



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

PANHANDLE REGION
2885 West Kathleen Avenue
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83815

Brad Little / Governor
Jim Fredericks / Director

July 28, 2025

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

REFERENCE: VA0020-25 – Shoreline Setback – Lightning Creek

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) has reviewed the above request for a shoreline setback variance of 52.5 feet where 75 feet is required along the shoreline of Lightning Creek. 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.

Bonner County Code (subchapter 7.1) states the purpose of the shoreline setback chapter is to preserve both the quality and quantity of Bonner County water resources. Additionally, it aims to reduce erosion and sedimentation into waterways.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) maintains that setbacks are the best way to protect stream channels and floodplains because these dynamic natural systems are active and tend to meander and flood, thereby requiring space to function properly. Healthy, functional floodplains and riparian areas provide many benefits to water quality, act as flood attenuators, and provide diverse habitat for many species of fish and wildlife.

Bonner County Code (subchapter 7.2) states that the purpose of the subchapter is to protect property, surface water and groundwater against significant adverse effects from excavation, filling, clearing, unstable earthworks, soil erosion, sedimentation and stormwater runoff, and to provide maximum safety in the development and design of building sites, roads and other service amenities.

Lightning Creek is a major tributary to the Clark Fork River and a valuable spawning and rearing area for Lake Pend Orielle Bull Trout, Cutthroat Trout and Gerrard Rainbow Trout which migrate in and out of the system. It is prone to flashy flows and can move large substrate during high water events.

Should this variance be granted, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game recommends the following:

- The applicant retain as much of the native riparian vegetation as practical to maintain a riparian buffer between new construction and the floodplain and stream channel. Additional native plantings on disturbed soil or erosive banks would help to ameliorate any negative effects to water quality and sedimentation.
- The applicant avoids shoreline or riverbank armoring to allow the stream channel to naturally meander within the floodplain.
- If streambank erosion control is necessary, we recommend that softer techniques be used to include root wads, wood revetments, riparian vegetation, and stream barbs or vanes to direct currents. These techniques cause less damage to natural stream function than rock or cement bank armoring, lessen downstream erosion effects and channelization and provide more suitable habitat for fish and wildlife.
- Adhering to the most up to date erosion and sedimentation siltation BMPs during construction and maintaining or establishing riparian buffers. One resource to find and evaluate appropriate BMPs is the Idaho DEQ *Idaho Catalog of Storm Water Best Management Practices* available online at:
<https://www2.deq.idaho.gov/admin/LEIA/api/document/download/14968>
- An approved stormwater plan, prepared by a licensed professional engineer, be implemented.

If variances to Bonner County Code become regularly allowed, we would expect that to lead to modified shorelines, increased nutrient inputs, declines in water quality, and subsequent negative effects to the fishery.

Sincerely,

Carson Watkins
Panhandle Regional Supervisor

CJW:MH:lat
C: eFile M:\