

**Blaine County
Land, Water and Wildlife Program**

**Big Wood River Aquatic Biological Resource and Habitat Analysis
Trout Unlimited with partners Wood River Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy**

To: LAB and Tom Bergin
From: Clare Swanger
Re: Pre-Application Review
Date: September 16, 2014

Trout Unlimited submitted the Pre-Application for a non-acquisition project on Aug. 12, 2014. The Pre-Appl is complete.

Proposal Summary:

TU, in collaboration with USGS, Wood River Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy, request \$27,600 (26%) of the cost of conducting a two-year study, the objective of which is “to provide a baseline of biological conditions and associated habitats for the Big Wood River and major tributaries.” The Pre-Appl says that integrating biological data with key chemical and physical properties provides a comprehensive assessment of stream health that is desirable when evaluating multiple watershed stressors.

The Pre-Appl further states that “the lack of consistently collected, long-term data makes it impossible to determine any statistically significant trends in water quality or biological integrity to help evaluate the effectiveness of best management practices... data obtained from this study will be used long-term to assess restoration treatments and provide guidance to future stream enhancement activities.”

TU provided a link to a recent news article about the project:

<http://www.kmvt.com/news/local/Big-Wood-River-Aquatic-and-Habitat-Assessment-273850871.html>

Project Finances:

- Total Project Cost: \$106,000
- Year 1, 2014: \$60,000. Funding provided by USGS \$24,000, and \$12,000 each from TU, WRLT and TNC.
- Year 2, 2015: \$46,000. Funding available from USGS \$18,400 and requested from LWWP \$27,600 per budget received 9/16/14. Year 2 expenses are for Labor: data analysis, report writing and review, and publication costs.

Proposal relative to LWWP Goals and Criteria:

B.C. Resolution 2008-71 lists primary goals of the LWWP. These include: Protecting water quality, rivers and streams; and Conserving, restoring or maintaining and otherwise providing for proper stewardship of lands and waters. The Program Materials, approved by the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) in June 2013, talk about protecting water sources and quality, and protecting habitat for wildlife and fish [Program Guide, page 5], and about improving water quality [Program Guide, Attachment #3, page 13].

Lasting conservation results are critical for all projects.

Attachment #3 of the Program Guide (included at the end of this Report) defines Non-Acquisition Projects as those that “protect, continue, restore, expand, improve or enhance natural systems and processes.” Eight of nine examples given describe active on the ground projects. The ninth example is “Conducting studies directly linked to a project.” As presented, the study in this proposal is not directly linked to a project.

Attachment #4 addresses eligible and ineligible costs for funding. For non-acquisition projects, eligible costs include “Studies directly linked to a project or potential project”. Chad Chorney, TU staff person, said the conservation partners need the study results in order to identify projects, which they will do once the study is complete. Depending on how one interprets “directly linked” and “potential project,” this project could be eligible for funding. Ineligible costs include project planning and administration, and human resources (e.g., staff, consultants, attorneys). During the Program Materials revisions in 2013, how to handle human resource costs was discussed at length by the LAB and to some extent by the BCC. The Pre-Application budget says Year 2 work, for which LWWP funds are requested, is: “Labor – data analysis, report writing and review, and publication costs.” Attachment #4 makes no mention of publication costs.

The LAB has said that costs already incurred would not be recommended for funding but that costs yet to be incurred in a multi-year project such as this one would be considered.

Six Minimum Criteria to be Eligible for LWWP Funding (for the LAB’s discussion during the Pre-Application hearing. All must be met at the Full Application stage):

- (1) Project location in Blaine County?
- (2) Project serves at least one of the three primary purposes of protecting land, water, wildlife?
- (3) Willing landowner?
- (4) Qualified entity willing to take responsibility for the completion, maintenance and enforcement of the project?
- (5) Matching funds or leverage?
- (6) Lasting conservation outcomes?

Questions:

1. What other studies have been done or are underway to assess Big Wood River stream health?
2. How will the applicants and conservation partners assess the effect/success of this project?
3. How is the study going so far? Is it on track relative to timeline and budget? How is the approach working? Has any of the data been analyzed yet? What have you learned so far about the study protocols or the data gathered?
4. When will the Year 1 work be complete?
5. When will the Year 2 work begin?

Program Guide - Attachment #3

Non-Acquisition Projects - Summary (often called Restoration Projects)

Definition: Non-acquisition projects are those that do not necessarily include an acquisition of a real property land or water interest. Non-acquisition projects protect, continue, restore, expand, improve or enhance natural systems and processes. Examples include but are not limited to:

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| Restoring a stream | Improving wildlife habitat and riparian areas |
| Rejuvenating decadent vegetation | Protecting wildlife transit or migration corridors |
| Creating fish passage channel | Creating wildlife crossings |
| Reconnecting stream tributaries | Improving water quality |
| Conducting studies directly linked to a project | |

Key considerations (See rest of this Guide, Pre and Full Applications, Project Evaluation Criteria for more info):

1. Lasting conservation results.
 - Applicants must clearly describe the conservation values of their project. LWWP understands that the future of natural systems and processes cannot be guaranteed, that there may be factors beyond the applicant's control, and that unforeseen circumstances may influence the project in the future. Nevertheless, clear and lasting conservation goals that will result from the enhanced natural systems and processes are essential.
 - Non-acquisition projects may be strengthened by including acquisition of a real property interest in land or water, such as a conservation easement on a property where a stream will be restored.
2. Clear measures of completion and success. Project progress, completion and success will generally be measured using a "Build to Plan" approach rather than by Performance Standards.
 - Build to Plan offers easily quantifiable measurements, e.g., cubic yards of dirt moved, length/type of fence installed, and wildlife crossing construction completed.
 - Performance Standards define conservation outcomes, e.g., pond temperature decreases by x degrees, wildlife using the crossing, fish hatch increased x%, water moving through stream. It is essential to clarify such conservation goals in your application.
 - Project completion means the project work is completed as planned and the natural system or process is stable. E.g., a viable healthy plant community exists with 80% cover consisting of the types of plants you sought. There should also be a reasonable expectation that the results will continue after the project is formally completed with Blaine County. LWWP encourages adaptive management.
 - Prompt notification to LWWP of problems, delays or changes is essential.
3. Sound maintenance, management, monitoring and reporting.
 - LWWP will not duplicate government monitoring and reporting requirements, but may have additional requirements. Monitoring/requirements will generally be three years.
 - Government agency or partner involvement may strengthen the project in some cases.
4. Required documentation
 - Project plan, scope of work, timeline, benchmarks, budget with explanation, required permits, contracts
 - Performance bond or insurance policy with Blaine County
 - Signed Grant Agreement between applicant and Blaine County LWWP that defines the terms of project and each party's rights and responsibilities.

Grant/Funds Dispersal:

- Cost reimbursements after benchmarks are achieved and invoice(s) submitted.
- A % of the total grant amount will be withheld until all monitoring and reporting is complete.

Program Guide - Attachment #4

Eligible and Ineligible Costs for Funding

Acquisition of an interest in land or water

- Eligible:
 - Direct costs to acquire the interest, e.g., a percent of appraised value
 - Studies directly linked to a project or potential project

- Ineligible:
 - Project planning and administration
 - Transaction costs, e.g., surveys, environmental assessments, appraisals
 - Human resources, e.g., staff, consultants, attorneys
 - Travel
 - Monitoring and stewardship
 - Enforcement
 - Post-funding reports to Blaine County, e.g., annual monitoring reports
 - Notifications and approvals to/from Blaine County per the Grant Agreement

Non-acquisition projects

- Eligible:
 - Materials purchase, e.g., culvert, fencing, fish ladder, wildlife crossing structure
 - Purchase of trees and plants, except annuals
 - Actual costs of construction, e.g., shovel work, plantings
 - Actual costs of maintenance within the County-required monitoring/reporting timeframe
 - Studies directly linked to a project or potential project

- Ineligible:
 - Design and engineering costs
 - Project planning and administration
 - Permit and application fees
 - Transaction costs, e.g., appraisals, environmental assessments
 - Human resources, e.g., staff, consultants, attorneys
 - Travel
 - Supplies
 - Contingencies
 - Incidentals
 - Insurance
 - Performance bonds with County
 - Post-funding reports to Blaine County
 - Maintenance and monitoring after completion of reporting requirements to Blaine County
 - Notifications and approvals to/from Blaine County per the Grant Agreement