



Janna Brown &lt;janna.brown@bonnercountyid.gov&gt;

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**[EXT SENDER] RE: Bonner County Planning - S0001-25 Agency Review - Short Plat - River Estates**

1 message

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**Horsmon, Merritt** <merritt.horsmon@idfg.idaho.gov>  
To: Bonner County Planning <planning@bonnercountyid.gov>

Fri, Jun 13, 2025 at 12:13 PM

Hi Janna,

Please find corresponding Idaho Department of Fish and Game comments attached.

Sorry for the delay on this one.

Have a nice weekend.

Thank you,

**Merritt Horsmon**

Regional Technical Assistance Manager

Panhandle Region

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**From:** Bonner County Planning <[planning@bonnercountyid.gov](mailto:planning@bonnercountyid.gov)>**Sent:** Wednesday, April 30, 2025 11:13 AM**To:** Alan Brinkmeier <[alan.brinkmeier@bonnercountyid.gov](mailto:alan.brinkmeier@bonnercountyid.gov)>; Amber Burgess <[clerk@ebsewerdistrict.com](mailto:clerk@ebsewerdistrict.com)>;  
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**Subject:** Bonner County Planning - S0001-25 Agency Review - Short Plat - River Estates

**CAUTION:** This email originated outside the State of Idaho network. Verify links and attachments **BEFORE** you click or open, even if you recognize and/or trust the sender. Contact your agency service desk with any concerns.

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The above-named application has been submitted to the Bonner County Planning Department for processing.

Please review the application relative to your agency's area of expertise and include any recommended conditions of approval and supporting code sections. Please see attached for details.

Thank you,

**Janna Brown, Administrative Assistant III**

**Bonner County Planning Department**

**208-265-1458 ext - 1252**



**BC\_SS0001-25\_PriestR\_RiverEstates.pdf**  
215K



## IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

PANHANDLE REGION

2885 West Kathleen Avenue

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83815

Brad Little / Governor  
Jim Fredericks / Director

June 10, 2025

Bonner County Planning Department  
1500 Highway 2, Suite 208  
Sandpoint, ID 83864

REFERENCE: S0001-25 – River Estates

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) has reviewed the application to divide one (1) 19.39-acre lot into (2) 9.691-acre lots along the Priest River. The purpose of these comments is to assist the decision-making authority by providing technical information that can be used to minimize fish and wildlife impacts.

The parcel considered in this proposal are partially composed of Priest River floodplain and contain both freshwater emergent and freshwater forested/shrub wetlands. Priest River is hydrologically connected to Lake Pend Oreille with no barriers to fish movement and, like a number of other tributaries to the system, provides spawning and early rearing habitat for Lake Pend Oreille Bull Trout. Native Westslope Cutthroat Trout also inhabit Priest River. The entire 45-mile length is federally designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Bull Trout depend on cool, clean water and use Priest River as a migration route to their spawning areas. Flood risk is rising in the Pacific Northwest due to changes in climate patterns. Floods can cause extensive property damage, increased nutrient inputs, and possible sewage, and chemical pollutant release into Priest River. In turn, any one of these outcomes could result in degradation of water quality and negative effects on coldwater aquatic life.

Wetland areas characteristic to northern Idaho include marshes, swamps, floodplains, and peat bogs. They play a crucial role in water quality, water retention, erosion control, soil and nutrient trapping, and provide important habitat for a variety of wildlife species. Additionally, wetlands help extend stream flow during droughts and aid in preventing devastating floods. Development and human activity in and adjacent to wetlands adversely impact these values and functions. We recommend that all wetlands should be protected from pesticides, fertilizers, and septic systems by a minimum of a 40-foot buffer of native vegetation. Additionally, Bonner County Code section 12-733B states that all high-quality wetlands require a 40-foot building setback.

Section 4.2 of the natural resources section of the Bonner County Comprehensive Plan states that "Impacts to fisheries from development are typically associated with modifications to floodplains,

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riparian areas, and stream banks which in turn affect stream channel stability, shade cover and other features which create fish habitat (Thurrow 1988, Liknes and Graham 1987, Rieman and Apperson 1989).” Floodplains are valuable both physically and biologically for many reasons to include flood abatement, filtering nutrients and pollutants, moderation of water temperatures, reduction of sediment, promoting groundwater recharge, and enhancing biological diversity.

Streamflow in lower Priest River is regulated by the Priest Lake Outlet Dam. Dam operations target a discharge of at least 60 cfs to lower Priest River during the recreation season and majority of irrigation season. During low water years, it has been difficult for the 60 cfs minimum flow to be met, and occasionally the flows have been dropped to nearly half that amount. Furthermore, Priest River below the mouth of the East River (mile 21.7) has a minimum flow water right requirement of 300 cubic feet per second held by the Idaho Water Resources Board. During the last five irrigation seasons, the minimum flow requirement was not met for more than 100 days, with most of that occurring in August and September for this water right (97-7380). Flows did not return to at or above the minimum flow until recreational water was released from Priest Lake. August and September flows are critical for Bull Trout migrating to spawning tributaries, which is one of the primary reasons that a minimum stream flow water right was requested. Additionally, “As development of land and water resources intensifies, it is increasingly apparent that development of either ground water or surface water affects the other” (Winters and others, 1998, USGS Circular 1186, 1999). With increased development in the area this important migration corridor is likely to see additional negative effects. Climate models predict less snowpack, earlier spring runoff, and high summer temperatures will occur with increasing frequency into the future. “The results of ground-water pumping are likely to be of greatest concern during periods of low flow, particularly when the reliability of surface water supplies is threatened during droughts.” (USGS Circular 1186, 1999). Lower Priest River is classified as water quality limited under §303(d) of the Clean Water Act. It is TMDL listed for both temperature and sediment. Fish kills have been occurring on Priest River due to lethally high-water temperatures during the summer months. While these do not occur consistently or frequently, they are of great concern to IDFG. Further reduction of flows and floodplain development will only increase negative effects.

In the general habitat section of the Bonner County Comprehensive Plan, it states that while some species may benefit from rural residential disturbance, many highly valued fish and wildlife species are sensitive to disturbance and habitat alteration associated with rural development. Bull Trout are a species that is sensitive to water quality changes, especially temperature increases that often accompany floodplain and off-channel development in riverine systems. The Comprehensive Plan states “While any one development proposal will have limited impacts on wildlife, those impacts will add cumulatively to impacts associated with past and future developments to ultimately reduce the capacity of the County to support many wildlife species.” The reduction of wildlife and available habitat will affect Idahoans who enjoy wildlife and wildlife-based recreation.

While the habitat contained in the proposed parcels is not currently designated as “critical” by any state or federal agency, with increased development, all undeveloped wildlife habitat and open spaces within Bonner County are becoming increasingly important. The flood risk and floodplain development in this proposal both disproportionally increase potential impacts to resources because of the high relative importance of floodplain and riparian habitats to wildlife.

In summary, wildlife use will be negatively impacted within the immediate areas with further floodplain encroachment. Additionally, there may be effects to both wetland habitat and to the Priest River if necessary precautions to protect these sensitive areas are not taken. While the habitat, and many of the species, may seem common and similar resources are available nearby, continued development will change the abundance, diversity, and distribution of wildlife within Bonner County over time.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Carson Watkins  
Panhandle Regional Supervisor

CJW:MH:lat  
C: eFile M:\  
Literature Cited

“Floodplain Management”. FEMA.  
[www.fema.gov/floodplain-management](http://www.fema.gov/floodplain-management). Accessed 5 April 2024.

United States Geological Survey. (1999) Sustainability of Ground-Water Resources. Retrieved from: <https://pubs.usgs.gov/circ/circ1186/html/title.html>

Rieman, B.E., and K.A. Apperson. 1989. Status and analysis of salmonid fisheries: westslope cutthroat trout synopsis and analysis of fishery information. Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Boise. Job Performance Report, Project F-73-R-11, Subproject n. Job 1.

Liknes, G.A., and P.J. Graham. 1988. Westslope cutthroat trout in Montana: life history, status, and management. American Fisheries Society Symposium 4:53-60.

Bonner County Comprehensive Plan, Bonner County, Idaho