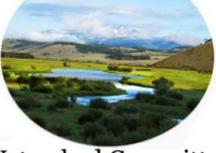


Big Hole



Watershed Committee

Big Hole Watershed Committee

Monthly Meeting Minutes

April 16, 2014 – 7:00 pm

Divide Grange

In Attendance

Jen Downing, BHWC; Gary Jones, BHWC; Mark Wilcox, BSB; Liz Jones, Rancher; Randy Smith, BHWC; Jamie Wood, Hamilton Ranch; Mark Kambich, Rancher and BHWC Weed Committee; Eric Kalsta, Rancher; Cindy Ashcraft, Rancher and BHWC; Doug Clark, ADLC; Bill Cain, BHWC-Glen; Paul and Sandy Cleary, Glen; Jim Hagenbarth, Dillon; Rick Hartz, Beaverhead County; Jim Carpita, Beaverhead County; Garth Haugland, Beaverhead County; Travis Barry, Pintlar Weed Management; Tanner Barry, Pintlar Weed Management; Judie Tillman, Pintlar Weed Management; Rich McEldowney, RESPEC; Sean Dickens, Dickens Weed Control; Jack Eddie, Beaverhead County Weed Control; Michael Stewart, ADLC Weed Control; Amber Burch, Beaverhead County; Lacy Decker, BLM Butte; Susan and Sam Stone, Big Hole Ranch; Jeanne and Tom Caddy, BHWC Weed Committee.

Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves.

Meeting Minutes

March meeting minutes were reviewed, no additions or corrections.

Reports

Streamflow Report, Jen Downing, Mike Roberts

- Peak snowpack is typically seen on or near April 15 each year.
- Warm weather has resulted in lower elevation snowmelt over the past few weeks, resulting in daily record maximum flows last week.
- Big Hole Watershed snowpack is currently 143% of average. Individual Snowtel sights report 137-155% of average.
- DNRC is anticipating overbank flows and flooding.
- BHWC is working to gather and distribute basic flood preparedness information.

Directors Report, Jen Downing

- 2014 Drought Management Plan is complete and sent out.
 - Plan includes addition of three real-time temperature sensors at USGS sites. BHWC has entered into agreement with USGS to fund the temperature monitoring.
 - BHWC additionally supports the operation of four USGS stations used to support the drought management plan.
- Issued a press release detailing the 2014 drought management plan, flow conditions, and addition of temperature sensors to USGS sites.
- Continue with capacity work for the organization
 - Historic electronic files have been cleaned out and organized
 - Annual Form 990 filed with accountant
 - Currently going through organizational policies and procedures.
- Upcoming Events
 - Tip the Big Hole week scheduled for June 22-28
 - Range management and plant seminar June 3-4 in Dillon. June 3 classroom day in 4-H building at Dillon Fairgrounds. June 4 is field day, tour and make recommendations for individual properties. More information will be provided when available.

- Ties to the Land Workshops, Succession Planning for Landowners in Missoula on May 22 and Helena on May 24. See attached flyer for more information.

Land Use Planning Committee - Jen Boyer/ Jen Downing

- Waiting for state adoption of new floodplain maps. County adoption process will follow state adoption.
- No word yet on payment for ecosystems grant.
- Currently working on grant application to DNRC.

Steering Committee – Randy Smith

- Committee met in Melrose.
- Committee has drafted and submitted a letter to the Forest Service and Montana Congressional Delegation outlining concerns with the plan to consolidate district offices. So far no response had been received.

Wildlife Committee – Jim Hagenbarth

- Montana Livestock Loss Board funding received to fund range rider and carcass removal project for 2014. Range rider will cover seven allotments from July to September.
- Working on pilot carcass removal project for upper Big Hole. Project will likely run for a short period of time in the fall of 2014. Lessons learned will be applied to any future carcass removal project.
- Westside Environmental Assessment has been released for bison management in the Yellowstone Valley.
 - The project proposes to open 400,000 acres of land for bison, and limit bison population to 4,000 animals. If project is approved, may ask the Department of Agriculture and Department of Interior for funding to assist with monitoring for brucellosis. Currently there is no known brucellosis in the Big Hole elk herds.

Presentation: Weed Committee Update and Plans for 2014 – Mark Kambich

Background: The BHWC Weed Committee includes county weed coordinators from Anaconda-Deer Lodge, Beaverhead, Butte-Silver Bow, and Madison Counties; volunteers; and professional weed control contractors. The group coordinates and supports weed control efforts throughout the Big Hole Watershed. Efforts include raising funds to support weed control at the annual Weed Whacker's Ball, support for private land weed spray with a cost-share program, attendance at several weed spray days, and support for specific weed control projects. The group was created to address a growing weed problem in the Big Hole.

Members of the weed committee and presenters were briefly introduced. Several presentations then followed, as detailed below.

Noxious Weeds 101 – Hannah and Carl Kambich

Hannah and Carl Kambich presented information regarding the Oxeye Daisy, referred to as the “Cutest Noxious Weed”. Hannah and Carl tested the effectiveness of herbicides to control Oxeye Daisy infestations. Oxeye Daisy is mainly found in the Wise River, with some small infestations noted in the upper Big Hole. No Oxeye Daisy is currently found in the Divide area.

Herbicide application during full bloom was found effective in the control of Oxeye Daisy. The demonstration project was for a single year, with no additional testing planned for this year. In the future, Hannah and Carl would like to test other plots for effectiveness of herbicide application and other potential control strategies. They are currently attempting to locate a suitable site for the demonstration.

Question: When does Oxeye Daisy bloom and how does it spread? Oxeye Daisy is a perennial that blooms early and tends to bloom all summer. It is a perennial plant that spreads by both seeds and rhizomes.

Jack Eddie – Beaverhead County Weed Department

Jack had taken over the administration of weed control grants for Beaverhead County.

Jack provided a summary of efforts and money spent on weed control last year.

- In 2013, Beaverhead County awarded \$25,000 in grant monies plus \$5,000 from the weed committee to control noxious weeds.
- Beaverhead County administers two contracts along the Big Hole River for weed control. Contracts typically cover 50-feet on each side of the river.
- \$33,000 was expended for Beaverhead County roads and campgrounds.
- \$10,000 was expended for Madison County roads and campgrounds.
- \$7,000 was expended for the BLM Dillon District.

While Beaverhead County makes a concerted effort in weed control, not enough money or personnel are available. With that said, Beaverhead County remains fairly weed-free. County is proactive to maintain this.

Beaverhead County has set a schedule for 2014 spray days. See attached flyer for specifics.

Beaverhead County continues to pursue grant funding from the Noxious Weed Trust Fund. Grant process is becoming much more competitive. Last year, 99 grant applications were received, with \$1.3M funded. An additional \$1.0M in requests went unfunded.

County is concerned with new invading weed species. New weed species from Idaho are within 20-miles, and from Ravalli County are within 1/4-mile.

County promotes education for recognition of weed species. Weed Committee donated \$500 for the Southwest Montana area weed education trailer. Trailer will be present at numerous sites throughout the area, providing educational opportunities to the public. A goal of this program is to get citizens to be able to recognize at least five different species of noxious weeds, and have basic information on how to eradicate and prevent the spread of the weeds.

Question: Is Beaverhead County considering any new biological controls for noxious weeds? The County has funded four new insect control projects. Generally, since September 11, 2001, it has become much more difficult to release new insects.

Question: Who do people call if they notice an infestation on Forest Service or BLM land? Call the County, and they will pass on the information. The County is working on remedying past issues with working on Forest Land.

Question: Could you provide a brief overall assessment of noxious weeds in Beaverhead County? Generally, Beaverhead County is holding its own with most weed species, making headway with knapweed and spurge. May be losing ground with Houndstongue in some areas.

Mark Wilcox – Butte-Silver Bow Urban Enforcement

Keys to the success:

- Strong support from solid community and conservation organizations.
- Engaged and active young members such as Hannah and Carl Kambich.
- Proactive relationships with organizations such as the Mule Deer Foundation.
- History of success in Butte-Silver Bow and in collaboration with surrounding Counties.
- Focus of the BSB enforcement program has somewhat shifted from enforcement and penalties to education and proactive measures. Currently BSB has 1,000 active weed control projects, with only 77 letters threatening enforcement action being sent out.

- Weed control has been made a priority throughout County Government. Currently Road Department, Parking Enforcement, and Animal Control are involved with reporting noxious weeds. More sets of eyes result in better information regarding weeds.
- New education outreach will come from County Extension Agent. She will provide a weekly newspaper article "Weed of the Week" throughout the summer.

Butte-Silver Bow supports several weed control projects, including a couple spray days on the game range, a contract to spray the Union Pacific Railway right-of-way, and an in-town contract for the BNSF right-of way. Efforts to date on the game range have been unsuccessful. County continues to focus on the area. County has weed spray loaner equipment available.

Question: Does the County receive funding from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks for weed control on the game range? Yes, but funding is not sufficient.

Question: Do the railroad contracts cover just the tacks and ballast, or does it extend to the entire right-of-way? The contracts cover the entire right-of-way. Personnel working within the right-of-way are required to have specific training.

Question: Can you explain the loaner equipment program?

BSB has the following equipment available to be loaned to landowners:

- 4-150 gallon truck mounted tanks and spray bars,
- 1 or 2 strap on tanks and spray bars for ATV applications

Given notice, BSB will deliver the equipment to the area for use, even over a weekend. Land owner is responsible for purchasing all chemicals.

Question: Can BSB work to encourage Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks to use helicopter spraying on the game range? Butte-Silver Bow is currently working with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks to address helicopter spraying on the game range. Additional support and funding may be available from the Mule Deer Foundation.

Michael Stewart – Anaconda-Deer Lodge County

Michael provided a summary of 2013 highlights and upcoming events.

- In 2013, ADLC committed \$5,000 to spray Highway 43 right-of-way.
- Deep Creek Spray Day (Ray Tillman Day) scheduled for July 25, 2014.
- In general, the Big Hole portion of Anaconda-Deer Lodge County is the most weed free.
- ADLC primarily focuses on right-of-way treatments.
- ADLC encourages citizens to notify them of problem areas.
- All landowners encouraged to participate in spray days, spray days not just for large landowners.

Sean Dickens – Dickens Weed Control – Commercial Applicator for lower portion of the river

Sean provided the following highlights from the 2013 spray season:

- Utilize specialized aluminum boat to spray from the river and transport chemicals.
- Contract starts at Dickie Bridge and continues downstream.
- 2013 contract of \$15,000 resulted in 14-days of spray application from Divide to Garrison Ranch
- Low water levels and braiding stream complicated spraying and access last year.
- Majority of weeds in the area are located on railroad right-of-way.

Question: What weeds are prevalent on the lower section of the river? Knapweed (mainly on the railroad right-of-way), daisy and houndstongue. To a lesser extent, Canada Thistle and Leafy Spurge in the lower sections.

Question: What chemicals can be used around the water? Mainly Milestone and Escort. Tordon is used around the railroad tracks. Prospective is a new and promising chemical, but has limited application usage. Cannot be used in areas that have historically been used for cattle grazing.

Question: What has the reaction been from guides and sportsman to spraying on the river? Generally the response from the guides has been positive, but the response from the clients has been negative. The guides have been taking the opportunity to educate the clients on how useful this project is.

Question: Do you coordinate with the guides to get GPS coordinates for trouble spots? Not yet, but working on it.

In 2014, Dickens Weed Control will integrate GPS mapping techniques to produce GIS maps showing the location and weed species of all weeds sprayed.

Travis Barry – Pintlar Weed Management – Commercial Applicator for upper portion of river

Travis provided the following highlights of the 2013 spray season:

- Contract runs from Squaw Creek to Silver Bridge fishing access
- Most access in this area is from existing roads, generally don't float the river to access areas.
- Mainly utilize ATV, truck and backpack spray equipment.
- Pintlar Weed Management has worked on Oxeye Daisy Project in Wise River
 - Primarily found in the Wise River
 - Prolific in open areas behind access points
- Majority of weeds found in contract area are Knapweed and Canada Thistle. Houndstongue found from Dewey downstream.
- Pintlar Weed Management also contracts with Butte-Silver Bow for weed control on the railroad right-of-way from Silver Bow to Divide. Also has a contract with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks for project in upper reaches of Big Hole.

Question: What weeds are found further up the Big Hole? Mainly knapweed and yellow toadflax in new construction areas.

Question: Beaverhead County requires 5-year weed bond on new construction. Is 5-years long enough? Generally yes. County has ability to extend time period if necessary, but generally is not.

Upcoming Meetings

- May 21, 2014 7:00 p.m.– Irrigation Scheduling Program for Blackfoot Challenge – Barry Dutton, Land and Water Consulting.
- June 18, 2014 7:00 p.m. – Annual Potluck
- No July Meeting

New Business – none

Adjourn