

Big Hole



Watershed Committee

Big Hole Watershed Committee Monthly Meeting Minutes January 19, 2012 ~ 6:00 - 8:30pm Divide Grange Hall

In Attendance

Rick Hartz, Beaverhead County Planner; Garth Haugland, Beaverhead County Commission; Jim Magee, Partners for Fish and Wildlife; George Trischman, rancher; Jim Olsen, FWP; Steve Luebeck, Sportsman; Scott Reynolds, George Grant Trout Unlimited; Randy Smith, Chairman & rancher; Jim Hagenbarth, Co-Chair & rancher; Kevin Brown, BHWC; Bill Cain, Steering Committee & sportsman; Jen Titus, BHWC; Pete Kamperschroer, rancher; Mike Bias, BHRF; Liz Jones, rancher; Dan Murphy, University of Montana; Erik Kalsta, rancher; Dean & Eddie Lou Stanchfield, rancher.

BLM Butte Field Office Staff: Team lead and wildlife biologist: Sarah LaMarr (absent); Butte Field Office Manager: Scott Haight; Presenter and forester: Marylou Zimmerman; Travel planner: Brad Colin; Fire Management Specialist: Greg Campbell; Range Specialist: John Sandford; Range Specialist: Eric Broeder; Range Technician: Vickie Anderson; Soil, Water, and Air Quality Specialist: Corey Meier

Introduction

Attendees introduced themselves. November meeting minutes approved.

Precipitation & Snowpack Report

Detailed report attached from Mike Roberts, DNRC. Average snowpack is near 64%.

Presentation: Upper Big Hole East Landscape Restoration Draft, Butte BLM Field Office

A pdf of the PowerPoint presentation is available; please contact info@bhwc.org for a copy.

The Bureau of Land Management Butte Field Office is nearing completion of the Upper Big Hole East Landscape Restoration Project Assessment. The watershed assessment is a multidisciplinary review of several issues on BLM lands including travel management, weeds, riparian resources, fish & wildlife, soil, climate change, range, fire, and forest health. Data was collected for the assessment in 2011. A draft report is expected March 2012 followed by a 2 week public comment and public meeting. A final report is expected spring 2012.

The BLM Field Office and several staff members provided a presentation to the BHWC with the purpose and scope of the assessment, objectives, alternatives, and preliminary results. Members provided comment. A majority of the issues revolve around forest health with red and dead trees, grazing permit renewals, and travel management. Assessment area includes 22,800 acres of BLM lands.

Comments:

Please do not include additional beaver introduction as a proposed action for restoration. There are many beavers at work in the area presently and cause problems in irrigation infrastructure.

Weed treatment, especially with any proposed action, is critical and should be a large component of the watershed plan. Treatment should be three times per year or more and continued over several years.

Ans. BLM will include weed treatment. Lacey Decker, BLM is active in weed programs in the Big Hole. Residents should raise their voice on concerns as it is the best way to be sure concerns are included.

Regarding removal of beetle kill trees; private lands adjacent to BLM lands designated for beetle kill treatment also have beetle kill. There is significant cost and effort associated for private landowners to access public lands for transport. It would make sense to include access for surrounding public lands and/or partnered beetle kill treatment using the same contractor to save costs and have a larger positive impact on forest health. Could partnership with landowners be included in the plan? *Ans.* Possibly, landowners encouraged to contact BLM Butte Office.

Sagebrush health is an important consideration.

How does BLM determine historical aspen stands to use as goals for aspen restoration? *Ans.* BLM uses several sources to create goals and locations for aspen regeneration. Models are developed using parameters such as aspect, moisture, slope, and soil to find possible locations, BLM staff conduct "aspen forensics" for historical aspen features, and staff refer to aspen restoration research.

Wise River is pulling together historical information for a museum. Part of that work includes historical photos. Would these photos be helpful in your historical research? *Ans.* Yes!

More information on the Upper Big Hole East Landscape Restoration Project can be found on the BLM website: http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/butte_field_office.html. Sarah LaMarr is the primary contact for the project (406-533-7636).

Presentation: MSTI Transmission Line Assessment Update, Tim Bozorth, BLM Dillon

Northwestern Energy submitted a right of way application in 2008 to BLM, State of Montana, and USFS for the MSTI Transmission Line to cross public lands. Each agency must review the request. In this case, BLM, DEQ and USFS are conducting their own investigations, but will create one Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and one proposed solution to Northwestern Energy. The time to complete the EIS has been lengthy due to litigation on the analysis, but is now resolved. The analysis includes several alternatives for transmission line routes stemming from Townsend, MT, extending to Jerome, Idaho. The final suite of alternatives is expected to be finished by January 23rd. The draft EIS is expected to be complete late summer 2012. There will be a three month public comment period including several public open houses prior to completion of the final EIS. Contact Tom Bozorth, BLM Dillon Field Office, 406-683-8000

Comments:

Can a corridor be designated for several transmission lines (i.e. power, pipe, etc.) that can be shared, therefore limiting the amount of disturbance to one route?

Is mitigation being considered? *Ans.* Yes. There are two forms of impact; 1. Direct Impact (i.e. tower installation disturbance), and 2. Indirect Impact (i.e. wildlife use or avoidance of transmission line). Direct impacts are easier to assign mitigation. However, research from indirect impacts shows a range of impacts to wildlife. Therefore, quantifying indirect impact is difficult. BLM policy dictates that BLM cannot require offsite mitigation; however, BLM will not approve a project without adequate mitigation. BLM plans to offer options to Northwestern Energy for mitigation. Much of the mitigation is driven by Sage Grouse habitat.

There are MSTI analyses on-going from other groups. How will these analyses impact the EIS? *Ans.* There are two analyses on-going. Agencies are dialoging with these groups. However, analyses will not be included as part of the EIS. It will be included as a form of public comment.

How will the final decision be made? *Ans.* BLM is the lead federal agency and MT DEQ is the lead state agency. Each agency will make their decision, the agencies will then gather to make one decision. The decision makers for Montana are Tom Bozorth, BLM, Dave Meyers, USFS and Richard Opper, Montana DEQ. In Idaho, Tom Bozorth and Dave Meyers will continue to represent BLM and USFS. Rather than a single state contact, Idaho lands will be represented by the counties.

Who represents private lands in the decision process? *Ans:* Agencies have tried to plan routes on public lands as much as possible limiting the amount of private land impacted.

Reports & New Business

BHWC Board Member Changes:

1. The Nature Conservancy representative on the BHWC board will now be Jim Berkey to replace Nathan Korb.
2. Andrew Hanson has served on the board as an outfitter representative; however, he is not outfitting any longer. Andrew would still like to be involved. We will need to find an outfitter representative to replace him. Please submit ideas.
3. Art Christensen, the Beaverhead Conservation District representative, passed way in November. We contacted Beaverhead Conservation District for a replacement. Harold Peterson is also on the BCD and could serve as a representative if there is no other interest.

Jim Magee, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, announced that Partners for Fish and Wildlife will be part of the annual Montana Wildlife Society Meeting. Meeting will be held February 27 - March 2, 2012 with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife segment to occur on February 28. Cal Erb, Wisdom rancher will present the Big Hole Watershed alongside Jim Magee, USFWS and Emma Cayer, FWP. See [Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society](#) for more information.

Tim Bozorth, BLM announced that a judge ruled in favor of the BLM Dillon Field Office for the Big Hole Watershed Assessment after Western Watershed made an appeal, thus ending the appeal. In addition, the latest federal budget ruling called for groups to exhaust their administrative outlets for comment on projects prior to initiating a lawsuit. This applies to agencies in the Department of Interior. The ruling was designed to limit frivolous and expensive lawsuits and should be very helpful to the BLM's work.

Jim Hagenbarth congratulated and thanked Tom Bozorth, BLM for his excellent leadership in discussions through very difficult issues and the MSTI Transmission Line effort.

Future Agendas

- February 15 – BHWC Annual Business Meeting
- A Drought Management Plan review will be held prior to the February meeting - TBA
- March 20 (Tuesday) – Land Use Planning Incentive Program Public Forum
- March 21 (Wednesday) – TBD if meeting will be held or move meeting to March 20 for LUP Incentive Public Forum

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 8:30pm

Big Hole Watershed Committee Snowpack Report

January 2012

General Comments:

The persistent dry pattern observed across Montana has shifted the expectation of a potentially average to above average snowpack year that a second-year LaNina can produce to average or potentially below average snowpack. Climatologists say the La Nina weather phenomenon has been negated by a ridge of high pressure over the Northwest and Great Plains. Based on the SNOTEL sites administered by NRCS, the Big Hole Watershed snowpack was 63% of average prior to this week's storms. Last year at this time, snowpack levels were slightly above average. There appears to be a shift in the weather pattern as observed by this week's storms. We are presently about half way through our snow accumulation period so we will need to receive above average snowfall from here on to make up for current deficits.

BIG HOLE BASIN APPROXIMATE PRECIPITATION				
		15-Jan		
	elevation	current	normal	% avg
		inches	inches	
Barker Lakes	8250	8.1	9.3	87
Basin Creek	7180	4.9	5.0	98
Bloody Dick	7600	6.6	9.4	70
Calvert Creek	6430	5.8	6.4	91
Darkhorse Lake	8600	11.0	18.4	60
Moose Creek	6200	9.4	11.7	80
Mule Creek	8300	7.4	9.4	79
Saddle Mtn.	7940	10.5	16.0	66
TOTAL		63.7	85.6	
BASIN AVERAGE		74.4		
BIG HOLE BASIN APPROXIMATE SNOW WATER EQUIVALENT				
		15-Jan		
	elevation	current	normal	% avg
		inches	inches	
Barker Lakes	8250	5.6	8.0	70
Basin Creek	7180	2.8	4.4	64
Bloody Dick	7600	4.4	7.2	61
Calvert Creek	6430	4.4	5.1	86
Darkhorse Lake	8600	10.0	17.6	57
Moose Creek	6200	6.4	10.0	64
Mule Creek	8300	4.8	8.8	55
Saddle Mtn.	7940	9.6	15.0	64
TOTAL		48.0	76.1	
BASIN AVERAGE		63.1		

-NRCS Data compiled by Mike Roberts, DNRC.