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Hemingway Chapter

April 28, 2021

Mayor and City Council  
480 East Ave. N  
Ketchum, ID 83340

Re: River Restoration and the SAP Process

Dear Mayor Bradshaw and City Council Members:

The Hemingway Chapter of Trout Unlimited welcomes the opportunity to address you on the *Big Wood River Atlas* and the best-management practices for the Big Wood River.

The River Atlas was commissioned by Blaine County and is the culmination of years of study of the Big Wood River. We are extremely pleased Jon Ambrose, its primary author, will speak to the Council. Mr. Ambrose will summarize the River Atlas findings and make suggestions on how the City can best utilize it going forward.

We now know much more about the behavior and preservation of high-mountain, free-stone river ecosystems. This science informs how public and private interests should approach questions of restoration and preservation of these priceless eco-systems. The River Atlas adds to this knowledge base by documenting the existing form, constrictions and opportunities for the Big Wood River. It documents how the River has been altered by human intrusion and confinement and what opportunities now exist to repair and preserve it. The River Atlas forms a new baseline of knowledge about the Big Wood River and makes it available to both private and public interests. The River Atlas can be found online at <https://www.co.blaine.id.us/509/Big-Wood-River-Atlas-2020>.

The City Council regularly faces difficult decisions when human activities and development conflict with the natural behavior of the Big Wood River. Mr. Ambrose's presentation and the related materials accompanying this letter can help you in the months and years ahead in understanding and resolving river issues.

The basic principles of river management and balance are important to state:

1. Let the River be a river, free of constraint or confinement, whenever possible.
2. Reconnect the River with its flood plain; prohibit development on the floodplain.
3. Avoid rock riprap and rely on trees and woody debris to stabilize river banks and shelter fish and wildlife.
4. Protect the riparian zone in and above the floodplain to provide shade, habitat and bank stabilization.

The enclosed memorandum describes the river studies prepared over the last several years. These studies document how and why the natural hydraulic function and habitat of the Big Wood has degraded and recommend various restoration policies and projects. The memorandum also outlines current restoration projects, both planned and recently completed, the organizations involved (“stakeholders”) and what still needs to be done to fix the river. This general background information provides context to understand what the river needs now. What we learn from all these studies is that projects designed to protect only one property (“the Band-Aid approach”) often exacerbate the overall problems on the Big Wood. Particular problems on the river usually point to broader problems requiring a more comprehensive approach.

A specific example occurs in Reach 5 of the River Atlas - Adams Gulch to Warm Springs Creek. Under “Reach Project Potential” for Reach 5, the River Atlas states :

The western floodplain throughout the upper sections of this reach are currently undeveloped and subject to some protection in the Northwood Natural Area. These areas serve a high value in floodplain function upstream of a highly developed zone. Efforts should be made to maintain and expand protected status, as well as restore channel processes in areas of prior channel occupation.

The River Atlas suggests a reach-wide project in Reach 5 to open up other historic channels (only one is active) in that area. Such a project could address the river’s current tendency to consolidate its flow in one main channel along its eastern boundary, eroding the eastern bank which the homeowners have fought off by placing extensive riprap. The western floodplain in this area may offer the opportunity to dissipate high spring flows toward the west bank, reducing the flood risk to residences on the east bank and downstream, including in high density West Ketchum.

For our part, the River Atlas motivates us to work with the City and the other Stakeholders in the Valley and ask the City to jumpstart an effort to deal with river issues on a comprehensive basis.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address the Council on the Big Wood River's status. We hope this presentation broadens the opportunity for renewed public efforts to sustain and restore the Big Wood River

Sincerely,

s/ Alan Richardson  
President, Hemingway Chapter of Trout Unlimited