Meeting Title: Big Wood River Working Group September Meeting
Date: September 23rd, 2026
Time: 6:03 PM – 8:51 PM
Location / Platform: In-person, IDFG Magic Valley Regional Office, Jerome, Idaho
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, Ed Northen, Amanda Bauman, Bob Jost, Chad Chorney, Greg Cameron

Absentees: Mike McKenna, Tim East

Non-Member attendees: 1

- The meeting was called to order at 6:03 PM by M. Corsi after a quorum of eight members was reached.
- M. Corsi welcomed attendees and took time to revisit discussions that took place up to this point, including those on season dates and harvest limits. Reminded group that year-round opportunity and harvest of 4 fish/day were the current passed proposals from the group.
- Corsi opened the floor to members to report on any discussion that the members may have had with their constituencies on group deliberations so far.
    - Harper discussed the working group's work to date with the Magic Valley Fly Fishers at their monthly meeting. Feedback from the group was largely positive with no perceived negativity. Year-round fishing was seen very positively, as was the proposed harvest limit. The support for harvest was surprising. He also fielded questions regarding how the working group was formed and other functions of the working group in general. The topic of stocking was raised by the group as well, but no clear consensus was voiced by the group as to whether they wanted to see stocking continue in the Big Wood.
    - Jost had numerous discussions with fellow anglers in the valley. In general, folks were largely supportive of year-round opportunity but were not supportive of anything but catch-and- release restrictions.
    - Northen spoke with anglers from Boise, Northern Idaho, and locals from the Wood River valley. All had lots of questions for him in general and there were differing opinions voiced. Most folks did not support a harvest limit of 4 fish but could largely support a 2-fish limit instead, potentially with a slot limit in place. Year-round opportunity saw support and was not a dealbreaker to most he spoke with. He informed the group he will also be presenting on the group's work at the Trout Unlimited State Council meeting in a few weeks and will report back on any feedback received.
    - Chorney has had a lot of random conversations with anglers at the fly shop in Picabo. He's seen a lot of support for year-round opportunities, but with a catch-

and-release season of some type. Many anglers think a longer season will help spread out pressure on the river. He saw some opposition to a 4-fish limit but not nearly as much as he expected. Stocking was brought up by anglers frequently, and there seemed to be support for less or no stocking in the Big Wood.
    - Baumann stated she has had conversations with the public, but wanted to wait to share until the next meeting after all rule topics had been deliberated upon.
- Corsi opened the floor to revisit old business, but no discussion was brought forth.
- Corsi opened the floor for deliberations regarding gear rules for the upper Big Wood River. Gear in this case references allowable tackle and fishing methods.
    - Sanders asked for clarification as to what the definition of a single hook was. It was explained that a treble hook counts as a single hook and are legal under a single hook restriction if a lure or fly has only one treble hook on it. Flies with multiple hooks would not be considered single hooks, but a tandem fly or lure rig would be allowable under single hook restrictions.
    - Harper opened discussion by stating that he believed that there should be zero restrictions on gear types throughout the river. He stated the importance of simplicity.
    - Northen believed that bait should not be allowed, especially where it isn't allowed currently. He stated there is plenty of opportunities to use bait already if it must be allowed at all.
    - Santo stated that rules should not be any more restrictive than they are currently.
    - A question was posed to IDFG regarding the mortality rates associated with different terminal tackle (bait vs lure vs. fly). IDFG provided context from literature that bait use does not seem to have a population level effect anywhere, but it can cause higher rates of mortality in individual fish under certain conditions. That effect is highly variable depending on the type of fishery (river vs lake) and how the tackle is fished (active vs static).
    - Chorney was in support of barbless hook restrictions due to the personal safety aspect of barbed hooks and to reduce scarring on caught and released fish. This was echoed by other members Baumann and Harper.
    - Cameron stated that the whole point of these deliberations is to make it easier to harvest fish, and that that is the only way we are going to see better size structure in the trout population. Make them simple so anyone can easily access the fishery, harvest some fish, reduce densities, and make a biological difference. Placing restrictions on gear or harvest below 6/ fish/day goes against that goal entirely.
    - Northen disagreed and stated his belief that anglers will only harvest the big fish if they are allowed to harvest more, which would go against the point of making bigger fish available to anglers.
    - Baumann asked the group to agree on a level of harvest they are comfortable with so we can move on to other important topics. She argued that harvest opportunity is only unavailable in 25% of the river currently.
    - Jost asked IDFG how long it takes a 10" trout to reach 16" currently. IDFG provided insight on data suggesting that it doesn't happen currently in the BWR, but generally that rate varies depending on the system.

- Sanders stated that people aren't going to harvest big fish because there aren't any out there to be harvested currently. The odds of encountering a 16" fish are extremely low as it stands.
- Northen restated his position that if allowed, anglers will target deep holes and remove all the large fish which is counterintuitive to the goal of creating bigger ones.
- Chorney asked IDFG staff what they thought the regulations should be. IDFG did not provide their opinions as this was not their role in the working group. However, Peterson did state that there is no rule discussed that would likely cause a negative impact to fishery compared to its current state. The fishery can support expanded, seasonal and harvest opportunity and potentially improve as a result. IDFG also stated that just because a rule is made that expands opportunity, it does not mean anglers will take advantage of it (i.e., harvest more fish if allowed).
- Northen stated he does not want bait to be allowed at all. Zondag asked Northen what he has against the use of bait, to which Northen responded that it causes higher mortality of caught and released fish. Gut hooking is more common with bait. He posed a hypothetical in which an angler hooked a fish deep and released it, that fish is now wasted because it will die. He stated that that could be avoided if a slot was done away with, which would allow anglers to harvest any gut hooked fish up to the harvest limit regardless of size.
- Corsi states that a lot of speculation has taken place on how angler behavior may change because of new regulations on the Big Wood. However, we have no way to know how behavior (i.e., harvest) will change if at all.
- Baumann asked IDFG to clarify the live bait restriction in Idaho, specifically regarding its sale. IDFG stated that live bait is legal in Idaho, but that refers to things like earthworms, crickets, maggots, etc. Live fish as bait is illegal, as is the sale of live fish for bait in Idaho.
- Northen stated that the Big Wood River, being a special wild trout fishery, deserves special consideration regarding gear. Bait opportunities are everywhere in the state, but unnecessary here in the Big Wood River.
- Cameron stated his support for allowing bait. He believes that the restrictions and overall complicated nature of the rules keeps anglers away from the river who would otherwise come and enjoy the resource. He stated that this is wrong given the goal of reducing trout density and growing bigger fish in the long run.
- Sanders voiced opinion that restricting bait makes the "family outing" impossible since most kids and new anglers might feel more comfortable using bait. By restricting that opportunity for all anglers to use their preferred method, we are taking opportunity from young anglers. Less restrictions means everyone can enjoy the Big Wood River for years to come.
- Northen said the bait/harvest opportunity is there already, but believes we can't have this conversation effectively without bringing geographic boundaries into it. He suggested maybe we split the river at Glendale Road, below is 6 fish/day, above would be 2 fish/day.
- Zondag asked to modify that proposal by moving the boundary to the hospital bridge which would allow higher harvest in the Hailey reach where density issues are the worst.

- Northen said folks will only harvest 2 fish max regardless of what the limit is so it does no good increasing the limit to more than 2 fish in that reach.
- Zondag said reducing density will be positive on overall fish size structure, so 6 fish/day would be more effective in case anglers wanted to harvest more.
- Northen stated that these rule changes aren't going to solve the fish size issue because that limitation is caused by things outside IDFG control. The goal here is to simplify regulations and the stated proposal does that.
- Zondag asked Northen why he is against all the proposed changes if he truly thinks the changes will not make a difference.
- Corsi interjected to state that harvest adds significant utility to this fishery from a management standpoint. He spoke of the changes in "trout fishing culture" over the past decades and that if rules are changed, we cannot guarantee people will harvest more fish. However, you must provide the opportunity for people to show up and harvest some. Increased fish mortality through fishing is what will change size structure in the river.
- Peterson and Corsi state that the river is likely at a stable state in terms of biomass. The biomass has not likely changed over the past 30 years, but how that biomass is comprised has. In the 80's we had fewer, but substantially larger fish, while today we have significantly more fish, but they are much smaller.
- Jost compared it to a forest stand. When he was a forester, you saw the same phenomena all the time. Old growth trees were sparse, while new growth was densely packed. You had the same amount of biomass, but it was split up differently depending on tree density.
- Cameron stated his belief that people in the BWR valley will take advantage of some extra harvest opportunity if we let them. It will make a difference.
- Sanders proposed that rules do not restrict gear type, meaning all conventional and fly angling gear would be allowed. However, he proposed keeping a sigle barbless hook restriction for the whole fishery. Harper seconded the motion and a vote was held.
- Yay: Baumann, Chorney, Cameron, Jost, Sanders, Santo, Harper, Zondag Jr.
- Nay: Northen
- The proposal passed by 8 to 1 vote.

- Corsi called for a break at 7:20 PM
- Meeting was called to order at 7:45 PM
- Corsi opened the floor to discussion of geographic boundaries for fishing rules on the Big Wood River
    - Sanders said that boundaries were irrelevant given that all the proposals so far have applied to the whole river.
    - Harper stated that boundaries are better for a negotiation tool given potential social pressure. Zondag, Baumann, and Cameron all voiced agreeance.
    - Northen stated his displeasure regarding the barbless hook rule vote given the groups hesitancy toward restrictions. Why was that so easily agreed upon. He states that he believes the proposed rules thus far will cause a firestorm of public disapproval.

- Harper states that Northen is trying to project his worldview and opinions on the entire fishing community. He saw widespread support from anglers he associated with for these proposals.
- Northen sees these reg changes as a diminishment of something special. There is lots of water out there to get the experience that harvest-oriented anglers are looking for.
- Harper disagreed, stating there isn't opportunity to fish with bait in a freestone stream for an hour or two in any direction of his home.
- IDFG interjected, reminding the group that topic specific votes are not final, and proposals may change when all individual proposals come together as a final package for commission consideration.
- Peterson asked the group whether they wanted to consider BWR tributaries as separate from the mainstem. The group agreed that tributaries should be regulated under the same rules as the mainstem BWR for simplicity.
- Northen recommends Glendale Diversion as a boundary in some way. For example, implementing a 2 fish limit between Glendale Road and the NF BWR confluence and general regs outside that boundary with no gear restrictions and year-round fishing.
- Harper supported Northen's idea of two separate zones but would rather see a split into upper and lower zones with a single reg change at a given point, feels Northen's proposal undercuts decisions made so far.
- Jost agreed with Harper, stating he believes that social support will follow once simpler regs are implemented.
- A broad group discussion ensued surrounding the combination of harvest and associated boundaries for differing rules.
- Sanders proposed that the system be managed under one regulation
- Harper stated concern that tributary harvest would be limited if managed under a lower harvest limit as Sander's proposal.
- Baumann asked IDFG for further clarification about the origins of the winter catch and release season throughout much of the upper Big Wood. IDFG stated it was commonplace statewide in trout fisheries for decades and is likely a remnant of management practices prior to the 1980s. There is no discernible biological justification for it.
- Sanders states that winter conditions and runoff will self-regulate use of the river at that time of year. No need to legislate closures.
- Jost stated a case for general regs in tributaries and sections stocked with hatchery trout to support that opportunity.
- Brauer provided insight into the harvest rates of stocked fish in the system upon request from Corsi. In general, only about 10-15% of stocked fish are harvested by anglers in the mainstem BWR. The tributaries tend to see slightly higher harvest rates. In general, he believed that reducing or stopping stockings in the BWR would likely not result in a large reduction in quality for those anglers.
- Peterson asked the group not to consider stocking practices as reasoning for setting boundaries for rules as IDFG is evaluating stocking practices and those may change soon.

    - Harper likes that that removes a large section of the BWR special rules from the rule booklet by treating tributaries the same as the mainstem
    - Baumann states that special regs aren't a big deal, it's the fisherman's responsibility to know where they are and what the rules are for that location.
    - Sanders proposed a top to bottom rule allowing 4 fish per day, barbless single hook only, with year-round fishing. Zondag seconds the proposal.
    - A vote was held
    - Yay: Baumann, Chorney, Cameron, Jost, Sanders, Santo, Harper, Zondag Jr.
    - Nay: Northen
    - The motion passes by an 8 to 1 vote.
- Corsi calls for a 10-minute break at 8:30 PM
- Corsi calls meeting back to order at 8:40 PM
- Corsi states that a comprehensive vote has been held and by the rules agreed upon by the group, the vote could be final, and the proposed rule package could be presented to the commission. Give the remaining dissent with the group, we will strive for consensus vote at the next meeting.
- Corsi introduces the homework assignment for the group aimed at identifying ways to reach a consensus vote on the final rule package. This is an opportunity to consider all discussions, voice concerns, consider constituent perspectives, and consider compromise to get to a unanimous vote toward a rule package.
- Corsi states that the October meeting will likely be the last meeting of this working group given progress made.
- Corsi also states that group justifications and dissents will be recorded at that meeting and will accompany the proposal for commission and public consideration.
- Corsi reminded the group of the next meeting which will be held on October 14th from 6 – 9 PM at the Hiley Community Campus Bullion Room.
- The meeting was adjourned at 8:51 PM

Minutes submitted by: Tucker Brauer
Date submitted: 10/1/2026