



## Comments and Considerations from the Priest River Watershed Group for the Development of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game's 2025-2030 Fisheries Management Plan

The Priest River Watershed Group (PRWG) is a local collaborative of diverse interests committed to protecting, maintaining, and improving the health and integrity of the Priest River watershed. To learn more about the PRWG and view the steering committee membership please visit [www.priestriverwg.org](http://www.priestriverwg.org). We appreciate this opportunity to provide comments and considerations for the development of the 2025-2030 Idaho Fisheries Management Plan. Our comments will be focused on the objectives and strategies directly affecting **Upper Priest Lake and tributaries, Priest Lake and tributaries, Priest River and tributaries and East River and tributaries**. The following represents the language we are suggesting for the "Priest River Drainage, Objectives and Strategies" section of the draft *Fisheries Management Plan 2025-2030* document. We feel these suggested objectives and strategies are reasonable, simple to understand, enforceable, and will benefit the native fish species in the watershed while still allowing anglers to enjoy these public resources.

---

### Objectives and Strategies:

**Objective:** Increase broad community understanding of the Priest Basin fisheries and fishery management.

**Strategy:** Increase community education and outreach events through mechanisms like annual State of the Lakes meetings and regular meet and greets focused on the Priest Basin.

**Strategy:** Place educational and special regulation signage at developed access sites along the river and lakes.

**Objective:** Improve the kokanee population levels that will support a quality harvest fishery.

**Strategy:** Maintain conservative harvest rules for kokanee.

**Strategy:** Periodically monitor kokanee abundance.

**Strategy:** Encourage angler harvest of Lake Trout in Upper Priest Lake and Priest Lake.

**Objective:** Maintain and enhance native fish populations in Priest Lake and Upper Priest Lake.

**Strategy:** Protect integrity of native Westslope Cutthroat Trout and Bull Trout populations by maintaining no-harvest rules for these two species in the lakes and tributaries.

**Strategy:** Work with the U.S. Forest Service, Kalispel Tribe, Idaho Department of Lands and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to improve habitat conditions in tributary streams.

**Strategy:** Continue to monitor Bull Trout population status by conducting surveys in Upper Priest Lake, Priest Lake and all suitable tributaries in the Priest River Watershed.

**Strategy:** Monitor Westslope Cutthroat Trout population status by conducting periodic surveys in Upper Priest Lake, Priest Lake, and tributaries.

**Strategy:** Continue annual suppression of Lake Trout from Upper Priest Lake to reduce predation mortality on native fishes.

**Strategy:** Encourage angler harvest of Lake Trout in Upper Priest Lake to supplement Lake Trout suppression efforts.

**Strategy:** Evaluate additional or modified methods for reducing Lake Trout abundance in Upper Priest Lake and main Priest Lake.

**Strategy:** Continue to gauge public interest in management objectives on Priest Lake with regard to Lake Trout.

**Strategy:** Monitor Lake Trout population dynamics including relative abundance, growth, and mortality to evaluate the effectiveness of harvest rules for Lake Trout.

**Strategy:** Monitor and evaluate opportunities to enhance the population of bull trout in the North Fork of Indian Creek.

**Objective:** Build a better understanding of recreational use on the Lower Priest River and tributaries.

**Strategy:** Conduct annual creel and access surveys.

**Objective:** Seek opportunities to improve the coldwater fishery in the Priest River and its tributaries.

**Strategy:** Protect current trout populations over this six-year planning period while solutions are investigated to improve the overall health of the Priest River and the fishery.

**Strategy:** Work with the Priest River Watershed Group to help determine effective and socially supported methods to improve the coldwater fishery in Priest River.

**Strategy:** Consider all options to Restore the Priest River, its tributaries and associated riparian habitat.

**Strategy:** Continue to monitor water temperatures throughout the Priest Basin.

**Strategy:** Explore methods to cool the Lower Priest River and increase access to cold water refugia in the Priest Basin.

**Strategy:** Evaluate potential to increase cold water refugia through habitat acquisition or conservation easements. Implement actions as appropriate.

**Strategy:** Work cooperatively with Kalispel Tribe to improve understanding of Westslope Cutthroat Trout habitat use and movement patterns in the Priest River.

**Strategy:** Incorporate climate modeling when making management decisions for fisheries in the Priest Basin.

**Strategy:** Consider enacting brook trout suppression efforts in beneficial cold-water tributaries.

**Strategy:** Assess seasonal restrictions, signage, and other actions to help maintain spawning bull trout in the East River watershed.

**Objective:** Provide diverse angling opportunities in lowland lakes.

**Strategy:** Continue periodic surveys of fish populations in Blue, Chase, and Freeman lakes to monitor population status and fish growth in relation to physical and biological conditions and fishing rules. Manage some lakes for specific fish species in order to maximize angling opportunity and diversity.

**Strategy:** Provide liberal harvest opportunities for warmwater species.

**Objective:** Develop a habitat conservation plan and an associated take permit for threatened bull trout meeting the requirements of the ESA.

**Strategy:** Work in cooperation with the IDL, USFS, and USFWS to develop a habitat conservation plan and associated take permit.

**Objective:** Evaluate potential opportunities for increasing connectivity for Westslope Cutthroat Trout and Bull Trout through the Outlet Bay Dam and Outlet Bay.

**Objective:** Monitor populations of pygmy whitefish in the Priest River Watershed.

**Objective:** Provide diverse angling opportunities in high mountain lakes.

**Strategy:** Periodically evaluate and adjust stocking rates in high mountain lakes to account for lake productivity, angling pressure and angler desires.

The Priest River Watershed Group is grateful for the opportunity to provide comment on the development of the IDFG 2025-2030 Fisheries Management Plan. Thank you for all that you do to support and enhance Idaho's fisheries.