

## MINUTES

Blaine County Levy Advisory Board  
Regular Meeting  
February 3, 2021  
Old County Courthouse  
206 S 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Meeting Room  
Hailey Idaho  
&  
GoTo Meeting Remote

### I. Call to Order and Quorum Determination

The meeting was called to order by LAB-Chair Jim Phillips at 6:08pm.

The members of the Levy Advisory Board (LAB) were present at the Old County Courthouse as follows: Jim Phillips and Denise Ford.

The members of the LAB participating remotely in the GoToMeeting were present as follows: Lili Simpson, Kurt Eggers, Rob Santa, and Abby Rivin.

LAB-Vice-Chair Alan Reynolds and LAB-member Nancy Linscott were absent from the meeting.

Also present at the Old County Courthouse and participating remotely in the GoToMeeting were: Tom Bergin, Blaine County Land Use Department Director and Wendy Pabich, Land, Water, and Wildlife Program (LWWP) Administrator.

### II. Discussion about LWWP Guidelines for Non-Acquisition Projects

LAB-Chair Phillips began the meeting by introducing the discussion about LWWP guidelines for non-acquisition projects.

Tom Bergin, Blaine County Land Use Department Director, noted that material for the discussion about LWWP guidelines for non-acquisition projects had been posted to the LWWP page on Blaine County's website.

Wendy Pabich, LWWP Administrator, provided the LAB with background regarding LWWP policy guidelines for non-acquisition projects. Pabich explained that the types of conservation projects applying for LWWP funding have changed—applications received at the beginning of the program were primarily conservation easements and recent applications have been non-acquisition and restoration projects.

Pabich explained that the LWWP program materials were updated in 2013 to include policy guidelines for non-acquisition projects. She noted that the 2013 policy guidelines identified eligible and ineligible costs for non-acquisition projects. Pabich explained that the LAB has struggled to evaluate non-acquisition projects based on the standards in the LWWP materials. She emphasized that the LAB needs to clarify the guidelines. Pabich noted that the LAB's evaluation of recent applications has highlighted the need to: (a) specify what types of non-

acquisition projects comply with the mission and intent of the LWWP and (b) to clarify eligible and ineligible costs.

Pabich explained that the LAB has grappled with defining lasting conservation outcomes for non-acquisition projects that are not tied to land ownership or conservation easement. Pabich summarized the goals of the discussion were to: (a) gauge the LAB's opinions regarding the types of non-acquisition projects that meet the intent and values of the LWWP and (b) identify eligible costs appropriate for levy funds and ineligible costs.

LAB-member Simpson thanked Wendy for her introduction to the discussion topic. Simpson stated her concerns have centered on the requirement for projects to demonstrate lasting conservation outcomes. She explained that smaller projects may result in conservation benefits, like education, that meet LWWP values but may not provide lasting conservation outcomes in perpetuity. She asked the LAB to consider how the LWWP criteria for projects to achieve lasting conservation outcomes may expand to apply to non-acquisition applications.

LAB-Chair Phillips explained the history of LWWP-funded projects. He noted that at the beginning of the LWWP, the LAB primarily funded conservation easements. Phillips noted that applications for LWWP funding have shifted towards restoration projects. He stated that the LAB needed to determine if these restoration projects meet the intent of the LWWP and identify the eligible and ineligible costs.

LAB-member Ford agreed with existing language in the 2013 policy guidelines stating that the list of eligible costs specified does not guarantee the LAB's recommendation of approval for funding. She emphasized that the LAB's role is to secure lasting conservation outcomes for projects that preserve land, water, and wildlife. Ford stated that the LWWP criteria needs to be expanded for projects with conservation benefits related to restoration and non-acquisition projects. She explained that projects should contribute towards lasting conservation outcomes and these contributions may include broader conservation benefits that align with LWWP values.

Ford suggested adding language specifying that eligible costs must be tied directly to the project that is the subject of the application for LWWP funding and any administrative or staff costs tied to the applicant's organization are ineligible.

Pabich identified that a gray area in need of the LAB's clarification is costs associated with the applicant's staff conducting field work associated with the project.

Ford responded that an applicant's staff time dedicated to the restoration project is an appropriate and eligible costs for LWWP funds. Ford stated that any equipment purchased for restoration and associated non-acquisition project improvements would also be an appropriate use of LWWP funds.

Pabich suggested expanding eligible construction costs to include specific line items like equipment.

LAB-member Simpson agreed with the clarifications proposed by Ford and Pabich. Simpson suggested clarifying costs associated with project supplies. Simpson asked about the LWWP's definition for small-grant projects.

Pabich responded that as a rule of thumb applications requesting less than \$15,000 have been qualified as small-grant projects.

The LAB discussed the standards for small-grant projects that may qualify for the expedited review process.

Bergin noted that funding requests are significantly higher for acquisition projects, which are more costly than restoration projects. The LAB discussed using the expedited process to review certain non-acquisition and restoration projects. Pabich noted that certain restoration projects are too complex for review through the expedited process.

LAB-member Simpson stated that the LAB's conflation of small-grant projects with restoration projects was due to the challenges of defining lasting conservation outcomes with these types of applications. She elaborated that these projects generate conservation benefits but may not result in lasting outcomes in the same way that a conservation easement guarantees preservation in perpetuity.

Phillips added that the LAB may adopt changes or clarifications to the expedited process that result from their discussion regarding non-acquisition projects.

LAB-member Rivin suggested the LAB clarify how non-acquisition projects meet the intent and values of the LWWP. She recommended the policy guideline clarifications focus on linking non-acquisition projects with their associated conservation value instead of adding examples to the list of eligible and ineligible costs.

LAB-member Ford noted that applicants have expressed concern that the LWWP application process is too complex. She stated that the program materials should clearly identify the process and policies for each type of project.

Pabich explained that the LWWP program materials and policy guidelines have been clarified and modified over time as the LAB has learned from their continued review of different types of projects. She noted that staff could generate a flowchart that maps and outlines the process and policies for different types of projects.

Simpson noted that LWWP staff dedicate considerable time and effort towards shepherding applicants through the LWWP process. She thanked Pabich and Bergin for their work.

LAB-Chair Phillips stated that the most challenging issues he has wrestled with is how to consider recent non-acquisition applications through the lens of lasting conservation value.

The LAB discussed non-acquisition and restoration projects through the lens of lasting conservation value. LAB-member Rivin read the key considerations for lasting conservation results as specified in Attachment #3: Non-Acquisition Projects.

*Applicants must clearly describe the conservation values of their project. LWWP understands that the future of natural systems and processes cannot be guaranteed, that there may be factors beyond the applicant's control, and that unforeseen circumstances may influence the project in the future. Nevertheless, clear and lasting conservation goals that will result from the enhanced natural systems and processes are essential.*

LAB-member Ford suggested adding language as recommended by Simpson to expand lasting conservation value to include additional conservation benefits like education programs. Simpson suggested removing the word lasting and adding specific conservation goals that projects must meet to qualify for LWWP funding.

LAB- Chair Phillips suggested that Pabich propose revisions and updates to the policy guidelines based on the LAB's discussion. He noted that while the LAB is not considering a comprehensive update to the program materials, these clarifications will enhance the process for new applications applying for remaining LWWP funds.

LAB-member Santa stated that the policy guidelines should retain a degree of latitude and flexibility for interpretation as the LAB cannot predict the range of projects that may apply for LWWP funds in the future.

Phillips stated these clarifications will help the LAB address the change in types of projects applying for LWWP funds.

### **III. Public Comment**

No members of the public were present at the meeting to give comment.

### **IV. New Business**

Bergin and Pabich noted that the LWWP staff had conversations with Board of County Commissioners regarding a second levy for land, water, and wildlife conservation projects.

### **V. Adjourn**

The LAB meeting adjourned at 7:38pm.