



The purpose of the Big Hole Watershed Committee is to seek understanding of the river and agreement among individuals and groups with diverse viewpoints on water use and management in the Big Hole watershed.

Newsletter of the Big Hole Watershed Committee December, 2008

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Letter from the Board



Greetings!

In light of the recent financial turbulence in the United States economy, I was asked to provide an update on the financial condition of the Big Hole Watershed Committee.

I'm pleased to tell you that our finances remain solid despite the recent economic turbulence that

has swept the country. As it stands today, the Big Hole Watershed Committee has adequate funds to operate for about another year; which is typical. Due to earlier Congressional appropriations, the Big Hole Watershed Committee has had adequate cash to fund operations for the last several years. The appropriation funds were then supplemented with other grants and donations from individuals like you. This allows the Big Hole Watershed Committee to maintain a small surplus; enough to cover our administrative needs for about one year into the future.

However, the federal appropriations have been the base of our budget and future appropriations will be much more difficult to obtain due to recent federal government events, like the \$700 billion bailout of the banking industry. As a result, we need to increase our local financial support to make up for the lack of federal dollars.

As you know, in 2006, we launched a membership program and many Big Hole residents and other interested parties became supporting members.

Likewise, many individuals also made tax-deductible donations to support our efforts. We've increased our grant requests to foundations and asked the organizations that we do business with to support our efforts. These are all steps in the right direction, but we must do much more.

On a positive note, funds for projects like stream restoration and grayling habitat continue to be easier to raise than operating dollars, as most foundations are willing to fund on-the-ground projects that have long-term benefits. Unfortunately, without a significant operating budget it is difficult to apply for the underlying project grants and it takes administrative oversight to get the projects up and running and to monitor the long-term effect of the project.

We are doing much to control costs at the BHWC. We've limited our staff travel to reduce our fuel costs. We've tried to combine meetings to reduce the total amount of travel time. Through cutbacks such as electronic delivery of the newsletter the BHWC is striving to maintain its commitment to the Big Hole River and its people while lowering our printing and postage costs. We continue to seek cost cutting measures that still allow us to focus on our mission.

Outside foundations are a critical component of our budget. For instance the Cinnabar Foundation recently awarded us a grant for operating costs. This grant requires a match of 100% or \$5,000. Currently, we are less than \$500 short of our goal. We are hoping, with additional support, we can notify Cinnabar by the end of the year that we have reached our goal.

The BHWC has recently been honored with several memorial donations. These donations show the commitment of the generations to the Big Hole Valley. The Big Hole River is a place where generations have worked and played, creating a commitment to continued support for the Big Hole community. Those who have passed will be honored with their names, donor information and pictures starting in the February Newsletter. Memorial donations allow us to honor our past while providing an important source of funding

In these lean times we all know it is difficult to contribute to organizations. We appreciate your past sacrifices in support of the Big Hole Watershed Committee. How can you continue helping? Renew your membership. If you aren't a

member then please join. Encourage your friends and family to join the membership ranks of the Big Hole Watershed Committee. Include the Big Hole Watershed Committee in your holiday giving plans by making a tax deductible year-end contribution. Take the Cinnabar Challenge, or place a memorial to those who have gone before us so that we may continue the traditions for the next generation of ranchers, landowners and sportsman.

Happy holidays!



Steve Luebeck - BHWC Treasurer

Smiling Faces from the Weed Whacker Ball 2008



Project Focus - Lower Big Hole

Over the past two years, the BHWC has been the recipient of generous donations from an anonymous benefactor which have been put to use by the BHWC in our efforts to develop and implement prioritized projects on the lower Big Hole. In one way or another, these projects will improve streamflows and support a healthier fishery

in our beautiful blue ribbon trout stream. Currently, we have seven projects in progress. At this writing, it appears we are close to having all the funding in place to begin implementation for the two projects highlighted in this newsletter. We'll fill you in on other "lower" Big Hole projects in future newsletters.

Kalsta Spring Creek and Slough Restoration

(by Erik Kalsta)

For at least three generations, this body of water has been known within the Kalsta family as "the Slough". Ducks utilize the pond, but numbers are dropping as well as the number of days used. When the pond is deeper (caused by beavers damming the outflow) trumpeter swans stop by in early spring and late fall. In my father's and grandfather's lifetimes the slough was fishable, but we haven't seen anything but carp for some years now. Prior to the Kalsta's tenure upon this land "the Slough" was an intermittent river-channel and probably even the main channel at some point, but now it is becoming weed choked and filling at an exponential rate.

I suppose that, left alone, this would eventually become one of my most fertile pastures. However, it is one of those special places where you can always go to see wildlife.



A northwest view overlooking the Kalsta Slough.

Moose raise their calves on its shore; elk graze the nearby pasture; turkeys roost in the trees; whitetail and mule deer bed in the willows; otters, ducks and geese use its water; and I have seen bear, bobcat and lynx patrolling its shores. I want to share this with my children, and hopefully with theirs.

The springs that feed the slough provide a reliable, cool temperature water source for the river throughout the year. That even temperature and the surrounding vegetation, coupled with good conservation management, will allow the water to be used as a spawning stream for rainbow trout in the spring and perhaps even for browns in the fall, while waterfowl should benefit from the increased depth for rearing their broods.

Editor's note: The Kalsta Spring Creek Project is a priority project for the BHWC and FWP within their drought management efforts since the project is anticipated to increase stream flows and mitigate late-summer water temperatures in a critical reach of the mainstem. Additionally, FWP considers this a significant project for providing trout spawning and thermal cover where none currently exist. Along with the BHWC and FWP the Beaverhead Conservation District fully supports this project.

Big Hole Cooperative Ditch Project

A 2007 assessment of irrigation infrastructure on the lower Big Hole River identified and prioritized infrastructure projects with the greatest potential to improve instream flows in support of the Big Hole Drought Management Plan and to benefit the fishery. The Big Hole Cooperative Ditch Project was ranked as the highest priority. But long before that – more specifically in 2004 – Bill Cain and Dick Marshall brought this project to the attention of the BHWC.

The project is located on the south bank of the Big Hole River downstream from Pennington Bridge. This is a large diversion used by 22 irrigators to irrigate just shy of 4,000 acres. The ditch intercepts water from the Big Hole River and discharges it into the Beaverhead River not far from the mouth of the Big Hole near Twin Bridges. DNRC synoptic data indicate this river-reach has the greatest loss of streamflow of any reach on the lower Big Hole during

the irrigation season. Owlsley Slough and Schoolhouse Slough are intimately associated with the ditch.

What are the problems? The headgate on the Big Hole Ditch is inoperable. A flow measuring device installed years ago proved ineffectual. The diversion structure prevents fish passage, contributes to degraded water quality, and endangers floaters. According to Jim Olsen, FWP Big Hole Fisheries Management Biologist, "This ditch has the largest elevation drop below a diversion that I have seen on the Big Hole. Getting this project completed will be a great accomplishment."

The BHWC is working with members of the Big Hole Cooperative Ditch Company, the Ruby Valley Conservation District, DNRC, NRCS, and FWP to get this project completed. We believe we can git'er done in 2009!

2008 Watershed Tour

(by Paul F. Vang)

A tour of the Big Hole river basin is a study in contrasts. From the alpine peaks in the headwaters to the riparian cottonwood bottoms of the lower river, a tour of the area is a journey through varied landscapes and environments—and as the novel reminds us, a river runs through it.

On a late September day, when the clear and gentle waters of the Big Hole River sparkle in the autumn sunshine, it's sometimes difficult to remember that a few months earlier, the river and its tributaries can be a roaring torrent.

Phil Ralston, who operates a ranch along the Big Hole and its tributary, Deep Creek, has no trouble remembering what spring runoff can do.

In 1997, a year with a big snowpack and long winter, spring finally came—with a bang. Near the intersection of the Mill Creek highway with Highway 43, Deep Creek exploded with water surging through the meadows on its way to join the Big Hole. At a horseshoe bend in the creek, the water blasted a new channel through the meadows, threatening not only ranch property but even the Mill Creek highway.

“We’ve got to fix this,” was the unanimous agreement among Ralston, Montana FWP, and the USFWS. In a project funded by the DNRC, FWP, USFWS and the Big Hole Watershed Committee, heavy equipment came in to drop big boulders to block the new creek channel and re-route the water back into the horseshoe bend. The channel was filled back in and banks were stabilized with netting and willow plantings.

With chronic drought conditions in following years, it took awhile for the land to heal, but in 2008 the creek and



Tour participants learn about the importance of good headgates and flow measuring devices to help irrigators better manage and support the drought management plan.

its meadows are lush with willows and tall grasses that stabilize the banks, as well as keep stream waters cool in summer.

As part of the project, the creek bottom was fenced to keep livestock away from the stream banks. Previously, the entire area was one big pasture. “It’s a big improvement,” Ralston said, noting that, previously, calves occasionally blundered into the runoff swollen creek waters and drowned. Phil still uses the creek area in autumn for limited grazing to graze off tall grasses.

Deep Creek is also a spawning tributary for trout and Arctic grayling and the Ralston ranch is participating in the CCAA program, the furthest downstream property participating in the program. In addition to Deep Creek, Ralston is participating in an ongoing project to move some fence lines away from the main river, both to keep livestock from damaging the riparian areas, and to eliminate chronic problems with ice jams damaging fencing during spring runoff.

The Ralston Ranch project was possibly the most dramatic project demonstrated on this year’s watershed tour, in that it restored a stream bed, prevented possible highway damage, plus exemplifies an active partnership among landowners, government agencies and non-government agencies, such as the Watershed Committee, resulting in improved agricultural practices as well as protect and enhance the Big Hole watershed’s fishery. It’s at least a win, win, win situation.

Other projects on the tour included a diversion project on a channel of the Wise River that efficiently delivers water to Liz Jones’ ranch as well as other users, but at the same time allows fish passage up and down the stream.

Another diversion improvement project was just upstream from Melrose. Several years ago, during a low water year, an irrigator actually placed a tree across the river channel



Jeanne Caddy, BHWC Weed Committee Coordinator discusses the need for weed management on areas disturbed for projects. Ray Tilman, Alan Manas, Phil Ralston, and Jack Kambich (front to back) look on.

to force more water into his ditches, blocking boat traffic. Through a cooperative project, the water diversion was rebuilt to be more fish-friendly, not block boat traffic, plus included a new headgate constructed to better manage the flow of water.

On the tour's last stop, Glen area rancher Jim Hagenbarth showed off a new headgate and weir on an irrigation ditch, replacing an older deteriorating system. The new system manages water diverted from the Big Hole River, as well as from Rock Creek, a small tributary. An important feature in the system, and one that Hagenbarth included at significant personal expense, is a fish ladder to allow passage by the many trout produced in the diversion system.

From my standpoint as a Butte resident, the noon picnic lunch stop at the Divide pump station, where a significant portion of Butte's municipal water supply originates, was a tour highlight. The pump station preserves a huge coal furnace that originally provided steam to power an equally impressive pumping system. While electric pumps replaced the original system in the 1930s, the original system is still mostly intact and exemplifies a high level of engineering a century ago.

Plant manager Marty Hovan explained the design of the existing dam which diverts water from the river before it's pumped over the Continental Divide to be treated and sent on to homes in Butte. In the planning stage is a project to replace the often dangerous dam with a new dam system which will be less of a barrier to fish migration, as well as facilitate boat traffic on the river. Fisheries biologist Jim Olsen noted that in his education, low head dams, such as the Divide dam were referred to as "Drowning Machines."

In addition to the tour of various watershed projects were presentations on the hydrology of the Big Hole watershed, the concept of TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load), and how that is a factor on Big Hole water quality. Mark Kelley, DEQ outreach coordinator said that heavy metals are an invisible factor in Big Hole water quality. A vigorous stand of weeds around the Melrose water diversion project were a natural lead-in to the need for weed control and that post-project weed control should be considered in preparing budgets for future projects.

In short, a full day with just about more information than a person can handle.

"The more man learned to know the physical nature of water and to use it technically, the more his knowledge of the soul and spirit of this element faded." ~Theodore Schwenk, Sensitive Chaos

Where's my Newsletter? Inbox vs. Mailbox

Many of you found your last newsletter from the Big Hole Watershed Committee in your inbox instead of your mail box. In an effort to reduce costs while still reaching all those who love the Big Hole and all it stands for, the BHWC launched into the electronic age.

As the nation faces tougher economic times it is so important that we as an organization stretch every dollar possible by becoming more inventive. Switching to electronic delivery for those who have email access saved BHWC \$585 for one newsletter. Considering there are three newsletters and an annual Drought Newsletter produced each year switching to electronic delivery will save the organization \$1,755 in one year! Of course the more members that sign up for electronic delivery, the more we save.



photo courtesy of glenn badish

received an electronic copy but would prefer the paper copy, all you need to do is contact us and we will switch you back to paper. Give a call - 406.782.3682 - or send a note to BHWC, PO Box 931, Butte, MT 59703. Not on the electronic delivery list but would like to be?

Simply email us at: mcavanaugh@bhwc.org and we would be happy to add you to the list.

Since this is a new endeavor, please feel free to send us your comments. Feedback makes us grow and allows us to provide you with materials that are of value to you. Please remember to check out our website www.bhwc.org for additional information about the organization and upcoming events!

Don't panic if you do not have internet access! We understand that many of you do not have the ability to receive information electronically. We will continue to produce a paper copy for those members. Plus, if anyone

And finally, please be watching for our February Newsletter in which we will recognize our many generous members and supporters, without whom there would be fewer accomplishments on the Big Hole.

Big Hole Conservationist, George Grant Passes On

(by Jeffrey Johnson and Alyse Curry; grand-nephew and grand-niece to George Grant)

George Francis Grant, activist, conservationist, legend, and benefactor of the Big Hole River, passed away at St. James Hospital in Butte, Sunday, November 2. Born on September 18, 1906, he was 102 years old.

George was educated in Butte and attended the Butte Business College. From age 18 until 1942, when he was drafted into the Army, George was employed in progressively more responsible office jobs. All during this time, he was extremely interested in the tying of artificial flies for trout fishing and in 1939, secured a patent on a method of weaving hair hackles for fishing flies.

Upon discharge from the service in 1945, he operated a tackle shop in West Yellowstone, where he was assisted by his nephew, Francis "Fran" Johnson, another legend in the world of fly fishing. The following year, George returned to Butte and opened his own fishing tackle store, Grant's Fly Shop, which he operated from 1947 to 1951.

In 1947 he married his beloved Annabell Thomson, who was his constant companion. In George's words, Annabell was his "dyed in the wool" tomboy who he taught to fly cast like a pro and with whom he particularly enjoyed spending time wading the Big Hole River.

From 1951 until 1967, he entered the employ of Treasure State Sporting Goods where he was promoted to manager and tackle buyer. Upon his retirement he devoted himself to a full-time career in fly tying, fly fishing, writing about these subjects, and becoming an activist in the conservation of dwindling western natural resources, particularly in connection with wild trout streams.

George wrote many books over his lifetime which brought him national recognition, including *The Art of Weaving Hair Hackles for Trout Flies*, *Montana Trout Flies*, *The Master Fly Weaver*, and *Montana Trout Flies*. For many years he was the editor of *The River Rat*, official publication of the Montana Council of Trout Unlimited. A collection of George's written works is published under the title *Grant's Riffle...A Collection of Thoughts, Ideas, and Memories*.



Among his many awards were the Buszek Memorial Fly Tying Award and the Arnold Gingrich Life Membership Award presented by the Federation of Fly Fishers; the nationally recognized Chevron Conservation Award; and the National Conservationist of the Year by Trout Unlimited. George was featured in a 1993 Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks documentary titled *Three Men – Three Rivers*, a documentary which explores the lives of three men and their extensive conservation influences in Montana. In addition, he has been featured in many books and articles on the subjects of fly fishing, fly tying and conservation.

For many years he was an active fund raiser for conservation organizations and helped establish the River Rat Chapter of Trout Unlimited in Butte, which was renamed the George Grant Chapter in 1983 in his honor. In 1988 George conceived and established the Big Hole River Foundation to focus his conservation efforts on the Big Hole watershed. George continued to fish the Big Hole River in the fall of the year, when the water was low enough to wade comfortably, until he was almost 80 years old and tied flies for fundraising until the age of 90.

Governing Board Profiles



Bill Cain

Bill Cain is a third generation Montanan, born in Butte and raised in Missoula. He and his wife, Catherine, live south of Glen in the lower Big Hole. Prior to relocating, they lived in Divide for 18 years. After graduating from the University of Montana, Bill left home to serve his country and pursue a career in business. The lure of Montana's

rivers and mountains brought him back to Butte 30 years ago. His passion for floating and fishing Southwest Montana's rivers led naturally to his interest in conservation issues. Bill served as president of the George Grant Chapter of Trout Unlimited, then as TU State Council Chairman and a National TU Board member. In 1988 Bill was one of the founding members of the Big Hole River Foundation and served as its president for 5 years.

Bill joined the Big Hole Watershed Committee in 1997 and currently serves as a member of the Steering Committee. His commitment to the BHWC model of collaboration and consensus to resolve issues stems from his experiences in the past when divisiveness and fighting between interest groups was often the norm. Bill comments, "Just look at what has been accomplished over the past ten years. Twenty years ago nobody would have dreamed of such progress. The winner is not only the resource, but all of us individually and as a community. And it has set the standard for protecting watersheds throughout Montana. We have learned to work together, taking into consideration the needs and interests of others and to walk on common ground."



Dick Marshall

Dick was born in the Twin Bridges area in 1926. However, his childhood was spent on a ranch on Jackson Creek in Gallatin County. There he went to a one room school for eight years, attended Gallatin County High School.

Dick spent a couple years in the Army Air Force, then graduated from MSU with a BS in Agricultural Economics. He was married to Lenore Wilson in 1952. They had two children born when they lived near Big Timber. Dick then worked as a ranch manager in Wyoming for 20 years. Lenore taught Junior High in Newcastle. Both kids graduated from the University of Wyoming.

They came back to Montana in 1984 to a small ranch that Dick's grandparents homesteaded in the late 1860's. Lenore passed away in 1993 having been diagnosed with ALS.

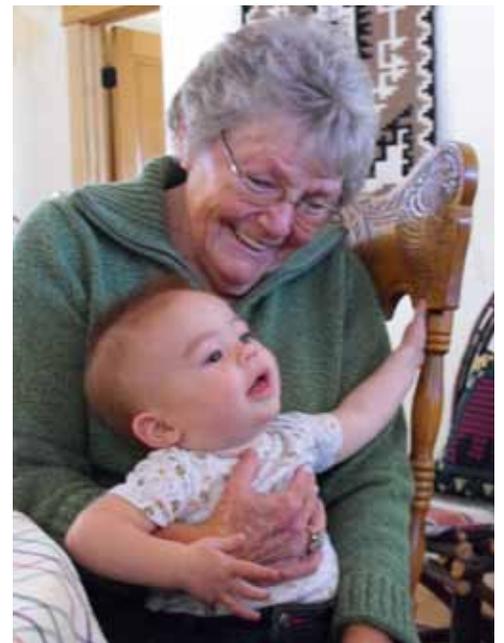
Dick married Valerie in 2000. They have a daughter, Julie, who is now a sophomore at TBHS. Valerie is the Director of Nursing at the children's psychiatric hospital in Butte.

Dick has been a member of BHWC since 1995. He states "It is a diverse group that constitutes the memberships. We've come to realize that we all are concerned about the well being of the resource. Even though we don't always agree on the method, we're willing to enter into the discussions. I feel that the valley has benefited from our efforts." Dick is also a member of the Twin Bridges Rotary Club and the VFW and American Legion Posts.

BHWC Socials

The Big Hole Watershed Committee, with the help of our friends and members, hosted four socials this summer that brought neighbors together over good food and good company. We gratefully thank our hosts for their support. The summer socials began at Bill and Cathy Cain's new home in Glen in late July. Randy and Emily Smith hosted the annual BHWC picnic. The picnic drew approximately 80 people from Wisdom to Dillon and from Butte to Wise River. The farthest flung guest, Senator Tester, arrived from Big Sandy, and as far as we know, was the only guest to get lost in Glen. Pete and Ronna Kamperschroer hosted an event at their home in Wise River in September. Finally, we revived the Ladies Tea, which was graciously hosted by Kristen (and Alan) Manas at their lovely home in Melrose. These events are a wonderful way for neighbor to meet neighbor and to learn about the work the Big Hole Watershed Committee is doing. If you are interested in hosting a social next year, or if you did not receive an invitation, please let us know. We want everyone to be included and we apologize if we missed anyone this year.

Anna Bennett and Sawyer Tackett bridged the generations at the Ladies' Tea.





Big Hole Watershed Committee
P.O. Box 931 Butte, MT 59703

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