

23. BIG WOOD RIVER DRAINAGE

A. Overview

The Wood River basin has a drainage area of over 2,990 square miles. Major drainages in the Wood River system are the Big Wood and Little Wood rivers. At its lower end, the Big Wood River is also known as Malad River. Flows from the Wood River drainage are controlled for irrigation and flood control by four major reservoirs: Magic, Little Wood River, Fish Creek and Mormon. Approximately 144,000 acres are irrigated from reservoir storage and other diversions. Hydroelectric power facilities are currently in operation at Magic Dam, Little Wood River Dam, the confluence of the Big Wood and Little Wood rivers, the Little Wood near Shoshone, Malad River upstream of the Malad George State Park, and the Malad River dams.

This drainage contains the most productive trout streams, lake and reservoir habitat in south central Idaho. Nearly all the major rivers, streams, lakes, reservoirs and ponds are suitable for trout. Rainbow trout are the most important game fish species in the drainage, but the lower Little Wood River and Silver Creek support excellent brown trout populations, and portions of the drainage sustain high populations of brook trout. Brown trout have established wild populations in the Big Wood River in the section from the backwaters of Magic Reservoir to about Stanton Crossing, and significant and steadily increasing numbers of brown trout are now found in the reservoir. The trout fisheries in the reservoirs are largely dependent on annual plantings of hatchery fish, although Magic and Little Wood River reservoirs do contain some wild trout. Trout fisheries in the larger reservoirs are normally maintained by fingerling planting but receive catchable plants following droughts or heavy drawdown periods. Wild trout populations varying from fair to excellent are found in most of the streams in the drainage. Excellent populations of wild trophy rainbow trout are found in the Big Wood River between Magic Dam and the Richfield Canal in good water years; and in Silver Creek and its main tributaries. During good water years, trophy rainbow trout are produced in Richfield Canal. The Big Wood River from Hailey to Ketchum produces trophy rainbow trout with restrictive fishing rules. Both wild and hatchery brown trout (fry and fingerling plants) reach trophy size in the lower Little Wood River and Silver Creek. Wild trout populations are supplemented with catchable rainbow trout in portions of several heavily fished streams. Loss of habitat from floodplain development, irrigation diversions, livestock grazing, and hydropower development has negatively impacted fish populations.

Good populations of warmwater game fish are found in many waters of the Wood River drainage, mainly in reservoirs, lakes and ponds. The principal warmwater fish species present are yellow perch, bluegill, largemouth and smallmouth bass. Tiger muskie are in Dog Creek Reservoir.

Angler pressure is very high in portions of the drainage. One of the most intensely fished stream sections in the area is the Big Wood River between Gimlet and the mouth of Prairie Creek. An increasing demand by anglers for more trophy fisheries has led to establishing more restrictive regulations on the Big Wood River and Silver Creek. Magic Reservoir is the largest reservoir in the drainage and receives the highest angler pressure of any water in the Magic Valley Region.

There are 16 alpine lakes that support fish in this drainage. These lakes are all relatively productive and most of them support high quality rainbow trout and cutthroat trout angling. The lakes are normally stocked by fixed wing aircraft every third year. Arctic grayling have been stocked in one alpine lake in the drainage and have done very well. Baker Lake is managed with a trophy trout rule to provide anglers with the opportunity to have a quality alpine lake fishery.

B. Objectives and Programs

1. Objective: Maintain existing and improve degraded stream habitats in the Big and Little Wood river drainages.

Program: Work closely with county planning and zoning agencies and IDWR to prevent channel and riparian degradation and development in natural flood plains.

Program: Work with land management agencies and livestock owners to implement grazing strategies, which will allow for the recovery of riparian systems along streams.

2. Objective: Reestablish stream connectivity between the upper Big Wood River and Magic Reservoir in good water years to take advantage of the surplus wild trout production in the river.

Program: Work with IDWR, water rights holders and interest members of the public to acquire sufficient water rights from willing sellers to maintain flows between Glendale Diversion and Stanton Crossing during average or better water years. If flows are acquired, implement best methods of diverting lost production in irrigation diversions into the river and Magic Reservoir.

3. Objective: Improve returns of hatchery fish and reduce impacts on wild trout populations in streams.

Program: Work with the USFS and the public to develop new fish out ponds and improve conditions on existing ponds in high use areas of the upper Big Wood River drainage.

4. Objective: Improve fish habitat and riparian ecosystem in the Little Wood River between Carey and Shoshone.

Program: Work with the Little Wood River Irrigation District on the development of an irrigation system which would provide flows in the river between Carey and Silver Creek in good water years.

Program: Work with state and federal agencies, irrigation districts and landowners on developing wetlands on irrigation returns to improve water quality in irrigation returns.

Program: Work with BLM and the public on reestablishing native riparian shrubs and trees along the Little Wood River between Silver Creek and Richfield to reduce water temperatures during summer months.

5. Objective: Improve reservoir fishing opportunity for both quality and harvest

fisheries.

Program: Investigate the desirability and feasibility of reducing smartweed in Mormon Reservoir to improve boating access.

Program: Continue to evaluate rainbow trout stocking program in Mormon Reservoir to determine effects of stocking timing and fish size on survival from bird predation. Also evaluate yellow perch population recovery.

Program: Investigate the feasibility of assisting in the rebuilding Fish Creek Reservoir Dam in exchange for a minimum pool.

Program: Work with State and Federal agencies, irrigation districts, and landowners to optimize water management in reservoirs to benefit the resident fisheries.

Drainage: BIG WOOD RIVER					
Water	Miles/acre	Fishery			Management Direction
		Type	Species Present	Management	
Big Wood (Malad) River from mouth to I-84 Bridge	3/	Mixed	Rainbow trout Smallmouth bass	Wild General	Wild trout populations. Maintain catch rates at 0.7 fish/hour. Evaluate population impacts of increased fish passage at hydroelectric facilities. Work with Idaho Power Company on fish passage provisions as per licensing.
Big Wood River from I-84 Bridge to Richfield Canal Diversion	60/	Mixed	Rainbow trout Smallmouth bass	General	Evaluate potential of hydro mitigation ponds for put-and-take fishery. Maintain smallmouth bass fishery.
Big Wood River from Richfield Canal diversion upstream to Magic Dam	3/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout	Quality	Maintain trophy size of fish and achieve catch rates of 0.7 fish/hour. Change management if fishery not maintained under current conditions. Work to maintain minimum flow for fish survival and prevent entrainment loss.
Big Wood River from Magic Reservoir upstream to Glendale diversion	14/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout Brook trout	General	Establish catch rate goals based on ability to get year-round water. Evaluate angling impact to spawning brown trout.
Big Wood River from Glendale diversion upstream to Mile 122 Bridge on Highway 75	12/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Mountain whitefish Brook trout	Quality	Improve habitat and river stability using native woody material where possible. Oppose further flood plain development. Catch rate goal of 1.0 fish/hour.
Big Wood River from Mile 122 Bridge on Highway 75 upstream to mouth of North Fork	14/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Mountain whitefish Brook trout	Trophy	Wild trout water, catch-and-release. Improve habitat and river stability using native woody material where possible. Oppose further floodplain development. Maintain catch rate 1.0 fish/hour.
Big Wood River from mouth of North Fork to headwaters	18/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout Mountain whitefish	Put-and-take trout	Yield fishery for wild and hatchery trout and mountain whitefish. Maintain catch rate of 0.7 fish/hour..
Trail Creek mouth to Wilson Creek	9/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout	Put-and-take trout	Stock with catchable rainbow trout to provide catch rates of 0.7 fish/hour. Work to provide fish passage for Big Wood River spawners. Investigate possibility of developing off river ponds for put-and-take stocking.
Warm Springs Creek from mouth to Rooks Creek campground	11/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout	Put-and-take trout	Stock with catchable rainbow trout to provide catch rates of 0.7 fish/hour. Evaluate potential of wild trout only status. Investigate possibility of developing off river ponds for put-and-take stocking.
Richfield Canal	14/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	General	Stock fish in low water years to provide 0.5 fish/hour. Seek year-round flow in canal to maintain fishery.
Little Wood River from mouth	18/	Warmwater	Smallmouth bass	General	Maintain as smallmouth bass fishery.

to Shoshone (Milner-Gooding Canal)					
Little Wood River from Shoshone to Dietrich diversion dam	17/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout	Put-and-take trout	Stock hatchery rainbow trout in potential high use areas to increase opportunity. Work to provide year-round flows and fish passage for this reach.
Little Wood River from Dietrich diversion dam to downstream boundary of Bear Track Williams State Recreation Area	10/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout	General	Brown and rainbow trout fishery with catch rate of 0.5 trout/hour. Make supplemental plantings of sterile rainbow trout and/or brown trout as needed and evaluate. Develop habitat improvement program in conjunction with BLM.
Little Wood River through Bear Track Williams State Recreation Area	3/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout	Trophy	Quality brown and rainbow trout fishery with catch rate of 0.5 fish/hour. Fly fishing only, catch-and-release basis as an access stipulation. Improve riparian conditions. Stock catchable rainbow or brown trout as needed.
Little Wood River from upper boundary Bear Track Williams State Recreation Area to mouth of Silver Creek	4/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout	General	Brown and rainbow trout fishery with catch rate of 0.7 fish/hour. Develop improvement program in conjunction habitat with BLM. Stock catchable rainbow or brown trout as needed.
Little Wood River from mouth of Silver Creek to canal diversions north of Carey	13/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout	General	Support proposed instream flow through area to develop fishery.
Little Wood River from canal diversions to dam	3/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout	Put-and-take trout	Stock hatchery rainbow trout to provide fishery and evaluate. Work for year-round flow downstream to diversions.
Little Wood River from Little Wood Reservoir upstream to second bridge	2/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	Put-and-take trout	Continue stocking program in high use area at campground.
Little Wood River from second bridge above Little Wood Reservoir to headwaters	20/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout	Wild	Maintain wild trout fishery with catch rates of 0.7 fish/hour.
Silver Creek from mouth upstream to county road bridge near Picabo	14/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout	Wild General	Wild trout fishery with average catch rate of 0.7 fish/hour. Maintain or improve rainbow trout population. Improve riparian habitat. Work to acquire additional public access.
Silver Creek from county road bridge north of Picabo to Highway 20 Bridge at Milepost 187	6/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout Mountain whitefish	Quality	Catch rate of 1.0 fish/hour. Improve riparian habitat. Work to acquire additional public access. Implement long-term monitoring program. Evaluate salmonid species composition and manage accordingly. Work with Federal and State agencies and landowners to improve fish habitat.
Silver Creek and tributaries upstream of Highway 20	8.5/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	Trophy	Catch-and-release. Fly fishing only on Nature Conservancy as access stipulation. Maintain catch rate of 1.0 fish/hour. Implement long-term

Bridge at Milepost 187 Bridge and Sullivan Lake within Nature Conservancy property			Brown trout Mountain whitefish		monitoring program. Evaluate salmonid species composition and manage accordingly. Work with Federal and State agencies and landowners to improve fish habitat.
Stalker Creek from public fishing portion of Nature Conservancy property upstream (including tributaries)	10/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout Brown trout	Wild	Catch rates of 0.7 fish/hour. Inform landowners/developers of need for maintaining habitat.
Loving Creek, from Nature Conservancy boundary upstream to headwaters, except Hayspur Hatchery grounds	3/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout Brown trout	Wild	Maintain catch rate of 0.7 fish/hour.
Loving Creek, (Butte Creek) Hayspur Hatchery grounds	1/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout Brook trout	Trophy	Maintain habitat for trophy fishery in new stream channel. Catch rates of 1.0 fish/hour.
Gavers Lagoon	/1	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	Put-and-take trout	Stock with catchable rainbow trout and occasional broodstock culls. Provide catch rate of 1.0 fish/hour.
Grove Creek	5/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout Brown trout	Wild	Catch rate of 0.7 fish/hour.
Camas Creek	50/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout	Wild	Investigate potential for fishery development. Improve habitat where feasible to increase carrying capacity.
All other streams in Big Wood River drainage	265/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout Brown trout	Wild	Maintain or improve existing habitat to increase carrying capacity for resident fish and spawning and rearing of migratory fish. Where habitat is suitable, 0.7 fish/hour.
Dog Creek Reservoir	/95	Mixed	Largemouth bass Bluegill Rainbow trout Channel catfish Yellow perch Tiger muskie Brown bullhead	General Trophy	Supplement warmwater fishery with put-and-take rainbow trout fishery in winter months. Continue use of tiger muskie to utilize forage species. Investigate use of water level management to control vegetation and carp reproduction.
Thorn Creek Reservoir	/126	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	General	Cooperate with BLM to improve carryover of water and fish in low water years. Catch rate of 0.7 fish/hour. Work to enhance boat access.

Magic Reservoir	/3,776	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout Yellow perch	General	Emphasize rainbow trout fishery with large annual fingerling rainbow trout stockings and limited catchable rainbow trout stockings after extreme drawdown. Maintain overall catch rate of 1.0 trout/hour on opening weekend of general season and 0.5 trout/hour through remainder of season. Consider habitat enhancement projects to improve yellow perch spawning habitat in low water years.
Mormon Reservoir	/2,700	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Yellow perch	General General	Consider brown trout if forage fish become excessive. Work to acquire minimum pool. Evaluate stocking strategies to maximize rainbow trout returns.
Carey Lake	/200	Warmwater	Largemouth bass Bluegill Yellow perch Brown bullhead Channel catfish	General	Yield warmwater fishery. Conduct fish population and limnological studies of lake to aid in assessing fisheries and to determine management direction. Cooperate with habitat managers to maintain adequate water volume to prevent winterkill.
Little Wood River Reservoir	/575	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	General	Maintain fishery with fingerling and catchable rainbow trout stocking. Maintain catch rate of 1.0 fish/hour for ice fishery and 0.5 fish/hour in summer.
Fish Creek Reservoir	/516	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	General	Collaborate with Federal and State agencies, landowners, and irrigation districts to investigate funding options to repair Fish Creek Dam. Pursue minimum pool. Evaluate trophy trout management potential is dam is repaired.
Lava Lake	/20	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	Put-and-take trout	Evaluate potential for improving fishery using restrictive regulations. Work to maintain access.
Baker Lake	/10	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout	Trophy	Maintain trophy fishing opportunity.
Upper Box Canyon Lake	/2	Coldwater	Brook trout	General	Evaluate methods to control brook trout numbers.
All other stocked alpine lakes (total of 11; 3 in Little Wood River drainage and 8 in Big Wood River drainage)	/80	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout Rainbow trout Arctic grayling Brook trout	General	Maintain diverse angling opportunity by stocking different lakes with different species. Stock every three years in cooperation with USFS to provide catch rates of 0.5 fish/hour.