

# Big Hole



Watershed Committee

## **Big Hole Watershed Committee**

Monthly Meeting Minutes  
October 19, 2011 ~ 7:00 pm  
Divide Grange Hall

### **In Attendance**

Dean Peterson, rancher; Ray Weaver, rancher; Liz Jones, rancher; Pete Kamperschroer, rancher; Jim Hagenbarth, Co-Chair, rancher; Garth Haugland, Beaverhead County Commissioner; Harold Peterson, rancher; Kevin Brown, BHWC; Alan Manas, landowner; Kristin Manas, landowner; Scott Reynolds, GGTU; Steve Parker, BHRF; Mike Roberts, DNRC; Jeanne Caddy, landowner; Rick Hartz, Beaverhead County; Peter Frick, landowner; Bill Cain, Secretary, conservation; Randy Smith, Chair, rancher; Erin Towler, NCAR; Phil Ralston, rancher; Hans Humbert, rancher; Jen Titus, BHWC; Tanya Rosen, WCS; Whitney Lonsdale, WCS.

### **Introduction / Review of Minutes**

Attendees introduced themselves and the September 2011 minutes were approved with no changes.

### **Precipitation / Snowpack Report**

Mike Roberts, DNRC, reported that the new water year began October 1<sup>st</sup> and we are only 2 weeks into the new water year. All the ditches are pretty much shut down and flows doubled since the September meeting. So far, things look good. We didn't have the big drop off in August and September and started the year well. Started seeing snow in the higher elevations and another La Nina is predicted which could bring average or above average snow pack.

Discussion: Questions regarding the number of completed CCAA's – 8 are signed and 34 have been approved, 5 plans are currently on USFWS "desk" awaiting final review and signature. Things are backing up due to USFWS staff change in Helena – Doug Peterson will still be reviewing plans and USFWS will be dedicating 1 month/year of Doug's time to this task.

### **Presentation: Emma Cayer was unable to attend and will be presenting at the November 19th Meeting**

**BHWC Next Steps** – Kevin Brown reviewed the top priorities identified in the September meeting. These priorities were approved by the committee and will help in the development and execution of the BHWC's Watershed Restoration Plan over the next 3 to 5 years.

- Comments: Add coordination with the Railroad to the weeds agenda? The county is paid by the railroad to control weeds, but the payment does not cover the cost and the fee has not increased in 10 years. Can we negotiate a higher payment?

### **Presentation: How can we make snowpack and precipitation information more useful to Big Hole hydrologic concerns and management.**

Erin Towler of the National Center for Atmospheric Research and the USGS presented her study looking at our existing Drought Management Plan and precipitation information and designing a model to assist with future management. This model could use historic data along with precipitation forecast, etc. to develop a probabilistic forecast to see what percentage of a chance we might go below our DMP triggers.

Discussion focused on the following topics:

- How would this compare to the work DNRC is already doing?
  - DNRC currently pulls from NRCS and USGS sites and historic record
  - The model could try and look @ historic trends and help predict how many days in a certain month we might see flows go below the threshold triggers
  - The model wouldn't be perfect and comparison testing and ground truthing would need to occur
  - Meant to compliment, not replace, existing information and data
  - Could directly link to the DMP thresholds
  - Could be a beneficial tool for managers
- Proposing to predict flows on a certain day?
  - It would be an estimate of the number of days we could be below the thresholds during the months of July1 – September 30
  - Could help having the number of days predicted
- Not changing what we're already doing, could help make decision to put water on earlier or put water on better producing fields

## **Committee Reports**

Director's Report (*Kevin Brown*)

- As reported in September, Kevin and Jen have been working with the new landowner re: the Streb Gallagher project. Due to many extenuating circumstances and discussions with the new landowner BHWC has decided to work with DEQ to move these funds to other priority projects. DEQ has approved the plan to utilize these funds on other priority projects with the majority planned to go toward the Wise River project.
- Jen Titus provided an update on the Wise River Diversion and Monitoring Project – consists of 2 components (monitoring to gain better water quality, quantity and fisheries data and the combination of 5 ditches into 1). The monitoring portion got a late start, but getting some good initial data – groundwater monitoring includes 14 different well sites and measuring groundwater to surface water interaction. Fisheries have 2 studies in the Upper Big Hole in 2011 and 2 studies in the lower river in 2012 that will lend good data. Data loggers will be installed in 2012. The design for the Wise River Diversion project is currently being reviewed by the technical advisory committee. Initial cost estimates were significantly higher than expected and are being reviewed and reduced by the landowners and contractor. Project implementation is not expected until spring of 2012, but hoping to begin some work this winter.
- The RRG Planning Grant was approved for \$10,000. This will help identify potential water quality, bank stabilization, fish spawning and rearing, and cold water return opportunities. Due to reduced funding, the project area was scaled back and will identify potential projects in the lower river near the Hamilton Ranch and High Bridge. Jen and Kevin will be meeting with the Hamilton Ranch Manager in November to tour previous BHWC projects and discuss project opportunities.

- The work with DEQ on potential wetland restoration sites continues with a meeting on October 27<sup>th</sup> to visit potential sites.
- The Land Use Planning Working Group has been working with county planners, DEQ, and DNRC to review the Big Hole Channel Migration Zone Study and determine the next steps in having State Approved, Zone A floodplain maps. Rick Hartz from Beaverhead County provided additional information regarding the need for State approved maps. Without DNRC approval of maps, any regulations we have might not stand up in court. Having approved maps will assist the counties in enforcing existing regulations. The next step is to gain more supporting data to get State approval. Maps will not change how flood permits are issued – it will help make them more legally defensible. The LUP Working Group is asking the BHWC, Future West and all 4 Counties to contribute \$5,000 each to work with a contractor to provide the necessary information to have State approved maps. A future step could be to look at having FEMA approved maps. The BHWC approved funding of \$5,000.
- The BHWC has received 2 challenge grants totaling \$23,000. If we can raise \$23,000 we will be able to put \$46,000 towards conservation efforts in the Big Hole – doubling the investment. Kevin reported that the annual appeal letters to members and donors is being drafted and the plan is to send this in late November. Kevin and the Steering Committee asked that each Board Member contribute to the efforts of BHWC and Kevin emphasized how important financial support from Board members is to helping with other donations. Randy will be sending a special appeal to all BHWC Board members.

#### Wildlife/Wolf Working Group (*Dean Peterson*)

- RAC Funding for 2012 has been preliminarily approved
- Holding a meeting in Jackson with Chet, landowners, WCS, BHWC and FWP to review 2011 rider program and determine changes, etc. for 2012
- Wildlife Services is no longer flying due to loss of funding, not a lot of collaring of wolves is occurring. FWP has \$900,000 for wolf management which is up to the Director's discretion on how to utilize these funds. Loss of the federal trapper would be very difficult for continued management.
- Small group of ranchers have pooled their money for flying efforts
- A levy on cattle is being considered which could be used for wolves – similar to the predator levy for coyotes, etc. A petition is currently being circulated
- Have received some publicity regarding the collaboration, management and deterrent efforts. Dean was interviewed by the Billings Gazette and the New York Times – emphasized the collaborative work between ranchers, organizations and agencies to find working solutions.
- Looking at working with NGO's and FWP to determine better wolf management strategies and how to minimize risk to cattle
- (*Jim Hagenbarth*) Jim reported on the Bison situation – the Governor and Director of FWP have established 2 new populations of bison. They are not affecting the Big Hole, yet. The National Park Service is not managing the number of bison coming out of the park each year
- Jim Hagenbarth discussed the brucellosis outbreak in Paradise Valley
  - Testing at Sage Creek, netting and testing in Pioneers

#### Weeds (*Kevin Brown*)

- The Weed Committee met on October 12<sup>th</sup> to discuss the WWB and suggestions for the future. The Committee is looking for ways to integrate the Weed Whackers Ball with all BHWC activities.
- The Weed Committee will meet on November 9<sup>th</sup> to determine the committee structure and preliminary goals, and discuss the possible integration of the WWB with BHWC.

### **New Business**

- Jen Titus reported on
  - The MWCC and MHP conferences she attended. The BHWC is receiving a lot of attention across the State for the good work we are doing.
  - State and Federal funding are focusing more on data driven results and paying closer attention to results
  - Need to streamline our message – how do we describe what we do?
  - Need to diversify – cross into other sectors/user groups
  - Utilize website and Facebook – goal of 100 Facebook users by end of the year, connect with other groups
  - Explore corporate sponsorships
    - Grant funding is down – help fill the gap
  - Policy Issues
    - Burden falling on Non-Profits
    - Agencies losing technicians
    - Society has overwhelming trust in Non-profits to do good work and make sound decisions – need good data and working partners
  - Critical to stay competitive and at the forefront
- Tax Deduction Credit
  - Up for renewal
  - Being considered for removal – could lead to fewer donations and less work being accomplished
  - BHWC approved signing on to petition to ensure Credit remains in effect

### **Future Agendas**

- November 16<sup>th</sup> – Willow Browse Study Update – Emma Cayer, FWP
- December – No Meeting
- January 18<sup>th</sup> – Butte Highlands Gold Mine Update – TBD

### **Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 pm.