

Big Hole



Watershed Committee

Big Hole Watershed Committee

Monthly Meeting Minutes

April 17, 2013 - 7-9:00pm

Twin Bridges High School

In Attendance

Jen (Titus) Downing, BHWC; Jim Olsen, FWP; Randy Smith, BHWC Chair/Rancher; Jim Hagenbarth, Rancher/BHWC Co-Chair; Doug Finnicum, BSB Water; Cindy and Dave Ashcraft, Rancher; Tom Welsch, Big Hole River Foundation; Sam & Susan Stone, Melrose; Paul and Sandy Cleary; Bill and Floydena Garrison, Rancher; Ginetter Abdo, MBMG; Trisha Cracroft, NRCS; Ann Schwend, DNRC; Tom Miller, RE Miller; Jamie Wood, Rancher; Andy Suerram, landowner; Mike Mosock; Jim Carpita, Beaverhead County; Wano Urbonas, Madison County Sanitarian; Margie Edsall, Madison County Weed; Beck Kington, BHWWC WWB; Chuck Buler, Big Hole River Foundation; Kyle Nye, Rancher; Joe Willauer, Guide/Outfitter; Erik Kalsta;

Introduction & Snowpack Report

Attendees introduced themselves. March minutes approved. Jen Downing read the Big Hole snowpack report provided by Mike Roberts, DNRC (attached).

Lower Big Hole & Big Hole Watershed Committee:

Part I: Big Hole Watershed Committee role and projects, Jen Downing, BHWC

BHWC provided an introduction to the Lower Big Hole River with a presentation of the role and structure of the BHWC and projects under the BHWC that have direct implications in the Lower Big Hole including the Lower Big Hole River Corridor Report, Floodplain Maps, Watershed Restoration Plan, Weeds, Drought Management Plan, and Lower Big Hole Irrigation Infrastructure Assessment.

Part II: Lower Big Hole River Fishery, Jim Olsen, Montana FWP

Jim provided information on the fishery in the Lower Big Hole river. In summary, fish numbers are lower in the lowest portion of the Big Hole River than in areas upstream. This is likely due to a lack of spawning habitat that provides both more fish and more forage fish for larger fish. The Jefferson River has undergone spawning habitat projects and their fish numbers have improved. Likely the Lower Big Hole River would see similar results of additional fish habitat could be created. At the same time, fish numbers in the Lower Big Hole River mimic the Jefferson River fish numbers, indicating the likeliness that fish from the Jefferson River are using the Big Hole River.

Jim also discussed the addition of a Lower Big Hole River Drought Management Section in the BHWC DMP this year. Triggers in the new section are lower than sections upstream because irrigation withdrawals do not reenter the Big Hole and are instead diverted to the Beaverhead River. In the recent record, river flows remained above closure targets every year except 2007.

Other Projects

Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology Ginette Abdo discussed two projects in the Twin Bridges area set to begin within the next year that will study ground water and surface water under the Ground Water Investigation Program (GWIP).

Big Hole River Foundation (BHRF) collects aquatic insect samples and results mimic Jim Olsen's fish data, where better water years yielded greater numbers of fish and insects.

Issues

Pennington Bridge: Mike Bias, BHRF reported issues at the Pennington Bridge where bank stabilization is needed to prevent further erosion from Big Hole Ditch to Pennington Bridge. BHRF completed survey work, but erosion has grown since the survey and it needs to be updated. They have not been successful in finding a solution or getting Madison County involved in the problem.

Big Hole Ditch measurement device needs to be functional. BHRF reports possible use of a staff gage. BHWC reports the engineer Lew Burton last week agreed to provide the rating curve for the structure to the irrigators.

Bill Garrison and Tom Miller report that the Big Hole River near Glen is threatening to change channels from the south channel to the north channel. Maps were provided to illustrate the issue. A county bridge is involved in the problem. NRCS reported that the landowner in this region recently entered the land into a conservation easement, and the easement would have some control over what work could be done on the property.

Sam Stone of the Big Hole Ranch reported past problems with the Melrose sewer pump failure, where if the sewer system had failed it could have contaminated the river. While the Melrose sewer district has alleviated the problem, it is an example of the importance of involving the counties in problems. Sam notes that Melrose also has multiple channels where channel movement could cause problems.

Weeds: Dave Ashcraft noted his support of the floater weed spray program where weeds are controlled by boat and the importance of continuing this program. Margie Edsall and Mike Bias seconds his sentiments. Margie noted that Jack Eddie received funding to do it again this year from the weed trust fund.

Bridges: Regarding questions of responsibility with county bridges, Garth Haugland notes that bridge maintenance is county responsibility. TSEP is a source of funds for repair and Beaverhead County has several requests, although funding runs on a three year cycle. Bridge repair is expensive and time consuming; however, addressing emergency problems instead can involve less permitting and include funds from emergency sources like FEMA.

Ann Schwend suggested engaging the conservation district to work with the county.

A landowner expressed frustration in not having all the players together to find solutions.

Overall, the problems in the Lower Big Hole are not individual, but part of a large problem each affecting the next. The issues need a global fix.

Results

The group agreed to create a sub-committee under the BHWC that specifically address the Lower Big Hole River. The goal would be to include as many important players as possible including, but not limited to, landowners, agencies, conservation district, county, and contractors. The group would work together to review the problems and remedies in the Lower Big Hole with the goal to improve river conditions. BHWC should notify Madison County of the results of the meeting and request their involvement in the sub-committee. BHWC should also identify the scope of the sub-committee. The critical piece of the sub-committee is for local people to have ownership and to speak from a uniform voice.

Reports & New Business

Directors Report:

Annual appeal donations have nearly ended, bringing to a close our most successful annual appeal on record. Our two remaining contracts with DEQ end in June and July of this year. Projects remaining include the Middle/Lower Big Hole River Watershed Restoration Plan, the Flow and Temperature Report (near final), Wise River Monitoring Final Report, one watershed tour and one newsletter. The 2013 Drought management Plan is almost complete and contains many changes and updates. The internal BHWC strategy and review continues. BHWC will administer the French Creek survey work for Montana FWP this spring.

Steering Committee - Jim Hagenbarth: The next meeting will be April 22.

Wildlife Committee - Jim Hagenbarth: The Wildlife Committee is interested in continuing the Montana FWP Moose Study whose funding is threatened. The Bannack Elk showed no Brucellosis. The Wildlife Conservation Society is hosting a Community Exchange Day May 15 on the Granite County Carcass program, where removal and composting of carcasses can reduce conflicts with carnivores. A flyer was provided and included with this minutes.

Weed Committee - Margie Edsall for Mark Kambich: Jack Eddie was successful in securing funds from the Noxious Weed Trust Fund again this year for \$250,000 to support the Oxeye Daisy program among others. A research project is underway from Pennington Bridge to the High Road Bridge for tall buttercup and is its second year. The project is identifying management techniques to control tall buttercup. Weed Whacker Ball will be September 14 in Wise River. Dean Peterson requested a wildlife meeting in Wisdom as a future meeting agenda.

Land Use Planning Committee - Jen Downing: Jen Boyer provided an updated via e-mail:

The Big Hole floodplain mapping project was highlighted in several sessions of the MT Floodplain conference in March. Rick and Jim gave a well received presentation on the committee's work and how our partnership has been strengthened over the years. Steve Story from DNRC presented on the technical aspects of the mapping project and how the state will use the project to establish new protocols.

The committee was also recognized by DNRC, Jennifer accepted a Floodplain Program Ambassador award which really recognizes the collaborative effort of all our partners, landowners and vision for improving floodplain management by creating local solutions.

DNRC is in the final stretch of their technical review and a final draft of the maps and reports is scheduled for end of May. Jennifer is working with DNRC to coordinate public information sessions and landowner outreach which will happen in late May-June. Public information sessions are targeted for 18, 19, 20 Wisdom, Divide, Twin respectively. In addition to the public sessions individual or small group sessions can be scheduled upon request. Public announcements will include, landowner notification letters to those having property in the floodplain, legal notices, press releases, email lists and BHWC website and facebook. The maps will be available online as well as in hard copy at each county office and with Jen Downing. Jennifer Boyer will be available to assist individuals and send hard copy maps upon request. Following the outreach a public comment period will be open for at least 30 days.

The incentive program has identified a potential funding source to establish a pilot. This is a national re-design grant that would be applied for by DNRC forestry bureau. We have been in contact with Angela Mallon at DNRC regarding the grant application. The re-design grant should be announced soon (seems to be delayed with federal budgeting). We will keep you posted on this opportunity.

Jennifer Boyer has applied to the PERC Enviropreneur program, if accepted she will focus her 10 day workshop training on developing the Big Hole PES program.

New Business

New Big Hole River Foundation President: Steve Parker, President of the Big Hole River Foundation resigned last week. His replacement, Tom Welsch attended the meeting and was welcomed as the newest addition to the BHWC.

Future Agendas

- May 15, 2013, 7pm: TBA
- June 19, 2013: 6pm Potluck, 7pm meeting: Floodplain Map Adoption Public Meeting (the group agreed this will replace the standard monthly meeting) held at the Divide Grange

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 9pm

Big Hole Watershed Committee Snowpack Report

April 2013

General Comments:

Both snow (86%) and precipitation (81%) are below average. While percentage –wise we are similar to 2012 snowpack at this time, keep in mind we have a “new” normal due to the shift in the base period from 1971-2000 to 1981-2010. Actual snow water equivalent is behind 2012 particularly at the lower elevation sites and valley sites. The result of warm March temperatures and valley and low elevation snowmelt has been well above average streamflows for the past three weeks. Recent cooler temperatures have slowed down the runoff and the high elevation snowpack is holding at this time.

The Climate Prediction Center shows below average precipitation and above average temperature for the next several months.

The following NRCS data was compiled by Mike Roberts, DNRC.

<http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/water.html>

BIG HOLE BASIN APPROXIMATE MOUNTAIN PRECIPITATION				
		Apr 16		
	elevation	current	normal	% avg
		inches	inches	
Barker Lakes	8250	14.9	17.4	86
Basin Creek	7180	-	-	-
Bloody Dick	7600	14.6	15	97
Calvert Creek	6430	10.5	11.1	95
Darkhorse Lake	8600	27.4	28.1	98
Moose Creek	6200	19	20.6	92
Mule Creek	8300	16.6	17	98
Saddle Mtn.	7940	19.9	24.3	82
TOTAL		108	133.5	
BASIN AVERAGE		80.9%		
BIG HOLE BASIN APPROXIMATE SNOW WATER EQUIVALENT				
		15-Jan		
	elevation	current	normal	% avg
		inches	inches	
Barker Lakes	8250	13.5	15.2	89
Basin Creek	7180	6.4	8.5	75
Bloody Dick	7600	10	10.7	93
Calvert Creek	6430	0	5.3	0
Darkhorse Lake	8600	28.7	28.6	100
Moose Creek	6200	9.9	14.3	69
Mule Creek	8300	15.4	15.4	100
Saddle Mtn.	7940	21.5	24	90
TOTAL		105.4	122	
BASIN AVERAGE		86.4%		

Please Join Us for A
Community Exchange Day
Wednesday, May 15, 2013
11 am to 3 pm

at the Granite County Carcass Composting Facility
Drummond, Montana.

Transportation is provided & details available when you RSVP

Based on growing interest in your area this next community exchange day will focus on learning how a local **Carcass Pick-up & Composting Program was Initiated and Implemented to Reduce Conflicts with Carnivores in Granite County**. Meet with the ranching community, agencies, and conservation partners that came together to develop and use this program; discuss experiences, share ideas, ask questions.

We will meet as early as 8 am for departure from carpooling sites & return around 5 pm (details available when you RSVP). There is no charge for this all day outdoor event and lunch is provided. Please **RSVP** by May 1st so we can plan lunch and transportation logistics accordingly. *Contact Kris Inman at (406) 682-3437 or email at kinman@wcs.org*. Feel free to bring a friend pass this information on to others that may be interested.



PEOPLE AND CARNIVORES

Big Hole



Watershed Committee



MADISON
VALLEY
RANCLANDS
GROUP



Madison
Conservation
District

