

WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I Grants for Fiscal Year 2023

Funding Opportunity Announcement No. R23AS00362

Park County (Co.) Water Initiative: Partner Collaboration and
Coordination, Community Engagement and Project
Development

November 2023

Proposal submission from:
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ABBREVIATIONS

GYE = Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem
 GYC = Greater Yellowstone Coalition
 MFP = Montana Freshwater Partners
 MT DEQ = Montana Department of Environmental Quality
 MT FWP = Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
 NRCS = Natural Resource Conservation Service
 PCCD = Park County Conservation District
 PCEC = Park County Environmental Council
 SVWG = Shields Valley Watershed Group
 TU = Trout Unlimited
 USFS = U.S. Forest Service
 UYWG = Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group
 YCT = Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Date: December 5th, 2023

Applicant: Montana Freshwater Partners

City, County, State: Livingston, Park County, Montana

Congressional District: MT2

The Upper Yellowstone Watershed is the headwaters of the longest free-flowing river in the contiguous United States. The iconic Yellowstone River originates southeast of Yellowstone National Park in the Absaroka Mountain Range, flowing 671 miles before its confluence with the Missouri River. The Upper Yellowstone Watershed is experiencing numerous pressures on its aquatic resources including current and legacy land-use practices, high recreational use, overallocation of water, invasive species, channel armoring/diking, and climatic changes. There are currently two watershed groups active within this geography. The Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group (UYWG) serves the Upper Yellowstone River and its tributaries from the National Park boundary in Gardiner, MT downstream to Carters Bridge (just upstream of Livingston, MT), while the Shields Valley Watershed Group (SVWG) serves the Shields River from its headwater tributaries down to its confluence with the Yellowstone River. Montana Freshwater Partners (MFP) has been a member of both of these Watershed Groups since 2016 and has been actively working with them to increase capacity and coordination to implement on-the-ground water conservation and watershed health projects. Over the past 18 months, MFP has made significant strides in bringing together a diverse group of water resource professionals and landowners to collaboratively identify and prioritize restoration, planning, and outreach projects, with the goal of increasing the health and resilience of the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watersheds. This planning effort has been in direct concert with the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watershed Groups, as well as other local partners including NGOs and local, state, and federal agencies. This level of coordination is particularly critical as our watershed faces unprecedented challenges posed by factors such as climate change, ongoing development, and increased recreational use. We are seeking funding to formalize this effort that we are calling the Park Co. Water Initiative (“the Water Initiative”) to continue to coordinate and collaborate on project identification and ranking, funding procurement and implementation. This proposal aims to fund capacity to **(1)** formalize the Water Initiative and develop mission and goals for the group; **(2)** build a website for the Water Initiative that houses prioritized project ideas and highlights completed projects and collaborative restoration efforts; **(3)** facilitate quarterly meetings to share updates and identify, rank, and develop implementation plans for aquatic conservation and restoration projects; **(4)** continue outreach efforts with landowners to identify additional projects; and **(5)** advance top-ranked projects, including completion of design and engineering for 2-4 on-the-ground restoration projects. These activities will increase the pace and scale of aquatic resource restoration and conservation in the Upper Yellowstone Watershed, increase collaboration and coordination

among a diverse group of partners and stakeholders, and ultimately increase watershed resilience to the numerous pressures the system is facing.

PROJECT LOCATION

The Park Co. Water Initiative encompasses all of the Shields Watershed (HUC 8 10070003) and parts of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed (HUC 8 10070002) within and flowing into Park County, Montana (Figure 1). Park County is located in southwest Montana and borders Yellowstone National Park to the South. The largest town in the project area is Livingston, Montana (population 8,400). The project area is composed primarily of private lands and land managed by the Custer Gallatin National Forest. State, city and county government, Bureau of Land Management, and other government lands make up a small portion of the project area.

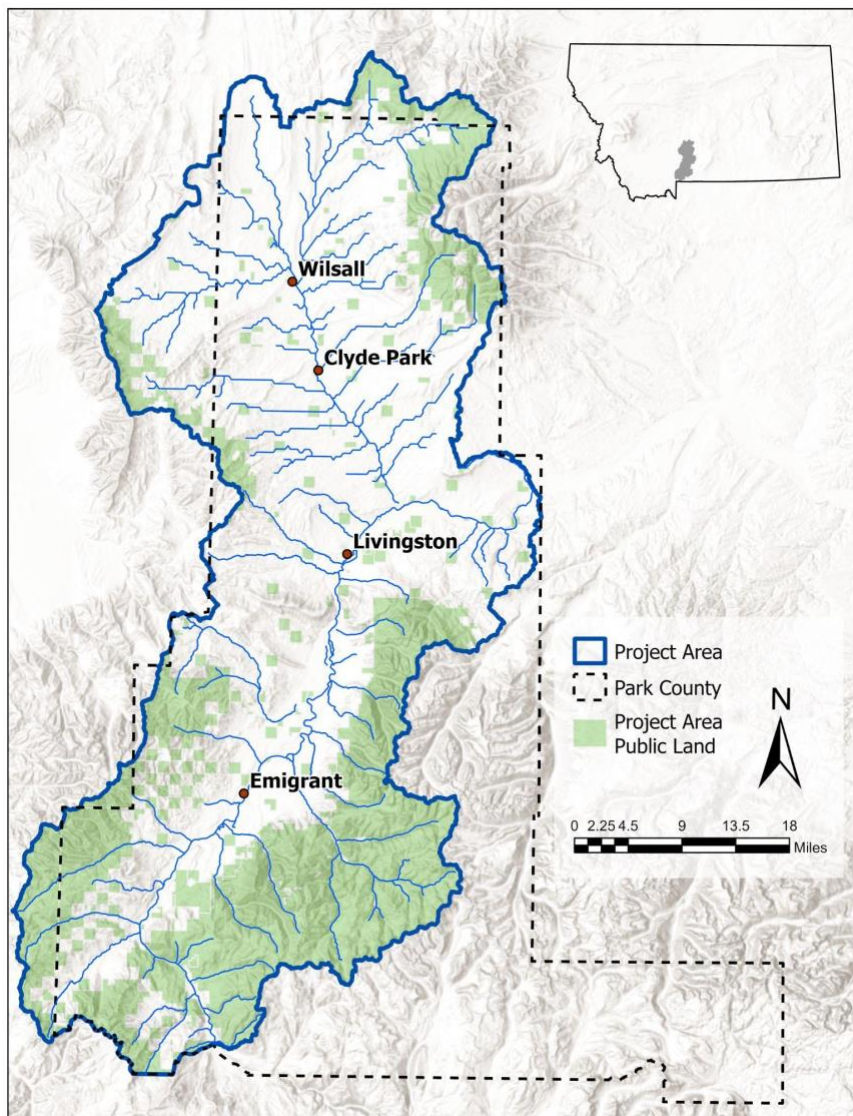


Figure 1. Map showing project area within blue outline.

TECHNICAL PROJECT DESCRIPTION

APPLICANT CATEGORY

Montana Freshwater Partners (MFP) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit based in Livingston, MT that works to preserve and restore streams and wetlands throughout the state of Montana. MFP was established in 2011 by some of the foremost water resource experts in the State of Montana who were seeing alarming rates of wetland and stream degradation and loss due to rapid development. MFP was founded to provide a viable option for compensatory mitigation under the Clean Water Act for unavoidable activities involving discharges of dredged or fill material into Waters of the United States. Since then, we have established numerous wetland and stream restoration projects across the state. Over time, as our organization has grown and staff capacity has allowed, MFP has expanded our programming beyond compensatory mitigation, with a particular focus on protecting and restoring the Upper Yellowstone Watershed, where the organization is based.

MFP is a participating member of two local existing watershed groups that have been around for more than two decades; the Shields Valley Watershed Group (SVWG) and the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group (UYWG). The SVWG is predominantly composed of landowners and a handful of natural resource professionals coordinating efforts to maintain productive and sustainable ranching operations and to protect existing natural resources. The UYWG is a collaborative of landowners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local businesses, and representatives from government agencies that meets regularly to address a wide range of issues including working lands, recreation and tourism, ecological monitoring, drought planning, flood response and preparedness, and community education and outreach. While both watershed groups value watershed health and climate resilience, there are a number of factors that interfere with their ability to get on-the-ground restoration implemented. This includes a lack of capacity (a single half-time staff person serves as the coordinator for both groups), as well as a greater overall focus on other priorities such as the sustainable management of working agricultural lands.

Between 2000 and 2015, the SVWG was more active in watershed restoration, but over time the capacity to get work done has dwindled. The SVWG conducted two previous watershed planning efforts; 1) an Upper Shields River Stream Assessment in 2001 that identified degraded aquatic habitat and assessed restoration opportunities on the upper 40 miles of the Shields River and 2) a Watershed Restoration Plan in 2012 that identified a number of projects/treatments to reduce sediment delivery along the mainstem Shields River including floodplain and riparian revegetation, removal of railroad and floodplain berms/dikes, bridge expansion for increased conveyance, and bioengineered bank stabilization. Both planning efforts are outdated and while they identified numerous aquatic restoration opportunities on private land, they did so without buy-in from local landowners. The UYWG has not completed any similar past watershed planning efforts. However, UYWG strategic planning sessions held in 2018 and 2021 identified the need for a watershed planning effort aimed at watershed health and climate resiliency.

With the support of both watershed groups, Montana Freshwater Partners (MFP) successfully applied for and received grant funding in December of 2021 to lead a project inventory and prioritization effort aimed at watershed health and climate resilience in the Upper Yellowstone. MFP has spent the last year and a half working on this effort, which spans the geographic scope of both watershed groups and incorporates the Upper Yellowstone River and its tributaries from the City of Livingston down to Springdale, MT. This reach from Livingston to Springdale lies within Park County and is currently not covered by either watershed group.

In contrast to previous watershed planning efforts in the Shields, MFP used a ground-up approach where public meetings were used to connect with interested landowners who had property along the Yellowstone or Shields Rivers or their tributaries, to make sure landowners had buy-in on identified projects. MFP followed up with site visits to interested landowners' properties and identified watershed restoration opportunities. Following this, a team composed of members of both watershed groups including agencies, NGOs, landowners, and the Park County Conservation District assisted with ranking identified projects. Ranking criteria included:

- Water quantity (potential of the project to increase instream flow, increase natural water storage, increase irrigation efficiency)
- Reduced flood risk (increased floodplain connectivity, protection or acquisition of intact floodplains, improved human/infrastructure safety)
- Reduced wildfire risk (increased wetness of riparian corridor, fuels reduction, increased width of riparian corridor)
- Aquatic habitat benefits (increased extent of riparian/ wetland area, increased habitat complexity, reduction of invasive species, improved connectivity)
- Water quality benefits (increased stream shading/ water temperature reduction, reduced sediment inputs, reduced nutrient inputs)
- Community benefits (public demonstration potential, community involvement/ volunteer potential, new/improved public access, public education)
- Scale of benefit (measurable landscape scale/multi property benefits, large scale ecological benefit, size of project)
- Sensitive/ ESA-listed species benefit

To date through this effort, we have identified almost 50 restoration, education, research, and monitoring projects (Figure 2 [below]). In this initial planning effort, we focused on identifying projects on private land, but we have been in coordination with the United States Forest Service (USFS) and other public land managers about their upcoming projects. Eventually if funding/ capacity allows, we would like to add priority USFS projects into the project inventory and support USFS staff in identifying funding and capacity to help them manage and implement those projects.

MFP, along with key partners of the watershed group and ranking team, including Trout Unlimited, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Park County Environmental Council, and Park County

Conservation District, are now seeking funding through the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program (CWMP) to fund capacity to continue this planning effort and to complete designs for high priority projects. MFP's goal is to formalize the ranking team from the project prioritization effort into the "Park Co. Water Initiative" to continue the project identification and ranking process and to advance actions identified within the project inventory. **Because this group has already been working together and is in direct coordination with the existing watershed groups, we are applying as an "existing watershed group."** This group of landowners, interested community members, NGOs and natural resource agencies has a goal of increasing resilience for the Upper Yellowstone Watershed in Park County through coordinated and collaborative watershed planning and project implementation. The CWMP grant will allow the Park Co. Water Initiative to increase our long-term capacity to support and expand the pace and scale of restoration work in the Upper Yellowstone Watershed.

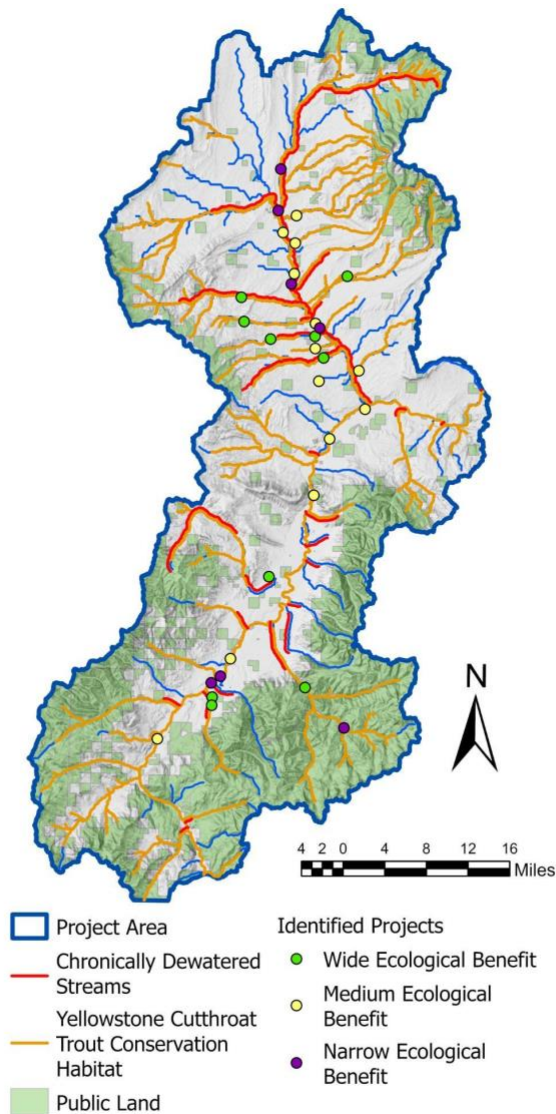


Figure 2. Map showing identified restoration project locations to date from the project prioritization effort spearheaded by MFP. Map also shows streams that have been identified by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks as chronically dewatered due to irrigation withdrawals as well as streams with high priority Yellowstone cutthroat trout populations.

ELIGIBILITY OF APPLICANT

Montana Freshwater Partners (MFP) is a 501c3 nonprofit based in Livingston, Montana. MFP is well-poised to lead the development of the Park Co. Water Initiative and administer the CWMP grant to promote the sustainable and collaborative use, protection and restoration of our water resources in the Shields and Paradise Valleys. We have extensive technical expertise in aquatic restoration; are deeply involved with both existing watershed groups; and we have built strong relationships with local partners, agencies, landowners and community members. Over the past 12 years, we have developed credibility not only in Park County, Montana, but across the state working with private landowners and water resource agencies and partners through our compensatory wetland and stream mitigation projects. In the past five years, MFP has grown from an executive director and a single project manager to three full time project managers and a three-quarter time finance manager. Our three project managers bring decades of experience in GIS, stream and wetland science, fisheries and wildlife biology, habitat assessment, restoration, monitoring, partner collaboration and coordination and regulatory experience. We also have a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), a team of water resource professionals separate from our Board of Directors, who provide technical advice on and reviews of wetland and stream restoration design plans, construction sequencing and costs, and monitoring protocols, among other topics. The TAC is composed of experts in stream and wetland restoration, engineering, design, ecology, botany, fisheries and wildlife biology. Our staff and Board of Directors is a diverse team of highly-skilled and experienced professionals in the fields of economics, small business, hydrology and fluvial geomorphology, fish and wildlife biology, wetland science, accounting, law, engineering and policy. Current board members include:

Name of Board Member	Board Position	Occupation
Marcus Pearson	Chair	Land Use and Water Law Attorney, Self-Employed
Sarah Zuzulock	Vice Chair	Principle Environmental Engineer, Zuzulock Environmental
Amir Darabi-Foresti	Treasurer	PhD Candidate in Mechanical Engineering at Montana State University
Kascie Herron	Secretary	Associate Director of Communications and Marketing, Adventure Scientists
Tom Parker	Director	Principal Ecologist, Geum Environmental Consulting
Liz Fairbank	Director	Road Ecologist, Center for Large Landscape Conservation

Halle Nienhaus	Director	Biologist, Sundance Consulting
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MFP has been a member of both local watershed groups (Shields Valley Watershed Group and Upper Yellowstone Watershed Groups) since 2016. With their backing, MFP is applying for CWMP funding to support the Park Co. Water Initiative which will facilitate project implementation across the geographic scope of both watershed groups AND incorporate an additional section of the Upper Yellowstone River and its tributaries from the City of Livingston down to Springdale, MT.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Montana Freshwater Partners (MFP) received grant funding in December 2021 from the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation to lead the development of a project planning effort focused on watershed health and climate resiliency projects in the Upper Yellowstone and Shields River Watersheds. In 2022, MFP used a ground-up approach to identify restoration projects through more than 20 individual meetings with local natural resource partners and community leaders, and three public meetings in distinct geographic regions within Park County, MT. Through these meetings, MFP connected with interested landowners who had potential watershed restoration opportunities within their properties. MFP then worked to ground-truth project ideas through site visits to potential projects. In the fourth quarter of 2022, MFP assembled a project ranking team comprised of individuals familiar with the watershed, representing varied stakeholder groups (e.g. the conservation district, state and federal agencies, other NGOs, and landowners) and with diverse expertise including hydrology; plant, wildlife and fisheries biology; stream and wetland ecology; geomorphology; engineering; water resources; and more. In quarter four of 2022 and quarter one of 2023, MFP project managers developed project ranking criteria aimed at scoring projects based on their benefits to water quantity, water quality, aquatic habitat, sensitive and threatened species and wildfire and flood risk reduction, as well as their benefits to the local community and the geographic scale of their benefits. MFP completed an initial project scoring and ranking using these criteria which assigned each project with a possible score of up to 24 points. We then held ranking team meetings in January and April of 2023 to review projects and evaluate project ranking criteria/initial project scoring with local experts. Following these meetings, MFP staff incorporated feedback from the ranking team into project descriptions and rankings and produced an updated ranked project inventory. In addition, we facilitated the matching of each project with relevant funding sources, streamlining the funding process for implementation. MFP, in partnership with key partners of the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Valley Watershed Groups, is now seeking funding through the WaterSMART Collaborative Watershed Management Program to formalize the Park Co. Water Initiative, continue collaborative planning, and begin moving top-ranked projects forward.

TASK A. Watershed Group Development

Under Task A, a successful CWMP Phase I grant would enable MFP and our partners to: 1) formalize the Park Co. Water Initiative and 2) develop a website for the Water Initiative. Up until this point, the Water Initiative has been an informal group with members from both

watershed groups and other watershed resource professionals that worked to help vet and rank watershed health and climate resiliency projects from the project inventory led by MFP. To carry this momentum forward and allow the group to have a clear vision as they continue planning and outreach efforts for restoration work and begin to develop implementation plans for top-ranked projects, MFP and partners are requesting money for the following tasks.

A1 Formalize the Park Co. Water Initiative

Formalizing the Park Co. Water Initiative will include working with a hired facilitator to develop a mission statement and goals for the group over the course of 2 facilitated meetings. The goal of this effort will be to build consensus on a shared vision and realistic outcomes for the group. As part of this effort, MFP and partners would also like to engage with indigenous groups that historically resided in the Upper Yellowstone to seek potential participation in the Water Initiative and hear indigenous perspectives on water issues and climate resiliency in the Upper Yellowstone, which has been a missing component of both existing watershed groups to date.

A2 Develop the Park Co. Water Initiative Website

Developing a website for the Park Co. Water Initiative is key given that the Water Initiative spans the geographic boundaries of 2 existing watershed groups as well as a portion of the watershed that isn't covered by either watershed group. Because of this, it doesn't make sense for the Water Initiative to have a simple webpage within either of the watershed groups websites. Additionally, it doesn't make sense for MFP to house the Water Initiative webpage within our website as we want this to be an unbranded, collaborative effort that all partners have ownership of and access to. Because of this, MFP and our partners feel strongly that the Water Initiative should have its own website/URL. MFP will work with a web developer to build the website and MFP staff will be responsible for developing initial written and visual content. MFP and partners have agreed that the website will serve several functions: 1) it will serve as our watershed restoration planning document and include background information on the watershed, issues impacting watershed health, the ranked project inventory matrix and an interactive map showing prioritized on-the-ground restoration project locations; 2) it will be used to maintain a centralized event and resource clearinghouse for the Water Initiative; and 3) it will serve as a space to highlight success stories regarding collaborative watershed restoration and conservation efforts.

TASK B. Watershed Restoration Planning

Under Task B, a successful CWMP Phase I grant would enable MFP and our partners to continue our watershed restoration planning efforts through outreach, site visits, and Water Initiative meetings. While MFP worked with partners over the past year and a half to identify, vet and rank over 50 projects aimed at watershed health and climate resiliency, the intent is for the project inventory to be a living document (housed on the Water Initiative website) and to continue to modify and/or add to it as necessary. MFP and its partners also plan to take existing projects from the project inventory and identify funding and implementation strategies, to begin moving some of the top-ranked projects forward.

B1 Facilitate quarterly Park Co. Water Initiative Meetings

An MFP project manager will facilitate quarterly Water Initiative Meetings where partners can present ongoing and planned restoration and conservation efforts and solicit feedback or assistance from partners. The meetings will also serve as a space to score newly identified projects using ranking criteria and update the project inventory. Lastly, we will use the Water Initiative meetings to develop funding and implementation strategies for top-ranked projects. This will include a discussion around which partners have the capacity and expertise to move a given project forward and how other partners can support their efforts.

B2 Continue landowner outreach to identify additional projects

Over the past year, MFP and its partners have engaged with a number of landowners who showed up to public meetings and/or watershed group meetings and expressed interest in restoring streams and wetlands on their properties. However, there are numerous landowners who we have not yet connected with and who may be interested in having their properties evaluated for water conservation and restoration opportunities. As part of our efforts under Task B, MFP will continue to network with landowners at watershed group meetings and other forums to gauge interest in doing restoration on their property. We will follow up with site visits on interested landowners' properties to evaluate restoration potential. Lastly, we will provide updates to landowners through one-on-one meetings, phone calls, and at watershed group meetings on funding procurement, implementation timelines and collaborative partnerships.

TASK C. Watershed Management Project Design

Under Task C, a successful CWMP Phase I grant would enable MFP and our partners to tee up 2-4 of the top-ranked projects within the project inventory for implementation. This is extremely useful, because many of the funding sources for water conservation and watershed health projects are geared towards implementation. It is challenging to find grant funding that can be used for design and engineering, so this CWMP funding would allow the Water Initiative to be competitive for several other funding sources, both within and outside of the WaterSMART program.

C1 Tee up 2-4 top ranked projects for implementation

As part of Task C, an MFP project manager will work with the Park Co. Water Initiative to develop consensus around which top ranked projects to implement first. MFP will then work to contract with a restoration design & engineering consultant to complete site-specific project design and engineering (60% design or higher) for 2-4 projects (as funding allows). MFP staff and the restoration consultant will work to analyze the means and methods for construction at the 2-4 project sites and identify constraints, prepare construction cost estimates and research what type of site-specific environmental compliance will be necessary for implementation.¹

¹ We understand that the CWMP funding cannot be used directly for implementation; we will only use CWMP funding to tee up projects for future implementation using a different grant funding source.

C2 Apply for EWRP or other WaterSMART funding opportunities for project implementation
To continue to move the top-ranked projects forward, MFP will use the designs developed as part of Task C1 to prepare a WaterSMART Environmental Water Resources Projects proposal for implementation funding.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

E.1.1. Evaluation Criterion A—Watershed Group Diversity and Geographic Scope (30 PTS)

E.1.1.1. Sub-criterion No. A1. Watershed Group Diversity

The Park Co. Water Initiative encompasses stakeholders throughout Park County, including the two existing watershed groups and many of their members. The intent of the Water Initiative is to identify and implement real, on-the-ground improvements and restoration within the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watersheds, and to engage the community in building increased watershed resilience and health. This is only possible through engaging a diverse array of stakeholders so that all water users' and community members' needs are heard and represented. The Water Initiative is committed to maintaining and building relationships with a diverse array of stakeholders to further community engagement in watershed conservation and restoration.

The Water Initiative has representation or partnership with the following affected stakeholders:

- **Shields Valley and Upper Yellowstone River Watershed Groups:** The Water Initiative includes members and representatives of both the Shields Valley Watershed Group and the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group.
- **Fishing, Outdoor Recreation, and Tourism:** As the gateway to the nation's first national park, the Upper Yellowstone River has a long history of fishing and recreational use. Annually, tourism brings over \$500 million dollars to Park County, and the recreation and fishing industries support many local businesses and citizens. The Water Initiative will work closely with the fishing and outdoor industry to engage them as we start to develop implementation plans for top-ranked projects.
- **Local Government:** The Water Initiative includes representation from Park County Conservation District, Park County, and City of Livingston.
- **Public Land and Resource Managers:** The Water Initiative includes representatives from the US Forest Service, Custer Gallatin National Forest and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. We also work closely with the National Resource Conservation Service, Montana Department of Environmental Quality; and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.
- **Environmental Conservation:** The Water Initiative includes representation from several environmental, non-governmental organizations including Montana Freshwater Partners, Trout Unlimited, Park County Environmental Council; Greater Yellowstone Coalition, and Friends of Park County.

- **Local Business Owners, Residents, and Landowners:** The Water Initiative strives to be community driven, and is dependent upon the participation of Park County residents, business owners, and landowners. The majority of currently identified stream projects are located on private land and these projects could not have been identified without input from landowners.
- **Agricultural Producers:** Park County has a long history of agricultural land use – primarily livestock and haying – and many ranches have been run by the same family for generations. Landowner buy-in is an important component of a widespread stream restoration initiative, and the Park Co. The Water Initiative works closely with agricultural producers to identify projects to improve stream function and agricultural land use simultaneously.

In addition, we hope to engage with the prominent Tribes of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed, working to build relationships with Tribal members and solicit Tribal perspectives and participation as we work to restore the watershed.

E.1.1.2. Sub-criterion No. A2. Geographic Scope

The Water Initiative will encompass a total of 2,093 square miles including the entirety of the Shields River Watershed, HUC 8 10070003, and 1,200 square miles of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed, HUC 8 10070002 (Figure 3). This includes the areas covered by two existing watershed groups, plus additional areas within Park County not currently represented by a watershed group (Figure 3). Collectively, the project area will draw from stakeholder perspectives from Park County’s rural, agricultural-based communities as well as our County’s primary urban population center in Livingston. Roughly 1,200 square miles of the project area is composed of private land, 700 square miles of USFS land, primarily in the upper stream reaches and headwaters, and 100 square miles of other public land.

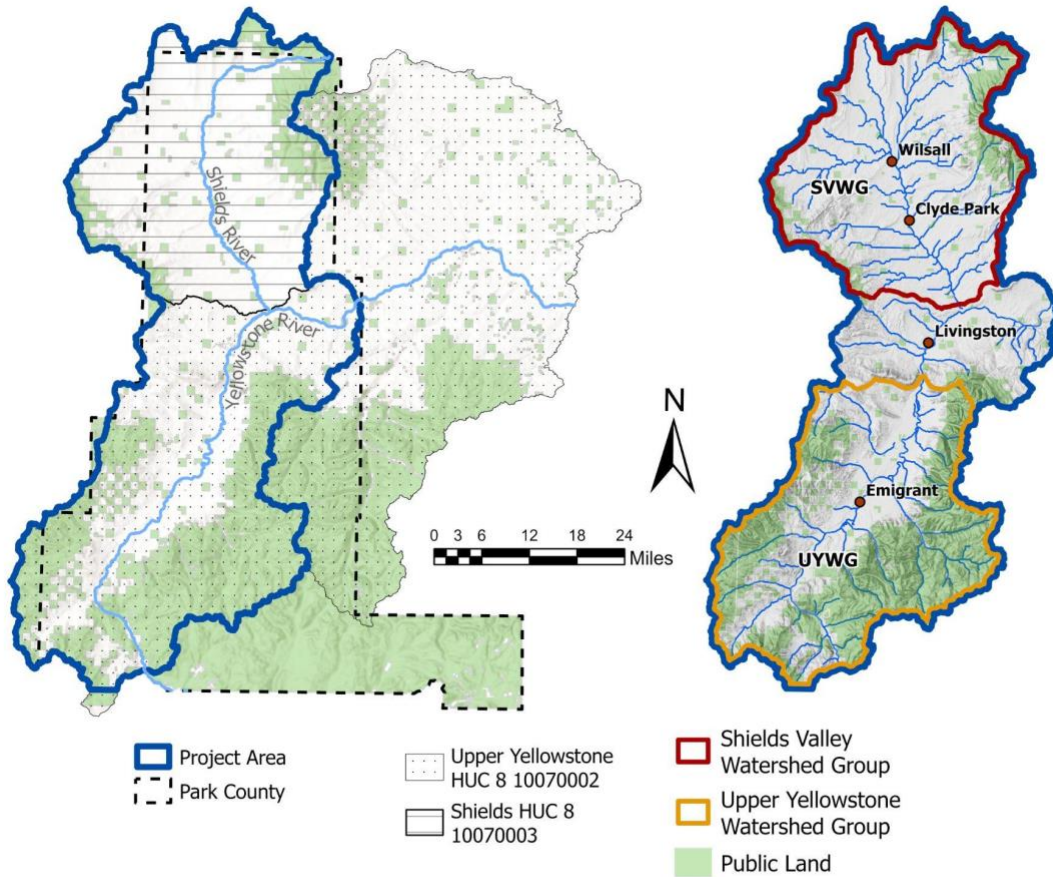


Figure 3. Left map shows the project area relative to the Upper Yellowstone (10070002) and Shields (10070003) watersheds and the right map shows the geographic coverage of the SVWG and UYWG with a lack of coverage in the watershed area between them.

E.1.2. Evaluation Criterion B—Developing Strategies to Address Critical Watershed Needs (35 PTS)

E.1.2.1. Sub-criterion No. B1. Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

Critical issues or needs facing the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watersheds include:

- Climate change
 - Current and projected climate change impacts in the Upper Yellowstone include increased air temperatures, decreased mountain snowpack, earlier runoff, and an increased likelihood of extreme events including floods, more frequent and severe droughts, and wildfires². Since 1950, the Upper Yellowstone Watershed mean annual temperature has already increased more than 2.0°F. An additional

² Hostetler S, Whitlock C, Shuman B, Liefert D, Drimal C, Bischke S. 2021. Greater Yellowstone climate assessment: past, present, and future climate change in greater Yellowstone watersheds. Bozeman MT: Montana State University, Institute on Ecosystems. 260 p. <https://doi.org/10.15788/GYCA2021>

5.2°F of warming relative to the 1986-2005 base period is expected by 2100. By the end of the century, climate models project a 44% decrease in mountain snowpack and a 36% decrease in summer base flows in rivers and streams. The effects of climate change will have far reaching consequences for everything from fish and wildlife populations, agriculture, and recreation economies, to human safety.

- Wildlife and fisheries concerns
 - The Greater Yellowstone ecosystem is one of the largest remaining relatively intact temperate ecosystems in the world. Even so, fish and wildlife species are not immune to threats, with many species experiencing declining populations and shrinking ranges.
 - Historically, Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YCT) were the dominant trout species throughout the Upper Yellowstone Watershed. Competition and hybridization with non-native species, habitat fragmentation and degradation, stream warming, and dewatering have all contributed to declining populations and range reductions for YCT³. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MTFWP) conducts annual population monitoring on the Yellowstone River within the Paradise Valley to estimate the number of YCT per mile (Figure 4). Their recent data showcases a concerning declining trend in the number of YCT over time, with the estimated number of YCT/ mile in 2023 being the lowest of any year on record.

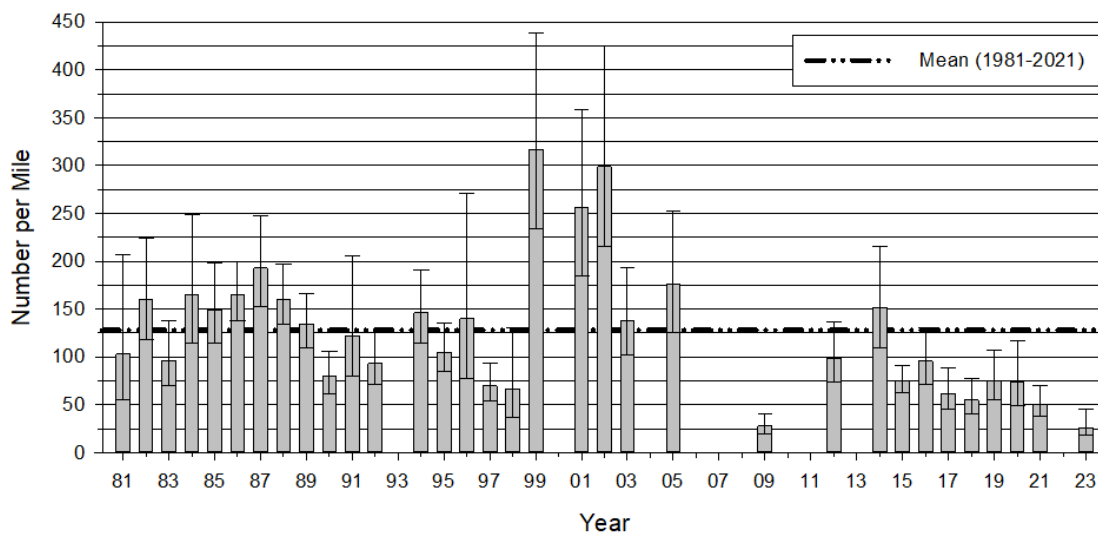


Figure 4. Annual estimates of the number of Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout per mile in the Yellowstone River within Paradise Valley. Unpublished MT Fish Wildlife and Parks data courtesy of Scott Opitz, FWP Region 3 Fisheries Biologist.

³ Endicott, C., L. Nelson, S. Opitz, A. Peterson, J. Burckhardt, S. Yekel, D. Garren, T. M. Koel, B. Shepard. 2016. Range-wide status assessment for Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii bouvieri*): 2012. Report prepared for: Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Interagency Coordination Group.

- Rapid rate of growth and development, including land use changes
 - The population of Park County has been steadily increasing, growing by 14% between 2010 and 2023⁴. These increases are projected to continue into the future, with people being drawn to Park County for the beautiful natural landscapes, ability to work remotely, and the proximity to Bozeman, one of the fastest growing municipalities in the country⁵. In recent years, much of this population growth has occurred outside of established cities and towns, reflecting a shift in land-use from agriculture to rural residential subdivisions (Figure 5). Because most new construction outside of established cities and towns relies on individual septic systems and wells, there is a strong potential for these new and existing homes and subdivisions to negatively impact water quantity and quality.

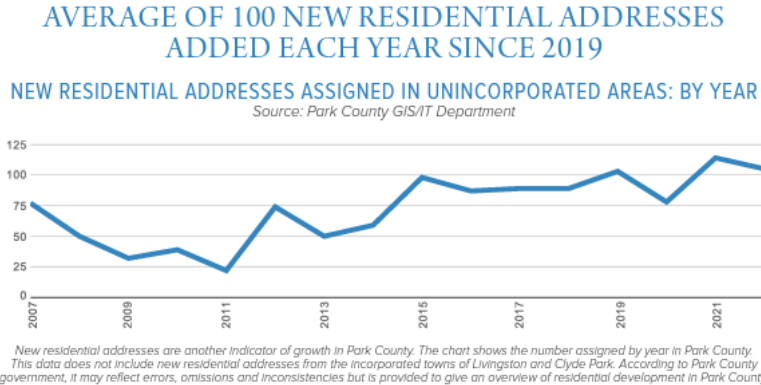


Figure 5. The number of new residential addresses assigned in unincorporated areas in Park County by year from 2007 to 2023, courtesy of the Park County GIS Department.

- Legacy land use impacts
 - Legacy land use practices and human impacts over the past 150 years including grazing, farming, development, bank armoring, and the construction of roads and railroads have led the Yellowstone River and its tributaries to become less dynamic and complex than they were historically. In Park County, approximately 24% of the channel migration zone (the corridor in which the river moves laterally over time) had been developed by 2011, with approximately 18% of the bankline being armored with rock riprap to lock the river in place and prevent natural movement⁶. Throughout the project area, many tributaries have been overallocated for irrigation, leading to the dewatering of important tributaries in the summer months (Figure 2). Overgrazing of riparian areas, active riparian vegetation removal, beaver removal, channel straightening, and armoring or

⁴ We Will Park County 2023. Park County Community Foundation.

⁵ Park County Growth Plan

⁶ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Yellowstone River Conservation District Council. 2015. Yellowstone River Cumulative Effects Analysis. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Omaha District. Omaha, NE.

diking have also contributed to the oversimplification of streams within the project area. In many cases, this has led to channel instability, downcutting, and lowered water tables across our landscape today.

- Increased recreational pressure on the Yellowstone River and its tributaries
 - Over the past several years, recreational use of the Yellowstone River has increased dramatically. An ongoing study led by the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group found a 25% increase in use of Yellowstone River access sites between 2021 and 2022⁷. Increased recreational use is leading to friction among different user groups and between river users and private landowners due to trespassing, increased trash and human waste, and poor river etiquette.
- Water quality concerns
 - Current and legacy land uses in the Upper Yellowstone and Shields have contributed to water quality impairments from non-point source pollutants. Total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) and a watershed restoration plan (WRP) have been developed for the Shields watershed related to excessive sedimentation from roads, unnatural streambank erosion, and sediment delivered from uplands⁸. The Upper Yellowstone Watershed does not yet have TMDLs or a WRP in place, but the river and many of its tributaries are listed as impaired due to physical habitat alteration and removal of riparian vegetation.
- Public safety concerns related to drought, flooding, and wildfire
 - In 2022, the Upper Yellowstone and several of its tributaries experienced a 500-year flood, followed by significant flooding on the Shields River in 2023, which resulted in the declaration of federal disasters for both events due to the extensive damage to private property and critical infrastructure including roads and bridges, as well as lasting economic impacts.
 - Over the last two decades wildfire has been a regular occurrence in both the Upper Yellowstone and Shields river watersheds. A majority of these wildfires have burned in relatively remote national forest lands, with the 2012 Pine Creek fire the notable exception, which burned through the community of Pine Creek destroying many homes and structures.
 - Drought has also been a frequent occurrence of drought in Montana throughout the last two decades (see Figure 6), including two periods of extended extreme to exceptional drought between 2001-2006 and 2020-2023⁹. This has a broad range of impacts across water uses from fisheries to agriculture and can increase the risk of wildfire significantly.

⁷ Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group. "Recreational Use Study."

<https://www.upperyellowstone.org/recreational-use>. Accessed 25 November, 2023.

⁸Confluence Consulting, inc., 2012. Watershed Restoration Plan for Shields River Watershed. Prepared for the Shields Valley Watershed Group, Livingston, Montana.

⁹ U.S. Drought Monitor. "Montana Percent Area in U.S. Drought Monitor Categories."

<https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>. Accessed 25 November 2023.

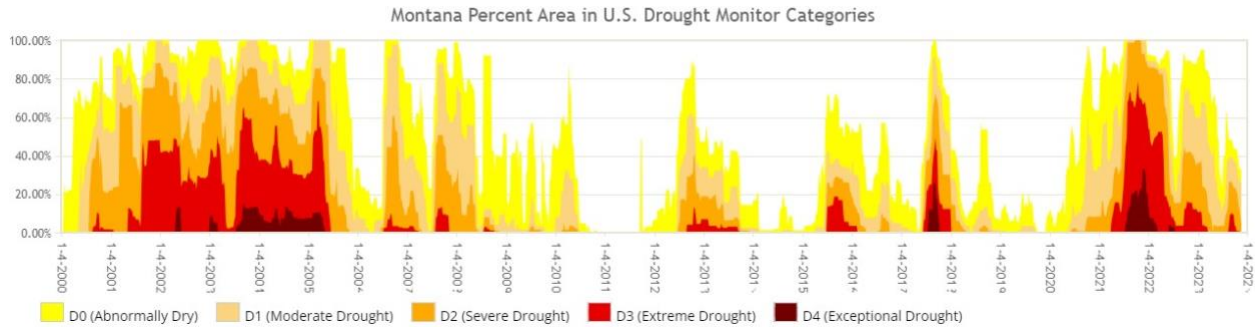


Figure 6. Percent area of MT in the U.S. Drought Monitor Categories, from the National Integrated Drought Information System (drought.gov).

- Lack of public understanding and engagement in watershed management and conservation and lack of capacity within local, state, and federal agencies to implement on the ground projects
 - The 2022/2023 floods highlighted a lack of understanding and need for education among city and county officials as well as the general public about basic river processes like channel migration and flooding. The City of Livingston and Park County lack the financial, technical, and administrative capacity to plan and implement on-the-ground projects to increase community resilience to future extreme events and have been relying on local organizations, like MFP, to complete this work.

E.1.2.2. Sub-criterion No. B2. Project Benefits

The activities proposed by MFP and its partners are an important next step because they formalize a group that focuses on identifying and developing implementation strategies for projects that address critical watershed issues. The existing watershed groups focus on sustainable management of working agricultural lands; however, they don't have the capacity to develop and implement on-the-ground aquatic restoration that targets critical watershed issues. The Park Co. Water Initiative fills this gap. The activities proposed in this application will ultimately lead to the development of watershed health projects that will reconnect floodplains and restore riparian habitat, stream channel morphology, sediment transport, stream and wetland hydrology, and other natural processes using a variety of nature based restoration techniques. Nature based restoration solutions for watershed health are widely cited in applied restoration journals, publications, and presentations. More recently, FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have recognized the need to incorporate more nature-based solutions to increase watershed and climate resilience.^{10 11 12} Reconnecting floodplains and restoring high-quality riparian habitat will address critical watershed needs by enhancing natural water

¹⁰ FEMA, 2021. Building Community Resilience With Nature Based Solutions. A Guide for Local [www://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_riskmap-nature-based-solutions-guide_2021.pdf](http://www.efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_riskmap-nature-based-solutions-guide_2021.pdf)

¹¹ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Engineering with Nature Initiative. <https://ewn.ercd.dren.mil/>

¹² Franz et al. 2022. Engineering with Nature in Fluvial Systems. ERDC/TN WEN-22-1 July 2022. [www://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ewn.ercd.dren.mil/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ERDC-TN_EWN-22-1.pdf](http://www.efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ewn.ercd.dren.mil/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ERDC-TN_EWN-22-1.pdf)

storage, attenuating flood flows, improving late-season flows (mitigating drought impacts), reducing wildfire risk and improving habitat for native species. This approach not only offers an immediate environmental impact but also provides valuable educational and demonstrative value for stakeholders and the broader community. Below is a description of how each of the proposed activities will ultimately facilitate the development (and future implementation, under a different funding source) of projects that will address critical watershed issues.

TASK A. Watershed Group Development:

Formalizing the Park Co. Water Initiative represents a critical step in our efforts to efficiently address the watershed's critical issues and needs, as identified in Section E.1.2.1. This initiative will enhance coordination among the various agencies and organizations working within the Upper Yellowstone Watershed. While the existing watershed groups in the Upper Yellowstone and Shields provide important platforms for information exchange and collaboration among landowners, NGOs, and agencies for natural resource conservation, both groups acknowledge the need for MFP to bring added capacity to lead important on-the-ground aquatic restoration planning and implementation efforts. The ranking committee, assembled by MFP over the past year and a half, comprises technical experts and key local partners capable of accelerating aquatic restoration and conservation projects.

TASK B. Watershed Restoration Planning:

Our proposal seeks to build on the watershed planning efforts that MFP has been leading over the past year and a half. This endeavor will result in the creation of a "living document," which will evolve to reflect the changing needs and conditions of the watershed over time. A central component of this project involves the development of a dedicated website, serving as a hub for prioritized project ideas and showcasing completed projects and collaborative restoration stories. This online platform will play an important role in increasing public understanding and engagement in watershed management and conservation, fostering a more informed and involved community. It will also allow a more collaborative

TASK C. Watershed Management Project Design:

Our funding request includes a proposal to complete designs for 2-4 of the top-ranked restoration projects that have been identified through our previous efforts and the activities outlined in Task B. At the time of this grant submission, specific project locations remain unidentified. However, based on our initial prioritization process, it is likely that we will select projects where there is potential to restore long reaches of impaired tributaries using low-tech, process-based restoration techniques. Completing designs for these projects will enable us to be competitive for implementation funding. These projects will serve as practical demonstrations for local partners and landowners.

E.1.3. Evaluation Criterion C—Readiness to Proceed (20 PTs)

A preliminary project schedule including major tasks, milestones, and dates is below:

TASKS AND MILESTONES	Responsible Party	START DATE	END DATE
A1. Formalize Park Co. Water Initiative			
A1.1 Develop mission and goals for the group	Contracted facilitator and MFP staff	January 2025	March 2025
A1.2 Conduct outreach to indigenous groups that historically resided in the Upper Yellowstone	MFP staff	January 2025	December 2027
A2. Develop Park Co. Water Initiative Website			
A2.1 Identify and contract with web developer to build Park Co. Water Initiative website	MFP staff will ID contractor. Contractor will build website	January 2025	March 2025
A2.2 Develop initial written and visual content for Website	MFP staff and web developer	January 2025	June 2025
A2.3 Maintain and share a centralized event and resource clearinghouse on website	MFP staff	January 2025	December 2027
A.2.4 Develop interactive map to show identified and completed project locations on website	MFP staff and web developer	January 2025	June 2025
A2.5 Gather and share success stories about collaborative projects being done by participating stakeholders to be shared on website	MFP staff and storytelling consultant	January 2025	December 2027
B1. Facilitate quarterly meetings. Meetings will include:			
B1.1 Updates from partners about ongoing and planned restoration and conservation projects	MFP staff	January 2025	December 2027
B1.2 Discussion around ranking newly identified projects	MFP staff	January 2025	December 2027
B1.3 Developing funding and implementation plans for identified projects	MFP staff	January 2025	December 2027
B2. Continue landowner outreach to identify additional projects			

B1.1 Networking with landowners at watershed group meetings and other forums to gauge interest in doing restoration on their property. Organize landowner tour of completed projects and impaired streams.	MFP staff	January 2025	December 2027
B1.2 Follow up with site visits on interested landowners' properties to evaluate restoration potential	MFP staff	January 2025	December 2027
B1.3 Providing updates on funding procurement, implementation timelines and collaborative partnerships to landowners	MFP staff	June 2025	December 2027
B1.4. Present updates on Park Co. Water Initiative activities to UYWG and SVWG	MFP staff	June 2025	December 2027
C1. Tee up 2-4 top ranked projects for implementation			
C1.1. Work with Park Co. Water Initiative to develop consensus around which top ranked projects to implement first	MFP staff	March 2025	September 2025
C1.2. Complete site-specific project design and engineering (60% design or higher)	Engineering/ restoration consultant and MFP staff	September 2025	December 2027
C1.3. Analyze means and methods for construction at the project site and identify constraints	Engineering/ restoration consultant and MFP staff	September 2025	December 2027
C1.4. Prepare construction cost estimates	Engineering/ restoration consultant and MFP staff	September 2025	December 2027
C1.5. Research what type of site-specific environmental compliance will be necessary for implementation	MFP staff	September 2025	December 2027
C2. Apply for EWRP or other WaterSMART funding opportunities for project implementation			
C2.1. Develop grant proposals for implementation funding for designed projects	MFP staff	January 2026	December 2027
Other: Grant Reporting/ misc. administrative tasks	MFP staff	January 2025	December 2027

E.1.4. Evaluation Criterion D—Presidential and Department of the Interior Priorities (15 PTs)

E.1.4.1. Climate Change

Formalizing the Park Co Water Initiative and furthering projects identified under our watershed planning effort over the past year and a half will lead to increased climate resiliency in our watershed, thereby helping to combat the climate crisis. The Upper Yellowstone Watershed is experiencing increasing air temperatures, decreasing annual snowpack, more precipitation falling as rain and earlier runoff.¹³ All of these changes lead to less reliable streamflow, especially in the latter half of the summer, which impacts everything from vegetation to macroinvertebrates to fish and wildlife, all the way up the food chain to humans. Many of our streams and rivers are disconnected from their floodplains and incised due to past and current land-use practices such as the overgrazing of riparian areas, active riparian vegetation removal, channel straightening, and armoring or diking of the river. These impacts ultimately lead to the oversimplification of streams, which causes channel instability and downcutting, and ultimately moves water off the landscape quicker. With decreasing snowpack and more precipitation falling as rain, we need to be doing everything we can to retain water in our watersheds longer. Our watershed planning effort identified numerous projects that increase stream-floodplain connectivity on degraded stream channels by way of aggrading incised stream channels through in-stream structures such as beaver dam analogs or large wood, creating inset vegetated floodplains where that approach is not feasible, and/or removing berms, bank armor, and undersized crossing structures that inhibit stream-floodplain connectivity. By increasing stream-floodplain connectivity and overbank flows, we are aiming to increase water storage and groundwater recharge, thereby increasing retention time of water in our watershed. Increased floodplain connectivity and water storage will also help to attenuate extreme flooding events and reduce downstream flooding, mitigate drought impacts and reduce wildfire risk and/or create fire breaks that can slow the spread of wildfire.

Additionally, some of the projects we've identified also increase community resilience to climate change by upgrading infrastructure. For example, by increasing the span of some of the major, undersized bridges within our community, we can increase flood conveyance so that there is less risk of the river flooding our local communities. Oscillations between large floods and periods of extreme drought are becoming more commonplace with increasing climatic changes, so building community resilience to climate variability is imperative. In June of 2022, the flood of record for the Yellowstone River in Park County flooded the homes of numerous residents, blocked access to main travel routes by flooding roadways and damaging key infrastructure including bridges and railroad trestles, and surrounded our local hospital with floodwater, requiring a full evacuation of the hospital. The Park Co. Water Initiative seeks to include and work with our local governments to find ways to build climate resilience into our local infrastructure and prevent high-risk development in the floodplain.

¹³ Hostetler S, Whitlock C, Shuman B, Liefert D, Drimal C, Bischke S. 2021. Greater Yellowstone climate assessment: past, present, and future climate change in greater Yellowstone watersheds. Bozeman MT: Montana State University, Institute on Ecosystems. 260 p. <https://doi.org/10.15788/GYCA2021>

E.1.4.2. Benefits to Disadvantaged, Underserved, and Tribal Communities

According to the Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool, this project benefits a disadvantaged community within Livingston, MT (Tract Number 30067000300 in Park County, MT). This tool indicated that our community is above the 95th percentile for projected wildfire risk; in the 83rd percentile for projected flood risk; above the 90th percentile for expected population loss rate (defined as “fatalities and injuries resulting from natural hazards each year”); and in the 71st percentile for low income households where income is less than or equal to twice the federal poverty level. The tool also showed that our community is above the 90th percentile for wastewater discharge, which is defined as “modeled toxic concentrations at parts of streams within 500 meters.” Outside of the city of Livingston, the communities in the rest of Park County were listed as above the 90th percentile for expected population loss rate from natural hazards.

Park County, MT comprises nine small rural agricultural communities in the Paradise and Shields Valleys. Paradise Valley, between the cities of Livingston and Gardiner, is renowned for its stunning mountain views, its blue-ribbon trout fishery on the Yellowstone River, and its proximity to Yellowstone National Park. Because of its desirability, the Paradise Valley is facing growing pressure from development and rural community members are finding it increasingly challenging to keep their working agricultural lands in production. This is especially true in the face of climate change, where community members are dealing with more frequent and persistent drought, wildfires, and flooding. As a result, large tracts of working lands are being sold off and subdivided.

The current proposal will lead to the development and implementation of projects aimed at restoring natural stream and wetland processes. The types of restoration projects that will come out of this proposal will benefit underserved rural community members by increasing stream-floodplain connectivity and storage, storing water on the landscape later into the growing season. These projects will restore hydrology and channel morphology, allowing riparian and wetland vegetation to thrive, which can ultimately remove sediment, nutrients, and toxicants from water and reduce streambank erosion, improving overall water quality. Additionally, projects that result in streams that are well-connected to their floodplains with robust riparian vegetation can also help attenuate floodwaters, making flooding less severe for downstream landowners and communities. This proposal will also lead to the development of projects aimed at increasing the span of undersized infrastructure such as bridges or culverts to better accommodate rivers/streams and their floodplains, which can reduce the risk of infrastructure failure during floods, improve safety for local residents and reduce long-term expenditures of tax dollars. All of these restoration projects also create job opportunities for engineers, biologists, and contractors among others and provide opportunities for economic growth within the underserved communities. Collectively this work will support Park County’s rural agricultural economies and City-based tourism and recreation economies that rely on healthy rivers and wetlands habitats in our watershed.

Tribal Benefits:

The Paradise Valley was a significant trading and hunting ground for numerous Tribes in the Western U.S. due to a suite of unique characteristics including the biological diversity, geography, climate, and geology.¹⁴ The Tribes of the Northern Great Plains maintained a seasonal lifestyle; a path through the Paradise Valley (between the National Park Boundary and Livingston) along the Upper Yellowstone River was a key part of that. While the Paradise Valley was the aboriginal territory of numerous Tribes, some of the most prominent use was by the Apsáalooke (Crow Tribe). Beginning in the 1500s, the Apsáalooke fished, hunted, and gathered in the Yellowstone watershed, including the Paradise Valley, which they referred to as the Púchéetá'annaáu or “well-traveled road.” Apsáalooke hunting in the Paradise Valley and nearby Shields River Valley included deer, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, elk and most importantly bison.

As we look toward restoring the Upper Yellowstone watershed, it is crucial that the Water Initiative has representation from the Tribes of the Northern Great Plains, who have the earliest living knowledge of the watershed. Within the UYWG and SVWG, Tribal representation has historically been absent. Beginning in 2022, there was a movement within Yellowstone National Park to acknowledge and celebrate the 27 tribes that occupied this region, which included public and place-based projects and art installations located throughout the Park and created by several different Tribal artists. Continuing with this momentum, we hope to engage with the prominent Tribes of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed as we determine the best courses of action for the watershed. This indigenous perspective and traditional ecological knowledge are paramount to holistic ecosystem restoration and a better understanding of historic reference conditions. The Water Initiative is looking to build relationships and engage with Tribal members, long absent and underrepresented, as we work to restore the landscape, benefiting both humans and wildlife.

¹⁴ Fairbank, et al. (2023) *US-89 Wildlife and Transportation Assessment*. Center for Large Landscape Conservation. Manuscript in Preparation.

PROJECT BUDGET

Budget Proposal

Table 1: Summary of Non-Federal and Federal Funding Sources

FUNDING SOURCES	AMOUNT
Non-Federal Entities	
	\$0
Non-Federal Subtotal	\$0
REQUESTED RECLAMATION FUNDING	\$299,533

Table 2: Total Project Cost Summary

SOURCE	AMOUNT
Costs to be reimbursed with the requested federal funding	\$299,533
Cost to be paid by the applicant	\$0
Value of third-party contributions	\$0
TOTAL PROJECT COST	\$299,533

Table 3: Budget Proposal

BUDGET ITEM DESCRIPTION	COMPUTATION		Quantity Type	TOTAL COST
	Cost/Unit	Quantity		
Salaries and Wages				
Executive Director - Wendy Weaver	\$49.88	360	hours	\$17,957
Project Manager - Leah Swartz	\$32.50	1800	hours	\$58,500
Project Manager -Ashton Bunce	\$32.50	1800	hours	\$58,500
			Subtotal	\$134,957
Fringe Benefits				
Executive Director - Wendy Weaver	\$19.88	360	hours	\$7,158
Project Manager - Leah Swartz	\$13.09	1800	hours	\$23,564
Project Manager -Ashton Bunce	\$9.53	1800	hours	\$17,158
			Subtotal	\$47,879
Travel				
Personal Vehicle Mileage	\$0.655	3000	miles	\$1,965
			Subtotal	\$1,965
Equipment				
				\$0
Supplies and Materials				
				\$0
Contractual				

Restoration and Engineering Consultant	\$140	450	hours	\$63,000
Communications and Storytelling Consultant	\$100	40	hours	\$4,000
Facilitation Consultant	\$100	30	hours	\$3,000
Website development Consultant	\$100	60	hours	\$6,000
			Subtotal	\$77,000
Subaward				
Trout Unlimited	\$30.35	200	hours	\$6,070.00
Subaward Fringe Benefits				
Trout Unlimited	\$16.29	200	hours	\$3,258.00
Third Party In-Kind Contributions				
				\$0
Other				
				\$0
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS				\$271,129
	Type	Percentage	\$ Base	Total
Indirect Costs				
MFP Administration	de minimis	10%	\$271,129	\$27,113
Trout Unlimited Administration	Per Nonprofit Indirect Cost Negotiation Agreement (attached)	13.84%	\$9,328	\$1,291
TOTAL ESTIMATED PROJECT COSTS				\$299,533

Budget Detail and Narrative

For the full budget detail and narrative please see Attachment B.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE COMPLIANCE

MFP is not proposing activities that would require environmental and cultural resource compliance as part of this funding proposal.

REQUIRED PERMITS OR APPROVALS

No permits or approvals are required for the proposed activities.

OVERLAP OR DUPLICATION OF EFFORT STATEMENT

There is no overlap between the proposed project and any anticipated proposals or projects in terms of activities, costs, or commitment of key personnel. This proposal does not duplicate any proposal or project that has been or will be submitted for funding consideration to any other potential funding source- Federal or non-Federal.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No actual or potential conflict of interest exists at the time of grant submission.

UNIFORM AUDIT REPORTING STATEMENT

Montana Freshwater Partners was not required to submit a Single Audit report for the most recently closed fiscal year.

CERTIFICATION REGARDING LOBBYING

I, Wendy Weaver, serving as MFP's Authorized Official, certify that I have not made, and will not make, any payment prohibited by CFR Part 18.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments to this proposal include:

Letters of Support

MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Greater Yellowstone Coalition

Park County Office of Emergency Management

Park County Floodplain Program

Park County Environmental Council

Shields Valley Watershed Group

Trout Unlimited

U.S. Forest Service

Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group



MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 3 Headquarters
1400 S 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

November 27, 2023

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
PO Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Committee,

MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) would like to express support for the Montana Freshwater Partners' (MFP) grant proposal to the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program, which aims to support the Park Co. Water Initiative.

Over the past 18 months, MFP has made significant strides in bringing together a diverse group of water resource professionals and landowners to collaboratively identify and prioritize restoration, planning, and outreach projects, with the goal of increasing the health and resilience of the Upper Yellowstone and Shields watersheds. This planning effort has been in direct concert with the Upper Yellowstone and Shields watershed groups, as well as other local partners including NGOs and local, state, and federal agencies. This level of coordination is particularly critical as our watershed faces unprecedented challenges posed by factors such as climate change, ongoing development, and increased recreational use.

FWP has been an active partner in both watershed groups since their inception. We have participated in many projects aimed at improving habitat and stream form and function with both groups. In the Shields watershed, we have worked together on projects related to the conservation of native Yellowstone cutthroat trout. FWP has been an active participant in the project ranking process that has been spearheaded by MFP in the watershed.

We are pleased to see that MFP's application includes stakeholder meetings to continue to engage the local community and provide stakeholders with the opportunity to provide additional information and identify project needs that may not have been considered. FWP believes that Montana Freshwater Partners is well-suited to continue spearheading and coordinating the Park Co. Water Initiative.

Momentum surrounding the protection and restoration of aquatic resources in Park County has been growing. Funding from the CWMP program will be critical for MFP to continue facilitating the project identification, prioritization, and implementation processes. This financial support will allow the project plan to evolve into a dynamic "living document" that will remain relevant and beneficial for all partners and stakeholders into the future.

Thank you for considering this request for funding.

For questions or concerns, please reach out to the following FWP personnel:

Scott Opitz, fisheries biologist (406-223-3951, sopitz@mt.gov)

Jen Smitham, R3 public comment coordinator (406-495-3262, jsmitham@mt.gov)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warren Hansen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Warren Hansen

Acting Region 3 Supervisor



November 27, 2023

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
PO Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC) to express our strong support for Montana Freshwater Partners' (MFP) grant proposal to the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program, which aims to support the Park Co. Water Initiative.

Over the past 18 months, MFP has made significant strides in bringing together a diverse group of water resource professionals and landowners to collaboratively identify and prioritize restoration, planning, and outreach projects, with the goal of increasing the health and resilience of the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watersheds. This planning effort has been in direct concert with the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watershed Groups, as well as other local partners including NGOs and local, state, and federal agencies. This level of coordination is particularly critical as our watershed faces unprecedented challenges posed by factors such as climate change, ongoing development, and increased recreational use.

Greater Yellowstone's rivers and streams are the fountainhead of the west. As such, we have a direct interest in the health of all Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem waters, including the Yellowstone River and its' tributaries. GYC has successfully worked on river conservation issues from Wild and Scenic River designations, to fighting dams, to addressing water quality issues and protecting refugia for native trout species. Our organization has been an active partner in the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group for almost a decade and has been a key participant in the stream restoration project prioritization plan that will be supported through the Park Co. Water Initiative.

The GYC believes that Montana Freshwater Partners is well-suited to continue spearheading and coordinating the Park Co. Water Initiative. MFP has been an integral part of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group since 2016 and has consistently demonstrated leadership and commitment to the preservation of our aquatic resources. MFP has successfully executed several stream and wetland restoration projects across the state, showcasing both the technical expertise and collaborative partnerships required to translate projects from planning to implementation.

Over the past year and a half, there has been growing momentum surrounding the protection and restoration of aquatic resources in Park County. Funding from the CWMP program will be critical for MFP to continue facilitating the project identification, prioritization, and implementation processes. This financial support will allow the project plan to evolve into a dynamic "living document" that will remain relevant and beneficial for all partners well into the future.

Sincerely,

Sierra Harris

Sierra Harris
Climate Conservation Coordinator
The Greater Yellowstone Coalition



OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT



Greg Coleman
Director, Office of Emergency Management
Park County, Montana
414 E. Callender St.
Livingston, MT 59047

November 22, 2023

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
PO Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Park County Emergency Management to express our strong support for Montana Freshwater Partners' (MFP) grant proposal to the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program, which aims to support the Park Co. Water Initiative.

Over the past 18 months, MFP has made significant strides in bringing together a diverse group of water resource professionals and landowners to collaboratively identify and prioritize restoration, planning, and outreach projects, with the goal of increasing the health and resilience of the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watersheds. This planning effort has been in direct concert with the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watershed Groups, as well as other local partners including NGOs and local, state, and federal agencies. This level of coordination is particularly critical as our watershed faces unprecedented challenges posed by factors such as climate change, ongoing development, and increased recreational use.

I had the fortune of meeting Freshwater Partners and the Watershed Groups during the historic 2022 flooding. The County lacked the experience with hydrology and the Yellowstone River ecosystem to know what we needed to do to help the river corridor recover from the flooding and what was needed to protect lives and property given the changes that occurred in 2022. The County has partnered with Freshwater Partners as subject matter experts and our goals for river recovery and resiliency are aligned.

Park County Emergency Management believes that Montana Freshwater Partners is well-suited to continue spearheading and coordinating the Park Co. Water Initiative. MFP has been an integral part of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group since 2016 and has consistently demonstrated



OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

leadership and commitment to the preservation of our aquatic resources. MFP has successfully executed a number of stream and wetland restoration projects across the state, showcasing both the technical expertise and collaborative partnerships required to translate projects from planning to implementation.

Over the past year and a half, there has been growing momentum surrounding the protection and restoration of aquatic resources in Park County. Funding from the CWMP program will be critical for MFP to continue facilitating the project identification, prioritization, and implementation processes. This financial support will allow the project plan to evolve into a dynamic "living document" that will remain relevant and beneficial for all partners well into the future. This is important for my work as I have learned the health and resilience of the river ecosystem is directly related to our ability to respond to and recover from future disasters in Park County. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Greg Coleman
Director, Office of Emergency Management
Park County, Montana



Lawson Moorman
Planner III/ Floodplain Administrator
Park County
414 East Callender St.
Livingston, MT 59047
November 22, 2023

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
PO Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Park County Planning to express our strong support for Montana Freshwater Partners' (MFP) grant proposal to the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program, which aims to support the Park Co. Water Initiative.

Over the past 18 months, MFP has made significant strides in bringing together a diverse group of water resource professionals and landowners to collaboratively identify and prioritize restoration, planning, and outreach projects, with the goal of increasing the health and resilience of the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watersheds. This planning effort has been in direct concert with the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watershed Groups, as well as other local partners including NGOs and local, state, and federal agencies. This level of coordination is particularly critical as our watershed faces unprecedented challenges posed by factors such as climate change, ongoing development, and increased recreational use.

Montana Fresh Water Partners has been performing an invaluable service for local water resource stakeholders by facilitating and maintaining an open line of communication between permitting agencies and key stakeholders in our community. By having a seat at the table in the ongoing dialogue amongst water resource stakeholders maintained by MFP, Park County Planning has been better suited to address and work on solutions for key issues identified in the Park County Growth Policy such as water availability and water quality.

Park County Planning believes that Montana Freshwater Partners is well-suited to continue spearheading and coordinating the Park Co. Water Initiative. MFP has been an integral part of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group since 2016 and has consistently demonstrated leadership and commitment to the preservation of our aquatic resources. MFP has successfully executed a number of stream and wetland restoration projects across the state, showcasing both the technical expertise and collaborative partnerships required to translate projects from planning to implementation.

Over the past year and a half, there has been growing momentum surrounding the protection and restoration of aquatic resources in Park County. Funding from the CWMP program will be critical for MFP to continue facilitating the project identification, prioritization, and implementation processes. This financial support will allow the project plan to evolve into a dynamic "living document" that will remain relevant and beneficial for all partners well into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lawson Moorman', is written over the word 'Sincerely,'.

Lawson Moorman, AICP, CFM
Planner III/ Floodplain Administrator
Park County



PARK COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL
— COUNCIL —

Max Hjortsberg
Conservation Director
Park County Environmental Council
PO Box 164
Livingston, MT 59047

11/27/2023

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
PO Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Park County Environmental Council (PCEC) to express our strong support for Montana Freshwater Partners' (MFP) grant proposal to the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program, which aims to support the Park Co. Water Initiative.

Over the past 18 months, MFP has made significant strides in bringing together a diverse group of water resource professionals and landowners to collaboratively identify and prioritize restoration, planning, and outreach projects, with the goal of increasing the health and resilience of the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watersheds. This planning effort has been in direct concert with the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watershed Groups, as well as other local partners including NGOs and local, state, and federal agencies. This level of coordination is particularly critical as our watershed faces unprecedented challenges posed by factors such as climate change, ongoing development, and increased recreational use.

PCEC has invested considerable time and resources in its 30-year history to the health, wellbeing and protection of the upper Yellowstone and Shields watersheds. Our grassroots community advocacy focuses on safeguarding our local water resources and riparian ecosystems from the impacts of industrial development, such as oil and gas drilling and hard rock mining. However, thwarting ill conceived development in our Nation's headwaters is not enough. We strive to be a good community partner, supporting our local watershed groups, and partner organization's efforts to implement restoration projects.

PCEC believes that Montana Freshwater Partners is well-suited to continue spearheading and coordinating the Park Co. Water Initiative. MFP has been an integral part of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group since 2016 and has consistently demonstrated leadership

and commitment to the preservation of our aquatic resources. MFP has successfully executed a number of stream and wetland restoration projects across the state, showcasing both the technical expertise and collaborative partnerships required to translate projects from planning to implementation.

Over the past year and a half, there has been growing momentum surrounding the protection and restoration of aquatic resources in Park County. Funding from the CWMP program will be critical for MFP to continue facilitating the project identification, prioritization, and implementation processes. This financial support will allow the project plan to evolve into a dynamic "living document" that will remain relevant and beneficial for all partners well into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Max Hjortsberg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Max Hjortsberg
Conservation Director
Park County Environmental Council

Shields Valley Watershed Group
DeWitt Dominick- co-chair
5242 US Hwy 89 S
Livingston, MT 59047

11/25/23

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
PO Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Shields Valley Watershed Group (SVWG), Park County MT to express our support for Montana Freshwater Partners' (MFP) grant proposal to the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program, which aims to support the Park Co. Water Initiative.

Over the past 18 months, MFP has made significant strides in bringing together a diverse group of water resource professionals and landowners to collaboratively identify and prioritize restoration, planning, and outreach projects, with the goal of increasing the health and resilience of the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watersheds. This planning effort has been in direct concert with the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watershed Groups, as well as other local partners including NGOs and local, state, and federal agencies. This level of coordination is particularly critical as our watershed faces unprecedented challenges posed by factors such as climate change, ongoing development, and increased recreational use.

The SVWG has hosted and supported planning efforts to solicit interest, identification, and input from landowners who own riverine-floodplain corridors in the watershed to determine locations and types of potential projects in the Shields Valley. Landowners and members are concerned about the general degradation of our water quality, drought, soils (accelerated erosion/sedimentation), loss of property-acreage, native fisheries, and antiquated bridges-culvert infrastructure.

SVWG believes that Montana Freshwater Partners is well-suited to continue spearheading and coordinating the Park Co. Water Initiative. MFP has successfully executed a number of stream and wetland restoration projects across the state, showcasing both the technical expertise and collaborative partnerships required to translate projects from planning to implementation.

Over the past year and a half, there has been growing momentum surrounding the protection and restoration of aquatic resources in Park County. Funding from the CWMP program will be critical for MFP to continue facilitating the project identification, prioritization, and implementation processes. This financial support will allow the project plan to evolve into a dynamic "living document" that will remain relevant and beneficial for all partners well into the future.

Sincerely,

DeWitt Dominick- co-chair- SVWG



Ashley Brubaker, Upper Yellowstone/Shields River Project Manager

Ashley Brubaker
Upper Yellowstone/shields River Project Manager
Trout Unlimited
321 East Main Street, Suite. 411
Bozeman, MT, 59715
11/28/2023

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
PO Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Trout Unlimited to express our strong support for Montana Freshwater Partners' (MFP) grant proposal to the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program, which aims to support the Park Co. Water Initiative.

Over the past 18 months, MFP has made significant strides in bringing together a diverse group of water resource professionals and landowners to collaboratively identify and prioritize restoration, planning, and outreach projects, with the goal of increasing the health and resilience of the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watersheds. This planning effort has been in direct concert with the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watershed Groups, as well as other local partners including NGOs and local, state, and federal agencies. This level of coordination is particularly critical as our watershed faces unprecedented challenges posed by factors such as climate change, ongoing development, and increased recreational use.

TU is a national cold water conservation organization comprised of 140,000 member-conservationists committed to protecting, restoring, and sustaining cold water fisheries. TU has 13 chapters in Montana and represents approximately 4,200 anglers dedicated to the conservation of Montana's wild and native trout and the clean, cold waters on which they depend. TU is active in the Shield Valley and Upper Yellowstone Watershed Groups and has been working with Montana MFP to identify and prioritize restoration projects throughout the Park Co. Water Initiative area. TU's Montana Water and Habitat Program specializes in improving instream flows and habitat and repairing degraded stream habitats and riparian ecosystems.

Trout Unlimited believes that Montana Freshwater Partners is well-suited to continue spearheading and coordinating the Park Co. Water Initiative. MFP has been an integral part of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group since 2016 and has consistently demonstrated leadership and commitment to the preservation of our aquatic resources. MFP has successfully

Trout Unlimited: America's Leading Coldwater Fisheries Conservation Organization

321 East Main Street, Suite 411, Bozeman, MT 59715

cell: (303)915-9282 • email: ashley.brubaker@tu.org • www.tu.org

executed a number of stream and wetland restoration projects across the state, showcasing both the technical expertise and collaborative partnerships required to translate projects from planning to implementation.

Over the past year and a half, there has been growing momentum surrounding the protection and restoration of aquatic resources in Park County. Funding from the CWMP program will be critical for MFP to continue facilitating the project identification, prioritization, and implementation processes. This financial support will allow the project plan to evolve into a dynamic "living document" that will remain relevant and beneficial for all partners well into the future.

Sincerely,

Ashley Brubaker
Upper Yellowstone/shields River Project Manager
Trout Unlimited

File Code: 2500
Date: November 22, 2023

Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
PO Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Yellowstone Ranger District of the Custer Gallatin National Forest to express our strong support for Montana Freshwater Partners' (MFP) grant proposal to the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program, which aims to support the Park Co. Water Initiative.

Over the past 18 months, MFP has made significant strides in bringing together a diverse group of water resource professionals and landowners to collaboratively identify and prioritize restoration, planning, and outreach projects, with the goal of increasing the health and resilience of the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watersheds. This planning effort has been in direct concert with the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watershed Groups, as well as other local partners including NGOs and local, state, and federal agencies. This level of coordination is particularly critical as our watershed faces unprecedented challenges posed by factors such as climate change, ongoing development, and increased recreational use.

National Forest Lands comprise the headwaters of the Upper Yellowstone and Shields River Subbasins. These public lands provide high quality water for plants, fish, and wildlife, and to users on and off the national forest in support of municipal drinking water, agriculture, and recreation. National Forest groundwater resources provide base flow and maintain water quality at a level that sustains the biological, physical, and chemical integrity of aquatic systems and the survival, growth, reproduction, and migration of native aquatic species. The Custer Gallatin National Forest is obligated by state and federal regulations as well as by the 2022 Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan to conserve these myriad ecosystem services. Because watersheds transcend jurisdictional boundaries, the Yellowstone Ranger District greatly values MFP efforts to bring together a diverse group of water resource professionals and landowners to collaboratively identify and prioritize restoration, planning, and outreach projects. To date the Yellowstone Ranger District has corroborated with partners on water quantity monitoring efforts, native fish conservation projects, planning floodplain and channel restoration projects, and has provided input into the project ranking process.

The Yellowstone Ranger District believes that Montana Freshwater Partners is well-suited to continue spearheading and coordinating the Park Co. Water Initiative. MFP has been an integral part of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group since 2016 and has consistently demonstrated leadership and commitment to the preservation of our aquatic resources. MFP has successfully



executed a number of stream and wetland restoration projects across the state, showcasing both the technical expertise and collaborative partnerships required to translate projects from planning to implementation.

Over the past year and a half, there has been growing momentum surrounding the protection and restoration of aquatic resources in Park County. Funding from the CWMP program will be critical for MFP to continue facilitating the project identification, prioritization, and implementation processes. This financial support will allow the project plan to evolve into a dynamic "living document" that will remain relevant and beneficial for all partners well into the future.

Sincerely,

ALEX SIENKIEWICZ
District Ranger



Bureau of Reclamation
Cooperative Watershed Management Program
PO Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear CWMP Grant Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group (UYWG) to express our support for Montana Freshwater Partners' (MFP) grant proposal to the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program, which aims to support the Park Co. Water Initiative.

Over the past 18 months, MFP has made significant strides in bringing together a diverse group of water resource professionals and landowners to collaboratively identify and prioritize restoration, planning, and outreach projects, with the goal of increasing the health and resilience of the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watersheds. This planning effort has been in direct concert with the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watershed Groups, as well as other local partners including NGOs and local, state, and federal agencies. This level of coordination is particularly critical as our watershed faces unprecedented challenges posed by factors such as climate change, ongoing development, and increased recreational use.

The UYWG believes that Montana Freshwater Partners is well-suited to continue spearheading and coordinating the Park Co. Water Initiative. MFP has been an integral part of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group since 2016 and has consistently demonstrated leadership and commitment to the preservation of our aquatic resources. MFP has successfully executed a number of stream and wetland restoration projects across the state, showcasing both the technical expertise and collaborative partnerships required to translate projects from planning to implementation.

Over the past year and a half, there has been growing momentum surrounding the protection and restoration of aquatic resources in Park County. Funding from the CWMP program will be critical for MFP to continue facilitating the project identification, prioritization, and implementation processes. This financial support will allow the project plan to evolve into a dynamic "living document" that will remain relevant and beneficial for all partners well into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ashley Lowrey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ashley Lowrey
Watershed Coordinator, Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group
Ashley.Lowrey@mt.nacdnet.net, (406) 946-3008