

Big Hole



Watershed Committee

Big Hole Watershed Committee

Monthly Meeting Minutes

April 18, 2012 ~ 7:00 - 9:30pm

Divide Grange Hall

In Attendance

Jen Titus, BHWC; Ray Weaver, Rancher; Harold Peterson, rancher; Rick Hartz, Beaverhead County Planner; Dean Peterson, rancher; Steve Luebeck, Sportsman; Scott Reynolds, George Grant Trout Unlimited; Jim Hagenbarth, Co-Chair & rancher; Kevin Brown, BHWC; Garth Haugland, Beaverhead County; Phil Ralston, rancher; Mike Bias, BHRF; Liz Jones, rancher; Pete Kamperschroer, rancher; Chris Howard, resident; Steve Armiger, Dillon BLM; Peter Frick, rancher; Hans Humbert, rancher; Jim Magee, USFWS Partners Program

Introduction

Attendees introduced themselves. March meeting minutes approved.

Precipitation & Snowpack Report

No snowpack report this month.

Presentation: Grayling Report & 5-Year Review, Jim Magee, USFWS Partners Program

Jim presented current status of the grayling and the CCAA program in a 5-year review of the program - Power Point presentation.

Current USFWS Endangered Species listing - all Montana grayling lumped now (not differentiated between fluvial and adfluvial) and a final decision on listing will occur in 2014.

The CCAA program is in its 5th year and is the largest CCAA program. There are 33 landowners enrolled = 158,000 acres. The program has four goals:

1. Improve Riparian & Channel Health Function
2. Flow Improvement
3. Connectivity
4. Entrainment Reduction

1. Improve Riparian & Channel Health

- Grazing management plans = phenomenal improvement in stream health. Lands are assessed and scored as "not sustainable", "at risk" or "sustainable" with goal to reach "sustainable." This year there was a lot of positive change and an upward trend was common.
- Channel Restoration:
 - 18 projects over 27 miles of stream
 - 102 miles of riparian fence

- 71,000 willows planted
- 55 stock water systems installed (many thanks to BHWC)
- 118 acres treated for noxious weeds
- Grazing Management plans are now a preferred form of restoration over physical restoration - i.e. \$80,000 of riparian fence versus \$500,000 of physical restoration. Fencing is slower, but achieves positive results. Some channel narrowing may take near 10 years.

2. Improve instream flows

- Established flow targets and triggers - goal is to meet them 75% of the time over a 10 year period.
- Tools: Communication, education, monitoring network, drought management plan, improved infrastructure, programmatic effort.
- Monitoring is an extensive network.
- 70 new headgates to improve water control
- 80 irrigation improvement projects.
- Landowner contributions to stream flow tracked. Overall, great improvements in CFS at low flows.

3. Connectivity

- Connect all life history stage and habitat needs - Spawning/rearing/thermal refugia/adult
- Tools: Increase flows, increase channel function, decrease barriers.
- Progress: 22 fish ladders, 5 culvert replacements (replaced with bridges)

4. Minimize or eliminate entrainment

- Shock ditches and remove grayling. High number of grayling removed in 2010 due to incubators, but overall not many fish moved. May increase as grayling numbers increase?
- How to decrease entrainment? - studies look to prioritize shocking by fish size, flow, season, location
- Fish screen to be installed in LaMarche Creek 4/17 as experiment - 1/2 miles upstream from Hwy 43. Screen mesh will still allow fry though. Screen rotates to self-clean.

Summary

- 143 Flow Improvement Projects
- 2 Entrainment Reduction Projects
- 89 Riparian Health Projects
- 86 Migration Barrier Reduction Projects

Is it working?

- CCAA Goal: Increase grayling numbers within 5 years. Reoccupy historical habitat within 10 years.
- Rock Creek Status: Restoration & Incubators
 - Incubators start in 2010 to run 5 years to imprint grayling onto Rock Creek.
 - Year 1 = 401 Young of the Year. Year 2 = 492 Young of the Year + Age 1 = Very Encouraging
 - Grayling numbers in Rock Creek over time: 1978 = 65 AG/Mile, 1988 = 20 AG/mile, 2005-2009, 0 AG/,mile, 2010-2011 = 120-180/mile. Fish return to spawn at age 3-4 expecting a return of first incubator year of fish in 2013. Fish are marked.

- Grayling have short life spans - max 6 years, but don't spawn until age 3. However, each grayling produces many young. If conditions are bad in one place, they are likely good in another.

Big Hole River grayling:

- 2006 - 2011 = positive trend in fish numbers, but not many fish per mile (only 2-3). Five year CCAA goal is achieved with a positive trend. 10 Year CCAA goal is partially achieved with Rock Creek. Consider that the positive trend is also a reversal of a negative trend.

What We Learned:

- Why does the CCAA and restoration work? Community and watershed conversations, listen to the people, promote conservation, bottom-up program, consistent with personnel and uses expertise as hand, admits when its wrong and learns from it, acknowledge diverse opinions, partnerships.

Ruby Grayling

- Incubators ended 2008. 2006-2011 = Natural reproduction occurring.
- 2011 showed decrease in fish numbers due to sampling inefficiency (high water, therefore fish are spread out)
- Fish are above the reservoir
- Stream is ideal because there is little competition with other fish, but the stream has a low carrying capacity. Currently holds 20 fish/mile - near max capacity.

Other

- Jim went to a grayling worldwide symposium in Canada in 2011 and created a summary of all talks - willing to provide presentation for a worldwide perspective on restoration. Grayling numbers in Canada are down 50% and declining fast due to oil/gas exploration (water is warming).

Questions:

- Madison Valley grayling? No, not yet. However Yellowstone National Park is starting grayling restoration.
- Status of grayling biologist? - no answer yet [NOTE: BHWC learned 4/17 that Emma Cayer is officially the new grayling biologist].

[Break]

Reports & New Business

Directors Report: Donations are trickling in. Board has requested more information on projects - what format would work best? *Ans:* Provide a list with a quick status report and funds monthly.

Brochures and hats available tonight.

Kevin will begin half-time work on Monday 4/23. Jen will remain full-time through June to finish projects. Steering Committee supports staff efforts.

Project Updates:

- *Watershed Tour and Wise River:* The watershed tour this year will be May 18 and will highlight project work in Wise River. This will include a seminar on the monitoring results and a tour of the construction project. School students will be invited to participate 5/21. The tour will be held

at the Wise River Community Building. Wise River construction has started. Monitoring continues.

- Lower Big Hole Corridor - Report from Confluence Consulting this month.
- Upper Big Hole Success Report complete - submit to DEQ this week
- Upper Big Hole Watershed Restoration Plan due May 2012 - present final at next meeting,
- Lower Big Hole Watershed Restoration Plan is next, Wetlands to restart May 2012
- Website still growing. FB following up to 154.
- DEQ Quarterly reports sent this month (3)
- Need to do a newsletter - include DMP? Comments: Provide project news and updates in a newsletter - some newsletters should be printed.

Wildlife Committee: Jeff Mosley, MSU contacted Wildlife Committee to support a grant proposal. If funded, grant will support a study that will collar Heidi Hirchey's dogs and document how far from the cattle the dogs roam. Data will be important because other dogs have been reported to wander from cattle and attack people. This project will provide preemptive data if this becomes an issue and is at no cost to BHWC.

Brucellosis: The elk on the Montana/Idaho border infection is worse than prior thought. 100 elk are marked with GPS collars to track movement.

Weed Committee - The 2011-2012 cost share renewal for Wise River with Beaverhead County was just completed.

- Next weed meeting: April 25 - 6:30pm at Beaverhead County Courthouse.
- Garth attended the Southwest Area meeting. Reports they have agreed to back off from moving BHWWC funds from BHWC to MT Weed Control - best that funds stay with BHWC.

Land Use Planning: The Incentive Program public forum and workshop went well in March. Next step: flush out Ecosystem Service Market for Big Hole. LUP will bring back experts to identify sellers and buyers. Brainerd Foundation interested in assisting. Atkins mapping is in process. Random points have been identified for measurements. Big Hole is a pilot for other counties to cost-effectively complete state-approved floodplain maps.

New Business

- Kids Day on the Big Hole - May 5 - looking for volunteers
- George Grant TU will present the "State of the Fishery" 4/26, 6: 30pm at the Butte Plaza Inn.
- Guide & Outfitter Meeting - May 12, 5-9pm, Meriwether Ranch - BHRF
- AGRP 5K Run Fundraiser - May 12, Headwaters State Park, registration is online

Future Agendas

- May 16 (Wednesday) - BHWC Monthly Meeting, 7pm - Land Use Planning Update, Watershed Restoration Plan.

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 9:30pm