



**Big Hole Watershed Committee**  
Monthly Meeting Minutes  
*May 20, 2009 – 7:00 pm*  
Divide Grange Hall

**In Attendance**

Alan Manas, landowner; Art Christenson, BCD; Brad Borst, MWA; Darren Olsen, USFS; Dave Amman, DNRC; Doug Peterson, USFWS; Emma MacKenzie, BHWC; George Trischman, rancher; Jeanne Caddy, BHWWC; Jeff Everett, USFWS; Jim Hagenbarth, rancher; Jim Olsen, FWP; John Dillon; John Dooling, rancher; John Peck; Kristin Manas, landowner; Linda Lennon, TNC; Marty Hovan, BSB Water; Mike Bias, BHRF; Phil Ralston, rancher; Randy Smith, Chair, rancher; Ray Weaver, rancher; Scott Reynolds, GGTU;

**Introductions/Review of Minutes**

The meeting was called to order by Jeanne Caddy at 7:10 pm. Introductions were made and the April minutes were reviewed. No changes were requested in the minutes.

**Precipitation and Stream Flow Report**

Dave Amman presented this month's report (please see his report at the end of these minutes). Overall, things look good, we are currently approaching the lowest part of flood stage. Dave reminded the group that we haven't seen a "normal" peak and peak timing in several years. In the past, the normal peak at Wisdom (20 years) was June 6 with a rate of 1570 cfs and 7100 cfs at the Melrose gage on June 3. This year's forecast is a peak between June 2 and 9.

**State of the Fishery**

Jim Olsen, MFWP Big Hole Fisheries Biologist, gave an update on the state of the river fisheries. The PowerPoint presentation is available to anyone interested. Please contact Emma at [info@bhwc.org](mailto:info@bhwc.org) to get a copy.

Jim noted that most of the data was taken in the spring of 2008, before the good water. He also mentioned that gaps in the data are due to times when the river was closed to drought and there was no electrofishing due to stress on the fish.

Generally, there is uptrend in the numbers of larger fish, however, the weight/length ratio indicates that the condition of the fish has dropped – they are skinnier and longer. This is most evident the larger fish – there are more of them, but in worse shape. The current research focus is one monitoring the relationships between water flow & warmth and fish condition.

**Committee Reports**

• Funding Advisory Panel

Mike Bias reported on the results of the meeting held on Tuesday, May 12<sup>th</sup>. Six proposals came in for the group's consideration. Each presenter had 20 minutes to give their proposal and answer any questions from the panel.

1. Vatland & Gresswell, USGS: Evaluating the availability and use of cold-water thermal refugia for Arctic grayling and nonnative salmonids in the upper Big Hole River watershed.



Request for funding to assemble tow fixed PIT-tag antenna stations in the mainstem Big Hole. This will be the last year of funding requests for this project. Funding requested: \$10,000. Funding awarded: \$10,000.

2. Olsen, MFWP: Floy tag study on mainstem Big Hole River and potential spawning tributaries Request for funding to tag all electroshocked fish in fall. Study to include research on where the 22-24" browns are coming from and how they're getting there. BHRF will fund \$3,000. Funding requested: \$5,000. Funding awarded: \$5,000. Caveat: Data to be collected from PIT tagging area and include in shocking studies in grayling reach.
3. Fyllum, Smucker & Hutto, Avian Science Center: Upper Big Hole River avian monitoring: evaluating habitat restoration. Request for funding to add sites and study of more birds e.g. cranes and curlews. This is a continuation of previously funded work. Funding requested: \$5,000. Funding awarded: \$5,000.
4. Everett, USFWS: 2010 Big Hole Willow Bank. Request for funding for remaining collection and storage of willow plugs. Funding requested: \$11,000. Funding awarded: \$11,025.
5. Mike Bias, BHRF: Monitoring and evaluation of benthic macroinvertebrates in the Big Hole River and tributaries. Request for funding to continue study differences in bug communities on tributaries and mainstem including hiring of interns to assist with research. Funding requested: \$7,000. Funding awarded: \$7,000.
6. Everett, NRCS: Rock Creek and Big Lake Creek Fish Ladders. Request for funding to install fish ladders for grayling access to additional habitat. Funding requested: \$1,951.80. Funding awarded: \$1,951.80. Caveat: monitoring of fish traps and reports made on findings.

There was discussion regarding whether the BHWC receives annual written reports for the projects that are funded. It was noted that some of the reports are already up on the BHWC website. Other reports, such as the FLIR study, is in draft form and was presented to the panel last week for their feedback. Randy pointed out that the subcommittees and panels are formed to advise the larger Committee and that their judgment should be trusted. Jim thanked the panel for their work on this. There was no one opposed to the funding recommendations.

- Land Use Planning

Emma MacKenzie reported on the first set of Land Use Education Forums that were held on April 20, 22, & 23 in Wise River, Jackson, and Twin Bridges.

Karin Boyd, geomorphologist, spoke about floodplains, avulsions, and river migration and how these natural processes might affect river management planning along the Big Hole watershed. The possibilities of updating the mapping and a variety of uses for the maps were also discussed.

There was good attendance in each community: 23 in Wise River, 27 in Jackson, and 35 in Twin Bridges. Jennifer has not yet had the opportunity to summarize the public discussion yet but will be getting out to us. Generally, the community felt that there is good baseline



information and they are interested in bringing information up to date. They are interested in consistent management along the river; exploring approaches that would compensate landowners for good management and mentioned that the current system for river management / development may not be meeting all the communities' needs and vision.

Some ideas were proposed on how to better the Big Hole development standards including putting the standards in the floodplain regulations instead of a building permit system and including the avulsion / channel migration zones.

The next forums will be held on:

Monday June 29 at 6:30pm in Wisdom

Tuesday June 30 at 12:00 noon in Wise River (lunch will be provided) and at 6:30pm in Twin Bridges. Speakers will be Traci Sears, the state floodplain administrator for DNRC and Sheryl Consort from MT DEQ. The topics will be flood insurance, FEMA maps, layers of floodplain management, and how they do and don't fit together; and water quality water quantity issues related to building along the river (e.g. new wells and septic systems)

- Steering Committee

Randy Smith reported that they will be initiating a search for a new Executive Director for the BHWC. Once a replacement is found, Noorjahan will be stepping into a different role for the BHWC.

Steve Luebeck and Randy went to Washington, DC at the end of March. They found the trip to be frustrating, as many of the people they hoped to speak with are not yet in place with the new administration. There were also many career retirements. They heard the phrase "things are tight" quite often. They only had five minutes each with Tester and Baucus and could not get a meeting with Rehberg. On the positive side, the people in DC know the BHWC and they like what we're doing. They got some insight on how to get in the presidential budget request which would allow for more consistent funding.

Randy gave a head's up on the reintroduction of the Clean Water Restoration Act and spoke briefly on the potential problems around the word "navigable" which may or may not be taken out. He suggested that the community get in touch with Baucus' office and let him know their thoughts.

Finally, Randy received an email from Tester's office suggesting that BHWC has received funding for over \$400,000, however, no one has been able to confirm that.

- Weed Workgroup

Jeanne Caddy reminded the group about Anglers Education Day on June 27 from 9am til noon at the Jerry Bridge, Divide Bridge, and the Melrose fishing access. She is looking for volunteers at each site to educate any anglers on how to look for weeds on their boats and trailers, and on noxious weeds (leafy spruce, purple loosestrife, and salt cedar – which consumes up to 200 gallons of water/day). Please contact Jeanne if you are able to help.



The Weed workgroup has received economic stimulus funds from the Dillon BLM. They will use 1/3 this year to help round out the river weed project and fund the cooperative ditch project in Melrose which begins next week.

- Wildlife Workgroup

Jim Hangenbarth reported that the groups has had three meetings so far, the next meeting will be on Tuesday, June 16 at the school in Jackson at 6pm.

The group is currently working on the management of elk in the Big Hole valley. They are looking at changing some district boundaries to address distribution and concentration of elk. They are looking to incorporate hunters to accomplish their goals: to get the numbers down, but no in the summer when you lose a lot of meat. They are also looking to work with absentee landowners. The group is trying to get a working model that isn't as difficult as the Madison Valley model because it's not yet as big a problem.

The focus of the group will be on one project at a time, to keep participation high and consistent, and to have a good experience for everyone. If this is successful, they will move on to another project. If there isn't enough participation, they won't continue with the group. Jim encouraged people who are interested to attend the next meeting and to get involved.

Emma notified the group of a two-day workshop being offered by the Sonoran Institute on community planning for wildlife and invited anyone who is interested to contact her about participating.

### **Determine June Agenda**

Jim Magee, MFWP Arctic Grayling Biologist, will report on the status and trends of the grayling populations. The BHWC will discuss the MISTI situation and whether to take a stance and what that will be.

Jeanne reported that the July picnic has not yet been set, and there were many requests that Randy consider having it at his place once again. Steve Running has agreed to present at the September meeting.

Requests were made for presentations on brucellosis as well as reports for the different studies that BHWC has been funding. Jeff Everett offered to present on the willow plantings in October and offered to speak with Shane Vatland regarding a presentation in October.

### **Other Business**

Jeff Everett, USFWS, reported that the Governor Creek culvert project is moving ahead quickly. Construction is expected to begin on September 1<sup>st</sup>. The Skinner's Meadow Road will be impacted for four to six weeks, and they plan to be done before rifle season. There will be a tour of the construction area and Jeff will notify the Committee when that date is set. Right now, the water is not between the culverts – so be careful when driving.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 9:5 pm.





## BIG HOLE BASIN SNOWPACK UPDATE

May 20, 2009

Thanks to timely late-season storms, snow pack conditions throughout the Big Hole Basin look great for the coming season. The high elevation SNOTEL stations all hold well above-normal snow water levels. The mid-elevation snow melted with the warm weather a few weeks ago. The Darkhorse Lake site in the upper basin shows essentially the same snow water as last year at this time. The Mule Creek site, representing the middle and lower basin, has a lot more snow water than last year at this time. The Climate Prediction Center forecast as of April 15 predicts below-normal precipitation through August.

### Percent of Normal Snow Water Equivalent (SWE)

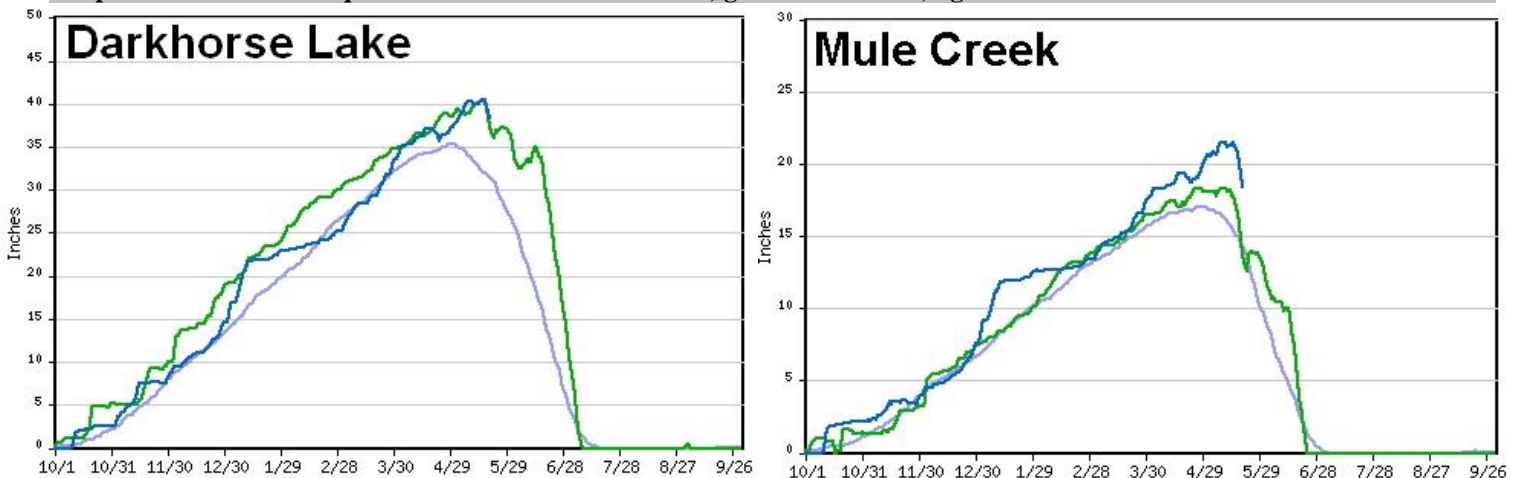
	Jan 6	Jan 12	Jan 21	Feb 4	Feb 18	Mar 3	Mar 18	Mar 23	Apr 15	Apr 30	May 20
Barker Lakes	139	136	124	116	108	110	117	119	128	139	158
Basin Creek	118	112	107	98	89	87	85	94	102	95	88
Bloody Dick	107	124	111	102	93	91	103	108	117	134	173
Calvert Creek	105	119	104	102	89	88	98	101	141	211	0
Darkhorse Lake	119	133	120	111	100	95	100	101	108	106	121
Moose Creek	104	127	110	103	95	91	93	91	99	104	100
Mule Creek	127	143	129	120	107	102	106	109	114	119	128
Saddle Mtn.	103	117	104	99	89	87	91	91	103	100	116

### **BASIN AVERAGE**

**115    126    114    107    97    94    99    101    114    114    124**

Statistically, the median annual peak flow is about 1570 cfs at Wisdom, occurring around June 6. The median peak for the long-term gauge “near Melrose” is about 7100 cfs around June 3. This year, flow at Wisdom has already exceeded the normal peak and at Melrose it came pretty close in mid-April. At this point, the timing of the peak and the shape of the hydrograph in general are dependant on air temperatures. As of May 13, the NRCS forecasts Big Hole River peaks between June 2 and June 9, assuming “near-normal” climatic conditions.

**Graphs of Snow Water Equivalent: dark blue line is 2009; green line is 2008; light blue line is 1971-2000 normal accumulation.**



May 15: the NRCS forecast the following flow volume projections, based on the 50% and 70% chance of exceedance:



Big Hole River at Wisdom, the **forecast is for 159% to 130% of normal volume**  
Big Hole River near Melrose, the **forecast is for 151% to 137% of normal volume**

Last year at this time, predictions were for 115% of normal at both gauge sites.

D. Amman, Montana DNRC, 444-6648