

Meeting Title: Big Wood River Working Group August Meeting

Date: August 18th, 2026

Time: 6:06 PM – 9:00 PM

Location / Platform: In-person, Hailey Community Campus, Bullion Room, Hailey, ID

Facilitator: Matt Corsi, IDFG

Recorder: Tucker Brauer (IDFG)

Attendees: Mike Peterson (IDFG), Matt Corsi (IDFG), Tucker Brauer (IDFG), Lance Hebdon (IDFG), Dirk Zondag Jr., James Harper, Ryan Santo, Kent Sanders, Mike McKenna, Ed Northen, Amanda Bauman, Bob Jost

Absentees: Chad Chorney, Tim East, Greg Cameron

Non-Member attendees: 1

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- The meeting was called to order at 6:06 PM by M. Corsi after a quorum of eight members was reached.
 - M. Corsi welcomed attendees and took time to revisit rules of order that were agreed upon by the group at the previous meeting. These included definition of a quorum (8 members) and voting rules (simple majority of quorum to advance proposal & supermajority or 8 members to approve final recommendations to commission).
 - M. Corsi opened the floor to members to discuss whether these rules were still supported by the group.
 - D. Zondag proposed lowering the quorum and final vote requirement to 7 members. Other group members supported lowering quorum requirement but maintaining 8-member supermajority support of the final recommendation package. Discussion of proposals followed and it was ultimately decided to keep the rules agreed upon in July as written without amendments.
 - M. Corsi opened the floor to those members that were not in attendance in July to weigh-in on discussions and voting that took place regarding seasons.
 - B. Jost stated that after reading the meeting minutes from July, he was in support of providing year-round fishing opportunity on the Big Wood River, stating that the river generally limits use on its own with flows rising and having a set date as a closure didn't seem necessary.
 - M. Peterson provided perspective that year-round opportunity may alleviate some pressure on Silver Creek given it opens other options for stream anglers during the spring. Members discussed the pros and cons of year-round fishing.
 - E. Northen reiterated his dissenting vote from the July meeting, stating he supports year-round angling, but only if it includes a winter catch-and-release season in some form to protect fish at a vulnerable time of year.
 - A Baumann asked whether this change is being considered to increase opportunity or for simplification. Stating that if the closure is removed, it will be hard to undo in the future if necessary. She stated that in low runoff years, we may see over exploitation of the resource due to increased accessibility in the

- spring. Additional discussion of data provided by Wood River Land Trust and IDFG regarding spawning timing and overall population dynamics was had and group members settled on a mix of biological capacity, creating opportunity, and rule simplification as reasoning behind votes to support year-round opportunity.
- B. Jost brought up possibility of “opening day syndrome” wherein angler use is very high at the beginning and end of fishing seasons. Stated that doing away with the closure may lessen that phenomenon. Group members both agreed with the statement or believed that it would still be fished heavily regardless of a closure being in place.
 - J. Harper asked the group to consider the generational changes in the fishery and its user base when considering the proposed rule change. He stated the seasonal closure was likely appropriate at the time it was implemented but based on the data provided it may not necessarily be the best thing to have in place currently.
 - M. Corsi ended discussion of July business to stay on schedule and provide time to discuss other topics. He opened the floor to the group to continue discussions of harvest rules on the Big Wood River.
 - R. Santo provided a short recap of where discussions were left in July. Specifically, the group had been discussing the need for size-based restrictions on harvest. The group discussed this aspect with some members advocating for some form of slot or minimum size limit and others advocating for no size restrictions.
 - The group discussed additive vs. compensatory mortality in the system and whether a size limit will improve quality. Discussion of whether protecting big fish will produce more big fish vs. whether the modelled data is true that more harvest across all sizes will produce more big fish.
 - M. Corsi brought up that regardless of how much harvest occurs because of a rule change, it is highly unlikely we will see any change in total mortality due to the compensatory nature of mortality in the trout population.
 - Some discussion took place regarding concern that broadening harvest opportunity will invite a demographic of anglers to the fishery that disrespect it (e.g., littering bait containers). It was cited that there are frequent complaints to some group members about this and a belief the problem will be exacerbated if rules change.
 - D. Zondag made reference to the group charter and reminded the working group that they cannot discriminate against certain angler groups while deliberating. To which, E. Northen stated that this is not a put-and-take fishery, but a wild trout fishery and should be managed differently as such.
 - A Baumann asked IDFG to clarify the distinction between native fishery and wild trout fishery in our management plan in regard to harvest. L. Hebdon and M. Corsi described the distinction and that harvest has little to do with those designations. They explained that restrictive harvest rules are put in place based on specific population need and biological justification, it just happens that many prominent native and wild trout fisheries have restrictive regs based on biological justification and are vulnerable to harvest. Many wild and native trout fisheries can support exploitation and subsequently do not have harvest restrictions. Examples of this were provided including the Middle Fork of the Salmon and the upper South Fork of the Boise River.

- The group discussed how anglers don't harvest fish these days like they used to both in Idaho and beyond. B. Jost and J. Harper both stated that harvest does not seem to negatively affect this population even if it is occurring at a higher rate than we believe. It was suggested that the Big Wood River could easily support a harvest limit of 6 fish per day, but the social appetite for a harvest limit of that magnitude is likely low, and no matter what data is available, there will be a lot of people who don't care what science says. K. Sanders disagreed, saying we can't legislate based on irrational people's opinions.
- The group acknowledged that the political aspect of the recommendation process is prominent and should be considered.
- D. Zondag stated that this group and members of the public likely believe that by opening harvest opportunity, there will be a flood of harvest-oriented anglers using the Big Wood. He then added that this is likely inaccurate based on the current culture surrounding fishing in the valley and in general being more catch-and-release oriented.
- B. Jost stated a concern that if harvest is brought up to 6 fish/day it will be very difficult to change it back if it is needed, also suggesting that a more conservative approach to expanding harvest is likely the right path forward.
- A. Baumann asked the group why these changes are so important if they are ultimately unlikely to improve the fishery quality, stating we cannot make people harvest fish even if rules allow you to. She states that the culture of the fishing community is in support of restrictive harvest regulations and seasonal closures as they are. Group members discussed this at length, citing the biological capacity to support harvest, fishery quality concerns, and the goal of simplifying regulations. Dissent from the group suggested that this mindset is not as pervasive as suggested, and that these resources are not only for users that live in the Wood River Valley and decisions are for all Idahoans' benefit.
- M. Corsi calls for a break at 7:24 PM
- M. Corsi called the meeting to order at 7:48 PM
- M. Corsi made a statement praising the group for their thoughtful discussion so far. He made a statement recognizing themes from that discussion. He described the two themes from discussions so far, namely that this population can support expanded harvest and may benefit from it from a quality standpoint, and the social consideration of what the public has the capacity to accept in terms of changes. He asked the group to consider the interplay between these themes and what they mean to the group in the remaining discussion.
 - D. Zondag provided his perspective regarding harvest. He stated that it isn't just for those people that want to fill the freezer. He stated that he would love it if his kids could go down to the river, fish with whatever equipment they like, at any time, and not be afraid to harvest a fish or two for fear of breaking a rule. The "fun" aspect of fishing is lost with the worry of breaking rules.
 - E. Northen followed and suggested that culture defines what is "fun", in this case the Big Wood River is not harvest oriented and harvest is not viewed as fun and should not be prioritized. J. Harper suggested that viewpoint exists because catch-and-release anglers are in an echo chamber. Stepping outside that world will likely change a person's perspective.

- K. Sanders, R Santo, and J. Harper discussed the development of the current rules and agreed that at the time Catch and Release regulations made sense. Discussion suggested that it is appropriate to change things now as it is a different fishery than it was 30 years ago, maybe harvest makes sense now given the data presented.
 - E. Northen stated he doesn't believe that the reduction in fishery quality is an abundance issue or one related to harvest. He stated he believes this is entirely a habitat issue that limits quality size structure. Members rebutted citing the data presented to the group and coalesced around the idea that we don't have justification to limit opportunity if we know it won't negatively affect the resource.
 - M. McKenna suggested that the group is largely being discriminatory toward catch-and-release oriented fly fishermen despite evidence that harvest would not have a negative impact.
 - A. Baumann made a point that there is already opportunity for everyone on the Big Wood River. There is multiple sections on the river that allow for bait angling, harvest, and catch-and-release.
- R. Santo summarized themes from the discussion and suggested where the group will likely settle. He suggested the group will probably agree somewhere around 2 fish per day harvest for the entirety of the upper Big Wood River with year-round opportunity and a winter catch-and-release season of some form to be agreed upon later.
- Stating that the vote should only target harvest rules at this point, R. Santo made a motion that harvest should be limited to 2 fish per day with no size restrictions for the upper Big Wood River. Ed. Northen seconded the motion. A vote was held.
 - Yay: McKenna, Santo, Northen, Baumann
 - Nay: Harper, Jost, Sanders
 - Abstain: Zondag
 - Final vote tally was 4 (Yay) 3(Nay) 1 (Abstain) The motion did not reach a 5-vote simple majority of the quorum. Motion did not pass.
- K. Sanders made a motion to limit harvest to 4 fish per day with no size restrictions for the upper Big Wood River. Discussion of the proposal ensued. J. Harper seconded the motion. A vote was held
 - Yay: Harper, Sanders, Santo, Jost, Zondag
 - Nay: McKenna, Baumann, Northen
 - Final vote tally was 5 (Yay) 3 (Nay). The motion passed and will be advanced for consideration by the group as part of the final rule proposal package
 - Dissent from Nay voters included that they believed that 2 fish was much more palatable to the public that are not in the room with the group. It would be much easier to gain public support for 2 fish per day vs. 4 fish.
 - Supporters of the motion cited that 4 fish is a good compromise between 6 fish per day and 2 fish per day. It is biologically justified and it provides IDFG room to negotiate based on public comments received.
- D. Zondag proposed a motion to allow harvest of 6 fish per day in all sections of river except the current catch-and-release section, in which only 2 fish per day would be allowed. This motion did not receive a second. Motion did not receive a vote.
- At 8:46 PM M Corsi closes group discussion to allow time for housekeeping items.

- M. Corsi thanked the group for their thoughtful discussions. He asked that members take time to think about the topics they've voted on so far and how they work together. He also asked them to consider how those topics will interact with gear rules and geographic rule boundaries that will be discussed at the next meeting in September.
- IDFG asked the group whether they are comfortable with meeting minutes listing specific group member names with discussion topics or whether they would prefer discussions shared with the public be anonymous. The group unanimously agreed that they should be transparent as possible with deliberations and public meeting minutes should list names alongside the recorded discussions.
- M. Corsi reminded the group of the next meeting which will be held on September 23rd from 6 – 9 PM at the IDFG Magic Valley Regional Office in Jerome.
- The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM

Minutes submitted by: Tucker Brauer

Date submitted: 8/19/2026