

**Upper South Fork John Day Watershed Council**  
***Input for OWEB Board Priority Selection***  
**October 15, 2014**

**1. Proposed Priority Description**

**a) What is the native fish or wildlife habitat to be conserved or other natural resource issue to be addressed?**

Our priority is to achieve enhanced flow that helps restore habitats from ridge top to ridge top across the John Day River Basin.

**b) What are the specific expected ecological outcome(s) to be achieved after this priority is addressed?**

Aquatic: Clean water at sufficient temperature, quantity, and timing to sustain connected and properly functioning stream corridors that support anadromous fish abundance and productivity per recovery plans.

Upland: Resilient upland plant communities that resist undesirable species and catastrophic fire, support native wildlife per appropriate plans, and contribute to healthy watersheds.

**c) What is the defined geographic location within which this proposed priority can be successfully addressed?**

Within the John Day River Basin, our organization's focus is on the South Fork of the John Day River, from its headwaters to its confluence with the upper mainstem of the John Day River. Within the South Fork there are many priority areas for restoration, including 1,685 miles of Clean Water Act 303d listed streams, the Murderer's Creek Wildlife Management Area, two Conservation Opportunity Areas (BM-05, and BM-08), the Aldrich Mountain Wilderness Study Area, the Black Canyon Wilderness Area, and the Utley Inventoried Roadless Area.

**2. Significance to the State**

**a) Why is this proposed priority of ecological significance to the state, even though it may not be present everywhere in the state?**

The John Day River is the longest free-flowing river with wild runs of salmon and steelhead in the Columbia Basin. It is also the 4<sup>th</sup> largest drainage in the state and the 3<sup>rd</sup> longest undammed river in the West. Within this system, the South fork of the John Day River is very unique. The Oregon Plan describes it as meeting the American Fisheries Society requirements for being ecologically outstanding, and therefore calls for focused conservation attention in the area.

Our watershed contains a Wild and Scenic River corridor, the South Fork Falls, the Black Canyon Wilderness area, and the Utley Roadless area. The South Fork Falls acts as a natural barrier to anadromous fish, however the native red-band trout in the Upper South Fork are genetically identical to the anadromous steelhead. Therefore, the Upper South Fork acts as a nursery for steelhead populations. The South Fork also contains numerous indicator species of watershed health such as the Goshawk, migratory birds, Aspen stands, and Mule Deer.

**b) Are there any social and/or economic considerations that the Board should understand regarding this proposed priority?**

The local communities within the John Day Basin contain a relatively small portion of the state’s population, however these communities are heavily reliant upon the natural resources surrounding them. Creating a priority focused on natural resource improvement has a greater chance of success if it aligns with the requirements of these communities.

Implementation on any ownership presents difficulties. Regulations associated with public lands can slow restoration efforts through permitting processes. Working on private lands can also be difficult, when the landowners lack the trust and understanding needed to pursue needed restoration. There is a greater chance for long-term success if ecological and community goals are in alignment.

**c) In addition to its significance to the state, identify how the proposed priority fits within regional & local ecological priorities.**

The priority serves the goals in the following regional and local plans and priorities:

- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s *Oregon Conservation Strategy*, and *Mule Deer Initiative*
- US Forest Service’s *Aquatic Restoration Strategy*
- *Whole Watersheds Restoration Initiative*
- Oregon Department of Forestry’s *Oregon State Forest Assessment and Resource Strategy*
- Oregon Department of Environmental Quality’s *Upper Mainstem and South Fork John Day River Agricultural Water Quality Management Area Plan*
- [Could list specific TMDLs that apply to the Upper South Fork.]

**3. Limiting Factors**

**a) What ecological limiting factors exist that relate to the proposed priority identified?**

Grazing management	Mining	Feral Horses
Stream Channel structure	Naturally Occurring Thermal Sources raising water temperatures	Increased Elk Populations
Fish passage barriers	Logging	Preservation of Historical sites
Fire	Flooding	Educational barriers
Juniper Expansion	Invasive Species	Available Funding
Planning and Permitting	Landowner Willingness	

**b) Existing frameworks:**

This priority fits within the following regional frameworks:

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s *Oregon Conservation Strategy*, and *Mule Deer Initiative*

US Forest Service’s *Aquatic Restoration Strategy*

*Whole Watersheds Restoration Initiative*

Oregon Department of Forestry’s *Oregon State Forest Assessment and Resource Strategy*

Department of Environmental Quality’s *Upper Mainstem and South Fork John Day River Agricultural Water Quality Management Area Plan*

*Mid-Columbia Steelhead Recovery Plan*

*Upper South Fork of the John Day River Watershed Assessment*

#### **4. Threats and Benefits**

##### **a and b) What overall threats exist to the proposed priority identified?**

Aquatic: Drought, over-allocation of water, inefficient use of water, and impaired riparian and upland health. *If not addressed:* degradation of habitats and decline in species numbers.

Upland: Continued expansion of noxious weeds and juniper with a transition to undesirable species, over grazing and improper timing of grazing, and lack of land manager knowledge. *If not addressed:* transition to undesirable plant communities, reduced ground water recharge, loss of soil health, erosion of soil, and change in the site capability once it is impaired.

Both: permitting on private and public land, funding, and knowledge of BMPs.

Overall, if these threats are left unaddressed, there is a lot to lose in this basin. Catastrophic events like the South Fork Fire (66,000 acres), will lead to increase sediment loads, lack of soil and poor substrate stability. Also the amount of funds that have already been invested in the basin, and the headway that has been made, will be lost.

##### **c) Describe the economic, social, iconic and cultural benefits of addressing the outcome and impacts of not addressing it.**

The benefits of addressing the outcome include:

1. Maintains and enhances the basin as a stronghold for steelhead and salmon.
2. Provides increased sustainability for existing local resource-dependent communities.
3. Increases jobs and economic output from in recreation, restoration, and tourism.
4. Supports cultural needs of tribes and broader community, emphasizing how much economic output the local natural resource community contributes.
5. Enables voluntary restoration over regulated/enforced restoration.

##### **d) Briefly summarize how much has been done already, how much is remaining.**

A lot has already been done to address this priority. Actions from ridge-to-ridge include:

- Juniper thinning
- Addressing fish passage barriers
- Water temperature reduction and monitoring
- Beneficial planting (perennial grasses)
- Improved grazing management
- Riparian protection plantings/fencing
- Noxious weed control
- Educational Workshops
- Partnership development to perform cohesive watershed restoration.

All of these restoration activities have improved habitat and steelhead numbers enough to provide two steelhead fishing seasons within the last three years. With all of the improvements made, there is still more to do. Our flows are still not where they were in the 1970s, which we need for a healthy watershed.

**e) What is your best estimate of cost to address the priority, and as a result, how economically feasible do you believe it is to address this priority over time?**

We have just recently formed the John Day Basin Partnership, and we are just beginning the process of building a comprehensive action plan for the basin. . Thus, it is not possible to provide an exact number at this time. In the interim before development and costing of an action plan, we offer some example numbers that illustrate the cost of the challenge if scaled.

The Upper South Fork of the John Day River Watershed Council has compiled a Needs Assessment, which estimates the costs for all desired restoration projects in the Upper South Fork above the Falls. Across all ownerships, for upland and aquatic work, it is estimated that the cost would be approximately \$1.6 million. If this estimate is tripled to compensate for the entire watershed it would be approximately \$4.8 million. If this were expanded to cover 6 years, it would be approximately \$800,000/year.

While we have a lot to do, with the right cooperation and funding we believe our priorities are feasible. Finally, we view these costs as investments that pay out to natural resources, the community, and other externalities long-term.

**5. Opportunities**

**a) Ecological:**

1. What are the measures of ecological success? What’s the likelihood of ecological success in the short (6-year), medium and long-term (define the term lengths)?

See below for a list of our measures of success:

- Increased stream corridor habitat—buffer habitat, tree canopy, etc.
- Increased fish numbers.
- Achievement of CFS goals at specific locations.
- Resilient, diverse, drought-tolerate upland plant communities.
- Increased aspen, mule deer, other priority upland species.
- Landowner agreements secured.
- Thriving rural resource-based communities indicates successful balance between ecological and economic goals.

Fully achieving longer-term species-related goals could take 20 plus years. While thoughtfully selected interim milestones for species, habitat, and landowner recruitment are attainable in the short and mid-terms. As noted earlier, with the right cooperation and funding we believe can meet our chosen success measures.

2. What types of voluntary conservation actions could be undertaken to address the proposed priority?

Bank Stabilization	Juniper Removal
Grade Stabilization Structures	Sagebrush Removal
Irrigation Management Structures	Weed Control
Measurement Device(s)	Seeding
Irrigation Tailwater Management System(s)	Fence (cross)

Beaver Management	Gully Plugs
Spring Development	Riparian planting
Solar Fence	Fish barrier removal
Riparian fence	Grazing management
Aspen enhancement/protection	Stock Water Development

3. Should the proposed priority be divided into geographic areas that are appropriate for partners to address?

South Fork John Day River is our focus. We find that it is economically feasible to improve the flow in the South Fork, and in turn, contribute to improved health of the entire John Day Basin.

**b) Social:**

1. Do partnerships exist to address the proposed priority? If so, briefly describe. If not, note why this proposed priority is important enough that partnerships may form to address it.

The Upper South Fork of the John Day River Watershed Council has a number of formal and informal partnerships across private and public partners: Private landowners, The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, National Forest Service, OSU Extension Services, Grant SWCD, NRCS, ODFW, Grant County Court, John Day Basin Trust, and the BLM.

The new John Day Basin Partnership is our biggest and newest effort to coordinate planning and information exchange across the entire basin. This Partnership is striving to include entities from the headwaters of the John Day River, to its confluence with the Columbia River. Further information on this new group is provided under Question #7.

2. What social opportunities exist to address the proposed priority? Is there momentum built?

The local community is highly natural resource oriented, and recognizes the opportunities that our surroundings present. The community depends on the land to provide economic stability, and takes great pride in the local area.

The need to build partnerships, relationships, and provide education to all interested parties is crucial in ensuring we have the social license to reach into the small communities in our basin and accomplish the priority.

Existing successful landowner outreach programs provide lessons for expanding access on private lands, and a cooperative approach with regulatory agencies may aid in streamlining regulations and permitting to encourage further work. An attitude of "Cooperate & Compromise" will give our partnerships the chance to foster relationships, and create a unified front, and leave behind the "us against them" perspective of the past

3. Describe educational benefits, if any.

With implementation of restoration efforts, educational tours can be offered to local land managers and the community. The Upper South Fork John Day Watershed Council has performed educational workshops, and tours, and the local response is always very supportive. . If we are to be successful in educating entities it will be essential to involve decision-makers, elected officials, the public, and our youth. Outreach programs will need to be interesting and dynamic to involve all of the

interests that are important to taking action to improve flow in the John Day River Basin from ridge top to ridge top.

4. Summarize the social, community, political, regulatory or other factors that will help lead to the success of this proposed priority.

We believe to improve flow in the John Day Basin a unified plan will be needed. This plan can then be leveraged to strengthen partnerships, highlight past successes, and secure ever-needed project and local capacity funding. Elected officials and political understanding will also be needed to be fostered to gain support. With the support of the partnership it may be possible to streamline the regulatory process, provide community education, and otherwise will encourage more voluntary work on private lands.

**5. What can be leveraged to address the proposed priority (funding, acreage impacts, other resources)?**

**a) Economic Benefits**

1. Describe the economic benefits of addressing the ecological proposed priority, including ecosystem services

Addressing any natural resource based priority can provide new funds to rural communities. Action to improved flow in the John Day will increases the use of the land through restoration, recreation, and more sustainable working lands . Addressing this priority would truly need to be viewed as a long term investment, stabilizing our natural resources, and sustaining our local communities for generations to come.

**6. FOR ALL SUBMISSIONS: Assess the proposed priority by locating the proposed priority in one of the quadrants below. Describe why the proposed priority falls in this quadrant. There is no wrong answer to this question and there may be multiple answers.**

		<b>Question #6: Place each priority in the proper quadrant.</b>	
<b>COMPLEX</b>		<b>Science X</b>	
	<b>EASY</b>		<b>Social X</b>
		<b>WELL UNDERSTOOD</b>	<b>NOT WELL UNDERSTOOD</b>

- The technical aspect of restoring aquatic and upland habitats is well studied and mostly understood. However, the science can be very complex and is constantly evolving as new learning takes place.
- The social aspect of restoration can range from 'complex to easy' and 'well understood to not well understood' depending on the knowledge of conservation science and programs, working landowner needs, and the benefits/threats of inaction held by the landowner, partners, and other decision-makers.
- A strong partnership with the capacity to develop and implement a coordinated restoration plan and outreach program can help create opportunity for lasting progress in the face of these challenges and other limiting factors. This argues for concerted work to build coordinated strategies and partner capacity to pursue outreach and education. In the John Day we are confident with the right plan, partnerships, and funding that we can ensure that the basic science and social element live in the 'easy/well understood' space.

### **7. Is there other information the Board should know regarding this priority?**

The John Day Basin Partnership was formed in September 2014 by a diverse group of basin stakeholders with the common interest of restoring and maintaining our watersheds for the ecological, economic, social, and cultural well-being of local communities. We seek to maximize collective and coordinated action that accelerates realization of healthier and more resilient habitats, native species, and resource-dependent economies across the basin. The partnership pursues this goal by facilitating partner dialogue and learning, acting under a comprehensive basin-wide restoration plan that achieves shared interests, leveraging the partnership and plan to secure new project and organizational funding, and more fully engaging the community in the John Day recovery process.

Several members of the partnership worked together in a workshop setting to initiate development of their priority submittals. These groups include the Monument Soil & Water Conservation District, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, the Upper South Fork John Day Watershed Council, The Freshwater Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon.

We chose to coordinate at this stage so we could share our perspectives on each priority question, identify commonality, identify questions for the group or OWEB, and overall, take another step toward operating as a high-performing basin-wide partnership.

The two clear priorities we identified were restoring aquatic and upland habitats and associated native species across the John Day Basin. Taking actions from ridge-to-stream that enhance flow was viewed as a unifying goal for the group. Such actions improve conditions for fish, stream health, upland plant communities, and resource-dependent livelihoods. Home to the third longest undammed river in the West, the longest free-flowing tributary of the Columbia River with wild runs of salmon and steelhead, and millions of acres of working farms and forests, the John Day is of great significance to state.

Adequate flow, clean water, and properly functioning stream corridors are the primary ecological limiting factors across our aquatic habitats; while management of undesirable species, grazing and irrigation practice, and historic human impacts can hamper our progress in the uplands. These factors along with social considerations such as inadequate funding, lack of coordinated planning,

and poor landowner engagement and education are generally applicable across the basin and must be addressed if we are to attain our two basin priorities.

With the right mix of coordinated planning, funding, and education moving forward we are confident that the partnership and individual partnership can build on ongoing voluntary instream and upland restoration efforts to enhance the basin's position as a stronghold for salmon and steelhead, nurturer of upland biodiversity, and supporter of small resource-based communities across.

The John Day Partnership looks forward to building a unified partnership and coordinated recovery plan and using these new tools to join with OWEB and other funding partners to implement the plan over the coming years.

**8. In lieu of attaching letters of support for this proposal, please submit a list of other supporting individuals or organizations.**

National Resource Conservation Service  
Grant Soil and Water Conservation District  
Grant Weed Control  
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs  
Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation  
Bureau of Land Management  
Cascade Pacific RC&D  
Oregon Department of Agriculture  
Bonneville Environmental Foundation  
Malheur National Forest  
Grant County Road Department  
Grant County Court  
John Day Basin Trust