



March 30, 2022

Priest River Conservation Mitigation Alternatives Position Statement

The Selkirk Conservation Alliance (SCA) is committed to understanding, supporting, and protecting the southern Selkirk environment through cooperation, scientific inquiry, education, and economic diversity. We advocate for all beings, human and non-human, who live in, love, and benefit from Priest Lake and its surroundings. One major component of these surroundings is the Lower Priest River – and it is in trouble.

Lower Priest River flows, both in quantity and quality, are insufficient to sustain an historical cold-water fishery, or healthy habitat for other threatened and endangered species. Recreation on the Lower Priest River in late summer is limited due to low river flows. The degradation of the Lower Priest River must be addressed.

SCA has monitored water quality in the lake for years including the temperature of Priest Lake tributaries. We are the leading advocate in the area for wetlands preservation. We advocate for responsible forest management to preserve forest canopy near streams. All these are attempts to maintain or improve water quality including temperature in the lake and in the river.

SCA is mindful of the tremendous recreational and economic benefit derived from Priest Lake itself. We do not deny that there are conflicts and tradeoffs between the river flow management and potential lake impacts. We are hopeful that wise management can reduce the magnitude of tradeoffs inherent in this issue.

SCA is open to discussion and exploration of all management actions that will improve the Lower Priest River environment while maintaining the enormous benefit derived from recreation on and adjacent to the lake itself. The SCA does not feel we can advocate for a cold water bypass until it can be reasonably assured that effects on Priest Lake, in both construction and operation, are held to a minimum and concerns listed herein are addressed.

Better hydrological and temperature data on stream and Thorofare flows under various climate scenarios would greatly advance the discussion of this issue. The ecologic impact to Outlet Bay and silt runoff to Priest River from a large dredging operation needs evaluation. Potential changes to Outlet Bay currents and flow patterns during the operation of a Bypass needs modeling. Importantly, a coordinated management plan incorporating Outlet Dam, Coldwater Bypass, and Lower Priest River flow rates linked to seasonal lake pool levels needs to be scientifically developed.

Through scientific inquiry and public education, SCA seeks answers to the environmental challenges facing the Lower Priest River. Historically, the long-term ecologic impact of the Outlet Dam was not understood. As remediation efforts for those consequences are being considered, the SCA requests more thorough outcome data.

SCA Staff and Board of Directors