Project 32012 – Response to ISRP FY 2003 Review

Implement Best Management Practices to improve habitat and upland conditions within the Clover Creek watershed.

ISRP FY 2003 Initial Comments

ProjectID: 32012
Implement Best Management Practices to improve riparian habitat and upland conditions within the Clover Creek watershed.
Sponsor: BRSCD
Province: Middle Snake
Subbasin: Bruneau
FY03 Request: $44,500
5YR Estimate: $91,999
Short Description: Enhance riparian and upland habitat and reduce nonpoint source pollution within the Clover Creek watershed through the development of a Coordinated Resource Management Plan on private, state, and federal land, focusing on private land improvements.
Response Needed? Yes
ISRP Preliminary Recommendation and Comments:
A response is needed. The proposal and presentation dwell on this as a collaborative effort but are light on potential biological benefits. More specific involvement of fisheries biologists, such as at IDFG, needs to be better demonstrated. More detail needs to be provided on monitoring or links to other monitoring efforts that would provide information on native fish response. Details need to be given on prioritization of sites for restoration. See the programmatic section of this report. Is there a watershed assessment completed that specifies needed actions? Are there potential benefits of using the CRP in this area?

Potential biological benefits

Healthy riparian-wetland areas provide values and benefits far in excess of the small percentage of the landscape they involve. Riparian-wetland areas, when healthy and functioning have the following values:

1. Contribute to improved water quality and removal of sediment as water filters through the robust, native vegetation.
2. Rebuild floodplains and reduce erosion of streambanks, hold water in streambanks and release water slowly, increasing the amount of water effectively available for irrigation, mainstream biota, and ground water reserves.
3. Provide improved spawning and rearing habitat, aquatic life for food, overhanging bank and woody debris shelter for fish populations.
4. Provide food cover, nesting sites, and migratory routes during critical periods of birds' life cycle.
5. Provide forage, shade, shelter, and water for livestock and a wide array of game and non-game wildlife species.
6. Contain important archeological and cultural resources.
7. Allow for environmental education and scientific research on the most productive, sensitive, diverse, and often geographically limited ecosystems.

The primary intent in this proposal is to move impaired or non-functional riparian areas to a functional system, through non-regulatory actions. Those fisheries benefits will follow upon moving the impaired areas to a functional condition. The first steps towards a functional water body, using the Proper Functioning Condition definition here, must be to reduce stream width-depth ratios by increasing the amount of stabilizing vegetative at bankfull. The riparian vegetation will filter out sediments, thus "widen" or increase the riparian area into the stream channel as well out into the adjacent "upland" area.

The creation of a more appropriate width-depth ratio, increasing overhanging banks, improving pool-riffle-run ratios, and diversify the substrate conditions, cannot but help improve fisheries spawning, rearing, and adult habitat. Quantifying the actual fishery "enhancements" or numbers is difficult. However, quantifying the physical attributes of that desired fishery habitat is not. Therefore, the first and long-term step to be taken will be to document those changes in the physical attributes.

IDFG Biologists, etc.

During the first year of this project, the development of a "fisheries" monitoring program will mainly be developed with the support of IDFG, NRCS, and BLM biologists within the first year of the project. DEQ TMDL, and SCC riparian program monitoring will continue.

At this point in time, there is no MOU or official agreement among the Bruneau River SCD, NRCS, IDFG, BLM, and other agencies to ensure the reviewers that a "good" cooperative working relationship exists, or will exist for this project. However, the existing cooperative relationship among these agencies does exist and will continue.

The expected procedures for fisheries monitoring will follow the IDFG standard stream survey methodology, as was as utilizing the IDFG BPA funded native salmonid survey protocols (Meyer, 1999)

"idfg standard survey.PDF"

IDFGPROPOSAL.DOC

Site prioritization

The entire length (approx. 2.2 miles) of the portion owned by the landowner is a priority. At this time, no other landowner has requested assistance in developing a conservation to address resource concerns through this coordinated resource management planning process. It is important to note as well that there only exist a few landowners on this stream, where the majority is public land. Of the entire length of Clover Creek (51 miles), approximately 42 miles is BLM, 8 miles is private, and 1 mile of state land. Only 16 percent of Clover Creek has private ownership, where this project will cover nearly 1/3 of all the private acres.

Watershed assessments

There exists a DEQ developed TMDL, which includes a problem assessment, and beneficial use assessments, on the Bruneau River watershed, which includes Clover Creek (too large to email). Also, there exists a rangeland resource inventory provided by NRCS and a riparian assessment on this privately owned portion and the allotment, where Proper Functioning Condition, Stream Visual Assessment Protocol, and Streambank Erosion Condition Inventory have been utilized on the entire 2.2 miles.

"clover allotment assessment.PDF"

CRP application

CRP facts.PDF

Idaho does not have a Conservation Reserve Enhanced Program (CREP).

What Idaho does have is the Continuous Signup CRP, which may or may not be available to a landowner, or acceptable due to long-term requirements and low rental rates. See the imbedded CRP – Continuous signup enhancements fact sheet for some detail on what this program includes. The length of CRP contracts is from 10 to 15 years, with rental rates based on the average dryland cash rent, regardless of any irrigated conditions, where the average cash rent is substantially higher. Qualifying marginal pastures, which is the predominate landuse adjacent riparian areas, qualify only if the are suitable for riparian buffers.

Some areas with potential or existing weed infestation problems are further compounded where CRP is enrolled and riparian areas are inundated with weeds. Weed control is limited adjacent to riparian areas.

For marginal pasturelands adjacent to permanent or seasonal streams, C-CRP "permanent" rental rates range from $30 to $59 per acre, plus an additional incentive, up to 20%, depending on the practice installed such as buffer strips. "Seasonal" rental rates range from $18 to $53 per acre.

C-CRP is discussed with landowners during the development of an implementation strategy for their conservation plan, as well as all other funding sources. The set-aside portion of the C-CRP program is not acceptable to the landowner for this project, therefore, alternative funding sources are being sought where resource objectives will still be achieved.

Additional comments added from subsequent email:

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-----Original Message-----
From: Dave Ferguson [mailto:DFERGUSO@agri.state.id.us]
Sent: Friday, March 22, 2002 7:50 AM
To: kphillips@nwppc.org; emerrill@nwppc.org
Subject: Additional info: ISRP initial review response for Clover Creek
BP A Proposal 32012


Additional information from IDFG for BPA project 32012:

-----Original Message-----
From: CHARLES WARREN [mailto:cwarren@IDFG.STATE.ID.US]
Sent: Monday, March 18, 2002 5:09 PM
To: DFERGUSO@agri.state.id.us
Cc: DOUGLAS MEGARGLE
Subject: re: ISRP initial review response for Clover Creek BPA Proposal


Dave,
IDFG currently has an obligation to sample ten sites on Clover Creek for
fish
and their habitat this year.  We currently have no commitments or plans for
sampling beyond 2002.  Our strategy is to sample various locations including
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one on the segment owned by the Bachmans, assuming we get permission to do so
on their property. We plan to sample upstream and downstream of the Clover Creek road crossing. Although our commitment is not as extensive as our plans for sampling Billingsly Creek, we do support this project for its potential to improve habitat for what we believe may be a redband trout population that has very little if any genetic introgression from coastal strains of rainbow trout. Since Clover Creek is part of the Bruneau and Jarbidge River systems, there is the possibility that bull trout are present

there, although none have been documented in the past. The plans to restore

segments of the Clover Creek riparian zone will be a significant improvement

to conditions for cold water aquatic species of this desert ecosystem. Low flow resulting from irrigation withdrawals coupled with poor riparian zone conditions are probably creating the greatest impacts to Clover Creek. Mid-summer water temperatures are probably at the maximum threshold of tolerance in some reaches of Clover Creek where riparian vegetation does not

provide enough shading and flows are too low to buffer against excessive insolation. Studies this summer will include placing thermographs at various
locations to measure this effect. Current fish sampling plans include determining all species present at all sites sampled and obtaining population
estimates of redband trout where practical for density estimates. We may also include taking fish tissue samples to determine level of redband trout allele frequencies.

I know that this is pretty brief but I hope that it helps.

Chuck Warren
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