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September 3, 2024

Watershed Restoration & Growth Scenario Planning in the Big Wood River Basin

Submitted by the Wood River Land Trust, on behalf of
the Wood River Water Collaborative watershed management group.

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Applicant Information

- Submittal Date: September 3, 2024
- Applicant Name: Wood River Land Trust
- City, County, State: Blaine County, Idaho and the cities therein: the City of Carey, City of Bellevue, City of Hailey, City of Ketchum and City of Sun Valley

Project Summary

The Big Wood River is key to the vitality of the communities and wildlife in south-central Idaho, where Blaine County's mountain resort communities in the north transition to high-desert agricultural lands in the south. Nine years ago, the Wood River Land Trust, Trout Unlimited, and The Nature Conservancy Idaho convened the Wood River Water Collaborative– a collection of over seventy-five diverse water users– to plan and execute water management projects. Now, a working group of the Collaborative draws its attention to the health of the Big Wood's natural floodplain and seeks to update the County's guiding watershed restoration plan– the Big Wood River Atlas. Central to the update is data-driven "growth scenario planning" that will engage the community in conceptualizing how existing and potential zoning regulations and development patterns stand to impact water usage and riparian habitats in the basin. Understanding the watershed's health as a variable in the locale's human-environment system, this planning effort will synthesize new and existing data sources to prioritize river restoration projects, discern roles and delegate responsibilities for watershed management in the Big Wood River basin.

Length of Time and Estimated Completion Date

The proposed two-year watershed planning project is scheduled to begin in September 2025 and conclude in September 2027. The final, completed watershed plan—the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0— will encapsulate all aspects of the planning process and be published in September 2027. See Evaluation Criteria: Readiness to Proceed for a detailed description of the implementation timeline.

Federal Facility

The proposed watershed planning effort does not involve a federal facility but will encompass land managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

Project Location

Blaine County, Idaho: A "gateway community"

From the alpine forests and lakes in the north to the sagebrush steppe and lava fields in the south, Blaine County spans nearly 1.7 million acres of south-central Idaho (Blaine County, 2021c). The county is mostly covered in brush and classified as semi-arid; some 60% of annual precipitation falls as snow from November to March (Blaine County, 2021c). Riparian areas and wetlands are fed and sustained by the annual snowpack, which holds a median peak of 16.2 inches of snow-water equivalent before running off into the Big Wood subasin through spring and summer (NRCS, 2024). Nestled in and around five mountain ranges, Blaine County's five cities are positioned at the gateway to extensive areas of public land. Three of the cities– the City of Bellevue, City of Hailey and City of Ketchum– are located along the Big Wood River corridor. The natural beauty, incredible access to outdoor recreational amenities and remote location add to the appeal of the Wood River Valley.

Today, Blaine County profiles as what researchers call a "gateway" community: a set of small towns with outsized access to increasingly popular natural amenities (Stoker et al., 2020). The majority of Blaine County's population resides in the cities of Sun Valley, Ketchum, Hailey, Bellevue, and Carey with a total population of approximately 25,000 people (US Census Bureau, 2022). Home to the world famous Sun Valley Resort, full-time and seasonal residents say that access to outdoor recreation is the top contributor to quality of life in the Wood River Valley (Evans, 2022). Blaine County's geography and natural amenities have led to great wealth and opportunity in the community as well as challenges that are uncharacteristic of other, more conventional rural communities. "Big city" problems like a dearth of affordable housing, traffic congestion and looming sprawl require a suite of unique solutions to keep Blaine County, in the words of researchers at Headwaters Economics, from being "loved to death" (Lawson and Smith, 2023).

Like other gateway communities and in concert with the State of Idaho, Blaine County experienced substantial amenity migration during and directly following the COVID-19 pandemic (Idaho Department of Labor, 2024b). Population trends– as well as sprawling patterns of development– compromise open space, increase loss of agricultural lands and espouse a sense of unwanted change in rural communities across the west (Markey et al., 2022). Blaine County is no exception, residents surveyed by the Wood River Land Trust pointed to habitat conservation—including protections for open space, wildlife and watersheds—as a community priority, in need of attention (WRLT, 2024a). The desirable market for new development in Blaine County poses risks to water availability and riparian habitats along the Big Wood River corridor and its major tributaries.

In the last statewide survey, the Big Wood River was ranked as the third most popular fishery in Idaho (Jensen, 2017). Each season the Big Wood attracts recreational tourism and part-time residents from around the world. Local fly fishing shops and guided services, plus Sun Valley Resort, are part of the county's primary economic driver: tourism (Idaho Department of Labor, 2024a). In 2018, anglers spent nearly $785 million on fishing-related expenses in Idaho, generating $1.2 billion in economic output and supporting 8,750 jobs (American Sportfishing Association, 2021). In Blaine County alone, the recreational fishery in the Big Wood River Valley contributed $2.5 million to local economy in 2016 (Cook and Becker, 2016). Yet, the Climate Impact Lab predicts that Blaine County will experience a 40% decline in the number of days at or below freezing by the end of the century; the Lab predicted similar results across Idaho (McCusker and Hess, 2018). All said, the Big Wood River's health is vitally important to the watershed– its wildlife and aquatic resources– as well as to the local economy (McClure, 2021). Understanding the stressors and opportunities of Blaine County's tourism and recreation economy, the imperative to maintain and enhance the health of the Big Wood River is clear.

Big Wood River Watershed

The Big Wood River watershed (HUC 17040219) encompasses roughly 1,496 square miles or 957,495 acres across Blaine, Gooding, Lincoln and Camas Counties, in south-central Idaho. Originating at an elevation of about 10,800 ft in the Sawtooth Mountains near Galena Summit, the Big Wood River flows south for 137 miles. Winding through the Boulder Mountains to the north, Pioneer Mountains to the east and the Smoky Mountains to the west—the Big Wood flows through the Wood River Valley. Flowing south through the Wood River Valley, the Big Wood River receives the tributary streams of Warm Springs Creek and Trail Creek, is joined by the East Fork Wood River, and enters the northern part of Magic Valley before flowing into Magic

Reservoir at an elevation of about 4,800 ft. The mountainous terrain of Blaine County contributes to the formation of several sub-basins within the watershed and lends to the region's hydrologic complexity.

See Appendices A through C for the Big Wood River Watershed Map, Big Wood Watershed Delivery Blocks and Affected Stakeholders, and the List of Wood River Water Collaborative Members. See Evaluation Criteria: Watershed Group Diversity and Geographic Scope for a detailed description of the members of the Collaborative and larger scope of the Collaborative.

Geographic Scope of the Project: Big Wood River Atlas 2.0

The proposed update to the County's guiding watershed restoration plan– the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0—will maintain the scope of the existing, original plan. Specifically, the Atlas 2.0 will integrate recent and new data sources to plan for restoration projects between a) the North Fork of the Big Wood River in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area to the north and b) Stanton Crossing near the Big Wood's confluence with Camas Creek and its entry into Magic Reservoir to the south.

In Figure 1, the geographic scope of the Big Wood River Atlas is marked by the highlighted termini: the North Fork of the Big Wood to the north and Stanton Crossing to the south. Visit the interactive Big Wood River Reach Maps and Data for a more detailed look at the scope of the Big Wood River Atlas (Blaine County, 2021b).

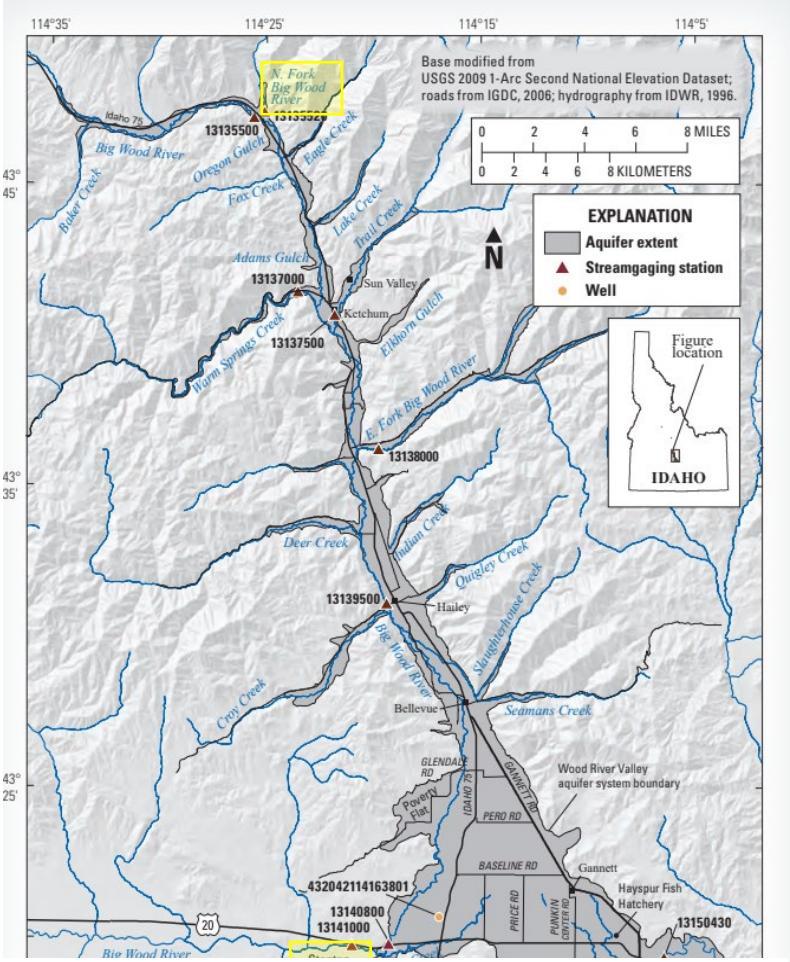

Figure 1 - The geographic scope of the Big Wood River Atlas is marked by the highlighted termini: the North Fork of the Big Wood in the north and Stanton Crossing in the south. The underlying map depicts the locations of communities, select USGS stream-gaging stations, the extent of the aquifer and other features of the Wood River Valley in Blaine County, Idaho.

Within this geographic scope and extent of the Big Wood River, competing interests exacerbate the need for conflict resolution, strategic prioritization and delegation of responsibilities between the Wood River Water Collaborative members. Expanding development, longstanding agriculture, popular recreation and a native trout fishery all compete for water in the Big Wood River basin.

Applicant Category & Eligibility

Existing Watershed Group: Wood River Water Collaborative

The Wood River Land Trust (WRLT) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization applying to the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program on behalf of an Existing Watershed Group named the Wood River Water Collaborative (also referred to as "the Collaborative").

The Wood River Land Trust (WRLT) initially convened the Wood River Water Collaborative in 2015, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy Idaho ("TNC") and Trout Unlimited. Shortly after, Trout Unlimited ("TU") received a grant from the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program to support the development of the Collaborative and initiate watershed planning. Over the past nine years, the WRLT, TNC, and TU have coordinated the Collaborative, and at times, fiscally sponsored certain activities and projects.

The Collaborative is a grass-roots non-regulatory watershed group. The more than 75 members of the Collaborative consist of affected stakeholders in the watershed– representing a diversity of perspectives, knowledge of sustainable water usage and experience with the criticality of the Big Wood River's health and function.

The Collaborative's mission is multi-pronged. As stated on the Collaborative's website, the watershed group works to preserve core community values and ensure that:

- safe and clean drinking water supports the needs of the watershed;
- sustainable water use supports the region's farming and ranching; and
- healthy riparian habitats support the fish and wildlife that rely on the Big Wood River, Little Wood River, Silver Creek and their tributaries (WRWC, 2024).

The Collaborative has been successful at bringing together water users on all sides of water calls to discuss potential solutions and proactively pursue water management and watershed restoration projects, ongoingly and since its inception nine years ago. Most recently, watershed hydrologist Dr. Kendra Kaiser has been working with and through the Wood River Water Collaborative to develop a "predictive flow model" for Silver Creek, Camas Creek, and the Big Wood River above Magic Reservoir. Such data-driven prediction tools are key to cooperative water resource management: they help manage water users' expectations of curtailment dates and seasonal availability (Kaiser, 2020).

Separately and together, many of the Collaborative members are involved in ongoing work and special projects that affect the quality or quantity of water in the watershed. Aside from projects of the Collaborative, the Wood River Land Trust is involved in the following watershed management projects:

- the initiation and execution of riparian habitat restoration projects (WRLT, 2024d);
- the initiation and execution of soil health projects;
- the ongoing collection of data and monitoring of river health (WRLT, 2024c);
- the ongoing monitoring of conservation easements in the watershed;
- the maintenance of riparian restoration projects, riparian habitats and public access preserves, several of which are located in the natural floodplains of the Big Wood River and its major tributaries;

- the initiation, compilation and completion of watershed planning studies and reports. See WRLT, 2024b for a list of Big Wood River studies in which the WRLT has spearheaded or participated.
- the leadership of the Conservation, Infrastructure, and Efficiency (CIEF) Fund Committee (IDWR, 2024b) for the Big Wood River Ground Water Management Area and Management Plan (as designated by the Idaho Department of Water Resources; see IDWR, 2024a);
- the development and advocacy of municipal code landscaping standards that require or incentivize smart water usage; and
- the education and encouragement of residential and commercial landscaping to conserve water, support backyard habitats and abide by "Trout Friendly" water quality standards.

In 2021, the Wood River Land Trust was awarded the National Land Trust Excellence Award by the Land Trust Alliance. To date, the WRLT has preserved nearly 27,000 acres, created 16 public access preserves, 41 conservation easements, and completed several in-stream and riparian enhancement projects. As exemplified in the aforementioned projects and history of the Wood River Water Collaborative, the WRLT is capable of convening community partners and water users to promote the sustainable use of water resources in the watershed.

Working Group: Big Wood River Atlas 2.0

As proposed herein, the Wood River Land Trust will help convene a working group of the Wood River Water Collaborative to update to the Big Wood River Atlas watershed restoration plan. Known as the Atlas 2.0 Working Group, it will be composed of the following primary project partners: Blaine County, the cities of Ketchum, Hailey and Bellevue, Idaho Fish & Game, the Sawtooth National Forest and Ketchum Ranger District of the US Forest Service, Project Big Wood, the Hemingway Chapter of Trout Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy Idaho. A second-ring of partners will be regularly involved in reviewing the progress and milestones of the Atlas 2.0 Working Group, namely the Hiawatha Canal Water Users Association, the Big Wood River Ground Water Management Advisory Committee and recreationist groups and businesses. The Working Group meetings will be open to all members of the Collaborative. The Atlas 2.0 Working Group will regularly report to the forum of the Collaborative and outreach to the wider Wood River Valley community. See Evaluation Criteria, Readiness to Proceed.

Project Description

Introduction: Watershed Restoration Plan Update

On behalf of the existing Wood River Water Collaborative (the Collaborative), the Wood River Land Trust (WRLT) seeks funding to coalesce stakeholders and update to the region's guiding watershed restoration plan—the Big Wood River Atlas. The proposed watershed restoration planning project will:

- integrate the recent and new studies (Task B: Phase I and II River Studies);
- engage the wider Wood River Valley community in growth scenario planning (as it pertains to watershed management; Task B: Growth Scenario Planning);
- engage the Collaborative's members in conflict resolution to pursue complementary roles and delegate responsibilities (Task A: Group Development); then,
- compile the findings and takeaways from the aforementioned activities in an updated watershed restoration plan– the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 (Task B: Big Wood River Atlas 2.0).

The Collaborative particularly needs cooperative watershed planning at this time, to advance the community's understanding of the current functioning of the Big Wood and optimize the organizational capacity among the member entities. By integrating a wide breadth of studies and including the larger Wood River Valley community in growth scenario planning, this watershed planning project aims to holistically address the critical needs of the Big Wood River basin, for the foreseeable future.

Task B: Phase I and II River Studies

Part of the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 update will entail the integration of recently completed Phase 1 and new Phase II studies. Since the production of the Big Wood River Atlas in 2020, members of the Collaborative have pursued Phase I studies, acquiring but not always publishing the data sources:

- macro invertebrate sampling,
- restoration project evaluations,
- green LiDAR and topobathmetric mapping, and
- a fish habitat suitability index (in-progress).

In addition to synthesizing findings from the aforementioned Phase I studies, members of the Collaborative have expressed interest and discussed the merits of pursuing the following Phase II studies:

- geomorphic change mapping,
- river-wide hydraulic modeling,
- assessment of fish passage and entrainment, and
- sediment transport study.

Building on the general "best-practice" recommendations of the existing Big Wood River Atlas, the synthesis of Phase I studies and addition of Phase II studies will provide the Atlas 2.0 Working Group and Collaborative with a more detailed understanding of:

- the critical condition of certain reaches,
- the potential impact of a restoration project on downstream reaches, and
- how to maximize the Collaborative's effectiveness.

WRLT River Program Director Cory McCaffrey will help coordinate members of the Atlas 2.0 Working Group and the wider Collaborative, to review the synthesis of Phase I studies and oversee data collection for two Phase II studies of the Collaborative's choice.

See the Evaluation Criteria for the Project, as well as the Project Budget: Budget Narrative for a description of each line item related to the River Program Salaries & Wages and the Phase II River Studies Contractual activities.

Task B: Growth Scenario Planning

Another part of the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 update will incorporate findings from a land use analysis and community engagement process: growth scenario planning. Scenario planning is used in the field of regional planning to engage communities to understand and prepare for the possibilities of an "uncertain future" (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2024). The practice is especially useful to understanding the impact of the built environment on natural resources, and exploring aspects of a community's environmental resilience.

How scenario planning works: several elements are held constant while others change. In the context of Blaine County and watershed restoration planning—

- The constants will include:
    1. the forecasted growth for Blaine County and the cities therein, based on their published analyses or (when there are data gaps) the average growth trajectory over the past 10 years; and
    2. climate trends, specifically warming precipitation and shifting snow melt trends.
- The variables will include different zoning regulations. Very generally, the zoning regulations may follow the following four trends; however, involvement from the Atlas 2.0 Working Group will need to determine more specific stipulations of the various zoning regulation trends:
    1. Maintain present-day zoning regulations (the status quo),
    2. Adjust zoning regulations to increase land use efficiency in the cities,
    3. Adjust zoning regulations to limit development in the floodplain and canyons, and
    4. Combine variables 2 and 3 to reflect smart growth.

Under the constants, each variable will create a different development pattern and growth scenario. Each growth scenario will impact water usage and riparian habitats differently. For example, typically large lots with domestic wells use significantly more water than apartment units with little to no landscaping and that are connected to municipal services. Through growth scenario planning, people are able to link water usage quantities and habitat impacts to actual development types and patterns. The data-driven growth scenarios will inform watershed restoration planning about where the potential of development and risk to riparian habitats is greatest along the Big Wood River corridor.

For the Atlas 2.0 update, WRLT Community Planning Director, Cece Osborn, will engage members of the Atlas 2.0 Working Group in:

- the methodology of a land use analysis that maps current land use efficiency (more commonly referred to as land use capacity or capacity for development);
- reviewing the impact of a warming climate on Blaine County's seasonal flood cycles and water availability;
- conceptualizing the details of hypothetical but realistic zoning regulations for three additional growth scenarios, beyond the status quo;
- reviewing the map-making of various growth scenarios;

- reviewing the water use analysis and watershed restoration implications of the development patterns associated with each growth scenario;
- preparing presentations and communications to the wider community; plus
- reviewing the development and supporting the administration of a community-wide survey about the growth scenarios, watershed impacts and zoning regulations for smart growth.

See the Evaluation Criteria for the Project Benefits, as well as the Project Budget: Budget Narrative for a description of each line item related to the Community Planning Salaries & Wages and Growth Scenario Planning Contractual activities.

Task A: Group Development

In 2018, around fifty members of the Wood River Water Collaborative deliberated and established the group's mission (as discussed under Applicant Category & Eligibility: Existing Watershed Restoration Group; WRWC, 2024). However, several factors have encouraged the WRLT to incorporate Task A: Group Development activities into the proposed update to the Big Wood River Atlas watershed restoration plan:

- the Collaborative has grown to include more than 75 water users and user groups, with an even greater diversity of interests and capacities; and
- the Collaborative has not developed by-laws nor protocol. Yet, the Collaborative seeks improved coordination, delegation of responsibilities and consensus around restoration priorities.

When the WRLT presented the Atlas 2.0 project description and Atlas 2.0 Working Group idea to the larger Collaborative, new members in the Collaborative—several from sustainability programs in local government or with new non-profit organizations—agreed that now is a good time to expand the focus of the Collaborative beyond water management and to be multi-purpose. Older members also approved of the expanded focus, and welcomed structure—e.g. a working group—to house the new focus: watershed restoration planning. Throughout the process, the WRLT will encourage the wider Collaborative to deliberate and establish protocols for decision making, which may offer guidance in future times of stress or uncertainty.

See the Evaluation Criteria for the Project Benefits, as well as the Project Budget: Budget Narrative for a description of each line item related to the River Program Salaries & Wages and Group Development Contractual activities. Of the WRLT Staff involved in the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 update, the River Program Director Cory McCaffrey will participate most in the Group Development activities.

Task B: Producing the Update, "Big Wood River Atlas 2.0"

Lastly, we seek to incorporate the findings and takeaways from the three aforementioned components—the Phase I and II River Studies, Growth Scenario Planning and Group Development—into one document, the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0. As mentioned in the beginning or Introduction of the Project Description, the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 product will be an update of the original and existing Big Wood River Atlas (Blaine County, 2020).

An update of the existing watershed restoration plan is needed to advise more specific reach prioritization and delegation of responsibilities among the Wood River Water Collaborative members—especially given the context of post-pandemic growth and amenity migration to

Blaine County. See Project Location, Blaine County: A "gateway community" for a review of the concern for community change on natural resources in the Wood River Valley.

In its complete state, the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 will:

- Document the full range of watershed stakeholders involved in the Collaboration and cooperative watershed management and restoration planning in the Big Wood River basin.
- Educate the community and city/county planning professionals about the status of the Big Wood River's health and function.
- Describe existing studies and plans in a relatable language, plus compile/organize them in on digitally accessible location.
- Conceptualize the impact of different development patterns and growth scenarios on water usage and riparian habitats.
- Prioritize reaches of the Big Wood River for restoration— as informed by the Phase I and II River Studies, Growth Scenario Planning and Group Development.

See the Evaluation Criteria for the Project Benefits and, as well as the Project Budget: Budget Narrative for a description of each line item related to the Salaries and Wages plus the Atlas 2.0 Production under Contractual activities.

Evaluation Criteria

Watershed Group Diversity and Geographic Scope

E.1.1.1. Sub-criterion No. A1. Watershed Group Diversity

The Wood River Collaborative includes more than seventy-five individual water users and user groups from every area of the Big Wood River subbasin (HUC 17040219)— spread across 957,495 acres south-central region of Idaho, much of which is located on public lands. See Project Location for details about character, needs and dynamics in the subbasin. Since the beginning, the WRLT has worked to include all interested stakeholders and exemplify respect for the various and sometimes opposing interests of the Collaborative's members. See Appendix C: Wood River Water Collaborative Members for a list of the entities that are regular participants in the Collaborative, organized by type of organization; as well as Appendix B: Big Wood Watershed Delivery Blocks and Affected Stakeholders for the members' general location in the subbasin.

Since its inception, the Collaborative has been predominantly focused on water monitoring, delivery and management projects. Now, the Collaborative supports the creation of the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 Working Group to focus on river restoration projects along the Big Wood corridor. Over the past nine years, the Collaborative has regularly convened to discuss and address new happenings or challenges. The group also proactively pursues water resource planning and management projects. Careful in its approach and with regard for diverse interests, the Collaborative currently operates under an informal, consensus-based model.

From the start, the inclusion of elected leaders and regulatory bodies has been instrumental in guiding the collaborative. Such representation and understanding of current and future financial, legal and political implications has given the Collaborative opportunities to gain broader insights and potential tools. The Collaborative includes stakeholders who have sat on different sides of water calls—namely between surface water users in the lower watershed and groundwater users in the upper watershed. Stakeholders from The Big and Little Wood Water Users Associations

represent the senior surface water callers. The impacted groundwater stakeholders are represented by: the municipalities, groundwater districts, homeowner associations, tourism and recreation industries, gold course managers, property managers, consultants, and small and large agricultural producers.

The conservation stakeholders are represented by several non-profit organizations, as well as state and federal agencies in government. In recent years, the Collaborative has welcomed new sustainability programs in local government and from the non-profit sector. This added capacity—of new sustainability professionals—may allow the Collaborative to diversify its purposes beyond the scope of water management, e.g. to include river restoration.

We are pleased to include letters demonstrating the support of diverse entities and organizations, see Appendix D: Letters of Support. Our goals are to continue capturing stakeholder interest by coordinating meetings, transcribing and disbursing minutes, hosting speakers and studies that are pertinent to the collaborative, and responding to individual collaborative member needs. We plan to be inclusive of other potential stakeholders, such as the Cities of Gooding, Carey, Fairfield, Richfield, and Dietrich. We will also reach out to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation staff involved with the Little Wood Reservoir, as well as the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

E.1.1.2. Sub-criterion No. A2. Geographic Scope

The current geographic scope of the Collaborative is the Big Wood River watershed in Blaine, Lincoln and Gooding Counties—including HUC 17040210: the Big Wood subbasin (area 1,460 square miles), HUC 17040221: the Little Wood subbasin (area 1,120 square miles) and HUC 17040220: the Camas Creek subbasin (area 700 square miles). The Collaborative and its members represent the full geographic scope of the watershed— from the mountains near the headwaters of the Big Wood in the northern Wood River Valley, down to the springs that feed Silver Creek in the south, and where the lower Big and Little Wood Rivers come together near Shoshone and flow into the Snake River as the Malad River. See Appendices A through C for the Big Wood River Watershed Map, Big Wood Watershed Delivery Blocks and Affected Stakeholders, and the Wood River Water Collaborative Members.

The proposed watershed restoration planning project herein limits the scope of the Collaborative to focus on the Blaine County communities located along the Big Wood River Corridor: the City of Bellevue, City of Hailey, the City of Ketchum and the unincorporated Blaine County. Because this seeks to update the original Big Wood River Atlas watershed restoration plan, the limited scope will allow the Atlas 2.0 Working Group to go into greater depth— studying unexplored dynamics of the Big Wood, analyzing zoning codes appurtenant to the municipalities along the Big Wood River corridor and prioritizing river reaches for restoration.

As always, we attempted to include the Carey community—which is located outside the geography of the Wood River Valley but inside Blaine County— in the Atlas 2.0 Working Group. However, we encountered three obstacles in doing so:

- The monetary amount needed to update and expand the geographic scope of the Big Wood River Atlas watershed restoration plan (to include the Little Wood River Basin) would've exceeded the maximum award amount and no other funds have been identified to carry out the project.

- The Collaborative representatives from the Carey community—at the City of Carey, Little Wood River Irrigation District and the Blaine Water Soil Conservation District—were happy to watch by the sidelines. While they were interested in growth scenario planning, they did not feel the need to prioritize other aspects of the project. If the grant is awarded, we will extend another invitation to include the Carey community in the growth scenario planning portion of the project.

Developing Strategies to Address Critical Watershed Needs

E.1.2.1. Sub-criterion No. B1. Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

Blaine County sits atop two principal aquifers. One being an unconfined aquifer that follows the valley floor, roughly mimicking the path of the Big Wood River from north to south. Water flows down the valley and either stays shallow or goes down into a deeper, confined aquifer south of Baseline Road in the Bellevue Triangle. The two aquifers reconnect near the community of Gannett, where the pressure of the confined aquifer pushes the water up above the ground, forming the springs and tributaries that feed Silver Creek. Whereas precipitation and snowmelt channeled through supporting tributaries feed the Big Wood, Silver Creek depends on this groundwater upwelling to maintain flows. In turn, the aquifers are recharged by stream seepage and precipitation filtering downward (Bartolino and Vincent, 2013).

As recently the early 1970s, when Idaho established a permitting system for surface water rights (IDWR, 2015), there was a general view that development and land uses did not impact the County's water supply. Now, there is evidence that environmental changes, regional growth and over-allocation have severely impacted groundwater levels over time (Ecosystem Sciences, 2023). A 2007 report prepared in collaboration with local entities and published by the US Geological Survey showed "significant declining trends" at three wells that the Survey identified as representative of the valley's groundwater system (Skinner et al., 2007). Ground water monitoring since 1975 supports those findings with a clear downward trend (Ecosystem Sciences, 2023). Population and water level trends over the 50-year period are addressed on pages 21 and 24 of the 2007 USGS report, speculating a relationship between consumptive uses and groundwater levels. The Idaho Department of Water Resource's 2022 Order Establishing Moratorium on most new appropriations declared the "surface and ground waters of the Big Wood River drainage [to be] connected" (IDWR, 2022).

An analysis of the annual streamflow volumes of the Big Wood found that it was 26% lower in 2016 than it was in 1970 (Ecosystem Sciences, 2023). Water available to the area's two principal diversion canals, which deliver a majority of the surface water used for agricultural irrigation in the south valley, was cut in half (Ecosystem Sciences, 2023). Silver Creek, the bellwether for the south county's aquifer, saw flows decline by 54% from 1975 to 2016 (Ecosystem Sciences, 2023). Both measures indicate an overall decline throughout the water system. Decreases in surface water flows and groundwater levels are interconnected, and susceptible to the pressures of climate change.

Climate change is exacerbating drought and triggering snowmelt earlier in the year. Average temperatures are steadily increasing year round (The Climate Toolbox, 2024), compromising the capacity of the region's snowpack to store water through spring and into summer. Spring runoff has and will continue to begin earlier each year, significantly reducing stream flows during the hottest months of the summer. More frequent and intense drought and wet periods further stress the ecology of the Big Wood River subbasin (USGS, 2016). Meanwhile, more efficient irrigation

methods and water delivery methods offer less aquifer recharge. Lower ground water levels throughout the aquifer have reverberated system wide.

Increased water demand, locally and regionally, further stresses local water resources. Agriculture has felt the pressures of diminished water resources in recent years (Jones, 2020). Agricultural uses account for almost 74% of water use across the Big and Little Wood Drainage in Water District 37. In 2016 they accounted for 125,000 of 169,687 acre-feet in 2016, some 40.7 billion gallons (Blaine County, 2022). Domestic wells were the second biggest user, consuming 24,907 acre-feet that same year; municipalities used 11,000; golf courses used 8,380; and the resort's snowmaking used 400 (Blaine County, 2022).

The population of Blaine County depends on groundwater for domestic and public supply, from both privately-owned and municipal-supply wells. In comparison, irrigation for local agriculture is largely dependent on surface water supplies. The lower watershed downstream of Bellevue (known as the Bellevue Triangle) is mostly farms and ranches irrigated by groundwater and diverted surface water. Periodic changes in discharge for the Big Wood River are directly impacted by surface and groundwater withdrawal for irrigation in the downstream reaches. Water use for irrigation typically occurs during the growing season between May and September, during which time discharge in the southwestern part of the watershed is diminished and portions of the river downstream of Bellevue are depleted.

Blaine County's community and built environment are invariably connected to the conditions of the surrounding sagebrush steppe, forests and waterways. Natural hazards, posed by wildfires, avalanches, and floods don't heed jurisdictional boundaries. While a variety of local entities respond to natural disasters, coordinated and proactive planning across the community and region can further mitigate risks. Coalitions of conservation, restoration and outdoor recreation groups engage federal and state agencies to steward open spaces. Managing development in the Wildland-Urban Interface becomes especially critical as climate change pushes us into new fire regimes and unpredictable flooding events (Mowery et al., 2019).

Unlike many other states that take active roles in managing and moderating growth, Idaho does not have a state agency dedicated to growth management. Passed in 1975, Idaho's Local Land Use Planning Act requires cities and counties to draft their own comprehensive plans to guide development but offers little in the way of statewide support or technical assistance for sustainable growth (Witt and Nemnich, 2011). As such, interjurisdictional cooperation is essential to shaping responsible, smart growth— to conserve the vibrant habitats and precious natural resources of our watersheds (Piro et a., 2017).

E.1.2.2. Sub-criterion No. B2. Project Benefits

Task B: Phase I and II River Study Benefits

Overall, the integration of recently explored and new data from Phase 1 and Phase II River Studies into the Atlas 2.0 update will better prepare the Collaborative members to delegate responsibilities and design shovel-ready restoration projects. These additional data sources are needed to prioritize and optimize restoration work, to maximize the benefit of the Collaborative's work. Restoration projects will improve riparian habitats, mitigate flood risks and support the function of the Big Wood and unconfined aquifer—both of which rely on healthy flows and water levels (Blaine County, 2020). Beyond the circle of professionals involved in the

Collaborative, the River Studies will provide the wider community with an educational opportunity to understand the functioning of the Big Wood.

Task B: Growth Scenario Planning Benefits

Through growth scenario planning, people are able to link water usage quantities and habitat impacts to actual development types and patterns. Conceptualizing this link— the impact of different development types or patterns on natural resources and habitats— is important to justifying and encouraging less conventional but more environmentally resilient and sustainable zoning regulations. Growth scenario planning will give sustainability ambassadors throughout the valley the information that they need to propel climate action— whether it be the revamp of a zoning tool like the County's Transfer of Development Rights program (which could give property owners an attractive mechanism by which they can divorce development rights from parcels in the floodplain) or incentive programs for water reclamation, reuse and conservation on-site. Furthermore, the data-driven growth scenarios will inform watershed restoration planning about where the potential of development and risk to riparian habitats is greatest along the Big Wood River corridor.

Task A: Group Development Benefits

A contract for professional services experienced in conflict resolution, natural resource management and organizational infrastructure will facilitate the discussion of roles, delegation of responsibilities and prioritization of river reaches and restoration projects amongst the Collaborative members. The intended benefit is to maximize the effectiveness of fiscal resources and staff time dedicated to restoration projects. Instead of five staff people from Collaborative member entities exploring funding to carry out restoration on the same reach of the Big Wood, the Collaborative may increase its positive impact if we coordinate complementary projects across different reaches of the river.

Task B: Producing the Update, "Big Wood River Atlas 2.0" Benefits

Just as the original Big Wood River Atlas acts as a go-to resource, the Atlas 2.0 may serve as a center of knowledge concerning the health and importance of the Big Wood River to the community. The added river studies, context of growth scenario planning and group development will enable the Atlas 2.0 to serve as a roadmap to meeting long-term needs in the Big Wood River subasin. Specifically, it will better prepare and position members of the Collaborative:

- to design shovel-ready projects;
- to secure competitive grant funding, as well as local philanthropic, for restoration projects;
- to navigate barriers to implementation, via greater delegation of responsibilities; and
- to inspire the larger community to support restoration endeavors, even if it requires new and different zoning code regulations.

Readiness to Proceed

Regularly reporting to the Collaborative and closely working with the Atlas 2.0 Working Group, the following WRLT Staff will carry out Implementation per the following Timeline/Checklist:

- <u>September - December 2025:</u>

  - Announce the grant award to the Wood River Water Collaborative and proposed Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 working group (WRLT River and Community Planning Programs).
  - Review project scope and implementation timeline with the Collaborative and Atlas 2.0 working group (WRLT River Program).
  - Review existing data sources (Phase I Studies) with the Atlas 2.0 working group (WRLT River Program).
  - Engage the Collaborative and Atlas 2.0 working group to recommend Phase II Studies (WRLT River Program).
  - Present Phase II Studies list and Request for Proposals to the Collaborative (WRLT River Program).
  - Contract for services of the Phase II Studies (WRLT River Program).
  - Contract for services of Growth Scenario Planning (WRLT Community Planning Program).
- January - June 2026
  - Engage the Atlas 2.0 Working Group and wider Collaborative in monitoring the methodology, progress and milestones of Phase II Studies and Growth Scenario Planning data analyses, over the course of at least six meetings (WRLT River and Community Planning Programs).
- June - September 2026
  - Engage the wider Wood River Valley community in at least three Growth Scenario Planning workshops and presentation events (WRLT Community Planning Program).
  - Collect survey data from at least 2,000 respondents about the Growth Scenario Planning findings and takeaways, including but not limited to the public's support for environmentally resilient and sustainable zoning regulations and for protecting critical and sensitive areas along the Big Wood River corridor. (WRLT Community Planning Program).
  - Contract for services of the production of the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 report (WRLT River Program).
- September - December 2026
  - Engage the Atlas 2.0 working group to approve a document structure for the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 report and present to the Collaborative (WRLT River Program).
  - Review and monitor the synthesis of Phase I and II Studies, alongside the Growth Scenario Planning findings and survey results, for the creation of the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 report (WRLT River and Community Planning Programs).
  - Present the progress of the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 production to the wider Collaborative (WRLT River and Community Planning Programs).
  - Contract for Conflict Resolution services (WRLT River Program).

- January - June 2027
    - Create and disseminate a survey to guide Conflict Resolution amongst the Collaborative (WRLT River and Community Planning Programs).
    - Engage in Conflict Resolution, including discussion of roles, delegation of responsibilities and prioritization of river reaches and restoration projects amongst the Collaborative (WRLT River and Community Planning Programs).
    - Review first, second and third/final draft of the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 watershed restoration plan (WRLT River and Community Planning Programs).
- June - September 2027
    - Publish the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 watershed restoration plan, including delegation of roles, responsibilities and reach and project prioritization (WRLT River and Community Planning Programs).
    - Present the published Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 watershed restoration plan to the municipal governments within Blaine County and the regulatory entities involved in water management (WRLT River and Community Planning Programs).

Presidential and Department of the Interior Priorities

What do rising temperatures mean for us in the Wood River Valley? Year after year, the rising temperatures of climate change mean that the capacity of our annual snowpack to store water, through spring and into summer, decreases. Spring runoff has and will continue to begin earlier each year, significantly reducing stream flows during the hottest months of the year. More frequent and intense drought and wet periods further stress the ecology of the Big Wood River subbasin. Plus, the increased water demand associated with irrigating landscaping on large residential lots and sprawling subdivisions decreases the water available to sustain wildlife habitats.

E.1.4.1. Climate Change

The Department of Interior's (DOI) Climate Action Plan provides a framework of implementation strategies to advance several climate adaption themes. Updating this the Bigwood River Atlas watershed restoration plan and advancing the group's position to carry-out river restoration projects closely aligns with Action 1; promote climate resilient lands, water, and cultural resources. With the Big Wood River being over 40% disconnected from its floodplain due to development of homes and other infrastructure, residents of the Wood River Valley have seen increased flooding impacts over the last few decades and the development within the floodplain and riparian areas of the Big Wood River have severely degraded fish and wildlife habitat and water quality despite ongoing efforts to regulate these highly sensitive areas.

The Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 update will convey the importance of floodplain connectivity via new data sources and concrete, relatable growth scenario planning. Most importantly, Task A: Group Development Activities of the Wood River Water Collaborative— where a diversity of people, oftentimes with opposing interests, come together to discover and pursue mutually beneficial solutions—lays the groundwork for sustainable change. Engagement amongst a diversity of people, through democratic systems, is as central to sustainability as the hard science of sequestering carbon from the atmosphere or mitigating emissions at their source.

Just as the DOI's Climate Action Plan will use the best available science to inform climate adaption strategies, the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 will use recently completed and new scientific studies (Phase I and II River Studies) and land use analyses (via Growth Scenario Planning) to update the existing watershed restoration plan. With an eye towards the protection and management of natural resources that are key to the healthy habitats and thriving wildlands in our service area, the Land Trust is poised to advance solutions with our community partners– regionally and across jurisdictions. Investment in cooperative watershed management today will pay off in the future.

E.1.4.2. Benefits to Disadvantaged, Underserved, and Tribal Communities

The county's southern cities are not only younger but also more diverse, supporting a large and growing Latino population. In 2023, 45.8% of students in Blaine County School District were Hispanic or Latino; 50.5% were white.231 Carey, the county's youngest community, is already majority Latino.232 Compare that to the whole county, where 23.7% of people identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 73.2% said they were white (US Census Bureau, 2022).

Ketchum and Sun Valley, the cities with the highest housing costs, have median ages of 51 and 64 respectively (ACS, 2022). The population skews younger moving south: 41 in Hailey; 37 in Bellevue and 30 in Carey (ACS, 2022). Overall, Blaine County's median age rose from 38.8 in 2009 to 45.9 in 2023. From 2021 to 2022, Blaine County had the joint highest jump in median age of any county in the country (US Census Bureau, 2023). The shift in median age is not solely attributed to growth but also population change (Guckes, 2022). People have migrated out of the County, and the people moving in are significantly older and wealthier (Evans, 2021; SVED, 2023).

With population change, the County has grown increasingly racially segregated. Based on the U.S. Census Bureau's racial dissimilarity index, Blaine County is the second most segregated county in Idaho (FRED, 2024). To achieve integration in neighborhoods and cities throughout the County, so that "each neighborhood's racial/ethnic composition [would] match that of the larger area" (Courtright, 2020) or County, nearly 40% of residents would have to move census tracts (FRED, 2024).

Zooming out, the picture is one of a county with stark disparities– a county that is home to extreme wealth, as well as to a working class struggling to keep pace with the high cost of living. The United Way found that, while Blaine County's median household income was higher than Idaho's average, 41% of households here can't afford the basic cost of living in the area (United for ALICE, 2024). In 2018, the nonprofit Economic Policy Institute announced Blaine County to be the most unequal county in Idaho, with the top 1% of earners making on average 46.8 times more than the bottom 99% (EPI, 2024). That coefficient makes Blaine the 27th most unequal county in the United States. Looking at other resort mountain towns– Teton County, Wyoming is the most unequal in the country, where the 1% make 142.2 times more than the bottom 99% (EPI, 2024). Only three other mountain resort town counties experience greater inequality than Blaine County– two in Colorado and one in New Hampshire (EPI, 2024).

Benefits to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe

The indigenous tribal people of the Wood River Valley are the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe (SBT). Historical records show the SBT used the Wood River Valley as gathering and trading place

among tribal members and as a route to harvest salmon and steelhead from the Upper Salmon River basin. In 2017 the SBT developed a Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan which included the Big Wood River subbasin. Page 18 describes how modeled results show an increase in stream temperatures and further states "Projected increases in temperature as well as shifts in precipitation and associated hydrological changes will all affect the species and resources that the Tribes care about" (Petersen, et al., 2017).

The Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 will advise how to best abate these temperature issues—with updated science, growth scenario planning to protect the floodplain from development and restoration project prioritization. The restoration projects prioritized by the Atlas 2.0, for example, could promote riparian buffers and reconnect floodplains that will result in groundwater recharge and allow the aquifer to increase flows and decrease water temperatures; or, advance fish passage projects. The Wood River Water Collaborative will continue to heed the recommendation of the SBT's Climate Change Assessment and Adaptation Plan, and the WRLT will continue to invite the SBT to participate in the Collaborative's activities.

Project Budget

Table 1 – Summary of Non-Federal and Federal Funding Sources

FUNDING SOURCES	AMOUNT
Non-Federal Entities	
1. N/A	$ 0.00
2. N/A	$ 0.00
3. N/A	$ 0.00
Non-Federal Subtotal	$ 0.00
REQUESTED RECLAMATION FUNDING	**$199, 997.80**

Table 2 – Budget Proposal

Budget Item Description	Computation		Unit	Total Cost
	$/Unit	Quantity		
Salaries and Wages				**$ 40,150.00**
River Program Director	$ 41.00	350	Hours	$ 14,350.00
Community Planning Director	$ 38.00	385	Hours	$ 14,630.00
Community Planning Assistant	$ 25.00	270	Hours	$ 6,750.00
Office Administrator	$ 34.00	130	Hours	$ 4,420.00
Fringe Benefits				**$ 12,848.00**
Full-time Employees	$ 0.32	per dollar of total Salary and Wages		$ 12,848.00
Contractual / Construction				**$ 141,700.00**
Phase II River Studies				*$ 30,000.00*
Phase II Study: Geomorphic Change Mapping	$ 15,000.00	1	LS	$ 15,000.00
Phase II Study: Hydraulic Modeling	$ 15,000.00	1	LS	$ 15,000.00
Growth Scenario Planning				*$ 56,000.00*
Land Use Analysis & Mapping	$ 25,000.00	1	LS	*$ 25,000.00*
Growth Scenario Visualization	$ 15,000.00	1	LS	$ 15,000.00
Water Use Analysis	$ 10,000.00	1	LS	$ 10,000.00
Community Survey	$ 4,000.00	1	LS	$ 4,000.00
Print and Digital Communications	$ 2,000.00	1	LS	$ 2,000.00
Atlas 2.0 Production				*$ 40,700.00*
Working Group Participation	$ 225.00	40	Hours	$ 9,000.00
Figures and Maps	$ 8,000.00	1	LS	$ 8,000.00
Writing and Editing Services	$ 8,000.00	1	LS	$ 8,000.00
Graphic Design Services	$ 10,000.00	1	LS	$ 10,000.00
Print and Digital Communications	$ 5,700.00	1	LS	$ 5,700.00
Watershed Group Development				$ 15,000.00
Conflict Resolution and Mediation	$ 15,000.00	1	LS	$ 15,000.00
Third-Party Contributions				**$ -**
Other				**$ -**
Total Direct Costs				**$ 194,698.00**
Indirect Costs (10% of Modified Total Direct Cost)				**$ 5,299.80**
Total Estimated Project Costs				**$ 199,997.80**

Budget Narrative

Salaries and Wages

As the fiscal agent for this grant, the staff of WRLT is assuming the role of administration, tracking, and reporting on the activities and tasks listed in this application. A bulk of the staff time will be devoted to facilitation of the collaborative, contract management, technical support, and plan development. The River Program Director will play the lead role in overseeing Atlas 2.0 development, contract and contractor coordination, and provide technical support to the Atlas 2.0 working group. The Community Planning Director and Assistant will conduct the growth scenario planning, provide the main link to previous planning efforts, and be the key facilitator of the Atlas 2.0 Working Group and larger Collaborative. The Office Administrator will process contractor invoices and payments for this project, ensure compliance with grant assurances, track time reporting for personnel working on the project to support agreement documentation, and provide financial information for federal reporting requirements.

Fringe Benefits

Fringe benefits for WRLT staff include such costs as social security taxes, health insurance, dental insurance, employer match for retirement contributions, and worker's compensation insurance. The costs of all of the fringe benefits allocated to employees are then divided by total payroll to arrive at a benefit rate.

Personnel

Cory McCaffrey, River Program Director, has a Master's degree in Environmental Science with a focus on aquatic ecology and has six years of experience working in river restoration and collaborative master planning.

Cece Osborn, Community Planning Director, has a Graduate Certificate in Sustainable Transportation: Planning & Livable Communities. With 5 years of experience in regional and city planning, and a passion for sustainability projects.

Erin Dorr, Office Administrator, has a Bachelor's Degree in Recreational Studies, and has seventeen years of administrative and operational experience across disciplines.

TBD, Community Planning Assistant. The forthcoming community planning assistant will support the Community Planning ongoing activities, special projects and community engagement with research and written communications.

Travel

No travel will be necessary.

Equipment

The purchase of equipment will not be necessary.

Materials and Supplies

Materials and Supplies will be part of the contracted portion of the project and documented as required.

Contractual

Phase II River Studies

Geomorphic Change Mapping and Hydraulic Modeling were suggested by the Collaborative as the priority data pieces needed to prioritize river reaches for restoration projects. That said, these recommendations will be confirmed with the Atlas 2.0 Working Group.

Growth Scenario Planning

Contracts for Land Use Analysis & Mapping, Growth Scenario Visualization, Water Use Analysis, Community Survey, and Print and Digital Communications will analyze zoning scenarios, visualize findings, estimate impacts to the watershed, and engage the wider community in process.

Atlas 2.0 Production

Contracts for Working Group Participation, Figures and Maps, Writing and Editing Services, Graphic Design Services, and Print and Digital Communications will synthesize the various components of the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 into one cohesive document.

Watershed Group Development

A contract for Conflict Resolution and Mediation will support the Collaborative group, especially new members, to engage in reach prioritization and discuss delegating responsibilities to work complementarily and maximize the benefit of the Collaborative's collective impact.

Third-Party In-Kind Contributions

Members of the Collaborative were not prepared to agree to specific in-kind contributions more than a year in advance of the project start date. However, they were generally willing to offer and discuss specific in-kind contributions when the grant is awarded.

Environmental and Regulatory Compliance Costs

None.

Other Expenses

None.

Indirect Costs

The budget includes a *de minimus* rate of 10% for indirect costs. We do not have a federally negotiated indirect rate and will use the allowable *de minimus* rate.

Other Information

Environmental and Cultural Resources Compliance

As this is a planning grant, WRLT and associated contractors will not engage in monitoring, measuring or fieldwork activities utilizing these grant funds. These endeavors will be undertaken under separate funding resources. WRLT will research and summarize environmental compliance for project concepts identified in the Plan.

Required Permits or Approvals

WRLT does not intend to complete work under this grant that requires permits or formal approvals but will research and summarize permitting and approval requirements for project concepts.

Overlap or Duplication of Effort Statement

A member of the Wood River Water Collaborative, Project Big Wood, is gathering pre-planning data to inform a fish habitat suitability index and expects to publish the data in Spring 2025. The project proposed herein will not duplicate Project Big Wood's work, rather it will integrate their findings into the Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 watershed restoration plan. Project Big Wood's habitat suitability index is one of many data sources intended to inform the Atlas 2.0. The Atlas 2.0 Working Group intends to engage the wider Collaborative in identifying and filling additional data gaps for the completion of Big Wood River Atlas 2.0 watershed restoration plan.

No portion of the proposed Phase 1 CWMP project will overlap with or be duplicative of other active or anticipated proposals or projects in terms of activities, costs or commitment of key personnel.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement

At the time of this submission, there are no actual or perceived conflicts of interest. WRLT has internal controls in place to identify, disclose, and mitigate or eliminate identified conflicts of interest. Wood River Land Trust will notify the Financial Assistance Officer in writing of any conflicts of interest that may arise during the life of the award, including those that have been reported by any contractors.

Uniform Audit Reporting Statement

Wood River Land Trust was not required to submit a Single Audit Report for the most recently closed fiscal year.

SF-LLL: Disclosure of Lobbying Activities

WRLT will not use funds from this grant agreement for lobbying activities.

Letters of Support

Please see the addendum for ten letters of support from the proposed Atlas 2.0 Working Group, plus other members of the Wood River Water Collaborative.

Official Resolution

Wood River Land Trust will adopt an official resolution during a special board Meeting in September, 2024. This resolution will be emailed to bor-sha-fafoa@usbr.gov before October 3, 2024

Unique Entity Identifier

E7ZGCF93ACJ5