Panhandle Forest Collaborative
Prichard Creek Field Trip Notes
June 22nd, 2021

ATTENDANCE

Members: Liz Johnson-Gebhardt, community nonprofit representative; Alan Harper, Eric Nave, timber representatives; Mike Petersen, conservation representative; Laura Wolf, state agency representative.

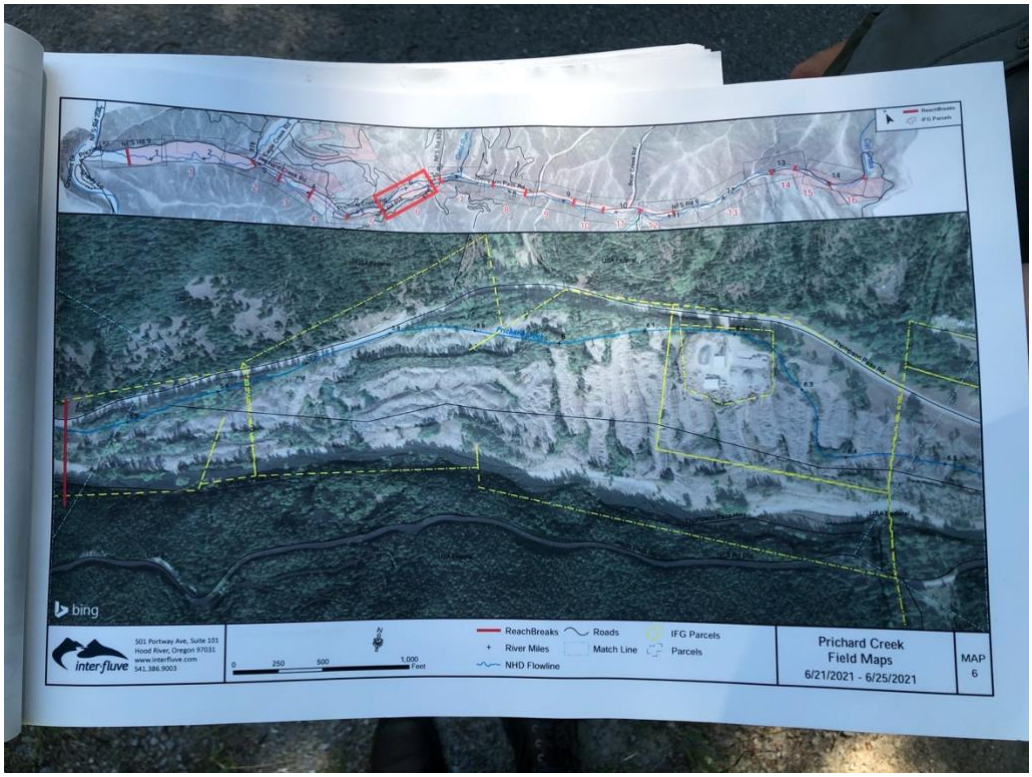
Stakeholders: Bob Smathers, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation; Ken King, US Fish & Wildlife Service

Technical advisors: Jake Garringer, Office of Governor Brad Little; Marc Kilmer, Office of Congressman Russ Fulcher; Ben Irey and Laura González Mantecón, National Forest Foundation; Erin Prue, Trout Unlimited.

FIELD TRIP NOTES

Stop 1 – Confluence of Prichard Creek and the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene

The field trip started with an introduction to the Prichard Creek restoration project.



- Prichard Creek runs 14 miles from the confluence to the Montana border. The Idaho Forest Group (IFG) owns almost all the adjacent land, purchased from a

private landowner who started acquiring individual parcels in the 1950s and 60s.

- The area has a long history of gold mining. The creek has seen a lot of dredging related to placer mining, which has caused it to partially dry up seasonally, with the consequential loss of habitat and lack of fish.
- IFG signed an MOU with the BLM to sell the creek bottom and keep the timberlands, but the slow process prompted them to do the restoration project themselves in partnership with BLM, the Forest Service, the Department of Environmental Quality, Idaho Fish and Wildlife, Trout Unlimited, etc. Together they have raised $1.6M in grant funding for the restoration project.
- The land is under easement, with mineral rights held by a land trust. This also prevents the area from being overrun with trailers like the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene is.
- The project is currently at the planning phase: IFG and its partners have hired consultants to study the ecology and cultural resources of the area and determine the phases of restoration. They expect to be "moving dirt" by next year, starting with smaller, quicker projects.

Stop 2 – Creekside planting area

The group drove up Prichard Creek and observed a BLM-funded creekside dredging and planting project undertaken last year.

- The plants looked healthy, but there were a good number of invasive species present as well. A weeds team is coming soon to deal with invasives along the creek.

- This part of the creek flows year-round, but further upstream it dries up in the summer months.

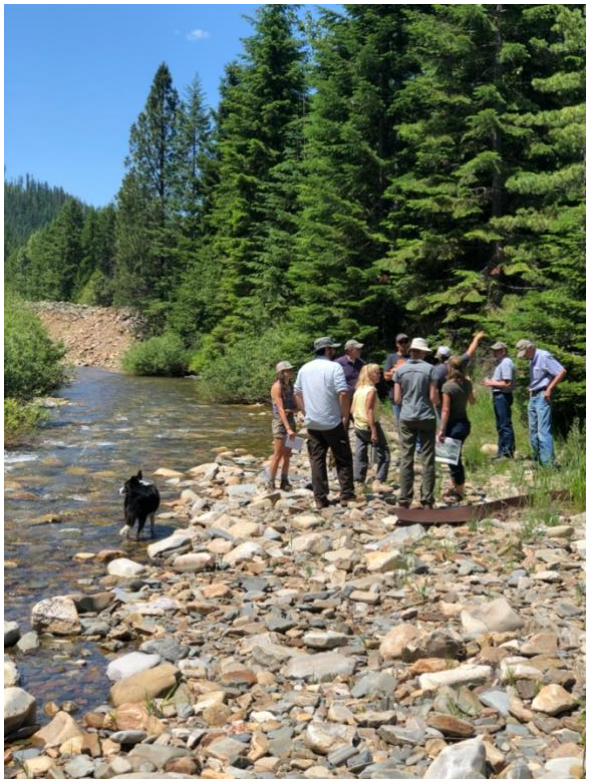
Stop 3 – Private land access bridge

The group continued upstream to a small bridge over the creek.

- A mining company still owns a few small (5 acre) claims upslope from the creek, and they put in the bridge to maintain river crossing access, even though right now the water levels are low enough to drive across.
- IFG has been in talks with them about buying the land or trading it for other parcels.

Stop 4 – Mine tailings

The group continued upstream to an area with very large mine tailings and rock piles.



- The area was home to 10 large mines, but there were possibly over 100 smaller ones, so the creek is very disturbed.

- The piles will be moved as part of the restoration project. There are so many that it will be easy to leave some as a way to preserve mining heritage and cultural resources. The partners are looking to include an education component into the restoration project, possibly working with the museum in the nearby town of Murray.

- There are some elevated levels of arsenic and other metals, but they are lower than other similar places.

- Large wood will be used to hold sediment and keep it from entering the creek.

Stop 4 – Lunch in Murray

The group stopped for lunch in the town of Murray, where they met with the contracted river restoration consultants from InterFluve (Luke Swan, Marty Melchior, Karin Boyd), as well as Wade Jerome (USFS), Kajsa Van de Reit (Idaho DEQ), Ed Lider (retired from USFS), and Mike Stevenson (BLM).

- The consultants described the restoration project as a mix of “low-hanging fruit” and big challenges. They mentioned geomorphology and subsurface flows as the biggest challenge so far.
- The consultants asked the group for input on the restoration process and there was a small discussion about the planning process and potential for implementation of different stages of restoration.

Stop 5 – BLM restoration site

To close the field trip, the group visited a small stretch of the creek that sits on BLM land. One side of the creek sits under a very steep and eroded slope.

In 2011, BLM used some leftover logs to create a structure at the bottom of the slope that would hold sediment and prevent it from reaching the water. The structure is still in place and the slope is starting to revegetate.