**South Fork Boise Watershed Collaborative**

**Kickoff Meeting Notes**

**Summary-** Information was shared on the current status of tributary connectivity, trout populations and endangered species in the basin. In addition to Bureau of Reclamation funding that covers oversight of the collaborative, NRCS has resources and funding to help private landowners.

Multiple opportunities exist to improve the watershed. These can be grouped into categories including tributary and mainstem habitat, recreation facilities, road/trail sediment management, irrigation and agriculture, signage and education, as well as a user survey.

Sub-committees will form to dive into these categories in more detail to identify specific projects. Project ideas will be brought back to the larger group at quarterly meetings for bundling and prioritization.

**Detailed notes**

* Introductions- We had 40 people on the sign in sheet and another 5 online virtually. We had representation from local, state and federal agencies, private land owners, recreation groups, NGOs as well as congressional representatives.
* Anthony reviewed Reclamation’s WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program that is funding coordination/management/oversight of the collaborative. Current funding goes through March 2025 with potential to apply for an extension up to an additional 3 years.
* Anthony reviewed the basic geography and facilities of the South Fork Boise Watershed. This will be available soon in a GIS based StoryMap format where everyone can visualize the information and zoom in on areas of interest.
  + Waterfalls near the mouth of many tributaries block upstream fish passage from the mainstem river. Other tributaries dry out in some years. There are a limited number of fish bearing tributaries, mainly due to waterfalls. Bull trout are only known to occur in the mainstem and Rattlesnake Creek.
  + Recreation facilities are concentrated in the roadside reach of the South Fork Boise River between Anderson Ranch Dam and Danskin Bridge/boat launch.

Existing data, conditions and resources

* Andy Tranmer from the University of Idaho discussed the existing data and models for flow, temperature, fish habitat, sediment movement and riparian plant survival. These models are all for the mainstem South Fork Boise River. Andy also discussed changes that have occurred over time including a reduction in channel width and a reduction in natural recruitment of riparian vegetation.
* Ciara Cusak from US Fish and Wildlife Service discussed the candidate, threatened and endangered species in the watershed. Federal actions in the watershed, including funding of work on private land would have to go through consultation if any of the species may be in the action area. Monarch butterfly are candidate species with an expected listing decision in late 2024. Threatened species include Canada Lynx, Whitebark Pine and Bull Trout. North American Wolverine is proposed to be listed as threatened.
* Tim D’Amico from Idaho Department of Fish and Game discussed fish surveys: mainstem adult population estimates, mainstem fry sampling, and tributary sampling. Adult population estimates started in 1997 and typically occur once every three years. 2023 is a sampling year but sampling just occurred and data has not been analyzed yet. Tributary sampling as well as spring and fall fry sampling occurred for a number of years in the 2010s. Adult populations were down slightly right after the fire/debris flows. Corrected for sampling equipment bias, mainstem fish numbers were actually higher in 2017 and 2020 than pre-fire. Fry sampling showed high variability in the fall with similar numbers in the spring. This indicates a likely overwintering bottleneck, which is common in cold climates. Tributary sampling showed most fish in tributaries are young of year born that spring. Additional fry monitoring and tributary sampling are not currently planned.
* Maureen Pepper provided a basic overview of Natural Resources Conservation Service resources and funding opportunities. NRCS can provide technical guidance and financial support to private landowners for on farm infrastructure improvements. They have a wide variety of options and suggest an on site walk through to discuss specifics with any willing land owners. Some improvements could benefit both landowners and either water quality or fish and potentially be covered by multiple funding sources at no cost to landowners.

High level introduction to potential opportunities for improvement that have already come up during discussions with many folks in the room.

* **Habitat** 
  + Mainstem habitat enhancement
    - Riparian planting and/or hydrograph manipulation could increase riparian plant survival.
    - Physical modification/creation of side channel habitat that is wetted at winter flows could improve overwinter survival of fish.
  + Tributary habitat enhancement
    - Beaver dam analogues, riparian plantings, trail sediment mitigation could all improve both tributary and mainstem habitat and water quality.
* **Recreation**
  + Boat ramps- Adding boat ramps and/or hardening user created ramps could allow for use of more sections the river and reduce congestion at highly used ramps while reducing riparian damage and sediment inputs.
  + Bathrooms- Currently most bathrooms are near boat ramps and not concentrations of camping. Adding toilet facilities at popular camping areas could improve user experience and water quality.
  + Campsites- The simplest idea was changing signs at individual campsites from the 14 day stay limited to match the 14 of 28 day limit rule on the sign below the dam. Other ideas include adding fire rings or defining/numbering individual campsite boundaries instead of the larger general camping areas. Some folks think creating at least some paid reservable sites could reduce the number of vacant camps that are left on site to “reserve” their spot for the next weekend.
* **Road/trail sediment mitigation** 
  + The largest opportunity for road sediment mitigation seems to be the Prairie Rd as it exits the canyon. Field surveys and/or a game camera may be needed to monitor potential passage issues.
  + Dust abatement on the road and/or creation of more riparian buffer at campsites/important habitat could improve water quality and user experience.
  + Investigating ways to reduce sediment input from winter plowing.
  + Improving trail/stream crossings could reduce sediment and improve user experience
* **Irrigation and agriculture** 
  + There are many options on both private and public lands. Riparian fencing and off site watering could improve in stream water quality as well as water quality for cows. Beaver dam analogues (covered in the Habitat section) could increase summer base flows and reduce sediment loss during high flows. Any willing land owners could have an on brainstorming site visit from NRCS.
* **Signage and education** 
  + Ideas for additional signage include; increase signage for fishing regulations and no guiding rules, more speed limit signs, official boat ramp signs/maps,
  + Potential educational signage on topics like bull trout, general flow/release patterns etc.
  + Investigating potential education opportunities for visitors prior to arriving. What websites/stores/groups are providing information. Can we ask to add information on stuff like no trash service, no guiding, no bathrooms on the canyon float.
* **User Survey** 
  + A user survey could inform aspects of many of the other categories. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game is looking at conducting a creel survey of fishermen/women. Car counters and game cameras could be used as surrogates for user counts. Occupancy surveys on high use weekends could inform best locations for bathrooms, campsite boundaries etc.

Kendra Kaiser provided an overview of Boise State University research interests and capabilities that could benefit the watershed group.

Additional ideas from the group

* Andy Brunelle- Ted Trueblood Chapter of Trout Unlimited in cooperation with the Forest Service collected environmental DNA samples from tributaries this spring/summer. Data will be analyzed this winter to provide additional information on fish presence/absence in tributaries.
* Andy Brunelle- In addition to adding sediment to Pierce Creek, the road out of the canyon is adding sediment to the mainstem through a gully downstream from Pierce Creek.
* Ceci Bennett- Potential to capture users at entry points for getting/sharing info. Road dust abatement could improve water quality and user experience.
  + Tim Wagner-EPA published a document recently on addressing dust and sediment issues on unpaved roads.
* Randy Davison- Usage of the watershed has increased significantly over the last 10 years. Anything we can do to maintain the multi-use benefits of the watershed while mitigating issues that come with increased usage would be good. One example could be adding more bathroom facilities.

Watershed Collaborative form and function

* Anthony briefly reviewed the range in how other similar groups operate
* Everyone wants to do good things, but compliance (ESA and NEPA) will be time consuming and may be bumped by other priorities. Being strategic about bundling projects for compliance and/or balancing compliance between land/water managers and funding agencies could reduce timelines for implementation.
* Currently there was no need for additional educational presentations on specific topics before moving forward. Presentations, like a summary of Green River side channel reconnection work, may benefit sub-committees and/or the larger quarterly meetings as we move forward.
* The wide variety of opportunities would be good for sub-committees to dive into deeper instead of one large group. Anthony has sent out a request for individuals to indicate which sub-committees folks would like to engage with and how involved they want to be.
* Sub-committees will dive into the details and report back to the larger group at quarterly meetings. The larger group will work to bundle projects together for compliance/funding. Where funding and/or limited staff time require prioritization of projects, the larger group will discuss the best path forward.