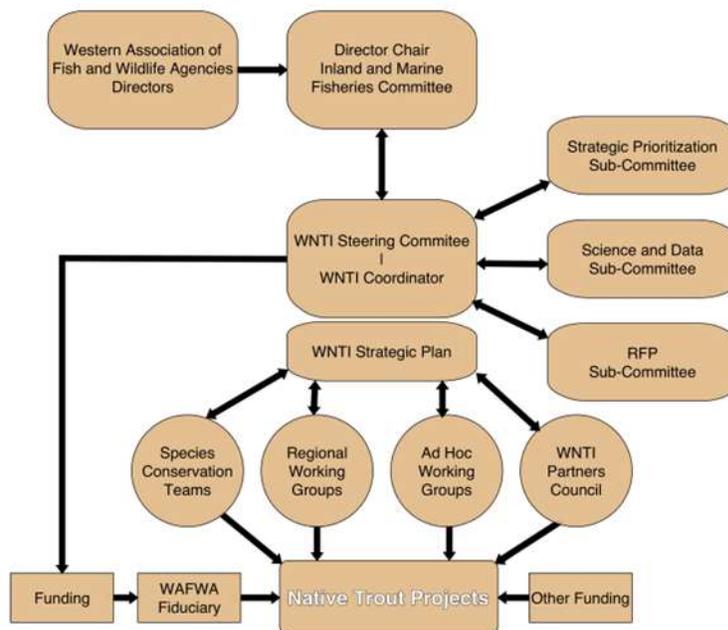


## Western Native Trout Initiative Prioritization Considerations

The Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI) is a collaborative, multi-state approach that requires the involvement of a wide range of partners – from public agencies to private individuals to conservation-minded organizations and corporations. Covering over 1.75 million square miles of public and privately managed lands, WNTI and our partners combine science-based assessments with expert and local knowledge to establish joint priorities for native trout conservation at a landscape scale. Setting priorities for management actions is difficult because of biological and scientific complexity, along with diverse policy issues and economic implications. WNTI’s organizational structure and status as an Initiative of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) provides us integrated relationships with western state and federal fish and wildlife agencies and interagency species-specific Game Management Unit (GMU) Teams, as well as WNTI’s regional working groups and interagency species Recovery teams that assist the WNTI Steering Committee by identifying priority projects and data gaps.

## WNTI Organizational Structure



In 2015, the WNTI Steering Committee began a process to review the 2008 Plan for Strategic Actions and 2010 addendum. In November 2016, the [updated Plan for Strategic Actions was approved by the Steering Committee](#) and work began to set goals for the next 5-10 years.

During the strategic plan review and update process, the Steering Committee recognized the difficulty of prioritizing conservation actions for 21 native trout and char species across the western U.S., especially given a finite supply of conservation funding. With that backdrop, the Steering Committee adopted a more strategic approach best summarized as “Big Impact: Three Species in Three Years”.

Beginning with WNTI’s fall 2017 RFP cycle (for federal fiscal year 2018 funding), up to 75% of WNTI’s National Fish Habitat Partnership funding could go toward the priorities listed below for the years indicated. Proposals for other WNTI species for NFHP funding will still be considered, but will need to meet a high standard in terms of project quality and impact to one or more of our 21 focal species in order to be funded. *[An inclusive list of project activities/outcomes eligible for potential WNTI NFHP funding are listed on page 3 of this document.]*

## **WNTI’s Priorities 2017-2022**

As a National Fish Habitat Partnership, WNTI’s #1 priority is the protection and restoration of habitat for western native trout and char species. Under this broad priority, we consider actions that achieve the following to be our highest priority:

- Actions that provide long-term protection of intact and healthy aquatic ecosystems that support priority populations.
- Restoration projects. Priorities are (in this order):
  1. Actions that protect or enhance multiple populations.
  2. Actions that provide immediate benefits to enhancing the viability of priority populations (e.g. restoring habitat connectivity where populations are isolated or threatened).
  3. Actions that support conservation of unique and rare functioning habitat, habitat diversity, life histories and genetic attributes.
  4. Actions that provide critical information needed for assessing success and making adaptive management decisions.

WNTI’s second highest priority is projects **that support our #1 priority** to benefit these species:

- 2017-2019: Bonneville Cutthroat Trout, Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout, interior Redband Trout.
- 2020-2022: Colorado River Cutthroat Trout, Lahontan Cutthroat Trout, Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout, Westslope Cutthroat Trout.

## Additional and ongoing prioritization

In 2017 and 2018, to support additional fund development from non-federal funding sources, WNTI will work with the above 7 interagency species teams and regional working groups to review all existing strategic prioritization and to support the teams in identifying detailed strategic priorities and recommendations for their species for WNTI. A report will be produced for each species team identifying priority habitats and/or projects and/or needs and include a conservation portfolio for each species for WNTI to appeal to private sector donors. WNTI will be prepared to coordinate with our partners for up to 3 years to appeal to funders.

## Project activities/outcomes eligible for WNTI/NFHP funding 2017-2022

WNTI supports projects that address the 3 R's of conservation:

**Representation:** *conserving the genetic, geographic, and live history diversity of a taxon*

**Resilience:** *the ability to withstand demographic and environmental variation*

**Redundancy:** *sufficient populations to provide a margin of safety*

**All projects must address one or more threats across the landscape that fall under our strategic framework**

| Impacts of nonnatives              | Degraded or isolated habitats         | Health of populations  |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Barrier construction               | Fish passage                          | Assessments  |
| Barrier removal                    | Water quantity                        | Data shortfalls  |
| Piscicide projects                 | Water quality                         | Genetics   |
| Nonnative fish control and removal | Climate change                        | Brood stock  |
|                                    | Channel restoration and stabilization | Presence/absence of species                                    |
|                                    | Riparian protection and restoration   | Effects of fire on habitat                                     |
|                                    |                                       | Protection of existing habitats to protect healthy populations |

## Triage

### Additional consideration for WNTI funding will be given for these categories:

- Protection of existing intact and healthy habitats and populations
- Immediate action is required to forestall degradation or deterioration of the resource
- Data shortfalls (species with serious data or rangewide assessment needs)
- Opportunistic/stochastic events (fire, drought, project window is short, sudden cooperative landowner, etc.)
- Populations most at risk (list based on input from interagency species conservation teams)