

# Welcome!

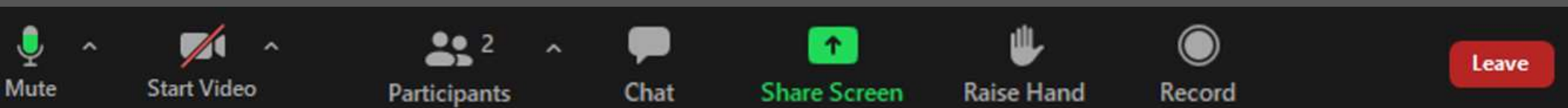
## Buffalo Flats Floodplains Restoration Project Focus Group Meeting

September 28, 2021

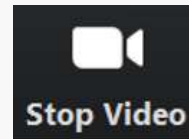
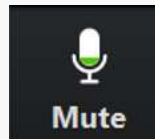
Non-Focus Group members will remain in listen-only mode.  
If you are a focus group member and have not been promoted to panelist, please “Raise your Hand,” send chat to Tess Wendel or email Tess at [twendel@rosstrategic.com](mailto:twendel@rosstrategic.com)



# Virtual Meeting: Panelist Guidelines

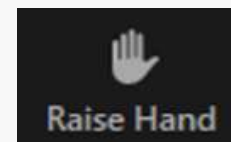
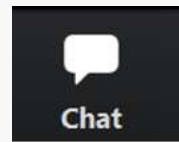


Mute/unmute your audio



Start/stop video share

View list of participants



Raise your hand to notify the facilitator that you would like to speak

Private chat to the Zoom Hosts (Tess, Susan) or send message to all panelists

# For Tonight

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1. Actively listen to and appreciate the diversity of views and opinions
2. Focus on issues and assume positive intent
3. Participate constructively
4. Behave respectfully
5. Enable the facilitator to guide the group process

# Meeting Objectives

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- Provide a project update to Focus Group members affirming the project area, activities currently anticipated for the project, and the project timeline
- Create a shared understanding of the decision-making process and purpose/timing of community engagement
- Share the next steps for the process, including additional opportunities for Focus Group and broader community engagement
- Provide the opportunity for Focus Group Q&A and discussion

# Meeting Agenda

6:00 PM	<b>Opening</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome &amp; Introductions</li> <li>• Agenda review</li> <li>• Group conduct</li> <li>• Synopsis of Focus Group interviews</li> </ul>	Jim Webster Susan Hayman
6:30 PM	<b>Project Update</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose and need for the project</li> <li>• Project area</li> <li>• Anticipated activities</li> <li>• Timeline/milestones</li> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>	Jim Webster Jesse Steele Brandon Barrow
7:30 PM	<b>Break</b>	
7:40 PM	<b>Decision-making Process</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What decisions will be made?</li> <li>• Who will make them?</li> <li>• How is the community involved?</li> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>	Jim Webster
8:15 PM	<b>Project Next Steps and Closing Remarks</b>	Susan Hayman Jim Webster
8:30 PM	<b>Adjourn</b>	

# Introductions

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Jim Webster, Aaron Bliesner, Deric Carson



Susan Hayman, Tess Wendel



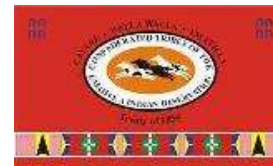
Brandon Barrow



Jesse Steele



Allen Childs



# Focus Group Members

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- Mike Becker
- Willard Bertrand
- Donna Beverage
- Dave Dahlstrom
- Leonard Flint
- Jeff Friesen
- Darren Hansen
- Susan Hawkins
- Pat Kennedy
- Jake Kimbro
- Kathy Kirby
- Andrea Malmberg
- Tony Malmberg
- Dick Middleton
- Cathy Nowak
- Anthony Pagliarulo
- Paul Phillips
- David Ricker
- Wade Titus
- Doug Wiggins

# Interviews with Focus Group Members





# Methods

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- USWCD introduced Ross Strategic staff to members by email, phone, or in person and ask members to participate in the interviews
- Ross Strategic set up 30 to 45-minute interviews with members
- Members received “guiding questions” in advance of the interviews
- Tess Wendel and Susan Hayman (Ross Strategic) conducted confidential interviews by Zoom or phone. In one instance, responses to the guiding questions provided via email.

# Interview Topics

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1. Awareness of the Buffalo Flats Floodplain Restoration Project
2. Proximity to the Project
3. Understanding of the project (e.g., location, purpose, kinds of activities that will take place and expected outcomes)
4. Directly or indirectly affected by the project
5. Questions/concerns with the proposed floodplain restoration activities
6. Access to reliable, up-to-date project information; primary source(s)
7. Adequate information to objectively look at the pros/cons of this project
8. Preferences for giving and receiving project information
9. Ability to participate in an online/virtual meeting

# Project Awareness

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- January 2020 public meeting
- City Council meetings
- Personal communication
- Aware for some time—don't remember the source

# Proximity to the Project

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## *Live or lease land:*

- Adjacent, along Catherine Creek
- Adjacent, along Little Creek
- Upstream of Buffalo Land & Livestock
- Downstream of Buffalo Land & Livestock
- Union
- Cove/vicinity

# Understanding of the Project/Activities

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- Location
  - Focused on Catherine Creek
  - Might now include Little Creek
  - Unsure which creek is now involved
- Purpose
  - Intended to improve fish habitat
  - Intended to reduce ice build-up/flooding
- Project activities:
  - Move Highway 203 so that it no longer constrains Catherine Creek
  - Move Catherine Creek into the middle of private property and make it meander
  - May provide opportunities for local ditch improvements (e.g., creating pipeline)

# Directly Affected?

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- Insufficient information to know
- Potentially increased flooding (adjacent)
- May affect water flowing into ditches
  - Increase or decrease, depending on location of diversion
  - Ability for ditch improvements funded by the project
- May impact gravity-fed City water pipeline crossing the private property
- Moving Highway 203 may create impasses due to drifting snow in the winter

# Indirectly Affected?

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- More water stored on private land means less water available via ditches or in creeks
- Neighbors/extended family flood risk may increase
- Reduced recreational access to Catherine Creek if creek/highway moved
- Improved water quality, fish habitat, and fishing opportunities
- Improved bird and wildlife viewing opportunities through improved habitat

# Questions about Proposed Activities

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- Why is it taking so long?
- Why doesn't the public have more influence over this project? Why should they?
- Will the gravity waterline owned by City of Union need to be moved?
- Who will be affected by increased flood hazard/be in the floodplain? How will it impact property owner's insurance?
- Will there be a loss of access to recreation activities associated with Catherine Creek if highway is moved/Catherine Creek "moved onto private property"
- Will water sources/groundwater will be disrupted?



# Member Impressions about the Project

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- The public has little influence over whether this project happens
- Potential for additional snow plowing required/more road closures due to increased drifting if Highway 203 is moved
- Seems the project would increase Catherine Creek water temps by spreading the water over a greater area (making creek shallower), plus lack of shade from mature trees/hillside—can't see the benefit to fish
- Taxpayer expense of moving the highway
- Appearance of public funds benefiting private gain
- A unique “big idea” that could be very beneficial to fish, wildlife, songbirds
- Project benefits (economic and ecological) are positive and not being clearly conveyed to the public

# Communication

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- Reliable, up-to-date project information feels generally lacking
- Less than half of the members are aware of/utilize the website
- Would like regular updates, even if there is very little to update (e.g., City Council updates).
- Email, with some phone and follow-up is the most reliable communication method
- In-person meetings preferred, but virtual can work

# Information Sought

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- Map of the project/project boundaries
- Project timelines
- Updated flood hazard/FEMA map
- Water table data / potential impacts to groundwater
- Potential impacts to ditches
- Examples of comparable, successful floodplain restoration projects
- Evidence that fish will benefit from the project
- Cost of the project/benefits (and to whom?)

# Interview Conclusions

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- Most members positive, neutral, or at least felt the goals were worthwhile.
- Opportunity to improve quality and timeliness of project information to the community
- Need a shared understanding for the complexity of this project and its timelines
- Building community understanding around technical topics (flooding, sediment, groundwater) would help alleviate concerns and build community confidence in project activities.
- Address the concern that people should have input into decisions that may affect them (i.e., when project impacts may exceed project private land boundaries), while respecting the rights of private property owners.
- Relationships need improvement. This is a two-way street.
  - Those outspoken against the project generally do not trust the project information they are receiving from those with the greatest degree of knowledge about the project.
- Transparency and good, two-way communication essential to project success.

# Project Update

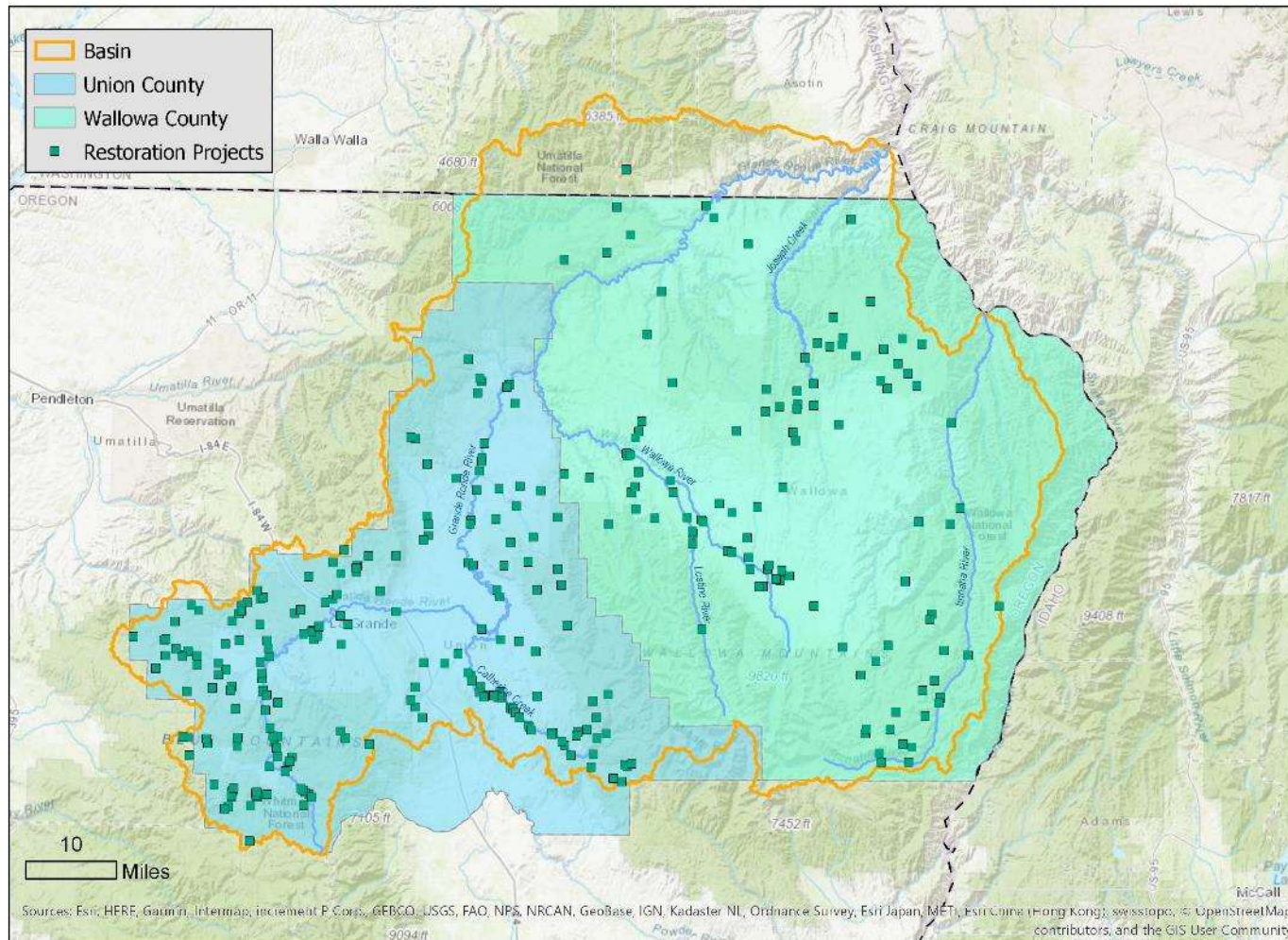
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Jim Webster

Jesse Steele, Grande Ronde Model Watershed



# Habitat Restoration in the Grande Ronde Basin





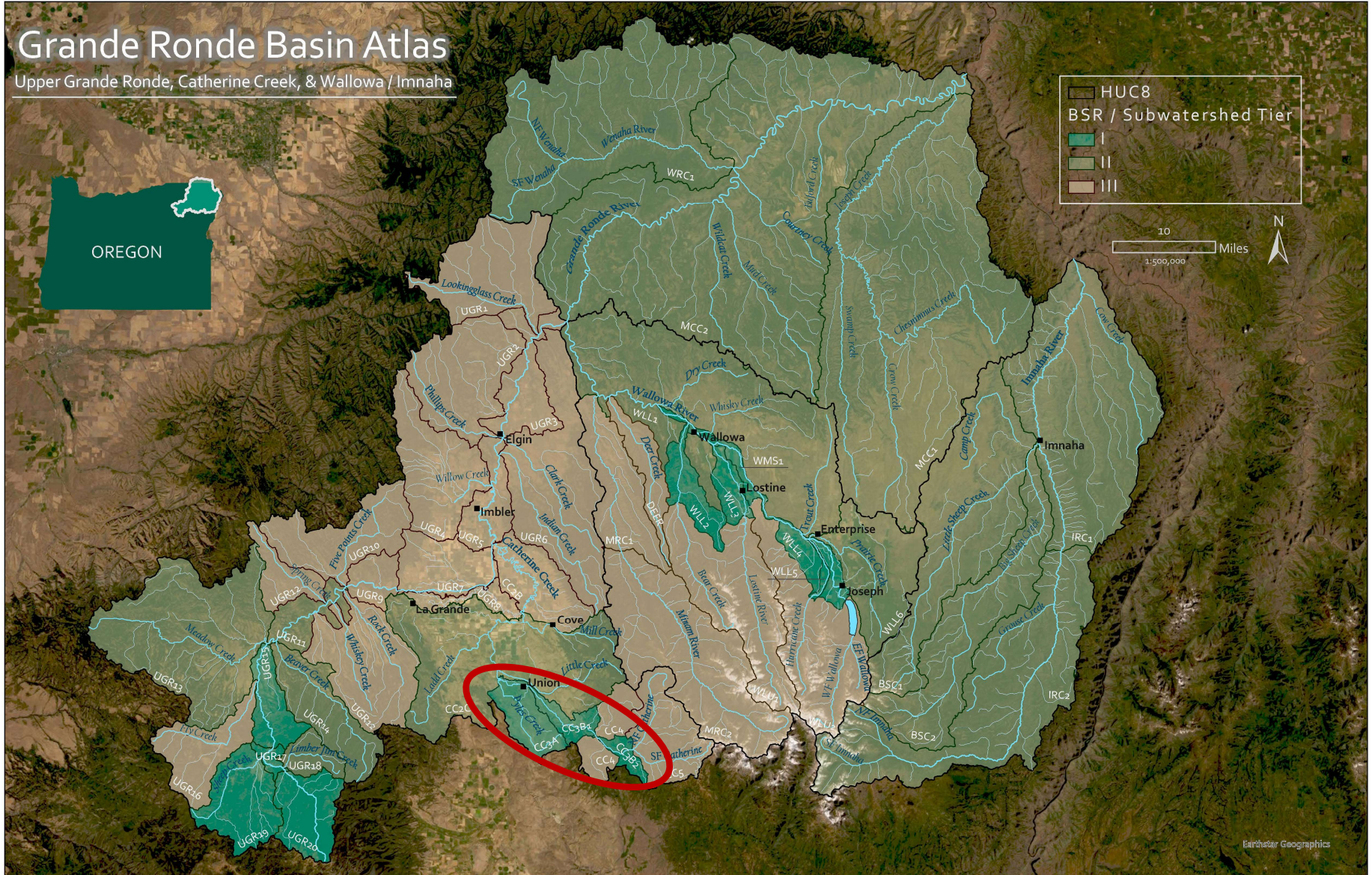
# Grande Ronde Basin Atlas

Upper Grande Ronde, Catherine Creek, & Wallowa / Imnaha



HUC8  
BSR / Subwatershed Tier

- I
- II
- III





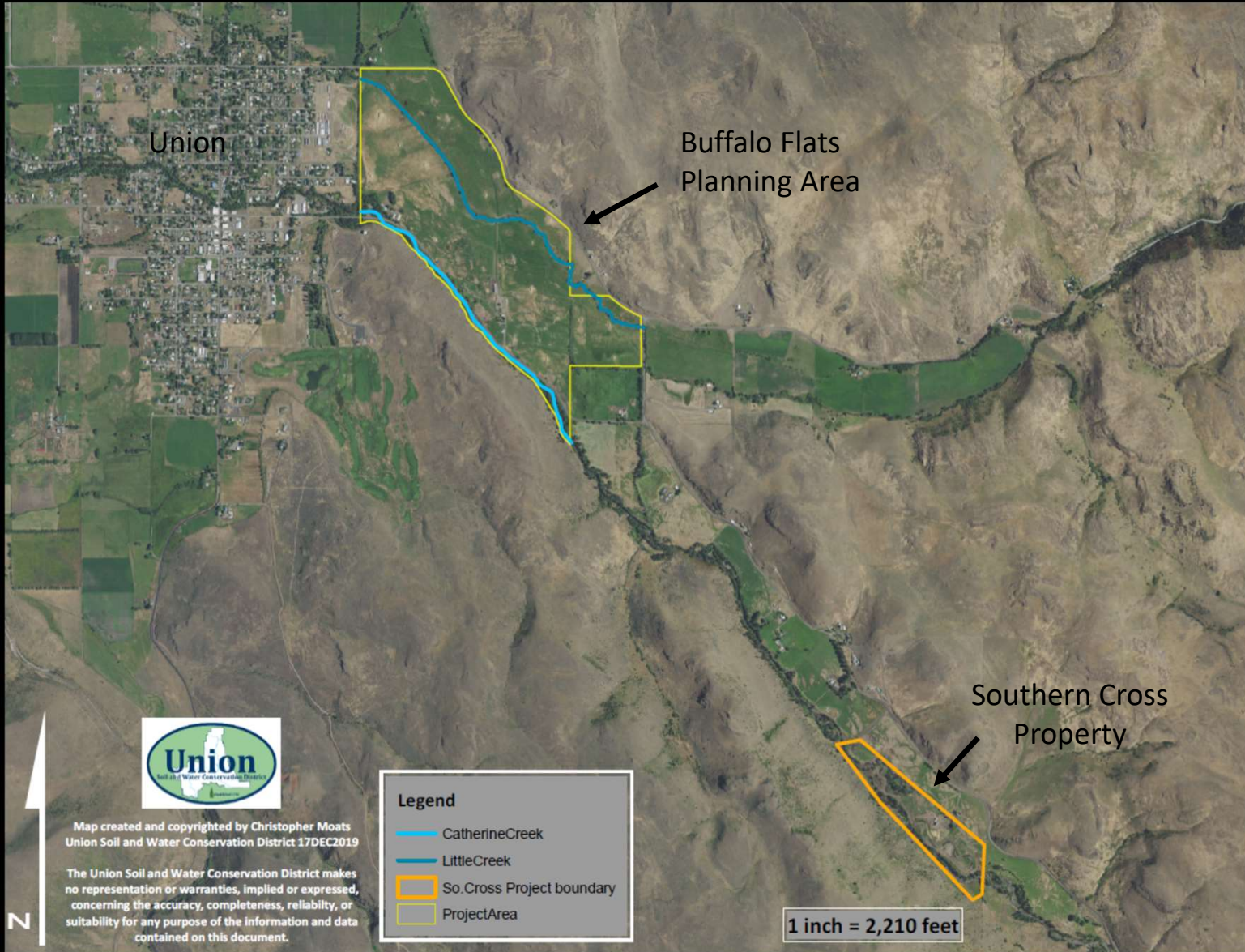
# Habitat Restoration Funding

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- Action Agencies
  - Bonneville Power Administration
  - Bureau of Reclamation
  - Army Corps of Engineers
- GRMW primarily receives F&W **mitigation** dollars from Bonneville Power Administration
- GRMW Board of Directors approve funding for local projects
- GRMW and partners apply for other private, state and federal grants. Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board is a key funder.









### **240 Acres of meadow**

- Historic floodplain
- Irrigated pasture

### **Over 3 miles of stream channel**

- Catherine Creek
- Little Creek

### **Water Quality/Quantity Concerns**

- Stream Temperature
- Sediment
- Instream Flow, Floodplain Storage

### **Fish Species Concerns**

- Poor Habitat Quality, cover and diversity
- Floodplain Connectivity
- Summer steelhead
- Spring Chinook salmon
- Bull trout

# Buffalo Flats Project Goals

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Enhance and restore aquatic and floodplain habitat conditions and increase habitat diversity and complexity for salmonids;



Improve water quality conditions (temperature and sediment) for salmonids, other native fish, and wildlife;



Promote conditions for restoring ecological function and improving soil health within the project area;



Improve riparian corridor and floodplain vegetative diversity and function within the project area;



Reconnect both Catherine Creek and Little Creek with their associated floodplains and expand quality floodplain habitat availability for salmonids within the project boundaries;



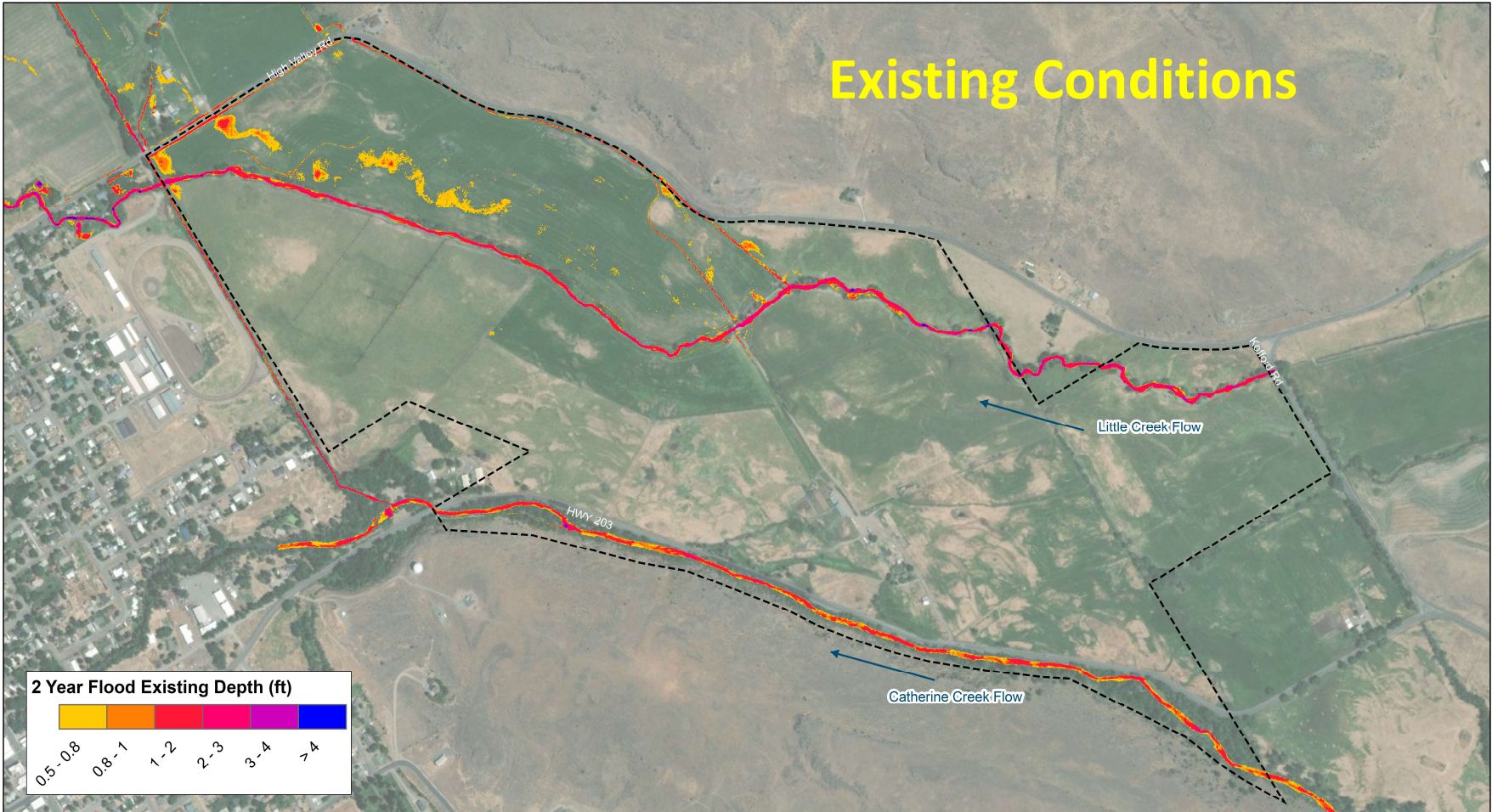
Increase streambank and floodplain storage of water and ice; thereby, increasing the potential for attenuating flows, and reducing ice formation within the project reach.



# Buffalo Flats—Little Creek: Project Activities

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- Reactivating side channels (used during high flow)
- Existing channel modifications to promote flow into new meander bends (increasing belt width of the channel)
- Block some parts of existing channel, dig out some new areas so that flow can continue to dig out those areas in the future
- Wood and rock structures in primary channel to create some stability and maintain deeper pools for fish
- Riparian planting

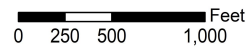


**Existing Inundation: 2 Year Flood Conditions**



501 Portway Ave, Suite 101  
 Hood River, Oregon 97031  
 www.interfluve.com  
 541.386.9003

Coordinate System: NAD 1983  
 State Plane Oregon North FIPS 3601 Feet  
 Vertical Datum: NAVD83



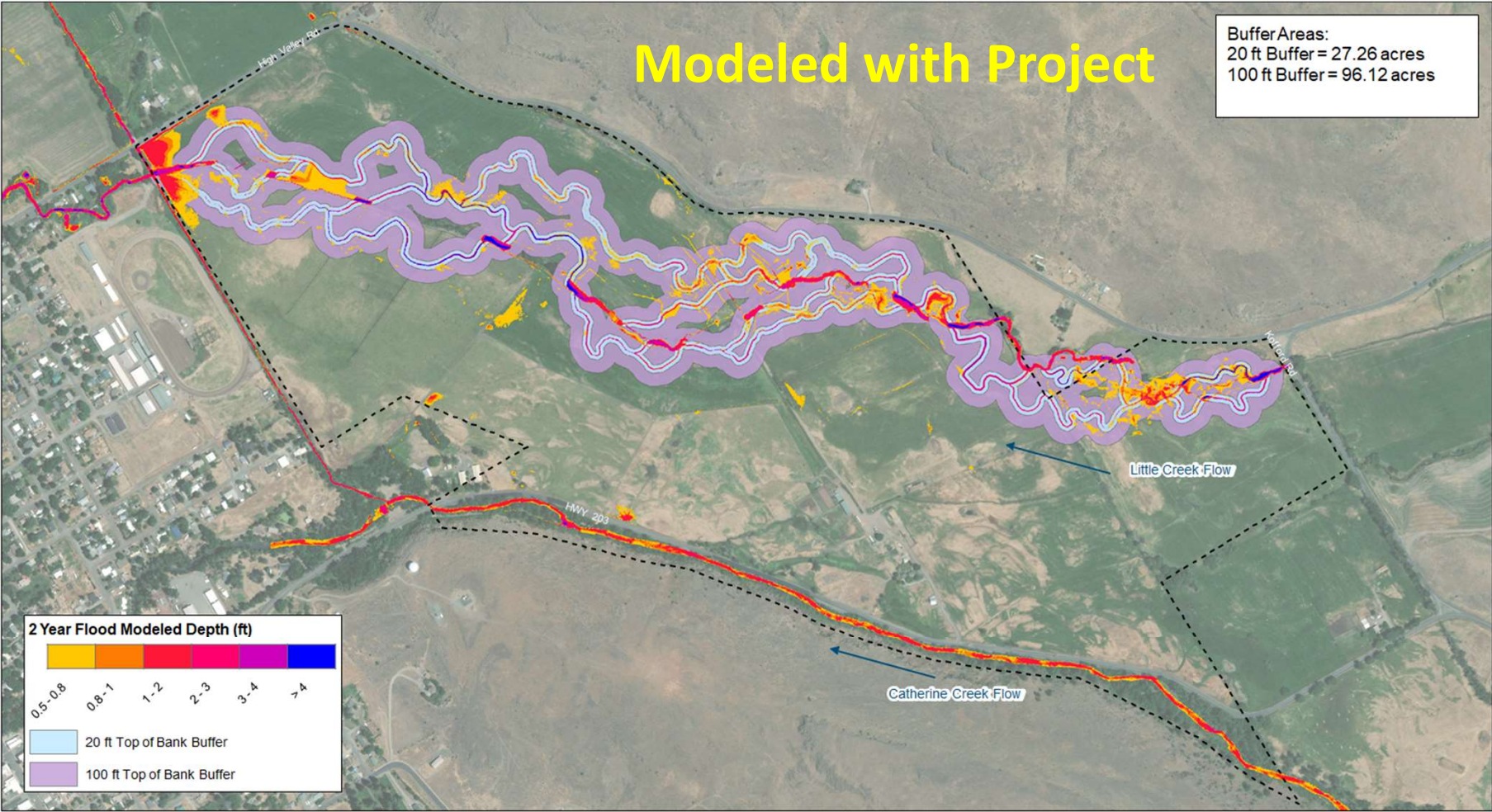
**Buffalo Flats  
 Union, OR**

Flood Depth Analysis



# Modeled with Project

Buffer Areas:  
20 ft Buffer = 27.26 acres  
100 ft Buffer = 96.12 acres

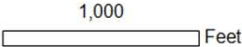


## Modeled Inundation: 2 Year Flood Conditions



501 Portway Ave, Suite 101  
Hood River, Oregon 97031  
[www.interfluve.com](http://www.interfluve.com)  
541.386.9003

Coordinate System: NAD 1983  
State Plane Oregon North FIPS 3601 feet  
Vertical Datum: NAVD88



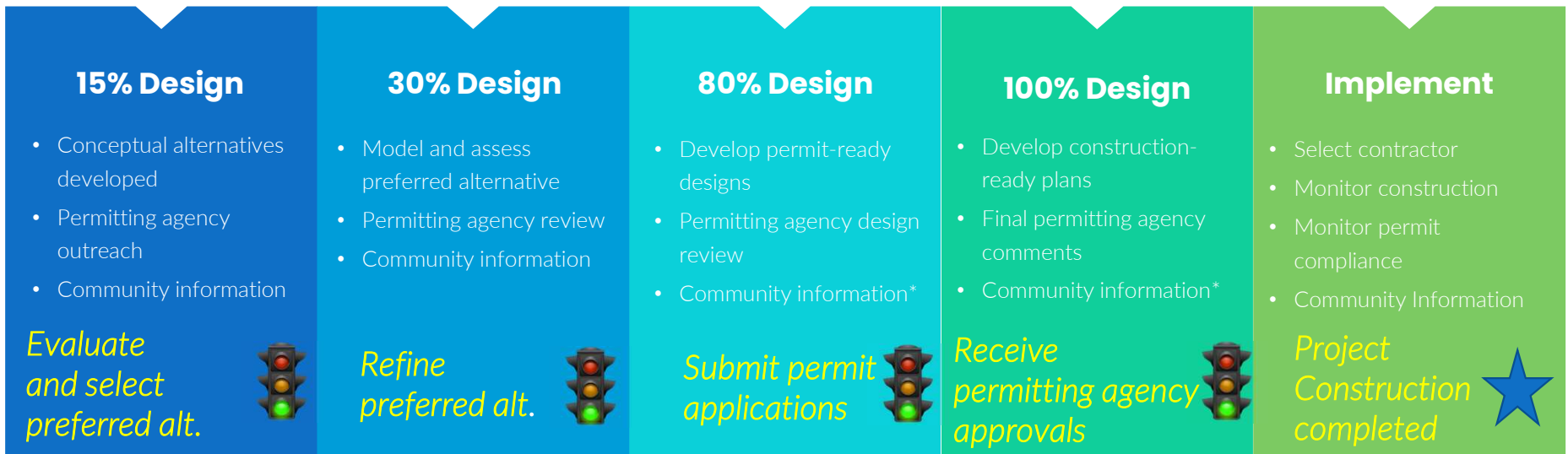
Buffalo Flats  
Union, OR

Top of Bank Buffers

# Buffalo Flats Floodplain Restoration

Projected Little Creek Portion – Milestone Timeline

Fall '21 Summer '22 Spring '23 Winter '23 Spring '24



*\*Post-meeting clarification: If the project ends up requiring environmental review per the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), “community information” at these steps would change to “public consultation” to reflect public review and comment on the proposals/alternatives.*

# Project Next Steps / Closing Remarks





# Thank you for attending!

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- Project website: <http://unionswcd.org/buffalo-flats.html>
- Project Contacts
  - Jim Webster [jwebster@unionswcd.org](mailto:jwebster@unionswcd.org)
  - Susan Hayman [shayman@rossstrategic.com](mailto:shayman@rossstrategic.com)

