

PRWG

Priest River Watershed Group

STRATEGIC PLAN

2024-2034

Adopted

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Who We Are, What We Do

The Priest River Watershed Group (PRWG) provides an opportunity for the communities who live, recreate, work, or are connected to the Priest River Watershed, to:

- Build a shared understanding of current conditions in the watershed.
- Identify and pursue actions that protect and conserve the watershed; rehabilitate ecological integrity; maintain and improve biodiversity; and improve beneficial and recreational uses.
- Increase the community's connection to and appreciation of the watershed.

History

Trout Unlimited (TU) initiated the development of the PRWG to bring attention specifically to the lower Priest River and to the degrading state of the fishery on the waterway. Due to the diverse and oftentimes competing water uses in the basin, recent attempts by agencies to address assorted issues has been met with both public support and opposition. In an effort to increase public awareness and support of appropriate solutions, TU organized a watershed group with members of diverse interests to work collaboratively, assist with public understanding of the issues this watershed faces and identify and prioritize potential solutions for these complex issues. TU solicited several funding sources and received multiple grants, including a substantial Bureau of Reclamation grant, to support the creation of the PRWG. Through collaborative planning, public outreach, data compilation, and stakeholder engagement, our focus is to improve the fishery and aquatic habitat in the lower Priest River watershed by seeking solutions to decrease summertime water temperatures, increase summer flows, and improve fish connectivity to cold water tributaries, in the face of a changing climate.

During the winter of 2022-2023, the Priest River Watershed Group (PRWG) formed with voting members representing a diversity of interests in the basin. The founding goals of the PRWG include:

- Effectively engage broad stakeholder participation in understanding the resource needs of the lower Priest River basin.
- Provide education and outreach on the lower Priest River.
- Work together to identify priority issues and explore ways to address those resource needs.
- Find ways to fill necessary informational gaps.
- Create a prioritized restoration strategy that addresses the lower Priest River basin.

Project Area

This project is located in the Priest River Subbasin, USGS Hydrological Unit 17010215, which is in the northwest corner of Idaho and contains 981 square miles, of which 453 square miles (46%) is the lower Priest River emphasis area (Figure 1). The closest incorporated city is Priest River, which is located at the mouth of the Priest River, the southernmost boundary of the watershed, where the Priest River joins the Pend Oreille River. The northernmost reaches of the watershed originate in Canada and the westernmost reaches originate in Washington State.

The Priest River Basin's rich natural resources has made it attractive to humans for thousands of years. It was a significant portion of the ancestral lands of the Kalispel Tribe of Indians and continues to be a high priority area for the Tribe today. In the late 1800s, European migration westward significantly changed the Basin landscape through beaver trapping, timber harvest, and massive log drives. Agriculture, including grazing, logging, and forest management, has and continues to be part of the current uses of the basin, but recreation is a primary use of the Priest Basin today. Outlet dam was built in the early 1950s and it supports Priest Lake's recreational economy by managing lake levels for the summer season.



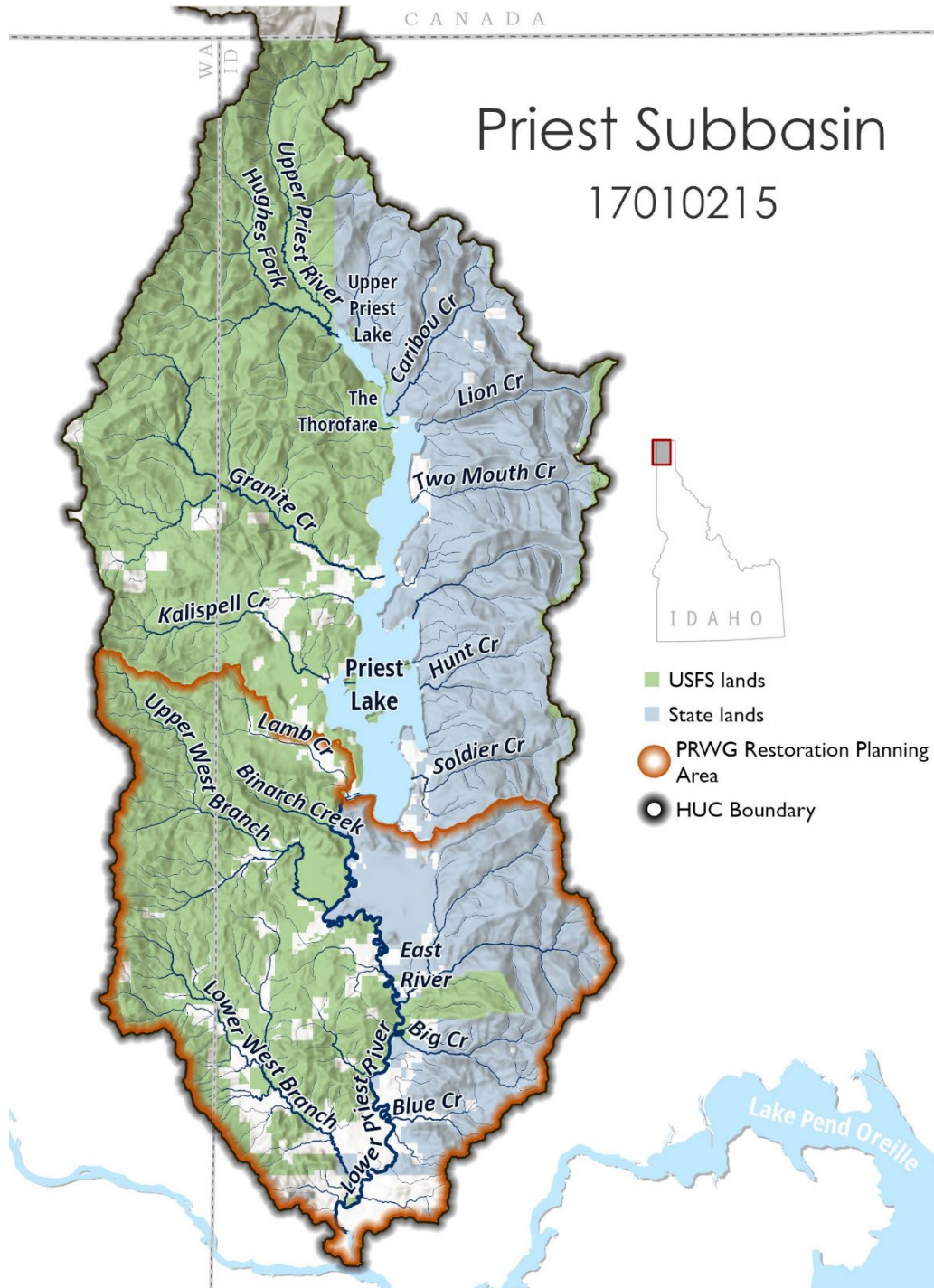


Figure 1. Project Area

Plan Perspective

The Strategic Plan is a road map for achieving long-term success, by providing a focused description of the PRWG's intentions for the next 10 years. As a guiding document, it is intended to assist and improve the PRWG's efficiency and advance the group's progress towards their founding goal of writing a Restoration Plan for the Priest River Basin, with a focus on the lower Priest River. As the PRWG's first Strategic Plan, the goals and objectives contained within are focused on establishing the structures and foundation which will support the PRWG's success in the long term, while also providing necessary flexibility for internal capacity to grow and for the exploration of new opportunities.

This plan was crafted through a collaborative process with the members of the PRWG Steering Committee and a professional facilitator. The PRWG consulted technical watershed resource experts to help refine the content contained in this plan. The PRWG created this plan with ambitious yet realistic intent, considering the resources, availability of the group and its members. This plan is intended to be a living document and will be updated as needed throughout the 10-year period.



Plan Workflow

The below chart (Figure 2) outlines the information presented in the Strategic Plan and how it will function in coordination with the annual work plan, progressing towards the creation of a restoration plan.

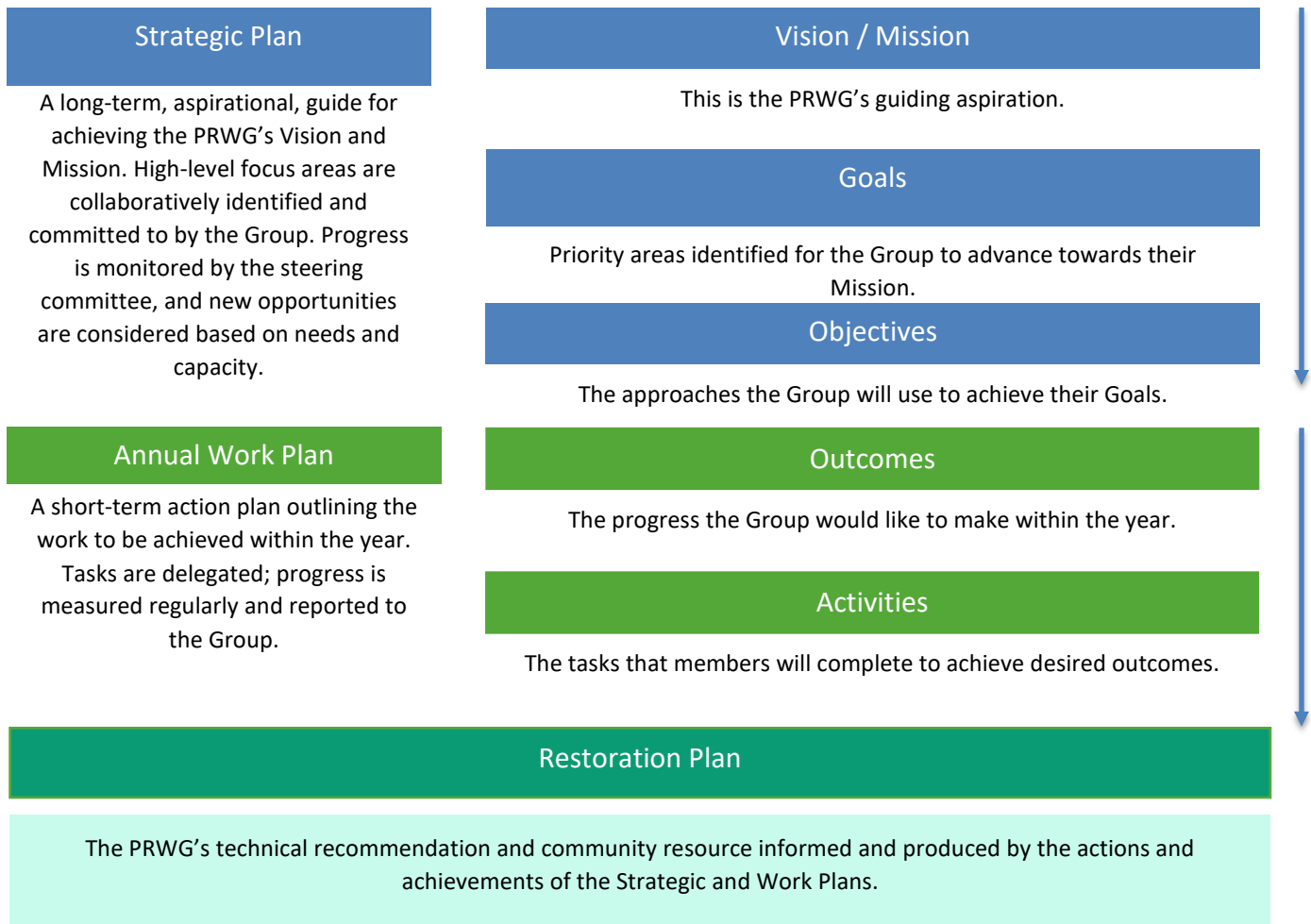


Figure 2. Plan Workflow

Criteria for Work

The following list of guiding questions were used in the development of the Strategic Plan to reflect on the intended use of the plan and craft a deliberate strategy:

- Are these SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely) goals?
- Are these appropriate efforts for the working group?
- What items are priority, or achievable in the near term?
- What items are more appropriate for a later edition of the strategic plan, or are only achievable after certain progress is made?
- Does the overall structure support, and directly relate to our Mission and Vision?
- What is reasonable, given our resources and capacity? Can or should we be doing more or less?



Vision, Mission, Goals

VISION STATEMENT:

To foster a properly functioning watershed with beneficial habitat that supports a healthy riverscape, its biological elements, and which meets the needs of the people who live, work, recreate, or are otherwise connected to the Priest River watershed.

MISSION STATEMENT:

Priest River Watershed Group works collaboratively with the intent to safeguard and restore the Priest River watershed with a primary focus on improving water quality and quantity, aquatic and riparian habitat, and connectivity in the lower Priest River.

GOALS:

GOAL A. Establish the internal processes and long-term sustainability of the Priest River Watershed Group by defining and adopting structures and systems for self-governance, coordination, and administrative efficacy.

- **Objective A-1. Protocols:** Within 3 months, review and improve the clarity and relevance of the PRWG protocols, considering how well they have served the group thus far, with specific attention to conduct, enforcement, and communication.
 - Establish a clear decision-making process to be used in the application and interpretation of steering committee votes and aid the PRWG in definitively determining group actions and/or decisions.
- **Objective A-2. Steering Committee Structure:** Within 3 months, establish an internal structure of self-governance for steering committee membership which addresses membership terms, representation, bylaws, leadership and officer positions, and subcommittees.
- **Objective A-3. Communication Plan:** Within 9 months, create and implement a communication plan which provides a strategy for external public and media relations to advance the mission of the PRWG.
- **Objective A-4. Funding Plan:** Within 6 months, create a funding plan which considers the short and long-term financial needs associated with meeting PRWG Mission and Goals.

GOAL B. Develop a broad scientific understanding of the Lower Priest River watershed to establish the foundation for PRWG's long-term goal of writing a restoration plan for the lower Priest River and tributaries.

- **Objective B-1. Continued Learning:** Continue to increase the PRWG Steering Committee's collective knowledge and establish a shared baseline of understanding:
 - Continue internal educational series
 - Invite technical experts to present on key topics

- Encourage the sharing of information
- Continue to develop and maintain a library of relevant resources
- Objective B-2. Data Catalog: Within 6 months, develop and implement a data catalog system for organizing and filing informational materials relevant to the PRWG Vision, Mission, and Goals, including survey data, maps, and plans.
- Objective B-3. Fill Information Gaps: Identify information gaps and produce accurate, relevant, and scientifically based materials to fill the gaps and be made available to the interested public. Resources may include, but not be limited to:
 - Survey Data: Fishing/recreational use; Sediment inputs; Biodiversity survey; Invasive species; Wetland inventory; Organic carbon stocks; Long term monitoring of sites
 - Maps: Land use; Ownership; Data; Didymo; Coldwater Input; Access; Wetlands; Erosion; Vegetation; Projects
- Objective B-4. Project Area Map: Within 2 months create a base map that will create spatial and temporal visualizations of relevant information to be used in the prioritization of PRWG actions and creation of the Restoration Plan, with a long-term goal of collecting and adding relevant data and layers, including but not limited to:
 - Land use; Ownership; Data; Didymo; Coldwater Input; Access; Wetlands; Erosion; Vegetation; Projects
- Objective B-5. Assessment Methodology: Within 18 months develop a methodology for considering solutions for restoring the lower Priest River and its riparian areas.

GOAL C. Improve human connection to the lower Priest River by developing a clear understanding and awareness of the use and issues affecting the watershed and seeking opportunities to make recommendations for policies that would improve those uses identified as problematic.

- **Objective C-1. Understanding Use:** Within 24 months, develop a clear understanding of how people use the lower Priest River by collecting information and soliciting surveys regarding use on private property, recreational public use (i.e. fishing, boating, hunting, etc.) and commercial use (i.e. timber harvest, road building and maintenance, weed control, etc.).
- **Objective C-2. Education and Outreach:** Explore opportunities to increase public awareness of the value and issues affecting the watershed, including Priest Lake, and lower Priest River. Opportunities may include participating in external efforts (citizen science groups), partnering opportunities, and/or measures the PRWG can take independently.
 - Within 9 months, compile a list of potential actions, resources, and contacts.
 - Within 9 months, determine a priority list of actions (including the costs and benefits associated with each) for the PRWG to support or facilitate public education regarding the Priest River watershed.
- **Objective C-3. Policy:** As opportunities arise, use the information obtained in objectives C1-C2 to craft well-informed recommendations and responses to proposed public policies or policy changes, or present PRWG crafted policy proposals which relate to the mission and vision of the PRWG regarding use of the lower Priest River.

GOAL D. Within 6 months, create a focused Work Plan (in alignment with the PRWG Vision, Mission, and Goals) which outlines a strategy and specific actions the PRWG can take to improve the Priest River watershed with a focus on the lower Priest River. In creating the Work Plan priority actions should be determined through consideration of costs and benefits, PRWG resources, and timelines as appropriate.

- **Objective D-1. Method for Work Plan Creation:** Within 4 months, develop a methodology for creating the Work Plan which outlines:
 - Steering committee assignments and roles,
 - The process for group review,
 - The use of technical experts in crafting the work plan,
 - A work breakdown structure (WBS) and schedule for completing the Work Plan, and
 - Any other necessary directions and guidance for delegating labor.
- **Objective D-2. Outline for Work Plan:** In creating the Work Plan, use the PRWG's organization of categories (and associated discussion which occurred during the strategic planning process) to draft clear, specific actions (i.e. coordination with agencies) to address prominent issues or opportunities for improving the Priest River watershed and public access to recreational opportunities, with a focus on the lower Priest River:
 - increase instream connectivity (especially to refugia),
 - reduce summer water temperatures,
 - reduce instream sediment load,
 - increase summertime stream flows,
 - improve riparian and aquatic habitat,
 - increase floodplain connectivity.

Objective D-3. Appropriately consult with technical experts and apply the SMART method as warranted while crafting the actions and goals outlined within the Work Plan.

GOAL E. Within five years, develop a prioritized restoration plan for the lower Priest River.