Pinedale Region Aquatic Habitat Priorities

Region: Pinedale **Priority**: 3

Watershed Name: Smith's Fork Watershed - Bear River

Sub-Basin Names:	**HUC**
Smiths Fork River	1601010202
Lower Bear River (below Sage Jct. to Idaho – Wyoming line)	16010102018
Lower Bear River (Bridger Creek Basin to below Sage Jct.)	1601010108

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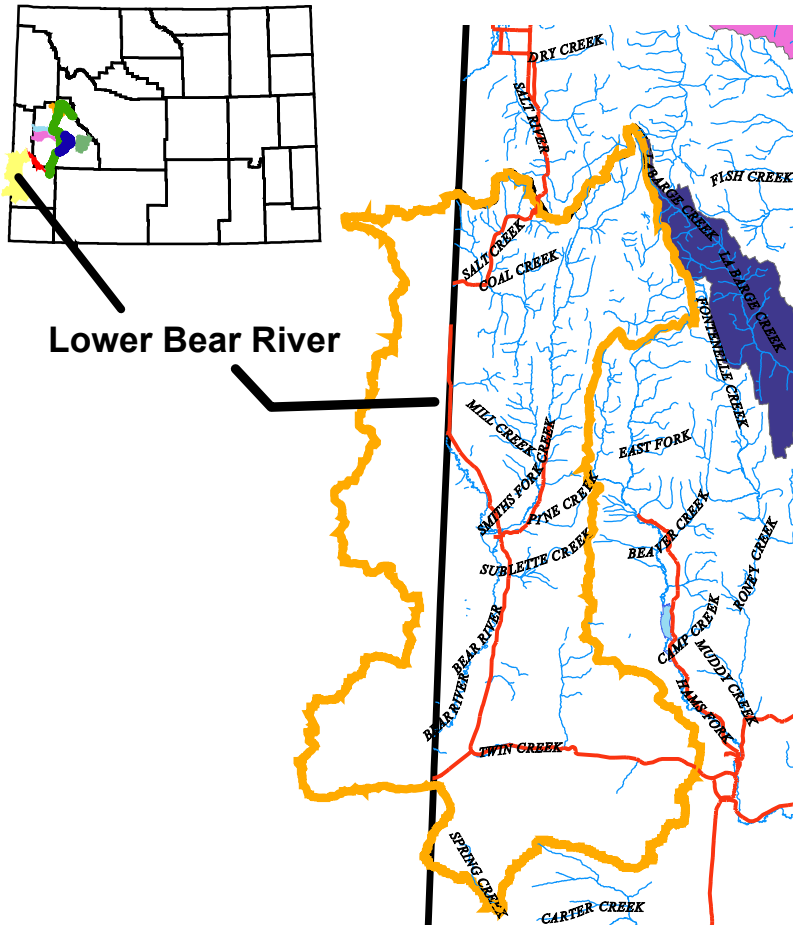
The Lower Bear River Watershed is defined by all the land within Wyoming, within the hydrological boundaries of the Bear River between Woodruff Narrows Reservoir and the Salt River Divide. This watershed is actually within the Green River Region as managed by the Wildlife Division. However, the Aquatic Habitat Biologist, and Fisheries Biologist for this area are both stationed in the Pinedale Office. To the extent possible a Habitat Project Biologist for this area has been stationed in Kemmerer until recently.



LAND STATUS: 15% Private 85% Public

SPECIES THAT COULD BENEFIT FROM ACTIVITY IN THIS WATERSHED:
Due to the large size (approximately 900 square miles) and relative diversity of this area, many of Wyoming's 600+ species are represented in this area. Primary emphasis is on native trout (BRC), mule deer, sage grouse, moose, antelope, elk and assemblages of riparian and sagebrush obligates.

CURRENT HABITAT CONDITIONS/LIMITING FACTORS:

Wildlife populations in this watershed are most limited by the overall unhealthy condition of the watershed. A healthy and functioning watershed is defined by a soil, water, and vegetation cycle that functions to maximize water storage and vegetation production and diversity while minimizing soil erosion. Both upland and riparian plant communities must function together to maximize available water while buffering its erosive force. Diverse plant communities and age structure within plant communities indicate healthy watershed conditions, while improperly functioning watersheds do not maximize the water resource resulting in the loss of vegetation, invasion of undesirable plants, and reduced soil stability. Other indicators of improperly functioning watersheds include, significant amounts of bare ground, stressed or low vigor plants, and lack of plant age diversity. Encroachment of dryer plant communities into once mesic or sub irrigated riparian areas is a common indicator of reduced water storage.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS/AGREEMENTS

Restoration of the vegetative communities in this watershed is most limited by the ability to control livestock grazing to provide for rest of vegetation treatments and proper follow up management following treatments. Readily available alternative locations to alleviate grazing pressure/demands in this watershed would provide greater opportunities for vegetation treatment/enhancement projects.

CURRENT ACTIVITES/PROPOSED PROJECTS

In 1993 a Project Biologist was stationed in Kemmerer to assess crucial big game winter ranges, fisheries habitat, and water quality in tributaries of the Bear River. This initial 5-year effort resulted in the "Lower Bear River Watershed Enhancement Completion Report" Clause, 1999). To the extent possible, a Project Biologist has been retained for this area since then with goals to implement projects recommended in this report and continue inventories and monitoring efforts. The Department's loss of a long-term (3-5 year) habitat enhancement program, combined with more lucrative job opportunities and an increased demand for personnel trained and experienced in natural resource fields, has stifled efforts to retain a Project Biologist for this Watershed Project. Because of the distance from Regional Offices, and other priorities of permanent habitat personnel, not having a continuous Project Biologist is currently limiting opportunities for implementation and assurance of proper implementation by federal land management agencies.