

MULTI-AGENCY EFFORT TO PRIORITIZE HABITAT RESTORATION AND PROTECTION PROJECTS FOR NATIVE SALMONIDS IN LARGE MANAGEMENT AREAS

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Avista Corporation (Avista) has an aquatic protection, mitigation, and enhancement program for the Clark Fork River Hydroelectric Project on the lower Clark Fork River and its tributaries in Montana and Idaho. Avista's aquatic program is implemented cooperatively by an Aquatic Implementation Team (AIT) consisting of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Idaho Department of Fish and Game; the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service; and Avista. The AIT initiated a project to 1) summarize the existing data on fish populations and habitat

conditions in tributary streams and 2) prioritize watersheds for future habitat protection and restoration. The team developed criteria to prioritize protection/restoration projects for the lower Clark Fork River drainage at multiple spatial scales, based on a philosophy of 'protect the best first.' This project combined professional knowledge and available data to rank current population and habitat conditions in the drainage. This prioritization allows programs to proceed in a logical order. The ability to prioritize future projects is an important tool for all managers attempting to allocate limited funds and receive maximum biological benefits that are consistent with management goals and objectives. This project provides a template for prioritization that could be adapted to other locations with differing resource management objectives.