

BIG WOOD RIVER ANGLING REGULATION ADVISORY WORKING GROUP CHARTER

1) Purpose:

The upper Big Wood River in south-central Idaho supports a self-sustaining trout fishery for Rainbow Trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss* and Brown Trout *Salmo trutta*. The river has been managed as a quality trout fishery since 1977, with increasingly restrictive regulations implemented beginning in 1990 to address evidence of high harvest of large trout and to improve size structure. Changes in regulations over time ultimately resulted in the river being divided into four separate management sections, each governed by different seasons and bag limits. Current regulations include a slot-limit section (two trout daily limit with no harvest between 12 and 16 inches), a catch-and-release section, and two general regulation sections (six trout daily limit; any size), in addition to multiple seasonal closures and gear restrictions. Collectively, these represent some of the most complex regulations in the state.

Idaho Department of Fish and Game has routinely monitored the Big Wood River trout population to assess long-term trends and evaluate the effectiveness of these regulations in meeting management objectives, including the production of quality-sized trout (>16 inches). Since 2012, monitoring data have documented a substantial increase in trout numbers throughout the river. As numbers have increased, trout growth rates and average sizes have declined, resulting in a high abundance of smaller trout and a reduced number of quality-sized trout. These trends are consistent with density-dependent limitations on growth and indicate that the current population exceeds available resources, leading to trout sizes that do not align with public or Department expectations. Angler feedback has mirrored these findings, with many anglers expressing concern over lack of quality size trout. Additionally, anglers have consistently noted dissatisfaction with the complexity of the current regulations, which has reduced participation for some due to confusion or concern about unintentionally violating regulations.

Based on available biological data and angler input, Idaho Department of Fish and Game has determined that changes to regulations are needed. Altering the existing regulations is desired to better align regulations with the status of the fishery. Recent analyses of the trout population suggest that additional harvest could be supported and reductions in trout abundance have potential to improve growth and fish size. Furthermore, and in addition to biological benefits, regulation simplification is intended to improve overall angler understanding, participation, and satisfaction with this fishery.

Recognizing the widely varying opinions on the matter of regulations within user groups of the Big Wood River, IDFG is seeking to organize and facilitate a working group to consider this complex issue. The purpose of the Big Wood River Working Group is to: 1) develop a shared understanding of the history and current status of the fish community in the Big Wood River, 2) develop shared understanding of the various perspectives and

values held by Big Wood River user-groups, 3) develop regulation recommendations in a collaborative and compromising process that balances biological conditions and dynamics with community perspectives. Recommendations would then be considered by staff, before being further considered by the broader public and Idaho Fish and Game Commission.

2) Authority:

- a. Working under the guidance of the Commission, Idaho Department of Fish and Game manages the fish and wildlife of the state of Idaho. Idaho Code (Section 36-103) states "all wildlife, including all wild animals, wild birds, and fish, within the state of Idaho, is hereby declared to be property of the state of Idaho. It shall be preserved, protected, perpetuated, and managed. It shall only be captured or taken at such times or places, under such conditions, or by such means, or in such manner, as will preserve, protect, and perpetuate such wildlife, and provide for the citizens of this state and, as by law permitted to others, continued supplies of such wildlife for hunting, fishing, and trapping."
- b. One of the major goals of Idaho Department of Fish and Game's Strategic Plan is to improve public understanding of and involvement in fish and wildlife management, one of the strategies is to increase the effectiveness of public engagement by improving awareness of and participation in Department and Commission decision making processes.
- c. IDFG holds the following CORE values with relevance to the Big Wood River Working Group.
 - i. Public Service – Idaho Department of Fish and Game believes in having open, two-way communication with the public, facilitating understanding and participation in management decisions, and providing diverse fishing-based recreational opportunities.
 - ii. Science – Idaho Department of Fish and Game believes that scientifically developed knowledge and information are the foundation of wildlife management, and that the Department is obligated to develop, use, and share such knowledge and information.
 - iii. Sustainability – Idaho Department of Fish and Game believes our management responsibility is to foster solutions to wildlife issues that are ecologically viable, economically feasible, and socially acceptable.
- d) The authority of the Big Wood River Working Group is limited to developing recommendations for regulation of fishing opportunities in the upper Big Wood River and its tributaries to be considered by Idaho Department of Fish and Game staff. Regulation alternatives developed by the working group can include the rationale behind their decisions.

3) Big Wood River Working Group sideboards:

The following are requirements identified by Idaho Department of Fish and Game that the Big Wood River Working Group must either acknowledge or address with proposed regulation alternatives.

- i. Draft regulation alternatives must be within the authority of the Commission.
- ii. Draft regulation alternatives must be biologically relevant (i.e. address population-level limiting factors)
- iii. Draft regulation alternatives must be non-discriminatory towards specific angler types.
- iv. The scope of work will be limited to game-fish present within the upper Big Wood River and its tributaries
- v. Draft regulation alternatives must align with management objectives as identified in the current Idaho Department of Fish and Game Fisheries Management Plan.
- vi. Draft regulation alternatives must be developed utilizing standard biological fisheries regulation strategies such as harvest limits, season dates, species-specific regulations, and geographic boundaries.
- vii. Draft regulation alternatives must strive for simplicity to promote understanding and regulatory compliance (i.e. enforcement) and be no more complicated than current regulations.
- viii. Staff will consider Working Group recommendations when drafting regulation proposals.
 - a. Staff will present draft regulation proposals to the IFG Commission [Commission]. The Department pledges to fully inform the Commission of the Working Groups recommendations.
 - b. Upon Commission concurrence, the public scoping process will be initiated to characterize public opinion. The scoping process will include random and non-random survey techniques.
 - c. Based on public opinion, proposals may then be modified by staff, after which staff recommendations are presented to the Commission for final consideration.
 - d. The Commission has the authority to adopt, modify, or reject staff recommendations.
 - e. Results of the Commission's decisions will be incorporated into the 2028-2030 Fishing Seasons & Rules Booklet.
- ix. Idaho Department of Fish and Game staff maintain the authority to dissent from proposed alternatives brought forth by the Big Wood River Working Group if said alternatives do not meet criteria established and agreed upon in this document.

4) Expectations

The Big Wood River Working Group will meet 8 - 10 times between April 2026 and December 2026 to deliberate, develop, and provide advisory recommendations for staff to consider as they develop draft proposals for public and Commission consideration.

Working Group meetings will be held in-person at the Idaho Department of Fish and Game Magic Valley Regional Office and potentially other locations based on locations of Working Group members. Opportunities will be provided for public viewing of these meetings, and the identities of Working Group members will be made available to the public. The Big Wood River Working Group should be available to respond to comments and questions that Idaho Department of Fish and Game staff, the public, and the Commission may have until the purpose of the Big Wood River Working Group is achieved and the group is disbanded.

5) Timeline:

Informational presentations to Working Group: Spring/early Summer 2026
Development of recommendations for proposal development: Summer/early Fall 2026
Working Group deliberation, consensus building: Fall/Winter 2026
Staff review of working group recommendations: Late Winter 2027
Submission of draft staff proposals to the Commission: Spring 2027
Public scoping period: Summer 2027
Commission adoption of proposals: Fall 2027
Regulation implementation: January 1, 2028

6) Roles and responsibilities:

- b) Members of the Big Wood River Working Group are expected to:
 - i. Read and become familiar with information provided to them throughout this process
 - ii. Regularly attend scheduled meetings
 - iii. Articulate interests, concerns, and perspectives on issues pertaining to regulation of fishing opportunity on the Big Wood River.
 - iv. Complete Big Wood River Working Group assignments as needed.
 - v. Maintain an open mind regarding the viewpoints or concerns of other group members, be respectful of others' opinions, and constructively manage conflict between members.
 - vi. Participate collaboratively in group decision-making and be willing to compromise.
 - vii. Work as a team member to address the responsibilities of this working group.
 - viii. Refrain from undermining group decisions.
 - ix. Commit to participate in the Big Wood River Working Group until the purpose of the Working Group is fulfilled, and the group is disbanded.

- c) Idaho Department of Fish and Game personnel are expected to:
 - i. Facilitate meetings fairly and without bias.
 - ii. Provide draft agendas for meetings.
 - iii. Organize facilities where meetings occur.
 - iv. Take notes and capture group decisions.
 - v. Be available to answer questions honestly and without bias.

- vi. Provide the best information possible to the group.
- vii. Provide press releases pertaining to the Big Wood River Working Group (e.g., meeting dates and times).
- viii. Review public input on regulation alternatives that the Big Wood River working group develops.

7) Funding and Support:

The Big Wood River Working Group operating expenses (meeting facilities/equipment/ etc.) will be funded by IDFG. Meals, snacks, and/ or drinks will be provided at the discretion of IDFG during in-person meetings. Any travel and housing needs for in-person meetings will be covered by members. Meetings will be conducted in-person. In-person meetings will likely occur at the IDFG Magic Valley Regional Office in Jerome but will ultimately be determined by members of the Working Group and involved IDFG staff.

I have read and understand the Big Wood River Angling Regulation Advisory Working Group Charter. I desire to be a participant and agree to make every effort to fulfill the roles and responsibilities as outlined in this charter.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____