

Meeting Title: Big Wood River Working Group July Meeting

Date: July 29th, 2026

Time: 6:21 PM – 9:00 PM

Location / Platform: In-person, IDFG Magic Valley Regional Office, Jerome, 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, Tim East, Greg Cameron, Kent Sanders, Mike McKenna, Ed Northen

Absentees: Chad Chorney, Amanda Bauman, Bob Jost

Non-Member attendees: N/A

-
- The meeting was called to order at 6:21 PM by M. Corsi. Meeting was delayed as members were running late due to poor traffic conditions between Bellevue and Jerome.
 - M. Corsi laid out the objectives for the meeting, including the establishment of rules of engagement and voting for the group and the prioritization of discussion topics for proposal development. He stated that if time remained, deliberations would commence toward the end of the meeting.
 - L. Hebdon, IDFG Fisheries Bureau Chief, introduced himself and expressed his appreciation for the group and its role in the regulation development process.
 - The group discussed the public scoping process, focusing on the associated timelines.
 - The group began discussing “Rules of engagement” for the group’s discussions. R. Santo shared a draft set of rules for the group that was modified and agreed upon by the members present.
 - Group members then discussed and established rules pertaining to how the group would vote on and advance ideas and proposals throughout the process. The following rules were agreed upon.
 - 8 group members are required for a quorum, without which a meeting will not be held. Members must strive to give IDFG a minimum of 48 hours’ notice if they will not be in attendance.
 - A simple majority vote of a quorum can advance a proposal
 - Final proposals must gain a supermajority of support to advance (8/11 votes)
 - The group will employ simple Roberts Rules for conduct and voting on proposals (i.e., Motion, second of motion, followed by a roll call vote).
 - M. Corsi introduced the next activity meant to prioritize discussions. Group members subsequently assigned priority to discussion topics including fishing seasons, equipment rules, harvest rules, geographic rule boundaries, and miscellaneous topics.
 - Group members agreed on the following order for discussions:
 - Fishing seasons
 - Harvest rules
 - Equipment rules

- Rule boundaries
 - Miscellaneous (topics suggested included IDFG stocking practices and IDFG education and outreach efforts)
- With order of discussion topics established, M. Peterson reviewed the group sideboards from the Working Group charter document prior to discussions commencing.
- M. Corsi opened the floor to group members to discuss fishing season proposals.
- R. Santo opened the discussion with a review of data collected by the Wood River Land Trust over the past 4 years regarding Redband Trout spawn timing and duration in the upper Big Wood River. Data suggested that the current closure (originally meant to protect spawning fish) does not actually protect fish as the fishing season is usually underway for most of the spawning period. He argued that flow rates over 500 cfs, provide natural protection to spawning fish as wading becomes extremely difficult as flows exceed that level and most anglers do not fish during high runoff. He suggested that the spring fishing closure be removed from the upper Big Wood River based on this evidence.
- Group discussed this data with members acknowledging that despite fishing occurring during the spawning period for decades, fish populations have not been negatively affected. Instead, fish densities are higher than they have ever been.
- J. Harper told the group that during his lifetime he has never seen a trout fishery go from a spring closure model to a year-round fishing model and been negatively affected from his perspective as an angler.
- E. Northen prompted a group discussion over the potential importance of opening day in terms of building excitement and anticipation for the fishery in the public. Members suggested that the closure causes a major uptick in angling pressure during late March as anglers “get their last casts in” which negatively effects the experience due to crowding. Doing away with it may alleviate that rush, to which members rebutted that its always busy out there regardless of the time of year.
- J. Harper shared a concern from previous conversations with others that increased angler traffic may have a negative effect on growth of riparian area during a sensitive time of year. Other members stated that the riparian area is also growing during June, but no clear negative effects have been observed from that traffic after the opener.
- E. Northen voiced concern that winter harvest may negatively affect the population as fish are vulnerable to harvest at that time of year. J. Harper disagreed, stating he did not believe harvest during that time would negatively affect the population. Further discussion highlighted importance of considering what seasonal changes may have on those fish that are repopulating the river. D. Zondag suggested that lifting seasonal closures will have no negative impact on the fishery.
- Upon request by the group, T. Brauer reviewed previously shared data regarding current use and exploitation rates for fishery and shared the potential biological effects of an additional two months of fishing pressure and harvest in the system.
- K. Sanders proposed a motion to remove seasonal closures on the Big Wood River and implement year-round angling opportunity system wide as part of the group’s final proposal. R. Santo seconded the motion. A vote was held.

- Yay: Santo, Sanders, Cameron, McKenna, Harper, East, Zondag Jr.
 - Nay: Northen (provided a dissent that he would support year-round opportunity if there was protection of some form included such as a designated winter catch-and-release- season)
 - Final vote was 7 yay to 1 nay; motion passed and will be advanced for consideration by the group as part of the final rule proposal package.
- M. Corsi called for a break at 7:40 PM
- Meeting resumed at 8:05 PM
- M. Corsi spoke to the group about the interrelatedness of the themes we will be discussing as a group. Many rules will be contingent on other rules, and these individual discussions will undoubtedly overlap between topics (e.g., seasons and harvest rules interplaying closely). He asked the group to keep this in mind as discussions continue and suggested the group develop a rule of engagement that addresses how these proposals advanced from theme-specific discussions will eventually be put together and voted upon.
- M. Corsi opened the floor to group discussion of harvest seasons.
- K. Sanders expressed belief that limitations on harvest are important in the headwaters of the Big Wood River as it is where the pure Redband Trout are. He stated that liberal harvest is likely appropriate in the lower reaches near Hailey as abundances are high in that section. Discussion of importance of protecting “critical areas” for endemic Redband was had, but a consensus could not be reached on where this critical area is.
- After some discussion of population genetics by the group, M. Peterson clarified that genetically pure Redband Trout are widespread throughout the system and the headwater, while still important, is not necessarily the stronghold for endemic Redband Trout in the Big Wood River.
- E. Northen expressed that he isn’t opposed to harvest in upper reaches but believes stocking hatchery trout has a bigger negative effect than harvest does in those reaches. A question was posed to IDFG about whether stocking practices was a topic this group could deliberate on. IDFG staff confirmed that stocking practices could be discussed as part of these deliberations.
- R. Santo asked the group if anyone was opposed to harvest. Group members were broadly supportive of allowing harvest, although some members preferred targeted harvest of certain fish, such as a slot limit of maximum allowable length for harvest. This idea was debated, and various lengths were proposed for a theoretical “maximum length for harvest”. Further discussion turned toward the need for a slot or size limit at all. The group considered the data provided by IDFG and multiple members suggested that limiting based on size may be a mistake and that harvest should be liberalized as much as possible. Members stated that they believe targeted harvest can be a win-win of simplifying rules while also producing more big fish for anglers.
- T. Brauer and L. Hebdon both reminded the group to consider the public’s views outside those in the room when considering a proposal.
- Discussion ended to make time for additional group business.
- Members discussed and agreed upon the dates and locations for September and October meetings
 - September 23rd from 6 – 9 PM in Jerome, ID
 - October 14th from 6 – 9 PM in Hailey, ID

- M. Corsi reminded group members of the next meeting date and location which will be held August 18th from 6 – 9PM at the Community Campus in Hailey, ID (Room TBD).
- M. Corsi thanked the group for their attendance and participation, and ensured that we would revisit today's discussions in the next meeting to bring those members that were absent up to speed
- The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM

Minutes submitted by: Tucker Brauer

Date submitted: 7/31/2026