



*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 February, 2009

P.O. Box 931 · Butte · MT · 59703

[www.bhwc.org](http://www.bhwc.org)

406-782-3682

### Letter from the Board

As I thought about writing this article, one of the things that struck me was how the concept of the Watershed Committee has evolved over the ensuing years. In the beginning, there were approximately 22 members and perhaps a dozen technical advisors from various state and federal agencies responsible for managing water, land, and wildlife resources in the Big Hole.

Much was accomplished in those years - the Drought Management Plan being noteworthy. But perhaps the greatest accomplishment was the development of trust amongst those involved, and the realization that by working together in a collaborative manner, more could be accomplished to address common interests than ever thought possible. It has been quite a learning process.

As we begin 2009, in addition to the 22 Governing Board Members and more than a dozen technical advisors, there are seven standing committees and three professional staff members. The Committees, in no particular order are:

- Hub and Spoke Committee
- Project Funding Advisory Committee
- Lower Watershed Planning Committee
- Drought Management Plan Committee
- Land Use Planning Committee
- Weed Committee
- Wildlife Committee

There are approximately 150 citizens involved in these groups. In fact, anyone with an interest in any of

these areas is welcomed to participate. It's here where the nitty-gritty work of the Watershed Committee takes place, where decisions are made, available funds allocated, and work on the ground undertaken. The Weed Committee even raises much of the funds needed for the continuing war on weeds. This is truly citizen democracy at its best and our hats are off to all of those who participate.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been expended for scientific studies and on the ground projects. But we're not resting on our laurels, for there is much more to do. While the upper Big Hole is the now the primary focus of landowners and the state and federal agencies under the Fluvial Arctic Grayling CCAA program, the Lower Big Hole Planning Group has identified more than a million dollars worth of on the ground projects that will improve water management, restore riparian habitat, and enhance fisheries and recreational opportunities.

In these difficult economic times, raising the funds will be a greater challenge than ever. It may take longer. But we are confident that it will happen. We've come too far not to continue the journey.

Bill Cain - BHWC Secretary



# Project Focus - Erb Ranch Project

The Erb Ranch is in the heart of the grayling recovery effort, and the Erb Family has been most generous in providing access to their land to get this important work accomplished. The Erb family has also extended access to the public through organized watershed tours to see the projects first hand. We are most grateful to them for this generosity.

Why is the Erb Ranch so important to the grayling recovery effort? While those working intensively in the upper Big Hole call this reach "Ground Zero", the story is a little more complicated than that. Jim Magee is the State Grayling Biologist for Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. He views grayling recovery from a drainage-wide perspective. This is a peripatetic species and their behavior is dynamic. Where grayling spawn and where they seek thermal refuge changes from year to year. But Magee agrees the Erb Ranch is particularly important, in part, because there is so much historic data upon which the success of recovery efforts can be compared.

The Rock Creek Reconnection Project, completed in 2006, was on the Erb Ranch. That project was described in our January 2007 newsletter (available on our website at [www.bhwc.org](http://www.bhwc.org)).

Among the objectives of more recent work on this reach is the restoration of a deeper and narrower river channel. This stream channel configuration maintains cooler more even streamflows. Because the Big Hole is considered a resilient system, the recovery team believes much of the recovery will happen quickly on its own simply by restoring and protecting the existing riparian vegetation community – primarily willows.

To that end, approximately 17 miles of new, wildlife-friendly, 3-strand, high-tensile electric riparian fence has been installed over the past couple of years. Over 4,600 rooted willows were planted on the Rock Creek project area in 2007, and more than 8,000 additional rooted willows were planted throughout the project area. There were 194 mature willow transplants, 14,855 willow stakes, 225 linear feet of willow waddles, 437 vertical willow bundles and 2,070 square feet of sodmat planted or installed. Over 2000 feet of bank sculpting, reshaping and brush layering were also accomplished.

The work doesn't end there. Willow survival, population dynamics of the fishery, wildlife browse, birds, stream flow and temperature, and channel geomorphology will be monitored for years to come..

Jeff Everett (USFWS) and Peter LaMothe (MFWP) were the primary project wranglers. They cobbled together funding sources, reviewed designs, hired and supervised consultants, engineers, contractors, and volunteers. Mike Roberts (DNRC) is charged with the complicated task of problem solving streamflow issues. Jim Magee (MFWP) and a competent and dedicated crew of fisheries technicians are tracking grayling population changes related to these projects. Emma Rens (MFWP) is monitoring willow survival and working with BHWC Weed Coordinator, Jeanne Caddy, to monitor weed dynamics. Kyle Tackett (NRCS) worked with the landowner to



*Riparian buffer zone on Erb Ranch*

develop a grazing plan that supports the work at hand. Montana Trout Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, the Big Hole River Foundation, and the Arctic Grayling Recovery Project have all taken on important roles in one aspect or another of this and other grayling recovery projects in the upper Big Hole. Who did we forget? It's a broad partnership indeed!

The BHWC has participated primarily by helping fill funding gaps and by organizing public tours of the project

area. Early on, we were able to provide for the design needs of the project through congressional appropriations we received for grayling recovery. This was an important contribution in that a good design is necessary to achieving a good project, yet many funders do not support design development.

Recently, the Committee provided final reports to numerous funders whom we approached over the past two years to support the work on this important reach of the Big Hole upstream from the Wisdom Bridge. These funders include Intermountain West Joint Venture, Orvis Company, Patagonia, and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Other funding partners include the Arctic Grayling Recovery Project, The Nature Conservancy, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Committee is also providing continuing funding for monitoring the success of these projects including: grayling monitoring through MSU's PIT-tag studies that track the movement and use of recovery areas by grayling and other species; UM's on-going bird monitoring study; and the willow survival and weed monitoring studies.

The Erb Ranch project is a huge, complicated, multi-year success story right in the middle of a critical reach of the Big Hole River. It is a very visible project. It is a perfect

example of a collaborative conservation success that could not have happened were it not for the landowner and the combined efforts of all the project partners. Jeff Everett reminds us, "It is important for us to celebrate our successes and showcase them...so long as we don't forget that we still have a lot of work to do".

Thanks to all the partners who are so dedicated to this important work. And thanks most of all to the Erb Family for making this success possible.

---

*What we know is so little and what we presume is so much. ~Pablo Neruda*

---

## Weed Committee Report

Now's the Time to Cuddle Up with a Good (Weed) Book

(By Jeanne Caddy, BHWC Weed Coordinator)

As I look out at our beautiful Big Hole River (which is completely frozen over here in Divide) it's hard to believe weed fighting season is right around the corner. Just like clockwork, the ice will melt and spring will make its way back to us once again. Ah, spring and the seasonal changes which come with it; mud and the unmistakable aroma of cow pies thawing out! Those are actually reminders for me that our weed committee needs to hit the ground running this summer in an effort to be effective on the weed fighting front.



We actually still have a few more months before noxious weeds begin their prolific attack on our watershed, so I thought this would be an opportune time to encourage you to familiarize yourselves with Montana's noxious weeds. Stopping the spread of noxious weeds in our watershed can seem like a daunting task. The first step is simply admitting there is a problem and then educating ourselves about noxious weeds. It is a step we the stakeholders need to take together in order to keep the Big Hole River the unique place that it is.

At present there are 32 weeds listed as noxious in Montana. Rumor has it more weeds will be added to the list soon. According to a noxious weed identification booklet (Montana's Noxious Weeds by M. Pokorny and J. Mangold) noxious weeds cover about eight percent of the land in Montana. That's a whopping 7.6 million acres!

Did you know noxious weeds drastically reduce the value of land and can have an adverse affect on wild and domestic grazing animals? Disturbed soil from construction and overgrazing is a hotbed for noxious weeds. Weeds and their seeds are not only spread by waterways and roadways, but also by animals (domestic and wild; large and small) and by humans (on our shoes, socks, and pants.) As I am sure you already know, weed seed also travels on the wind and we have some mighty strong winds around the watershed!

Throughout the course of this winter, the Big Hole Watershed Weed Committee has focused on getting projects funded that have been on our radar screen for a long time. However, we're not only focusing on projects, but also on programs that will help build relationships with all who have a vested interest in the Big Hole River. We know it is only through working together that we can truly make a difference.

One of our projects is the newly established Divide Creek Weed Management Area. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is funding the project. The project area begins at the vicinity of the Feely Exit on I-15 and follows the Divide Creek corridor downstream to the south end of the Kambich Ranch in Divide. It's a busy corridor which includes a railway, roadway, waterway, and an elk migration passageway. All of these serve as major vectors in the spread of noxious weeds. Representatives from county, state and federal agencies will work alongside landowners over the next two seasons to put a huge dent in the noxious weeds in this area of the watershed. The targeted noxious weeds in this area include yellow

toadflax, spotted knapweed, houndstongue, common tansy, hoary alyssum, and Canada thistle.

Also, Beaverhead and Silver Bow Counties will provide a Private (Weed) Applicator and Certification Training session on Tuesday, February 24th from 8:00am to 4:00pm at the Divide Grange. Topics to be covered include; calibrating your sprayer, noxious weed identification, personal protective equipment, chemical updates, and environmental issues. Please plan to attend this training / re-certification session if you want to learn more about noxious weeds and how to control them, if you are seeking re-certification credits to renew your private applicator license, or you want to take the test to receive a private applicators license. This session is open to all residents. To register for the training call the Beaverhead County Weed Department at 406.683.3790.

We are hoping to get more weed committee information and noxious weed links on the Big Hole Watershed Committee website soon. ([www.bhwc.org](http://www.bhwc.org)) In the meantime, please refer to the following websites to learn more about Montana's noxious weeds: Montana Weed Control Association, [www.mtweed.org](http://www.mtweed.org) or Montana Department of Agriculture, [www.agr.state.mt.us](http://www.agr.state.mt.us)

Please contact the Big Hole Watershed Weed Committee office if you would like one of the new weed identification books mentioned in this article or if you have any questions concerning noxious weed issues around the watershed. But please, please don't ask me to help you calibrate your sprayer. I am lucky if I can regulate the cream in my coffee in the morning! (Fortunately, I do have pamphlets for calibrating your sprayer and can pass one of those on to you.)

You can contact Jeanne at 406.267.3354 or e-mail [bhwwc@smtel.com](mailto:bhwwc@smtel.com)

---

*Don't be absorbed by the waterwheel's motion. Turn your head and gaze at the river. ~Jalaludin Balkhi*

---

## Wildlife Committee

(by Jim Hagenbarth)

The Big Hole Watershed Wildlife Committee has met twice and there is enough interest and concern to continue. A well rounded group of interested parties have agreed to participate and develop an action plan concentrating on elk and their management in the Big Hole Watershed.

John Scully and Jeff Klein gave a summary of the Madison Valley Elk Issues Working Group action plan submitted to the Fish and Game Commission. This plan forged relationships between all parties that addressed actions resulting in appropriate seasons, access and cooperation to begin dispersing elk and meeting management goals. This plan represents an historic effort in responsibly working together to find solutions. Kurt Alt (MFWP Region 3 Wildlife Manager) gave a presentation on the movement of elk and wolves in the Madison based on GPS tracked animals. It became clear that elk behavior is changing and we need to understand why, in order to develop appropriate strategies to achieve successful management of elk in the Greater Yellowstone Area. We have about 20 participants on this committee, but need a representative from the outfitting interests. Our next

meeting will be on March 3rd in Dillon. Anyone interested in participating can contact Noorjahan at 406.782.3682 or [nparwana@bhwc.org](mailto:nparwana@bhwc.org). A copy of the Madison Valley effort will be made available to all interested parties. I would like to thank everyone who has participated on this committee.



*Portrait of an Elk*

*Photographed from life by A.G. Wallihan, 1895*

# Thank you

We are thankful to all who made financial contributions to the Big Hole Watershed Committee in 2008. Financial support came in the form of new and renewed memberships, donations, participation in the always fabulous Weed Whacker Ball, memorials, and by meeting the Cinnabar Challenge. We even continued to receive contributions to the Orvis Challenge, a 2007 initiative. If we inadvertently left your name off our list, PLEASE let us know. We want to recognize each and every one of you.

## Memberships

Robert Adams; Anonymous; Holly & Robert Asmuth; Kenneth Atwood; Michael Azeez; John Bell; Ann Bennett; Big Hole Grazing Association; Joan Blom; Jennifer & Chris Boyer; Marion K. Bradley-Cook; Steve Buckner; Charles & Roxann Bulen - Sportsman Motel; Arnold Cattani; Joe & Eleanor Chelini; William & Elizabeth Childrey; Childs & Associates; Art Christensen; Paul & Sandy Cleary; George & Aspascia Clemow; Complete Fly Fisher; Cam Cooper; Jan Cronquist; Paul Dahlke; James Eden; Craig Fellin; Jack & Marilyn Fritz; Garrison Ranches; Frank & Ann Gilmore; John & Annette Giop; Margarete Guccione & Daz Zachry; Dave & June Guckenberg; Hagenbarth Livestock; Garth & Ruth Haugland; Joseph Herzog; Clayton & Barbara Huntley; William Inkret; Jackson Ranches; Liz & Don Jones; Michael & Gretchen Kadillak; Edward & Marilou Kilwien; David Kwolek; Bernard Lazzarri; Burr & Connie Lively; Vicki Lockner; Carole Lowman; Alfred Luebeck; Hilary Mackenzie; Alan & Kristin Manas; Elwood Mariner; Richard & Valerie Marshall; R.E. Miller & Sons; Roger Ogden; Jim & Judy Paffhausen; Lewis Paisley; Nigel Pashley; Leonard & Carol Raizin; John Ray; Scott & Billie Reynolds; Tony Reynolds; Robin & Reed Schifferman; Donald & Diane Sherman; Dan & Christelle Shields; David & Sherrie Smith; Sandy & Ron Sperry; Thomas Spruth; Lorrie Thomas; Thomas & Sally Troyer; Vigilante Electric; Ray & Gloria Weaver; Martin & Sheila White; John Wilson

## Corporate Sponsors

Great Pacific Iron Works; Pintlar Weed Management;  
Rowe Excavation

## Cinnabar Challenge

Robert Adams; David & Dode Anderson; Holly & Robert Asmuth; Big Hole Cooperative Ditch Company; Nancy & Bob Birkelo; William & Linda Booth; Marion K. Bradley-Cook; Shelly & Steve Burke; Jan & Les Davis; William Drury; Dave Ellingson - Meriwether Ranch; ERS Foundation; Jack Favero; Scott Ferris; First National Bank; C. Francis & Co; Harvey Gainey; Bill & Floydena Garrison; Barbara Gregovich; Margarete Guccione & Daz Zachry; Garth Haugland; Glenn Hoagland; Dan Holland; Patricia & Marvin Johnson; Shirley J. Johnson; Edward & Marilou Kilwien; Peter Kurtz; David Kwolek; Roy Lambertson; Bernard Lazzarri; Michael & Mary Pat Lewis; Vicki Lockner; Elwood Mariner; James Matteucci; R.E. Miller & Sons; John & Mary Nasstrom; Genevieve & Diane Nelson; Robert M. Nelson, Jr. & Linda S. Nelson; Nick & Ann Novich; Bob & Marilyn Olson - Embroidery Plus; Jim & Judy Paffhausen; Linda Que; Rafferty Cattle Company; Philip & Sarah Ralston; Dick & Sandra Rasmussen; Tony Reynolds; Neal & Linda Rogers; Clarence Sanders; Robin Schifferman; Margaret & Tony Schoonen; Alfred Schwentke; John & Dorene Shaul; Sparrow Ranch Grazing Association; State Bank & Trust; Virginia and Charles Stears; Frank & Kathy Taras; William & Marlene Tash; Lorry Thomas & W.T. Menahan; Union Pet Clinic; Ray Weaver; Martin & Sheila White; Mike Wilkinson; Wisdom River Cattle Company

## Orvis Challenge

Paul G. Benedum Jr.; Chet & Marcy Burchett; Don & Eunice Carroll; Central Mass. Chapter of Trout Unlimited; Fay and Kenneth Cooley; Robert E. Dicks, III & Lynn W. Dicks; Robert & Lynn Edgell; Nicholas & Christine Evans; William Goodrich; Perry S. Herst, Jr.; Morgan & Martha Hunter; Joseph A. Mahoney; Joan & Gregory McGinty; Kim & Jeffery Montay; Bryan K. Oakley; Lewis Paisley; Paverman & Paverman, CPA, PC; Edward & Marcia Hart Polloch; John & Mary Jane Richter; Constance Trounstone; Charles & Joy Waterman; Conrad Williams III & Jeanne Williams; Rufus & Sheila Williams

## Memorial Donations

Tony & Margaret Schoonen – in memory of Bill Thomas  
Tony & Margaret Schoonen – in memory of George Grant  
Complete Fly Fisher – in memory of Tim Finnegan  
Complete Fly Fisher – in memory of John Norris



(left to right) Tim, John, and DJ: "May Tim's pals always remember the times they enjoyed together on and off the Big Hole."



Mr. John Norris enjoying a day on one of his favorite rivers, the Big Hole.  
"May he rest in peace."

## Foundation and Government Support

Cinnabar Foundation; Intermountain West Joint Venture; Liz Claiborne Art Ortenberg Foundation; Patagonia; Orvis Company; Smart Growth Coalition and Sonoran Institute; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; Montana Department of Natural Resources Conservation; Montana Department of Environmental Quality; Bureau of Reclamation; Environmental Protection Agency.

# BHWC Governing Members

Bill Cain - Landowner/Guide, Glen

Art Christensen - Conservation Dist. Dillon

John Dooling - Rancher, Jackson

Jim Hagenbarth - Rancher, Dillon

Andrew Hanson - Guide, Wise River

Garth Haugland - County Commissioner, Dillon

Marty Hovan - Municipal Water, Butte

Hans Humbert - Rancher, Wisdom

Liz Jones - Rancher, Wise River

Mark Kambich - Rancher, Divide

Nathan Korb - The Nature Conservancy, Helena

Steve Luebeck, - Sportsmen, Butte

Dick Marshall - Rancher, Twin Bridges

Steve Parker - Big Hole River Foundation, Butte

John Peck - EPESP, Melrose

Harold Peterson - Rancher, Wisdom

Phil Ralston - Rancher, Wise River

John Reinhardt - Rancher, Wise River

Scott Reynolds - Trout Unlimited, Butte

Randy Smith - Chairman/Rancher, Glen

George Trischman - Rancher, Twin Bridges

Ray Weaver - Rancher, Wisdom

---

*One should not talk too much. That is what these huge spaces teach us – stop speaking at last. Also, the reality of droughts, with the pain and suffering they bring, does not lend itself to poetic terms. There is no romance about rains that never fall, and there is no significance in beauty when food and water are desperately needed. Bernard Plossu – The African Desert*

---

**To learn more about the BHWC, or to make a donation, visit our website: [www.bhwc.org](http://www.bhwc.org) or call 406-782-3682**