



Big Hole Watershed Committee

Monthly Meeting Minutes

October 19, 2016 – 7:00 pm

Divide Grange

In Attendance

Jennifer Downing, BHWC; Tana Nulph, BHWC; Pedro Marques, BHWC; Heather Barber, Bitterroot Water Forum; Roy Morris, GGTU; Randy Smith, BHWC/Rancher; Tom Wagenknecht, BVHD County; Zachary Collins, RESPEC; Garth Haugland, BHWC/BVHD County; Dean Peterson, BHWC/Rancher; Scott Reynolds, BHWC/sportsman; and Brandy Janzen, BLM.

Introductions *Attendees introduced themselves.*

Meeting Minutes *September 2016 meeting minutes were reviewed, no additions or corrections.*

Reports

Streamflow Report –Mike Roberts, DNRC (via email)

- After a nearly record-setting and extremely dry period running from June through mid-September, above average precipitation coupled with moderate temperatures provided much needed late-summer and early-fall relief to streamflows throughout the Big Hole watershed.
- All real-time stream gages are reporting average to above average flows at this time.
- October marks the beginning of the new water year and snowpack accumulation at high elevations is maintaining an average pace though it is way too early to analyze.
- Forecast: NOAA Climate Prediction Center predicts average temperatures and above average temperatures for the next three months.

Drought Management Plan – Jennifer Downing

- BHWC staff will be attending Montana Watershed Coordination Council annual symposium next week – as part of that, Jen will participate in a panel to discuss drought planning and help startup groups begin developing drought plans.
- There is growing momentum for the 2017 Legislative session to include drought discussions in their planning.
 - What other tools are there to address water supply besides asking ranchers to cut back their irrigation?
 - *Comments:*
 - *“I think people forget why the drought plan was started. We’ve gone a long ways from where we started – I think the DMP is working. How do we review what some of our core principals were to come up with the drought plan? A lot of thought and reason went into it. Maybe we need to kind of review, to inform people so they can get educated, where we were in 2005 and why it [water storage] went to the wayside. Education and outreach is key.”*
 - *“This was as tough a water year as we ever had – we couldn’t maintain our target flows – but the river didn’t go dry. It continued to run through a very tough year.”*
 - *“I’d guess 90% of the water coming down the tributaries was going into the river – even if we’d had 100%, it wouldn’t have been enough to hit target flows. It just wasn’t there.”*
 - ***Should we discuss/review water storage alternatives in 2017?***

Director's Report - Jennifer Downing

- It is fall fundraising time, so we're gearing up for our annual appeal.
- Missouri Headwaters Partnership: Started working on reinvigorating this group last year, giving it some direction and finding additional funding. BHWC is chairing the organization for the next two years. Will put together a website to identify groups involved in MHP. This will hopefully help us to bring in some additional funding.
 - **Potluck: December 1st, 2016 at the Divide Grange**
- Mt. Haggin Wildlife Management Area restoration projects:
 - French & Moose Creeks: Moose Creek started, nearly done. French Gulch project is complete. It has 3 miles of brand new stream and looks beautiful. We're also removing an additional ~15,000 cubic yards of mine tailings with some funding that was left over. We'll be able to make the floodplain 5 times wider than originally planned. Plan is to be completely done with construction by October 31st. Beaver structures added, will turn the stream into a perennial channel again.
 - "This project has been kind of a slam dunk, between the contactors, the engineers, and the watershed committee – it's just been a really great team." – Pedro Marques, BHWC Restoration Programs Manager
 - Mt. Haggin Uplands: Finished DNRC planning grant/demonstration project. Vegetation increased from 0-5% over the timespan of the project. The addition of nitrogen gave the plants enough "juice" to actually flower, and you could hear the pollinators buzzing on Joiner Gulch. The planning grant set us up to apply for a larger pot of money to continue restoring these bare hillsides.
 - On the other side of the divide, we're looking into the feasibility of using heavy equipment for restoration work. Trying some more aggressive approaches to things like creating natural water storage. The water is on the landscape, and if the soil and vegetation is right, the water can stay on the landscape.

Steering Committee – Randy Smith

- Steering Committee is happy with progress BHWC is making.

Wildlife Report – Jim Hagenbarth, Dean Peterson, Tana Nulph

- Funding:
 - Livestock Loss Board provided an additional \$17,000 in State funding for the carcass removal program and carcass compost facility. This is in addition to the \$33,000 in Federal funding granted for the range rider programs and compost facility.
 - Cinnabar Foundation provided \$2,000 for carcass removal.
- Programs:
 - Grizzly Bears:
 - Holding Bear Awareness Trainings in Wisdom and Wise River next week (flier attached).
 - Invited to participate in Southwest Montana Bear Education Working Group coordination meetings.
 - People and Carnivores providing bear-resistant garbage cans to Big Hole residents free-of-charge (donations accepted and go toward the next order of cans). Trash cans will be shipped soon to the Wise River USFS Ranger Station and Tana Nulph, BHWC Conservation Programs Coordinator, will coordinate their distribution. Contact Tana if interested in receiving a bear-resistant trash can for your Big Hole business or residence (contact information below).
 - Middle Big Hole Range Rider program:
 - Developing a 2nd Range Rider program for grazing allotments between Wisdom and Wise River.
 - Contact Tana Nulph, BHWC Conservation Programs Coordinator, if interested in enrolling allotments. (406-267-3421 or tnulph@bhwc.org).
 - Carcass Composting:
 - MDT reviewing lease agreement between BHWC/MDT to use their land for compost site. Hoping to set up the site before the end of November.

- Carcass removal will be offered Spring 2017 (February – May) for ranches in the upper Big Hole and Grasshopper valleys. The carcasses will be picked up by a dump truck, driven by BHWC staff, and hauled to the compost facility.
- The purpose of the carcass management programs is to remove predator attractant from the landscape in order to make predators work for their meals, to keep their populations in check, and to prevent them from forming the habit of preying upon livestock.

Land Use Planning Report – Pedro Marques

- Big Hole River Incentive Program:
 - The goal of this program is work cooperatively with landowners and find solutions that work for them and are informed by consultants/technical advisors. Working with landowners to choose what's right for their property – not a top down approach.
 - What we've learned is that by incentivizing projects, we are learning about issues that weren't necessarily on our radar – and this is a good thing, because BHWC is in a good place to work cooperatively with landowners to get these issues resolved.
 - The incentive program helps us identify those landowners who want to do good work on their property, but just need the information and/or tools to get it done.
 - A lot of information and challenges have come out of this first year.
 - BHRIP is transferring to be completely under BHWC's management (rather than BHWC/Future West) in 2017.
 - Great interest – one additional project that is eligible for a maintenance payment and will also address an old bridge abutment that is diverting water into a rancher's stream bank and degrading it.
 - One project by Melrose should be complete by now.

Meeting Topic: Emergency Response and Pre-disaster Mitigation in Beaverhead County and the Big Hole River Watershed

Presentation by: Tom Wagenknecht, Beaverhead County Disaster and Emergency Services Coordinator; and Zachary Collins, RESPEC.

Background: Emergency response and pre-disaster mitigation (PDM) planning are important tools for managing water quality and quantity, floodplain health, climatic variability, and other ecosystem impacts that result from emergency situations. Beaverhead County and Madison County have contracted with RESPEC to update their existing pre-disaster mitigation plans. FEMA has funding available for PDM projects, which includes projects addressing drought resiliency and floodplains. Integrating the goals and interests of BHWC with the PDM is a valuable endeavor for funding and for taking next steps for Land Use Planning related to floodplains

Beaverhead County Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) – Tom Wagenknecht

- Tom Wagenknecht is Beaverhead County's DES coordinator. He can be reached using the following contact information:
 - Address: 2 S. Pacific Street, STE #12, Dillon, MT 59725
 - Telephone: 406-683-3770
 - E-mail: twagenknecht@beaverheadcounty.org
- DES: To tie in/coordinate all emergency services and bring them into a comprehensive emergency operations plan that includes every resource and entity within Beaverhead County.
- Beaverhead County Department of Environmental Health:

- As County Sanitarian, Tom also works with water quality, permitting of waste treatment centers, HAZMAT, domestic wells, public water systems, wastewater treatment systems, solid waste, recycling, etc.
- **Big Hole River**
 - Highway 43 (has experienced some bad vehicles accidents.)
 - Highway 15
 - Union Pacific Railroad
 - Tanker wrecks (spill contaminants)
 - Train accident at Glen (2015):
 - Luckily the tankers did not rupture – they were carrying Magnesium chloride and it could have been a very bad spill.
 - Wreck a few years ago at Dewey:
 - Carrying Magnesium chloride and diesel fuel – it spilled into the river.
 - A primary concern regarding emergencies in the Big Hole watershed is our distance from many emergency responders – if a remediation group is called in from Missoula (because they may be the only ones with the tools to address the particular issue), they may not arrive for several hours.
- **Emergency Response**
 - **First Responders**
 - Local
 - Dillon volunteer fire department
 - Beaverhead Ambulance
 - Beaverhead Search and Rescue
 - Red Cross
 - Mutual Aid (Montana Mutual Aid Agreement)
 - Neighboring Fire/EMS, etc.
 - Montana Disaster and Emergency Services
 - State Resources
 - Hazmat Teams – Missoula, Bozeman, etc.
 - Montana National Guard – Civil Support Team
 - Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA)
 - Emergency responders must be trained to meet “awareness level” of placards for identification of hazards.
 - When a call comes in for a HAZMAT, it will go to 911 – Sheriff’s dispatch will page assistance from the fire department/DES. Other resources include DOT books, HAZMAT plan HAZMAT team (decided by incident commander), know who to call (Chemtrec 1-800-424-9300, Chemtel 1-800-255-3924), WISER app and program.
- Beaverhead County received Homeland Security grant last year to update noon siren in Dillon.
 - Received \$80,000 to update the siren/emergency warning system.
 - 550 lbs, in a wood frame, on 3 phase power, needs replaced.
 - Replacements will be placed at the University, next to the Fire Hall, and Search and Rescue.



Pre-disaster Mitigation Planning – Zachary Collins

- Zachary Collins, RESPEC, is the contractor who has been hired to update the PDM plans for Beaverhead and Madison Counties.

- The Beaverhead County PDM plan is being updated in conjunction with the Madison County PDM plan (so they have the same format). “Trying to work with our neighbors in the event of a really bad day.”- Tom Wagenknecht, Beaverhead County.
- PDM is what to do before the disaster actually happens.
- The important thing about PDM plans is that it will allow groups to access funding from FEMA (and potentially other sources).
- FEMA just began incorporating drought in their priorities – they’re still figuring out how to do cost/benefit analyses for drought.
- BHWC hosted a tour with FEMA on the lower Big Hole River near Melrose in August.
 - *“You guys (BHWC) did a great job on the FEMA tour – you really gave them a lot to think about and showed them how this program could work in a rural area.” – Zachary Collins, RESPEC.*
- The update process is on a 5 year cycle – if there are any issues that don’t get incorporated this time around, we’ll have another chance in 5 years.
- Public meetings will be held in Madison/BVHD Counties. Big Hole meeting will potentially be in Wisdom.
- Timeline
 - Public meetings this fall.
 - PDM plan must be submitted by FEMA by January 31st. It usually takes 1-2 months to approve an update.
 - County adoption (by March/April).
 - FEMA grant cycle begins around April.

Discussion:

- *“What happened with the river spill kits?”*
 - *“Union Pacific purchased some booms and other spill kits and provided them to Melrose Fire Department and other locations – we need consistent training for these tools and potentially additional/new supplies.”*
- *“Does Union Pacific carry response items/spill kits on their trains – they’re the first ones there in case of a disaster – it would be good for them to have supplies onboard.”*
 - *“No, they don’t carry such supplies. The closest equipment they have is in Idaho Falls. Until they show up, it’s dependent on local first responders to take care of it.”*
 - *“Can we make the suggestion for them to carry response kits?”*
 - *“We can make the request but they probably will say they’re already meeting their requirements for response plans. It comes back to needing increased training and supplies for local responders.”*
 - **Beaverhead County will have training opportunities available for first responders in the near future.**
- *“If there’s no funding attached to this PDM plan, where does the money come from?”*
 - *“The funding will be available through grants provided by FEMA, but in order to be eligible for FEMA funding for emergency response, the issues we’re trying to address MUST be included in the county PDM plan.”*
- *“Have you heard anything from Union Pacific or been working with them on this plan?”*
 - *“They have not been too involved up to this point. We have some local relations with the people that work on this section of railroad, but they haven’t been showing up regularly at planning meetings. Working on strengthening relations with UP.”*
 - *“The length of track between Beaverhead and Silver Bow County doesn’t get a lot of use (2 trains per day), but the track is old and not in great shape.”*
 - *“When you see the trains go by with all the different placards on the tankers you start wondering – what are they carrying and what would happen if they turned over into the river?”*
 - *“Statistically, there are far more accidents with semi-trucks on the interstate than with trains.”*
 - *“That’s true, but trains are bigger.”*

- *“Union Pacific doesn’t want this [train accidents] to happen either. I think they do a pretty good job. Neglect definitely has happened in that industry, but I do think they’re doing better about it.”*

Upcoming Meetings

- November 16, 2016, BHWC public meeting, 6pm @ Divide Grange. Topic: Big Hole River Fisheries.
- No public meetings in December or January.

Adjourn