

Lower Kootenai River Watershed Proposal

Strengths of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Proposal

Landscape

The Lower Kootenai River Watershed Restoration proposal area encompasses 800,000 acres in Boundary County, including more than 400,000 acres of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests. This unique area extends from the high crest of the rugged Selkirk Mountains to the Cabinet and Purcell Mountains that straddle Idaho and Montana. It is renowned for its remote forest settings and its steep, high-relief watersheds that drain out of the Selkirks into the low elevation Kootenai River Valley, and then flow north toward Kootenay Lake in Canada.



Past management and fire suppression, coupled with disease, insect infestations and human impacts have altered the landscape, threatening ecological health and resiliency. The proposal recognizes current conditions and identifies the critical path toward restoring the landscape.

Implementation of the proposal will build upon past successes to restore ecosystem function and ensure the quality of the watershed, wildlife habitat and ecological resiliency for future generations.

The Context of Restoration

The need for holistic ecological restoration across all lands in the lower Kootenai River watershed has been evident for years. Over the past decade numerous agencies and communities, the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho and non-governmental organizations have worked together to undertake joint and individual restoration projects to address water quality and wildlife habitat issues, community wildfire protection and forest restoration in the area. These efforts have formed a strong foundation for future work, but much remains to be done. Throughout the proposal area opportunities exist to improve watershed function, enhance wildlife habitat and restore ecological function in our forests.

The current conditions discussed in the proposal are based on the best available science, including recent landscape scale assessments. Because the proposal is grounded in science, it benefits from a clear understanding of the priorities on the landscape and the most effective methods for achieving the desired future conditions.

The Strength of the Strategy and Proposed Treatments

The greatest strength of the Lower Kootenai River Watershed Proposal is in its incorporation of a multitude of science based assessments, plans and strategies to develop a plan of action that is targeted on the greatest ecological restoration needs in the project area. The strategy begins with the Idaho Statewide Forest Resources Assessment and adds input from the Forest Service's Northern Region Integrated Resource and Protection Strategy, the Idaho Panhandle National Forests Draft Land Management Plan, Kootenai River & Moyie River Subbasin Assessments and TMDLs and the Rocky Mountain Research Station's Climate Change research program. All of these assessments and plans identify north Idaho as a high priority for restoration and provide the foundation for effective treatments that enhance ecosystem function and resiliency. Based on this science the proposal's strategy ensures balance between social and ecological needs such as watershed and ecosystem health, wildfire use and protection, recreation and public access and economic sustainability for local communities.

The restoration strategy outlined in this proposal is science based, restoration focused, collaboratively developed and takes advantage of ongoing and planned aquatic and vegetative treatments across all land ownerships.

This proposal also recognizes the need for an effective means for carrying out its goals and builds on the past decade of KVRI collaboration and restoration activities accomplished on all lands throughout the lower Kootenai River watershed. The treatment activities proposed here will improve water quality and wildlife habitat, bring economic opportunity to local communities, improve landscape resiliency to severe wildfire, insects and disease and minimize the effects of climate change. The restoration strategy outlined in this proposal is consistent with the management vision shared by the Secretary of Agriculture and the Chief of the Forest Service because it is science based, restoration focused, collaboratively developed and takes advantage of ongoing and planned aquatic and vegetative treatments across all land ownerships.

The Strength of Collaboration

The Kootenai Valley was built by independent people who forged a living from the vast natural resources they found in the area. However, in the recent past, local industry began to fail as did ecological and forest health. To respond to these challenges, in 2001 the Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative (KVRI) was formed under a joint powers agreement between the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, Boundary County, ID and the City of Bonners Ferry, ID. KVRI’s mission is to help improve coordination, integration and implementation of existing local, state and federal programs that can effectively maintain, enhance and restore the social, cultural and natural resource bases in the broader community.

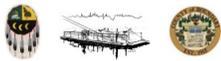


KVRI’s experience and success at bringing together diverse viewpoints on a wide variety of restoration projects is what makes the collaboration for this proposal so strong. Together with its partners, KVRI has worked for over ten years throughout the landscape addressing grizzly bear conservation, fisheries recovery, water quality, wetlands and riparian conservation, wildfire protection and forest restoration. This broad view of ecological health makes KVRI one of the first collaborative groups in the nation to embrace an “all lands” approach, and the best possible partner for the Forest Service on this proposal.

The Strength of the Funding Plan

The funding plan for the proposal will facilitate efficient use of funds, ensuring every dollar is put to its best use. Effective monitoring is critical to the success of the proposal and the proposed 8-10% of funding dedicated toward monitoring will allow the collaborative and the Idaho Panhandle National Forests to build on current multi-party monitoring successes. Both the Idaho Panhandle National Forests and the KVRI have committed to providing 50% of the funding necessary to implement this proposal based on the anticipated use of stewardship contracting wherever feasible. Funds generated from proposed management activities will be used to meet resource needs and to implement watershed restoration, wildlife habitat enhancement and recreational improvements. The KVRI and the Idaho Panhandle National Forests Forest Supervisor will work together to determine the appropriate levels of annual funding needed to implement the restoration activities in the proposal and ensure that all funding is utilized in the most effective manner available.

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