



# Big Hole Watershed Committee

Monthly Meeting Minutes

May 17, 2018 – 7:00 pm

Divide Grange – Divide, Montana

## In Attendance

Tana Nulph, BHWC; Pedro Marques, BHWC; Jim Hagenbarth, Rancher/BHWC; John Moodry, Butte-Silver Bow County; John Jackson, Beaverhead County; Peter Frick, Rancher/BHWC; Diana Morris, Rancher; Michelle Anderson, UMW; Scott Reynolds; Amber Burch, Beaverhead County; Steve Luebeck, Sportsman/BHWC; Brian Ohs, MTU; Wade Fellin, BHRF; David Dockery, Wild Rivers Consulting; Jessica Dhaemers, USFS-Wisdom; Lucas Phillips, USFS-Butte; Jim Wierba; Jane Wierba; Ben Cross, USFS; Mark Kambich, Rancher/BHWC; Lee Toman; Paul Cleary, BHWC; Sandy Cleary; Matt Barnes, Morrison-Maierle, Inc.; Dave Green, FWP; John Whittingham, Basic Biological Services; Liz Jones, Rancher/BHWC; and Roy Morris, GGTU/BHWC.

**Introductions** Attendees introduced themselves.

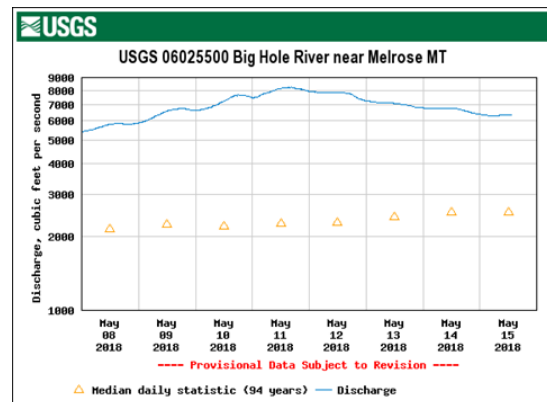
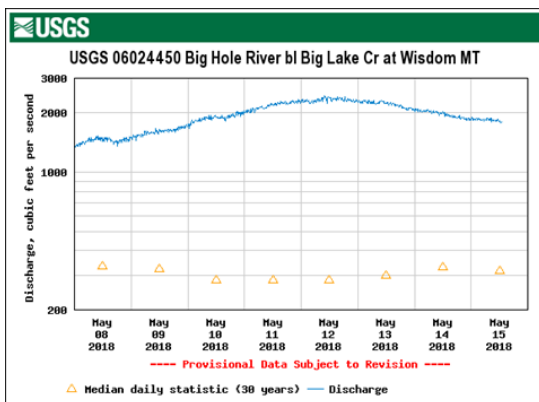
**Meeting Minutes** April 2018 meeting minutes were reviewed, no additions or corrections.

## Reports

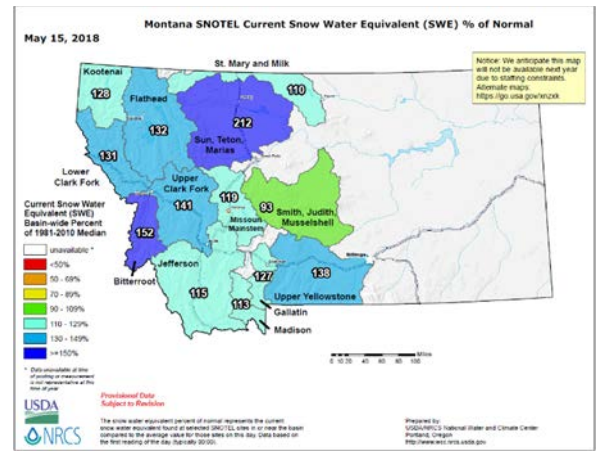
*Streamflow/Snowpack Report – Mike Roberts, DNRC and Jacqueline Knutson, MFWP*

- **Streamflows:** As of the beginning of May, most low-to-mid-elevation sites have transitioned to active melt that started during the last ten days of April. In most locations, the higher elevations are still holding snow water and not discharging at this time. The rapid increases in streamflows on many rivers and streams were due to snowmelt runoff at the end of the month due to the warm, sunny days and above freezing temperatures at mountain locations and precipitation continuing to regularly fall around southwest Montana. Streamflows have been well above average on the Big Hole and I expect streamflows to remain high through the end of the month and possibly through June depending, of course, on precipitation and temperature.

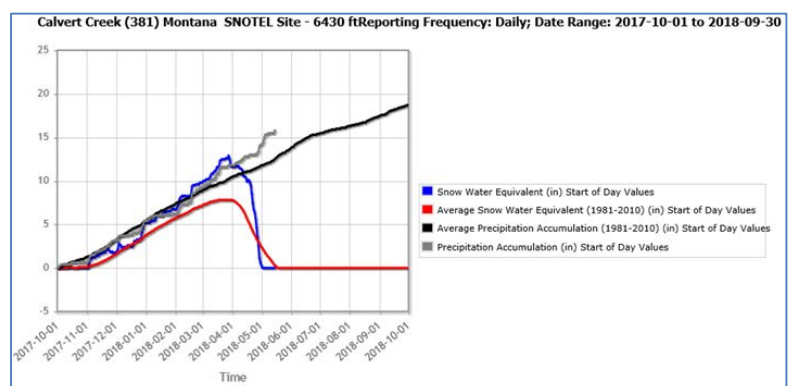
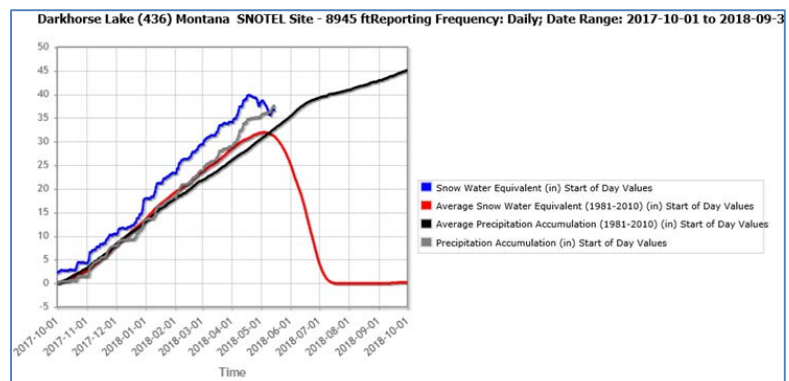
<a href="#">06023500</a>	Big Hole River near Jackson MT	2.43	107	189	--	05/15
<a href="#">06023800</a>	Big Hole River ab Spring Creek nr Jackson MT	3.11	120	174	--	05/15
<a href="#">06024020</a>	Big Hole River at Miner Creek nr Jackson MT	3.74	343	883	--	05/15
<a href="#">06024450</a>	Big Hole River bl Big Lake Cr at Wisdom MT	5.08	315	1,800	12.3	05/15
<a href="#">06024540</a>	Big Hole River bl Mudd Cr nr Wisdom MT	5.61	1,409	4,030	11.0	05/15
<a href="#">06024580</a>	Big Hole River near Wise River MT	5.93	2,210	5,360	<a href="#">Ssn</a>	05/15
<a href="#">06025250</a>	Big Hole River at Maiden Rock nr Divide MT	6.61	2,350	6,180	<a href="#">Ssn</a>	05/15
<a href="#">06025500</a>	Big Hole River near Melrose MT	5.42	2,530	6,340	11.9	05/15
<a href="#">06026210</a>	Big Hole River near Glen MT	5.70	2,200	6,380	<a href="#">Ssn</a>	05/15
<a href="#">06026420</a>	Big Hole R bl Hamilton Ditch nr Twin Bridges, MT	5.19	2,410	6,290	11.7	05/15



- Snowpack:** The Big Hole Basin is at 131% of average. The Jefferson Basin is at 115% of average. Mid and lower elevation sites are rapidly clearing of snow but upper elevation sites are still well above average and seem to be holding well. Precipitation events could rapidly change the current snowpack situation and release water into the valley. It is promising that there is still a strong snowpack in the mid and upper elevations as we enter the latter half of May but lower elevation snowpack melted off faster than average. This is something to watch as we wait for the rest of the snow that is primed for runoff.
- Precipitation:** April precipitation was, as seemed to be the case this winter, above average in southwestern Montana. Much of that April precipitation came as snow and many valleys throughout the western half of the state saw low elevation snow accumulation. Future weather will play a critical role in determining runoff this year, and water users are strongly encouraged to monitor any weather and flood forecasts issued during the months of May and June. Hopefully the wet and cool pattern will persist.
- Temperatures:** Temperatures in April were average although temperature was not recorded often last month. May has been a mixed bag although temperatures have been increasing and look as though they will continue to do so. Temperatures will likely be above normal for May.
- Forecast:** During April ENSO-neutral conditions returned. These conditions are expected to continue through September and possibly through November. The chance of El Nino conditions setting in for the winter of 18-19 is increasing and nearing a 50% chance. ENSO-neutral conditions in southwest Montana mean some variability in summer weather patterns but it is likely that we will see average temperatures and precipitation. Along with our robust snowpack this bodes well for the summer however we will have to wait until after spring for forecasters to feel confident in long-term predictions.
- The three-month outlook currently favors below average precipitation and average temperatures.



Station	elevation	15-May	15-May	1981-2010	
		2017	2018	median	2018
		inches	inches	inches	% avg
Barker Lakes	8250	12.6	18.5	15.1	123
Basin Creek	7180	1.4	5.9	7.6	78
Bloody Dick	7600	6.8	8.4	2.5	336
Calvert Creek	6430	0	0	0	0
Darkhorse Lake	8600	32.8	36.7	30.6	120
Moose Creek	6200	0	1.2	1.4	86
Mule Creek	8300	16.3	19.7	14.8	133
Saddle Mtn.	7940	24.4	30.3	20.1	151
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>94.3</b>	<b>120.7</b>	<b>92.1</b>	
<b>BASIN AVERAGE %</b>			<b>131</b>		



*Drought Management Plan – Jim Hagenbarth, Vice-Chairman*

- No changes to the DMP from 2017. The 2018 version has not been published yet, but the 2017 version is still valid as there have been no updates.

*Director's Report – Jim Hagenbarth, Vice-Chairman*

- Summer newsletter coming out soon!
- Jen to speak on stream budget issue at WPIC meeting May 21-22.

*Steering Committee – Randy Smith, Chairman; Jim Hagenbarth, Vice-Chairman; and Roy Morris, Secretary*

- Steering Committee is happy with the progress BHWC is making and has been more active than usual in light of Jen's leave of absence. They are happy with the progress BHWC is making.

*Wildlife Report – Jim Hagenbarth, Vice-Chairman and Tana Nulph, Conservation Programs Coordinator*

- BHWC provided carcass removal service to Big Hole livestock producers free-of-charge from mid-March to mid-May. Carcasses were picked up and hauled to our carcass compost site just outside of Wisdom.
- BHWC also partnered with the Centennial Valley Association to remove carcasses at Sage Creek for Centennial Valley livestock producers. Carcasses were picked up and hauled to the Beaverhead County Landfill.
- Wildlife Speaker Series event: The 2018 Wildlife Speaker Series – Big Hole event will be held Wednesday, July 25, 2018 – 6pm at the Wise River Community Building. The event will include a potluck dinner. Topic: Western Pearlshell Mussels. Presenter: Dave Stagliano, Montana Biological Survey. Potluck starts at 6pm, presentation starts at 7pm.
- Jim working with State of Montana on hunting & road management issues. The DNRC out of Dillon formed a working group to address road use issues. The tone of the meetings has been positive & collaborative. This is a good move and a big step toward helping hunters & landowners work together.
- Big Hole Sage Grouse Working Group is collaring sage grouse.
- Brucellosis interview through Common Ground – very educational and worth hearing.

*Restoration and Land Use Planning Report – Pedro Marques, Restoration Programs Manager*

- Big Hole River Incentive Program: Delayed completing 3 bank stabilization projects this spring, which turned out to be a really good idea because they would have been washed away by high water. These projects are lined up and ready for implementation in the fall.
- Mount Haggin: Proposals in the works for 3 more projects on Mount Haggin.
  - French Creek sediment control project
  - Upper French Gulch
  - Oregon Creek
- French Creek fish barrier project: Montana Fish, Wildlife and Park's project. This is a native fish restoration project that ties in with the restoration work we've been doing on Mount Haggin. Jim Olsen, FWP, will be taking a Montana Standard reporter to see FWP's Cherry Creek project, a similar native fish reintroduction project. Jim is accepting public comment on the proposed project until May 31<sup>st</sup>, and your comments are important. Please get in touch with Jim if you have anything to say about the project.
- *Discussion:*
  - *I hope people look down the road at what could happen if those species aren't taken care of. The regulations that are happening now because of sage creek (see below – 6 week wait for construction projects) represent what could happen if we don't secure at least one spot for Arctic grayling and Westslope cutthroat trout down the road.*
  - *Montana DEQ is now requiring a sage grouse consultation letter for any construction project that is greater than 1 acre, whether you think your project is in core habitat area or not. These letters can take up to 6 weeks, so if you're looking at construction projects, this is potentially a big deal.*
    - *Is that regulation statewide?*

- Yes.

## New Business

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### Meeting Topic: Managing Invasive Weeds in the Big Hole Watershed

*John Moodry, Butte-Silver Bow County Weed Control*  
*Amber Burch, Beaverhead County Weed District*  
*Jessica Dhaemers, United States Forest Service – Wisdom/Wise River*  
*Lucas Phillips, United States Forest Service – Butte*  
*Dave Green, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks*  
*John Whittingham, Basic Biological Services*

*Background:* Local invasive weed control groups presented the results of several Big Hole River watershed weed control efforts as well as plans for 2018.

#### **John Moodry, Butte-Silver Bow County Weeds Coordinator**

- BSB is 2-3 weeks behind where they were at this time last year due to weather conditions and snowpack. They have been spraying on and off for the last few weeks when possible.
- With this recent sunshine and warmer temperatures, the weeds are coming.
- A big issue is BSB is that Union Pacific Railroad is no longer contracting with the county to spray weeds along the railroad. They are bringing in a private contractor to spray the weeds. Please let BSB know if you live near the railroad and have any issues with weeds or with the performance of the private contractor. BSB will put UP in noncompliance if necessary.
- Assistance agreement funded county contracts to do work on BLM property. These agreements are no longer being renewed or modified. As it stands currently, BSB and Madison Counties no longer have assistance agreements. These funds are very crucial to counties to manage weeds on public property. If you don't see weeds crews out on BLM land in BSB this year, this is why.
- Legislative push through MWCA to increase vehicle registration cost by roughly \$1.50. If this goes through, it will generation ~\$1 million for weed control around the state. BSB would get ~\$15,000 and it would be used to support cost share & other landowners assistance projects. ***BSB requests support of BHWC for this proposed legislation.***
- BSB contracted Andy Orr with Orr Aviators to do aerial spraying. Call John to get on the list: 406-497-6462.
- Spray dates:
  - 6/12 – 8am – Fleecer Game Range – Meet at East Entrance
  - 6/13 – 8am – German Gulch/High Ride – Meet at Old Fairmont Store
- *Discussion:*
  - *There is a place on the BSB side of the river, just above Dewey, where the weeds are out of control. On BLM land.*
    - *That's a difficult area to access, but would be a great place for BLM to do some aerial spraying.*
  - *How are the bugs doing?*
    - *They're doing great, but we don't have enough of them. They won't eradicate weeds, but they help.*
  - *Have you seen the yellow dwarf alyssum as a problem in BSB?*
    - *Yes. In higher elevations, we don't have nearly as much of a problem. Once you go above 5,500 feet, you don't see them as much. They are a problem in the Feeley area.*
  - *Can you give us some information as to how a landowner would set up a new spray day?*
    - *Sure, you get in touch with your neighbors and schedule the spray day, and BSB will help. If you have a homeowners' association, they are a good place to start.*

## **Amber Burch, Beaverhead County Weeds Coordinator**

- 2017
  - BVHD County has a new noxious weed field guide.
  - The process to add species to the state noxious weed list is open right now.
  - BVHD County has contracts with BLM. Treated 225 acres for BLM in 2017.
  - BOR – Clark Canyon Dam – treated 11 acres. They also hire some private contractors. There is a sizable weed problem around the dam. Knapweed and leafy spurge.
  - BVHD County roads/property – 141 acres
  - MDT – 131 acres
  - FWP – 10.5 acres at Poindexter Slough. Also hires private contractors for some of the FAS that need more work.
  - Union Pacific Railroad – having similar issues as in BSB County. BVHD County has typically done work for UP, but now they want to hire their own contractor. UP intends to broadcast spray along railroad, which is probably more than is needed. The result is that additional forbs will die, which will free up room for more invasives.
    - Dyer's Woad – 6 locations across the state of Montana. Largest infestation is in BVHD County. A large portion of this infestation is on Union Pacific property. Dyer's Woad has an accelerated growth rate and can go from rosette to seed in as little as 2 weeks. BVHD County is monitoring for this weed every other week. Weeds are mechanically removed and the area sprayed. This is a very invasive, aggressive species, and the protocol for Dyer's Woad is total eradication. BVHD County has data back to the 1990s RE: the number, location, and life stage of Dyer's Woad plants found in Montana. Because the Dyer's Woad is on the State list, the Montana Agriculture Department has threatened to quarantine the railroad at the Idaho/Montana border if UP is put in noncompliance.
    - BVHD County continues to jump through UP hoops, including costly E-Rail Trainings & signing a release of liability, but UP has decided to hire contractors instead of working with BVHD County. BVHD County is prepared to put UP in noncompliance if necessary.
  - Contractor treated Birch Creek area through RAC project as well as 10 acres at Argenta, 33.5 acres up Quartz Hill, 29.5 acres on county roads, 12.5 acres on Continental Divide Trail.
  - Combined aerial work between Wise River USFS/BVHD County. Funded by RMEF grant.
  - Noxious Weeds Trust Fund Grant – funded by a portion of vehicle registration.
    - Clark Canyon: 903 acres
  - Cooperative Spray Days: 31 scheduled last year, 2 cancelled due to weather
- 2018:
  - Applicators' training/crew training May 29-31 in Whitehall
  - Had 2 seasonal employees start beginning of May – working on getting equipment ready
  - Tomorrow will be first day of spraying if the weather holds
  - 3 new seasonals will start on Monday
  - Spraying 2-3 weeks earlier this year to try to hit henbane
  - Received funding to treat Beaverhead River corridor.
  - Received \$28,000 to treat Big Hole River corridor:
    - Lower section to Dickens Weed Control – Shaun Dickens sold his company to Charlie McDougal.
    - Upper section to Todd Maki
- Funding to work with landowners in the Argenta area.
- House Bill 434 created a new grants program for noxious weeds projects that benefit wildlife habitat. First council meeting is this Friday, and 9 projects will be reviewed. FWP will make the funding decisions. There will be another funding cycle this fall (applications due around December/January).
- Weed Whacker Ball:
  - The 2018 Weed Whacker Ball will be held Saturday, September 8<sup>th</sup> this year.
  - 2017 Weed Whacker Ball:
    - Raised ~\$14,000

- All of the money raised at the Weed Whacker Ball stays in the Big Hole watershed and goes toward treating invasive weeds.
- *Cooperative Weed Spray Days attached.*
- *Discussion:*
  - *What about the oxeye daisy on the byway? Is anyone treating that?*
    - *That area is funded through SRS – it has been reauthorized, but BVHD County doesn't have any crews spraying the byway at this time.*
  - *Are there maps to show or record where the weeds are?*
    - *Yes, the State wants us to use an app called EDDMapS West or EDDMapS Pro. You can use the app even without cell service. If you mark weeds in the system, alerts will be sent to county coordinators. Can submit photos and waypoints for weeds on public or private land. On Tuesday, 5-22 at 6pm, Jasmine Reimer, USFS, will be at the 4H building in Dillon giving a demonstration on how to use the app. The app also includes the State noxious weeds list with pictures for easy identification.*
      - *This app could be useful for river guides, because they see so much of the river.*

### **Jessica Dhaemers, United States Forest Service – Wisdom/Wise River**

- 2017:
  - 3 seasonal employees and 2 permanent employees as well as volunteers
  - Agreement with the County
  - Secure Rural Schools funds/RAC funds – treated approximately 600 acres
  - Rush Skeletonweed in the Big Hole:
    - Located in the fall of 2015
    - Treated and monitored in 2016: state skeletonweed taskforce surveyed area
    - Monitored in 2017 – no plants found at the site.
      - Takes 3-4 years of not finding any plants for the State to consider if eradicated.
  - Cooperative Aerial Spray Contract:
    - Funded by RMEF, USFS, BLM
    - Cooperative project with Beaverhead County
    - Forest Units Treated:
      - \$18,000 in Title 2 Secure Rural Schools funds
      - ~\$10,000 in RMEF funds
    - Funds remaining for spring treatment in 2018
    - This was a great project with cooperative between Federal & State agencies, counties, and private landowners.
- 2018:
  - 5 Seasonal employees (2 Wisdom, 3 Wise River)
  - 2 Permanent employees (Jessica Dhaemers & Ben Cross – Range/Weeds)
  - Volunteers:
    - County Cooperative Spray Days
    - Locals, Grazing permittees
  - UTV sprayer
  - Cooperative aerial spray day project along I-15 corridor
  - Pintler Face Project surveys and planning
  - Consider cooperative weed management in Toomey Creek area
  - If you have any private land between Christiansen Creek and Harriet Lou Creek (W. Pioneers), USFS can help out with grant money they've received. Contact Jessica or Ben for more information.

### **Lucas Phillips, United States Forest Service – Butte**

- Fleecer Cooperative Weed Treatment Project with BLM/FWP/USFS/RMEF/BSB/BVHD County.
  - *The Need:*

- Fleecer Mountain has a major knapweed infestation. When you drive by in the spring/summer and it looks purple, that's all knapweed.
  - The Fleecer Mountain area is comprised of critical elk and mule deer winter range as well as year around and summer range habitats. The Fleecer Mountain Wildlife Management Area is adjacent to FS, BLM and private lands in this area. Improving site conditions here may help reduce conflicts between elk and area ranchers over elk winter damage on private lands. Noxious weeds in this area are reducing the native species composition and richness on National Forest system lands and adjoin State, BLM and private lands.
  - There has not been a lot of time & effort invested in this area previously, but these groups are working together to change that.
- *The Objective:*
  - To reduce or eliminate invasive plants across all ownerships in the Fleecer Mountain area within critical elk and mule deer winter range to improve site conditions to reestablish a stable desirable native plant community on the currently affected sites.
- *The Strategy:*
  - A focus area was chosen in cooperation with adjoin private lands owners, the state, and the BLM. This project is the first step in a three-year intensive treatment program aimed at stemming the spread of invasive plants within the Fleecer Mountain area. It will be followed by additional follow up herbicide application, introduction of Root Weevil and Flower Weevils, and potential selective reseeded with a native grass and forb mix to reestablish desirable native vegetation where needed.
  - Primary application was aerially applied herbicide with helicopter, secondary application was with ground crews.
  - Within the spray area, additional areas which can't be treated aerially, will be hand treated with ground crews. This is usually in areas where infestations are smaller, more manageable and can be eradicated. Additional areas will be inventoried and proposed for future treatment both with chemical means as well as with biological agents. Previous efforts in the Fleecer Mountain area have been independent activities performed by all of the cooperators at varying levels of intensity, frequency and widely scattered.
  - Aerial application focused on native grass communities and higher elevation park lands.
  - Ground application focused on road sides and forested areas.
- **Knapweed Root Weevil:**
  - Females lay approximately 100 eggs.
  - Larvae mine the central taproot.
  - Over-winters as larvae in the root.
  - Adults emerge from late July to the middle of September.
  - Adults do not survive the winter.
- **Knapweed Flower Weevil:**
  - Over-winters as adult weevils
  - Adults gather at plant when flower bud appears.
  - Females lay eggs on the flowers.
  - Larvae hatch and consume the seed.
  - Emerge as adults in late summer, fly away and over-winter.
- USFS/FWP got a Good Neighbor Authority agreement in place which allowed them to cooperatively treat weeds.
- **Cooperators:**
  - Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
  - BLM- Butte Field Office
  - United States Forest Service – Butte Ranger District
  - \*Adjoining private land owner annually treats weed infestations on their private lands with Aerial spray contracts to combat the knapweed problem.
- **Funding sources:**
  - Private landowner: \$10,000
  - RMEF Grant: \$17,000



- FWP (650 acres): \$13,000
- USFS (850 acres): \$17,000
- BLM (200 acres): \$10,000

### **Dave Green, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks**

- Vanna Boccadori, FWP, would normally talk to us about weeds on Fleecer & Mount Haggin, but she was unable to attend the May meeting and sent Dave Green in her stead.
- Fleecer has been a “problem child” for several years. John works with Vanna on managing invasive weeds on Fleecer, but his crew is limited and covers a huge area. John has been trying to get additional full time employees, but has been unsuccessful to-date. Region 2, out of Warm Springs, has agreed to share some full time employees to cover the Fleecer area, which should be a huge help this year.
- Will conduct more aerial spraying this year as funding is available. John and Vanna are working on a plan for this fall.
- It all hinges on money & people and you have to have both.

### **John Whittingham, Basic Biological Services**

- Vegetation management company, used proactive strategies including aggressive revegetation immediately following restoration projects.
- Company founded by John Whittingham and Linda Walent.
- Land rehabilitation, habitat enhancement, soil and water conservation
  - Design, permitting, installation, Environmental field services and consulting
  - 100s of projects throughout SW Montana and Eastern Idaho
  - Bonded, licensed, certified pesticide applicators since 2000
  - MSHA, HAZWOPER certified
  - 5 commercial MDA Pesticide license, ~3,000 applications
  - Professional Wetland Scientist (PWS #2155)
  - Certified Professional Erosion and Sediment Control (CPESC #3445)
  - Well insured, no liability claims or lost-time injuries
- Project driven with emphasis on vegetation:
  - Streams, wetland, and range restoration
  - Forestry, wildfire prevention, and rehabilitation
  - Mining and heavy construction
  - Noxious and nuisance weed control
  - Brush and invasive plant control
  - Chemical, mechanical, and biological methods
  - Revegetation and soil amendments
  - Erosion and sediment control
  - Fire fuel reduction
- Soil amendments:
  - Compaction
  - Organic matter
    - Riverside/barrow pit reclamation (recently completed a 19-acre project near Melrose)
    - Revegetated bridge crossings in Ennis
- Reclamation seeding:
  - Pastures
  - Slopes
- Restoration seeding:
  - Wetlands – spray weeds prior to construction and has found this method to be very successful. Re-seed area post-construction and offer 5 years of weed spraying upon project completion.
- Noxious weed control:
  - Herbicides
    - Remote site work
  - Mechanical removal



- Combination of mechanical removal & herbicides is much more effective than spraying alone; however, using both methods also significantly increases the cost of treatment.
- Wildfire prevention:
  - Rehabilitation
  - Residential/WUI work
- Big Hole Watershed projects completed by BBS:
  - Polyacrylamide used to reduce canal seepage loss, Humbert and Raffety Ranches, Technical Paper submitted to NCAT, 2003
  - Beaverhead County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, Authors, 2005
  - Project Inspector, Consultant to MFWP, for over one-hundred fifty 310 Stream Construction Site Inspections, many in the BHW, 2003-2008
  - Upper Big Hole Grayling Re-Introduction Project, Noxious Weed Control, 2012-13
  - Mount Haggin WMA Logging, noxious weed control, timber sale rehab, 2014-16
  - Riverside contracting Maynard Smith borrow-pit rehabilitation, 2014-Present
- *Discussion:*
  - *Do you do anything with conifer encroachment in the Big Hole?*
    - *Yes, we've done a few of these projects outside the auspices of sage grouse habitat restoration. The cost is pretty high and most people are not very inspired to do this work without a cost share.*

*In conclusion, thanks to all of the folks working so hard to manage invasive weeds in our area. Without you, we would be completely inundated with weeds. This is a very important issue, and we appreciate the work that you do.*

#### Upcoming Meetings

- June 20, 2018, 7pm @ the Divide Grange. BHWC Monthly Meeting. Topic: Big Hole Watershed Wildlife Update.
- July 25, 2018, 6pm @ the Wise River Community Building – Wise River, Montana. Wildlife Speaker Series Event. Topic: Western Pearlshell Mussels. Potluck at 6pm, presentation at 7pm.

#### Adjourn