Project 33007 – Response to ISRP FY 2003 Review

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

ISRP FY 2003 Initial Review Comments

ProjectID: 33007
Implement Best Management Practices to improve riparian habitat and upland conditions in the Medicine Lodge watershed.
Sponsor: Clark SCD
Province: Upper Snake
Subbasin: Upper Closed Basin
FY03 Request: $98,902
5YR Estimate: $564,510
Short Description: Enhance riparian habitat and reduce nonpoint source pollution within the Medicine Lodge watershed through the development and implementation of conservation plans on private lands, coordinated with local, state, and federal land managers.
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 minimal regarding potential biological benefits. More specific involvement of fisheries biologists, such as at IDFG, needs to be 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. Is there a watershed assessment completed that specifies needed actions? What is the likelihood and what are the 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. Actual fishery HU's will be quantified where possible, with the assistance of IDFG.

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, USFS, and BLM biologists within the first year of the project. EPA 319, DEQ TMDL, and SCC riparian program monitoring will continue.

At this point in time, there is no MOU or official agreement among the Clark SCD, NRCS, IDFG, BLM, USFS, 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 majority of Medicine Lodge Creek private lands has been assessed by an interdisciplinary team, utilizing the Proper Functioning Condition (BLM, NRCS, USFS), Rosgen Stream Classification, Stream Visual Assessment Protocol (NRCS), and the Streambank Erosion Condition Inventory (SECI - NRCS) protocols. The high priority areas for treatment have been identified and landowner participation commitment has been obtained.

Watershed assessments


MedLodgeSubbasinRevDocument1LatestV

There exists a DEQ developed TMDL problem assessment and beneficial use assessments, on Billingsley Creek (too large to email). There exists also a BLM subbasin review document (embedded above). Also, there exists a substantial riparian assessment, consisting of PFC, SVAP, and a streambank erosion condition rating on the majority of the stream miles in this project area, which has justified EPA 319, SCC, and C-CRP funding.

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 are 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.

There is planned, approximately $1,018,570 from C-CRP going into this watershed for riparian enhancement. With BPA's support, mitigation credits may be generated by these planned C-CRP projects that will occur even without BPA funding. Other riparian and upland conservation practices to be funded through EPA 319 and SCC programs may also count towards mitigation if BPA support is provided. It is important to note that only 2 acres are expected to be under a use-exclusion practice, providing only $300 over 10 years, at $15/acre C-CRP rental payment.