

Conceptual Application Recommendation
Land, Water and Wildlife Program
Colorado Gulch Stream Restoration Project

February 26, 2019

To: Board of County Commissioners
From: The Levy Advisory Board

Project Purpose: The 2017 water year for the Big Wood River was above normal, which led to a 50 year flood event that compromised the structural integrity of the Colorado Gulch Bridge. The previous road bridge length was too short to allow proper river function and connectivity to the floodplain; which led to the road bridge's infrastructure to be compromised and unsafe for travel during the high flow event of 2017. In the last 20 years, the road bridge's infrastructure was compromised three times due to its short length and restricting the river to the main channel and not allowing connectivity to the floodplain.

The Wood River Land Trust (WRLT) and Blaine County are collaboratively working to reestablish access to Colorado Gulch with a pedestrian bridge which will allow the bridge to be built at a greater length and at a lower cost than replacing the previous road bridge. The pedestrian bridge is a long term solution to provide access to Colorado Gulch and improve river function and fish and wildlife habitat.

The stream restoration at Colorado Gulch consists of removing old bridge abutments, rip rap, and bridge approach material. This will allow the main channel to access the floodplain approximately every 1-2 years. Benefits of connectivity to the floodplain includes, flood mitigation, groundwater recharge, channel stability, and vegetation and habitat recovery. The stream restoration also calls for the reconnection of a historic side channel which will increase fish habitat and provide habitat diversity. Bank stabilization will include natural large woody materials and revegetation will consist of native plants.

The stream restoration is just one phase of the Colorado Gulch Bridge Project. There are 5 phases to the project:

- 1) Old Bridge Removal and Site Cleanup
- 2) **Big Wood River Main Channel Restoration**
- 3) Bridge Planning, Design, and Construction
- 4) Public Access to the New Bridge
- 5) Establish New County Right of Way

The stream restoration is a key step not to only improve river function but also to allow Blaine County to secure funding for Phase 3, bridge planning, design and construction. Blaine County has secured a grant from FEMA and Idaho Office of Emergency Management (IOEM) for Phase 3 of the Colorado Gulch Project. Depending on bridge design, the grant amount is for \$100,000-\$200,000 and funds need to be used by February 2019. No bridge planning or design can be initiated until the stream restoration is completed. The grant allows for an extension of 20 months if other work needs to be completed prior to funds being used for the new bridge. The Colorado Gulch stream restoration will allow Blaine County to apply for an extension of the FEMA/IOEM grant to secure funding for Phase 3 of the Colorado Gulch project and reestablish access to Colorado Gulch.

Program Guide Review

Levy Advisory Board's Voting Threshold: Meets goals, values, criteria and checklist below.

Levy Advisory Board's Vote: The LAB recommends approval, by a vote of eight to none with one seat vacant, of a grant amount not to exceed \$35,000.00.

Primary Conservation Goal: *Protects water quality, rivers and streams, riparian corridors, floodplains, wetlands and water rights.*

Other conservation goals met:

Protect and preserve wildlife, habitat, and transit and migration corridors

- LAB Conclusion: Specifically aquatic habitat (i.e.: aquatic invertebrates, fish, etc.) and riverine associated wildlife (i.e.: big game, and river otter, beaver, etc.)

Preserve and enhance trail corridors

- LAB Conclusion: The restoration will enhance the Colorado Gulch Trail and the new proposed bridge.

Provide public access to waterbodies in the Big and Littlewood River watersheds.

- LAB Conclusion: The stream restoration project work will help match funding for a new bridge to access the Big Wood River.

Support public/private partnerships.

- LAB Conclusion: Blaine County and the Wood River Land Trust are collaborating with FEMA and the Idaho Office of Emergency Management for funding for a new bridge after stream restoration portion of the project is complete.

Conserve, restore, or maintain and otherwise provide for proper stewardship of land and waters.

- LAB Conclusion: This project will restore the river bank, floodplain function, and provide for more vegetative diversity.

Eligibility: *Non-profits.... Blaine County and other entities meeting the criteria of section 170(h) of the IRS Code or equivalent may apply.*

Assumptions and Values met:

- *Participation in the Program is entirely voluntary. Landowners must be involved from the start to ensure they are supportive of proposed projects.*
- *Projects will require partnerships between a Landowner and an appropriate Partner organization. Partners are nonprofit and governmental entities with the expertise and experience to complete conservation transactions, steward land or easements and secure funding to leverage Levy funds. Blaine County can act as a Partner, if desired by the Landowner.*
- *Project evaluation will be as open and transparent as possible to build public confidence in how the Levy funds are spent while respecting landowners' reasonable privacy interests.*
- *The County is committed to securing as much matching money as possible in order to achieve the most public benefit possible with Levy funds.*

- *Permanent conservation results are essential for demonstrating that Levy funds are well-spent. All partnerships are carefully evaluated to ensure that they serve the public's interests and produce outcomes that would not otherwise be possible.*
- *The County controls how Levy funds are spent and will demand accountability from all Partners.*
- **LAB Conclusion:** The above assumptions and values are pertinent to this proposed project.

Six minimum criteria questions (which must be met at this phase of the application process):

1. Is the project located in Blaine County? Yes
2. Does the project serve at least one of the three primary levy purposes by protecting land, water, or wildlife? Yes is designed to serve the water and wildlife protection purposes.
3. If this is an acquisition [or require a] landowner commit[ment]? The Wood River Land Trust, as the landowner in this instance, is committed financially and otherwise to this proposal.
4. If a non-acquisition project, is there a qualified entity willing to take responsibility for the completion, maintenance and enforcement of the project? The Wood River Land Trust, as owner and entity responsible for other stream bank projects in the valley, is sufficiently qualified to take responsibility for completion and maintenance of this project. Enforcement is not an issue.
5. Have matching funds or other leverage for the LWWP's funding been sought? The Wood River Land Trust is funding \$43, 577.00 of the total \$78,577 cost of this project.
6. Will the project have lasting conservation outcomes? This project will allow the main channel to access the floodplain approximately every 1-2 years. Benefits of connectivity to the floodplain includes, flood mitigation, groundwater recharge, channel stability, and vegetation and habitat recovery. The stream restoration also calls for the reconnection of a historic side channel which will increase fish habitat and provide habitat diversity. Bank stabilization will include natural large woody materials and revegetation will consist of native plants.

Project evaluation checklist:

(Responses to this checklist are needed at this point in the application process. LAB conclusions are underlined. Those needing further response are identified.)

II. Protect Water Resources

1. Is the property:
 - a. On the Big Wood or Little Wood River? This project is on the Big Wood River.
 - b. Within .25 mile of the Big Wood or Little Wood River?
 - c. Within 1 mile of the Big Wood or Little Wood River?
2. Is the property proximate to one of the following tributaries of the Big Wood or Little Wood River? East Fork Big Wood River, Warm Springs Creek, Trail Creek, North Fork Big Wood River, Deer Creek, Crook Creek, or Seaman's Creek? This project is not on a Big Wood River Tributary.

(Please identify which one):

- a. Immediately adjacent
- b. Within 1/2 mile of one of the above-named tributaries
- c. Within 1 mile of one of the above-named tributaries

3. Does the project create a permanent buffer along a waterway identified in the National Hydrology Dataset? The Big Wood River is identified in the National Hydrology Dataset. The extent to which the conservation easement or other private limits exist on the current or a future owner is not fully known. This property is also governed by a management plan that limits the extent and location of development Lot 2A of the Stevens Family Ranch is restricted by the plat and county code from intrusions into the 75' Riparian Setback. Preservation of that buffer is required by both.

4. If a buffer will be created, how much wider is it than required by Blaine County?
a. Less than 100 feet
b. 100-499 feet
c. 500-999 feet
d. 1000 feet or more? No new, additional buffer is proposed beyond 75 feet.

5. Does the project propose to restore or improve habitat in the new or an existing buffer? The project proposes to restore habitat impacted as a result of the 2017 flood event, the removal of the bridge or the elimination of the river bank road installed by the county after the 2006 flood. In addition, the project proposes to improve floodplain function in this vicinity which will improve habitat in both the existing and restored buffer areas.

6. Does the property currently contain the following ecological/natural characteristics that support protection of water quality and quantity?

- a. Floodplain
- b. Riparian corridor
- c. Wetlands
- d. Other aquatic resources, such as lakes or ponds

The property currently contains ecological and natural characteristics that support water quality and, while it does not appear to supplement water quantity per se, it does allow water quantity in floodplain, riparian and wetland areas that are restricted where development has occurred or have been limited in other ways both upstream and downstream of this project location.

7. Within the ecologically important areas identified in the prior question, is the vegetation currently:

- a. Completely undisturbed (100%)?
- b. 75% - 99% undisturbed?
- c. 50% - 74% undisturbed?
- d. Less than 50% undisturbed?

Other than the access road or trails and the disturbance from the bridge abutments, the property along in riparian area is largely, or 75 to 99%, undisturbed.

8. If the project is executed as proposed, will the vegetation in the ecologically important areas identified in the previous 2 questions be:
- Restored?
 - More disturbed?
 - In the same condition?

The project proposes to restore vegetation in the ecologically identified areas.

9. Are water rights appurtenant to the project/property? There are water rights appurtenant to a formerly cultivated portion of the property. See the area of water rights use map in the application materials.

10. Will all of the appurtenant water rights be tied to the property in perpetuity using a legally binding instrument? The Colorado Gulch Preserve has an easement on the property with associated water rights appurtenant to other parts of the property which are not to be separated.

11. Is the delivery rate sufficient to support the proposed project and planned future uses of the property? There is no need for irrigation water to support the proposed project or the planned riparian area use of the property.

12. If this is a working farms and ranches project, are all appurtenant water rights on the property being used for agricultural purposes? This is not a working farm or ranch project.

13. Are any changes (i.e. transfers) to existing water rights necessary to implement the project as proposed? No water rights are necessary to implement the proposed project.

14. Are additional water rights required in order to implement the project as proposed? No water rights are necessary to implement the proposed project.

15. Are highly erodible soils, as defined by NRCS, present on the project site? Interestingly, the "hazard of water erosion" in the riverwash soils identified in this area is considered "slight." The soil survey identifies the Major Use for soils of the type present here as "important habitat for wildlife; therefore, it should be managed and protected of this use."

16. Will the project improve a stream segment listed as impaired on Idaho's 303(d) listing? This stream segment is not listed as impaired on Idaho 303(d) listing.

17. Is the project in one of the following time-of-travel zones identified to protect drinking water?
- 3 year
 - 6 year
 - 10 year

No

III. Protect Wildlife & Fish Habitat

1. Is the project area identified as being important in one of Idaho Department of Fish and Game's wildlife plans?
 - a. [Mule Deer Plan 2008-](#)
 - b. [Comprehensive Plan for Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho \(2006\)-](#)
 - c. [Wolf Management Plan –](#)
 - d. [Idaho Bird Conservation Plan-](#)

Yes, though the project is not reference specifically, the Big Wood River and its riparian areas are reference as important habitat under subsection M332.

2. Is the project within a priority protection area for one of Blaine County's potential partner agencies or organizations? The project is not located in or near any of the areas listed below.
 - a. [Carey Lake WMA-](#)
 - b. [Minidoka NWR-](#)
 - c. [Silver Creek Preserve:](#)
 - d. [Craters of the Moon NPS:](#)
 - e. [Sawtooth National Recreation Area:](#)

3. Have species designated as Threatened and Endangered or species "of concern" in ID been found on the subject property?
 - a. [Sage Grouse: \(Idaho-All Data Types-Sage Grouse\)](#)
 - b. [Pygmy Rabbit maps: \(Idaho-All Data-Wildlife-Pygmy Rabbit\)](#)
 - b. [Species of Concern lists/maps from Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy:](#)
 - c. [GAP maps:](#)

No, though cottonwood riparian areas to the south of this property are habitat for the Yellow-Billed Cuckoo which may seek habitat further north as the climate changes.

4. [Does the project contain identified elk winter range?](#) Yes

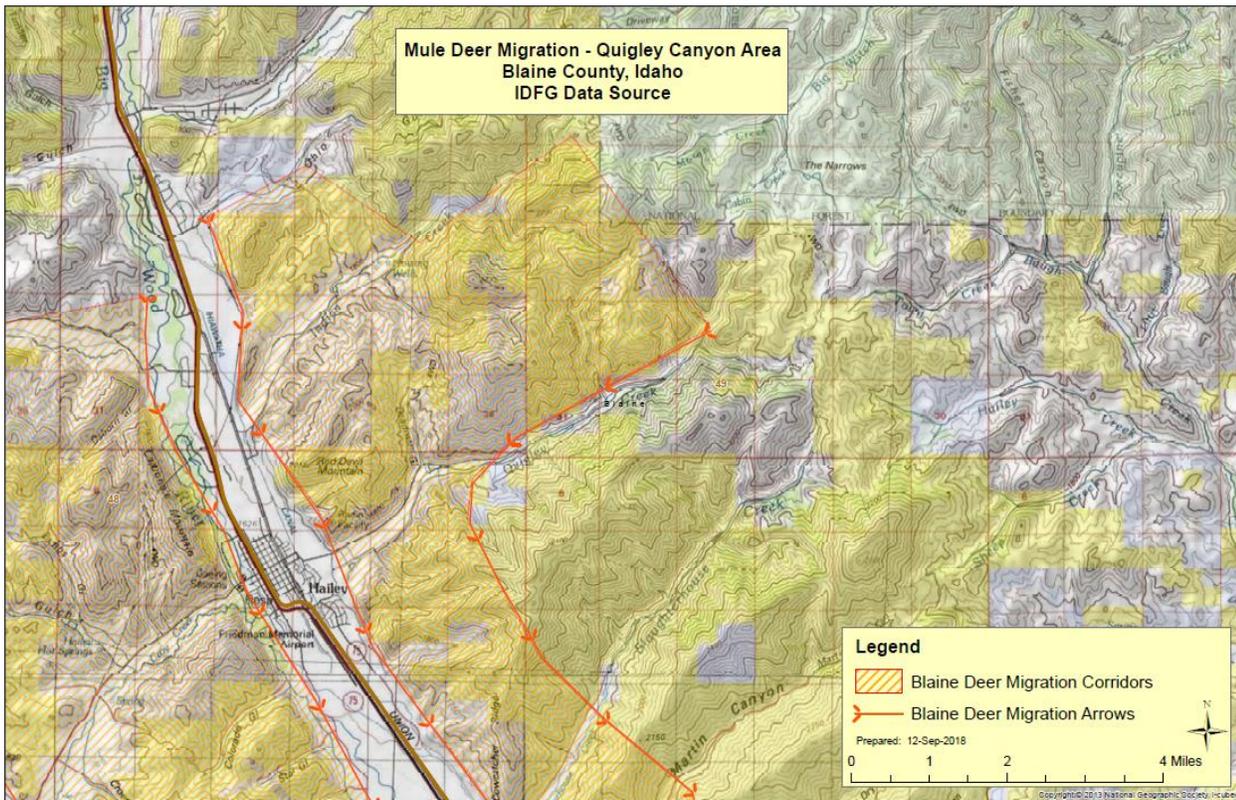
5. [Does the project contain identified mule deer winter range?](#) Not identified

6. Does the project contain priority habitat types as described in the [ID Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy](#) and [Bigwood Conservation Plan?](#) Yes

7. Within the priority habitat types identified in the prior question, is the vegetation currently:
 - a. Completely undisturbed (100%)?
 - b. 75% - 99% undisturbed?
 - c. 50% - 74% undisturbed?
 - d. Less than 50% undisturbed?

Currently, the vegetation in the project area is 75 to 99% undisturbed.

8. If the project is executed as proposed, will the vegetation in the priority habitat types identified in the previous 2 questions be:
- Restored, with plants native to the project area.
 - More disturbed?
 - In the same condition
9. Is the project located within one of the zones identified in public workshops as being important for wildlife? Yes
10. Are there wildlife migration routes as identified by [IDFG](#) across the property/project? Yes, see mule deer migration map below.
11. Does the project protect wildlife movements?
- Across major roads where there are frequent [wildlife/vehicle collisions](#)
 - Between protected lands and water sources or other resource areas.
 - By linking protected lands to other protected lands within winter range or corridors.



12 Will the project result in improved habitat for game or nongame wildlife species through activities such as post-fire restoration or re-vegetation with native plants? Yes, the project area is proposed to be restored with plant native to the area.

13. Does the property abut or contain any of the following specific stretches of water known to be important fish habitat?

- a. *Big Wood Tributaries,*
- b. *Big Wood River pages 290-294-*
- c. *Little Wood River above Reservoir, pages 290-294*
- d. *Headwaters of Salmon River to County Line: pages 216-223*

14. Does the property abut or contain frontage on a stream subject to IDFG Special Rules?

- a. *Mainstem Big Wood only above the Glendale diversion to the North Fork; Silver Creek and tributaries above highway 93 bridge;*
- b. *Reaches of the Little Wood within the Beartrack Williams WMA near Richfield and the upper river above the Baugh Creek confluence.*

15. Does the property contain one of the following important types of fish habitat?

- e. Fish spawning and rearing grounds
- f. Spring creeks
- g. Other, please name _____

16. Is the aquatic habitat identified in the prior question currently:

- h. Completely undisturbed (100%)?
- i. 75% - 99% undisturbed?
- j. 50% - 74% undisturbed?
- k. Less than 50% undisturbed?

Within the project area fish spawning and rearing grounds, the applicant estimates that less than 50% of the area is undisturbed. Further, the rip-rap and road do not allow access to the historic side channel which will provide fish spawning and rearing. Both also limit the connection to the floodplain.

17. If the project is executed as proposed, will the habitat for fish and other aquatic species be:

- l. Restored?
- m. Disturbed?

The project will return the river to a more naturally functioning stretch as existed prior to the road and bridge installation.

Project Funding:

Funding request: \$35,000 (or 44.5% of the total cost)

Total Project Cost: \$78,577

Levy Balance: Jan. '19: \$963,070.79

Grants awarded-funds not yet spent: \$309,309

(Expect Deer Creek to come in at \$100,000 under budget, which would add \$100,000 to the \$653,761)

Levy balance estimate, after all granted funds spent: \$653,761

PENDING APPLICATIONS			
NON-ACQUISITION			
Rock Creek Ranch Restoration - Phase II (10,400-acre ranch): WRLT, TNC	10,400	\$168,312	Revised Full Appl invited by BCC May 23, 2017 once these components are better planned and costed out. Yellow color means project is at Full Appl stage
BWR Bridge to Bridge Restoration (~1/2 mile, Hospital area): TU	n/a	\$189,136	Full Application submitted Dec. 17, 2018.
Hailey snow removal and Lions Park Restoration (rough estimates): City of Hailey	5		No longer considered a pending application.
IDFG: Pronghorn-US Hwy 20 Interaction Study		\$90,075	Pre-Appl received Sept. 20, 2018
WRLT/Blaine County: Colorado Bridge Restoration Project	2	\$35,000	Pre-Appl received November. 26, 2018
Total, Non-Acquisition Projects	10,555	\$482,523	
TOTAL PENDING APPLICATIONS	10,400	\$482,523	
REMAINING LEVY BALANCE IF ALL APPLICATIONS GET FUNDED AT 100% OF REQUEST - before staff, legal, other costs.		\$171,238	