ecological benefits whenever possible. She expressed concerns about the

sequencing and timing of the restoration design, its impact on the river upstream and downstream, and unintended negative consequences.

LAB-member Simpson requested the applicant provide historic channel maps as an exhibit with the Full Application. She expressed opposition to armoring the streambank with rock as proposed by the applicant. Simpson emphasized that these manmade changes impact the river downstream and upstream and may result in unintended negative consequences. Simpson explained that current approaches to river restoration consider the river holistically as a system and maximize opportunities by focusing treatments within undeveloped areas. She elaborated this approach utilizes existing riparian features for more flexible treatments that allow the river to meander naturally. Simpson emphasized her fundamental opposition towards riprap and bank hardening.

Vice-Chair Reynolds questioned the practicality of implementing a project that encompasses the entire Big Wood River Watershed with no applicant or funds. LAB-member Linscott responded that a LAB-initiated project may garner support from more landowners to holistically improve the health of the river system. Reynolds pointed out that adjacent landowners lack the buy-in to support the project due to the Lane Ranch Subdivision plat note prohibiting the installation of riprap outside of the recorded building envelope.

LAB-member Linscott expressed support for the project's conservation benefit to provide habitat restoration and indicated her willingness to approve the Full Application contingent upon the Board's approval of the SAP.

LAB-member Simpson highlighted opportunities that may be available to maximize conservation benefits if both the Bridge-to-Bridge and Cooper property reaches were considered together.

LAB-member Rivin thanked York for her thorough presentation of the project. Rivin expressed support for the project's ecological benefits and conservation value. She stated that more technical data would help inform the LAB's recommendation to maximize opportunities to enhance the project's conservation benefits.

Pabich explained that conceptual review of the Full Application is the LAB's only opportunity to thoroughly assess the project in order to determine whether or not the proposal aligns with LWWP conservation goals and is worthy of funding. She noted that due diligence solely memorializes the transaction and emphasized that this conceptual review is the LAB's only stage in the process to substantively review the project. Pabich stated that Biota should have attended the meeting to present the technical aspects of the project and answer LAB questions. Pabich expressed her concern regarding the rock toe treatment as a hard reflector that will significantly alter how water moves through the Big Wood River system. She emphasized the rock toe treatment's impact to the river system is a fundamental concern.

LAB-member Linscott asked about opportunities to redesign the restoration plan in order to incorporate a treatment that doesn't alter the flow of the river. Pabich stated that restoration design should be an iterative process that incorporates reviews of alternative treatments. She recommended that the SAP review-process should be further along before the LAB makes their final determination regarding the project. Linscott agreed that she would need the technical review in order to make an informed decision on the project's impacts to the river system. She suggested that the LAB table review of the application until the Board reviewed and approved the associated SAP.

LAB-member Eggers asked the applicant about the status of the associated SAP. York responded that the application was submitted last fall following the Cooper project downstream. She explained that technical review for the Bridge-to-Bridge project had been delayed in order for TU to consider the Board's review of this downstream SAP. York explained this delay would allow the applicant to preemptively address any concerns that may be raised by the Staff or the Board for the Bridge-to-Bridge project. York explained that the technical review would not include an assessment of alternative treatments.

Pabich explained that Blaine County's contract for Cardno's third party review of the SAP may be amended to include an assessment of alternative treatments. She noted that Cardno could also provide an assessment of a no-action alternative without streambank stabilization treatments. LAB-member Linscott expressed support for the consideration of alternative treatments.

LAB-member Simpson expressed her preference for a project that would enhance access to the Big Wood River over contributing LWWP funds to a project that includes flood mitigation.

LAB-member Linscott moved to table review of the Full Application for TU's Bridge-to-Bridge Restoration Project until the technical review is complete in order to understand the proposal's impacts to the river system and directed Cardno to include an analysis of alternative treatments including a no-action alternative in its third-party review of the SAP.

The LAB discussed the motion in relation to the Board's review of the SAP.

Linscott revised her motion to include a reference to the Board's review of the SAP. She moved to table review of TU's Bridge-to-Bridge Restoration Project until the technical review is complete and the SAP has been approved by the Board and directed Cardno to include an analysis of alternative treatments for streambank stabilization as well as an assessment no-action alterative in their third party review of the SAP.

The LAB discussed the motion. The LAB considered the increased costs associated with expanding the scope of Cardno's third part review and the Board's discretion in their consideration of the SAP.

LAB-member Simpson seconded the motion. Vice-Chair Reynolds called for a vote. All LAB-members voted in favor of the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Review and Approval of the December 4th, 2019 Meeting Minutes

The LAB moved to continue review of the December 4th, 2019 Meeting Minutes to the next meeting.

V. New Business

Bergin updated the LAB on the levy fund balance.

The LAB discussed considering potential amendments to the pre-application process.

Bergin commented that a new pre-application is anticipated to be submitted from the Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

VI. Adjourn

LAB-member Linscott moved to adjourn, seconded by LAB-member Simpson. All LAB members voted in favor of the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:07pm.