The segmented, multi-jurisdictional, and complex checkerboarded socio-ecological habitat of Lapwai Creek, Idaho is due in large part to the historical precedents that lay the foundation for problems and decisions for contemporary Salmonid protection.  Salmon and Steelhead still use this tributary to the Clearwater River as spawning grounds in the Spring and Fall.  However the heavy modification and channelization of Lapwai Creek, and the absence of some natural floodplains, makes the difficulty for returning Salmon even more challenging in the modified riverways of the Pacific Northwest.  The stakeholder/managerial decision-space, so crucial for the management of anadramous fish, is occupied by regional stakeholders that bring to the table their own precedent, views, and previous experience making the Lapwai issue so challenging. However, the ability to find compromise and progress the decision-space can be better achieved through managerial practices like adaptive governance or the ability to understand, expect, and work alongside flux in a system of management.  The Lapwai Creek Watershed’s checkerboarded socio-ecologic decision space is a challenging but digestible problem that will take interdisciplinary thought and an adaptive methodology of understanding in order to find better outcomes for the diverse stakeholders with their histories of precedent.

The largest stakeholders in the watershed are the Nez Perce Tribe, Lewiston Orchards Irrigation District, the Bureau of Reclamation, private landowners, as well as smaller stakeholders like municipalities, FEMA, USFWS, etc.  There are many hands in the same issue in regards to the Lapwai Creek Drainage.  Each stakeholder comes into this discussion with their own set of resource-problems and history.  For example the traditional stewards of this resource were, and are still a major player in the decision-space, the indigenous Nimipuu or known know as the Nez Perce Tribe.  The tribe, with its headquarters in Lapwai along the banks of the Creek, plays a central role in the use of their lands, fisheries resources, and provides the framework from where many of the checkerboarding in the drainage stems from.  The Tribe has a storied history of treaties and compromises with stakeholders that have often been taken back what precedent had been set thereby creating a fragmented and weak system of management.

The Tribe’s original treaty with the US Government in 1855, a very early treaty for the West, essentially divided the Nez Perce from ‘treaty’ and ‘non-treaty’ tribal affiliances, a affiliation contemporary tribal members still note.  From this motion ‘treaty’ Nez Perce were sent to the reservation at Lapwai while the ‘non-treaty’ Nez Perce culminated in the 1877 War with the US Government. After being sent to reservations the US Government began to institute various legislations to set about the assimilation of the Indian and open up land for non-native settlement.  The Dawes Act of 1887 was originally intended to ‘prove-up’ unused reservation lands by allotting parcels to individual families thereby taking open land for natives and reorganizing it to private property. From this system of fragmentization often times non-Indian ownership of lands would be the fastest outcome of the Dawes Act.  This process segmented habitat, further marginalized Indians, and set a historical precedent we’ve found as a cornerstone to contemporary issues in the Lapwai Creek watershed.

From this original habitat, both the social and ecological, we’ve checkerboarded our understanding of the entire system into the socially constructed and physically altered water system today.  From this point our dominant system of governance applies managerial oversight to the resource issue with this segmentation bas in inherent part of the decision-space.  Further issues like the Bureau of Reclamation channelization, Lewiston Orchards Irrigation District (LOID) reclamation, and floodplain encroachment has caused issues for Salmon and Steelhead management, habitat, and our methods for finding best outcomes.

Through all this complexity and challenge in the Lapwai drainage we are also given an opportunity to set our own precedent for success.  Using interdisciplinary techniques and tactics in our understanding of resource issues will lend us a more storied background to take to the decision-space.  Adaptive governance in our managerial system allows for natural flux in our often static systems of management.  Being dynamic and pragmatic in our understanding of precedent in our socio-ecological systems of management, governance, and ecological knowledge will lead us to a better set of outcomes.  Examples like the Lapwai Creek watershed and its issues related to Salmonid and Steelhead resource problems could potentially provide us a template for future outcomes in larger systems among the heavily modified riverways of the Pacific Northwest.