

Big Hole Watershed Committee

FALL 2017 NEWSLETTER

Seeking Understanding & Consensus
Creating Long-term Solutions
for the Big Hole River Watershed
Since 1995



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Aiming for the Wheelhouse, We Are Playing the Long-Game

Focused conservation for a strong, resilient future

Constant change is one thing we can rely on. Some change is welcome and some of it will require some adjustment. While our friends in Helena and beyond are still negotiating how and when the next round of budget cuts will land, you bet there will be some changes that will directly hit the Big Hole. We are fortunate to have an active conservation-minded community that can help navigate these changes. More and more of the responsibility of conservation work falls on the shoulders of local groups like ours.

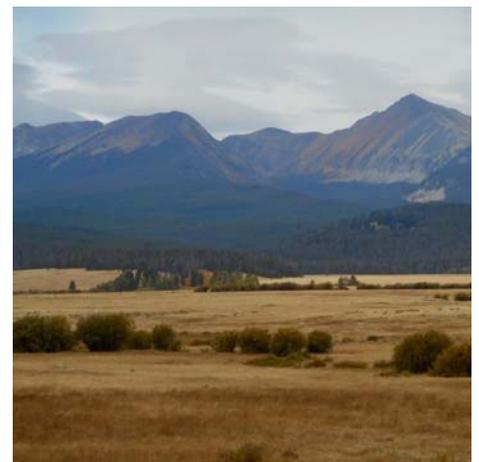
This group continues to consistently support the Big Hole River watershed by delivering high impact, long-standing programs. In the wheelhouse of this operation, this is what we think about as we develop and grow our programs:

1. *Support healthy ecosystems that collectively support a healthy watershed, whether repairing, creating, or maintaining, with a focus on areas that naturally sustain cool, clean water late into the summer like wetlands and riparian areas.*
2. *Use plans, laws, tools, and research that guide decisions related to conservation and use of natural resources.*
3. *Monitor changes and conditions and watch for patterns that show improvement, decline, or maintained ecosystems.*
4. *Strong people, businesses, and communities that understand, support, and participate in conservation . . . and are understood, supported, and encouraged to participate in conservation . . . and the conservation supports their participation.*

Our focus on big gains for the river creates results for long-term reliance of our river, habitat, and community. In two years, \$1.4 million has been invested in direct restoration projects and programs, our biggest year ever. Even more work was implemented from partners. That work reduced sediment loads to the river, supported native fish, increased natural storage of water, supported livestock living peacefully with predators, and supported monitoring of river conditions. As our 2015-2017 projects wind down, we are gearing up for the next two years. We will put more high-impact projects on the ground to increase river flow and water quality and sustain the progress made over our 22 years in existence. The results don't come instantly. We are playing the long-game.

Here is our greatest challenge. While we have quietly been working away to benefit the river and consistently deliver programs, we do not often stop to share the results. If there is such a thing as an introvert conservation group, we're it. In 2017, the Governing Board made their New Years Resolution to share more. We added online content and more public presentations and events. We are excited to share even more in 2018. Thank you for making it all possible and for helping it continue.

Jennifer Downing, Executive Director



Big Hole Watershed Committee

Our Governing Board:

Randy Smith, Chairman,
Rancher
Jim Hagenbarth, Vice Chair,
Rancher
Steve Luebeck, Treasurer,
Sportsman
Roy Morris, Secretary, George
Grant Trout Unlimited

Cindy Ashcraft
Rancher, Business Owner
Jim Berkey,
The Nature Conservancy
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Rancher
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Liz Jones
Rancher
Mark Kambich
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Big Hole River Found.
Erik Kalsta
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Phil Ralston
Rancher
John Reinhardt
Rancher
Ray Weaver
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Bill Kempf
Guiding/Outfitting
John Jackson
BVHD Cty. Commission
Andy Suenram
Resident
Eric Thorson,
Guiding/Outfitting
Paul Cleary
Resident
Mark Raffety
Rancher

Our Staff:

Jennifer Downing,
Executive Director
Tana Nulph,
Conservation Pr. Coord.
Pedro Marques,
Restoration Pr. Mgr.
Chet Robertson,
UBH Range Rider
Johnathan Costa,
Wildlife Pr. Tech.

Our Focus Areas:

- Fish & Water
- Wildlife & Uplands
- People

Meetings We Hope You'll Attend

Our monthly meetings include discussions important to our watershed and public speaker presentations. Our meetings are always open to anyone. Join us to listen and visit with your neighbors. Upcoming meetings include:

- ♦ *BHWC does not meet in December, no public meeting in January. Happy Holidays!*
- ♦ February 21, 2017, 6pm @ the Divide Grange.
Topic: Big Hole River Fishery Report from Jim Olsen, Montana FWP.

Meetings You May Have Missed

If you were there with us, thanks for coming! If not, here's a recap of the topics you missed:

June: Big Game Update from Vanna Boccadori & Craig Fager, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

August: Sandhill Cranes in the Big Hole Watershed with Patrick Donnelly, Intermountain West Joint Venture

September: Big Hole Sage Grouse Update with Vanna Boccadori, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and Jim Magee, USFWS—Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

October: Mount Haggin Restoration Progress Update by Pedro Marques, BHWC Restoration Programs Manager.

November: Big Hole River Channel Migration Zone Map Update with Tony Thatcher, DTM Consulting, Inc. and Karin Boyd, Applied Geomorphology, Inc.

Wish you'd been there? Visit our website, bhwc.org, for detailed notes from all of our meetings.

Are You a State Employee?

BHWC is an enrolled charity organization in Montana's State Employee Charitable Giving Campaign (SECGC); our SECGC # is 5597. Every fall, this campaign allows State employees to choose from over 400 nonprofit organizations to which to designate their charitable donations for the following year. Workplace donations are conveniently placed through optional payroll deductions. The 2017 Campaign runs 9/25-12/31. Visit <http://secgc.mt.gov> to make a donation to the nonprofit organization of your choice.



10 Traits that Make the Big Hole Special

What's your favorite part?

1. Land. So—much—public land.
2. World-class fishing.
3. Breathtaking open spaces & sprawling ranches.
4. Spirit of community.
5. Wildlife.
6. Our businesses
7. Friendly people.
8. Cows. So—many—cows.
9. All 4 seasons (even if some last longer than others).
10. Collaboration. People working together to conserve this wonderful place we call home.

Do you love the Big Hole too? Share your favorite Big Hole photos at #bigholewatershed.

New Cohort Joins the Governing Board

Six New Members Added

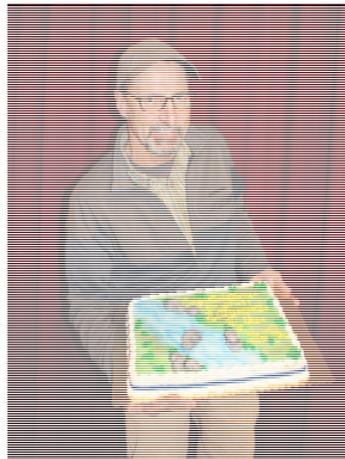
Elections were held June 2017. Each new member spent considerable time attending meetings and talking with current Governing Board members before the election. Careful consideration is made prior to elections in hopes to add members who are committed to participating and supporting conservation using the consensus model. We could not be more pleased with the results. Thank you to each of them for their commitment to join and lead our watershed group. This cohort is a power house:

- Bill Kempf, representing Guiding/Outfitting
- John Jackson, representing Beaverhead County Commission
- Andy Suenram, representing Residents
- Eric Thorson, representing Guiding/Outfitting
- Paul Cleary, representing Residents
- Mark Raffety, representing Ranching in the Lower Big Hole River

These positions were filled from vacancies, except for one. This year we added a second guide/outfitter position on the Governing Board. Our hope was to expand the voice of the guiding and outfitting community on the board, as well as represent diversity among the guiding community.

Mike Roberts, DNRC, Leaves a “Big Hole”

Big Hole River Hydrologist Steps Away After 19 Years



At BHWC's September monthly meeting, long-time DNRC Hydrologist, Mike Roberts, announced his intention to transition to part-time work and relinquish his Big Hole River duties. Mike has worked on flow management for the Big Hole River for nearly 20 years. He directed flow monitoring and flow plans for the Upper Big Hole Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) program for Arctic grayling recovery, working directly with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and irrigators to institute and track flow response that provided conditions required for grayling success. He provided critical technical support to the Big Hole River Drought Management Plan and provided a streamflow/snowpack report monthly. Mike instituted widespread flow monitoring including a suite of

local measurement sites and four upper river real-time USGS gauges. He was integral to the launch of DNRC tributary monitoring in real-time (as the Wise River site is one), and overall has never wavered in supporting both this group and conservation in the Big Hole. He was an asset to this watershed and this organization, a key technical advisor, and the backbone of flow response in this valley. He has been a great friend to BHWC. Mike will leave a “Big Hole” in our watershed. We wish him the very best in his future endeavors. *Photo: We sent him off with this celebratory cake at our September meeting.*

Big Hole Watershed Committee

Recent Events

What Do You Know About Wolverines?

BHWC Holds 2017 Wildlife Speaker Series Event at Great Waters Inn, Melrose

One of our favorite events each year is the Wildlife Speaker Series' annual Big Hole event. The Wildlife Speaker Series was introduced to Southwest Montana by the Wildlife Conservation Society's Community Partnerships Program in 2013 to increase awareness and refocus the conversation about non-game wildlife. Far too often, conversations about wildlife are divisive, disconnecting us from wildlife and leaving us with less time to be inspired by where we live and the creatures with whom we share the landscape. The Wildlife Speaker Series provides a break from these conversations, a chance to sit back with our friends and neighbors and enjoy learning about some of our less controversial wildlife. These events share stories of conservation initiatives and interesting wildlife facts at historical working lands and conservation-oriented venues.



This year, the Big Hole event was held at Great Waters Inn in Melrose. Presenter Kris Inman gave an excellent wolverine presentation backed up by first-hand experience from her years as a wolverine research technician. The presentation included a potluck dinner with beef brisket from Beaverhead Meats as a main course; 69 people attended. Thanks again to Great Waters Inn, everyone who attended, and our wonderful presenter! *[ABOVE RIGHT: Kris Inman, WCS, presents information from her years as a wolverine research technician.]*

We Dig Pint Nights

BHWC Raises Money for Stream Gauges at 2 Pint Nights

BHWC hosted two pint nights this summer to share information about drought management resiliency and raise funds for the Big Hole River stream gauges. (For more information on the stream gauges, see pg. 6.) Our first pint night was held Saturday, June 24th, on a sunny day in Dillon at the Beaverhead Brewing Company. Our second pint night was Thursday, August 31st at Quarry Brewing in Butte. Thanks to both breweries and everyone who attended!

Are You Bear Aware?

BHWC & SW MT Bear Education Working Group offer Free Bear Safety Training

This October, BHWC teamed up with the Southwest Montana Bear Education Working Group to offer a free bear safety training at the Divide Grange. Presenter Danielle Oyler taught 19 attendees how to tell a black bear from a grizzly bear, how to react during different kinds of bear encounters, and best practices to prevent attracting bears to homes and campsites. And then the fun part started—we went outside and practiced with inert bear spray and Danielle's homemade bear decoy. Two attendees won free bear spray, and an 11-year-old with one arm in a sling showed us all up during the practice session. It was a fun and informative evening for all. Thanks, Danielle, for taking the time to make us Bear Aware! *[RIGHT: Attendees practice with inert bear spray.]*





Will You Join Us?

If you're part of our community, you value conservation and know that investments in our land, water and wildlife now reap benefits that we all share together. Grant funds don't cover what your dollars support—things like:

- **Flow Monitoring:** In 2017, we committed to \$8,725 just like we do annually to keep the Big Hole River USGS gages operating. We made this commitment because we know they are important, and we are counting on our supporters to help us cover the cost.
- **Project Development:** From initial meetings with partners, funding requests, working with contractors, and developing a case for funding, project development takes time and is not funded by grants.
- **Outreach:** Each month we provide an opportunity for anyone to join us to learn and discuss our watershed. We also provide additional outreach opportunities as well as updates via website, email, and social media.
- **Support Projects:** From individual, small projects to supporting large projects, donations can provide some much-needed support for projects that need to be polished-off.
- **Involvement:** in regional partnerships that bring resources and knowledge back to our area.
- **Opportunity:** With your support, the opportunities are boundless. We can adapt to meet the needs of our area and our people, expand our programs to support our river, and be flexible to take advantage of great opportunities that come our way.

Help us Help the River by Contributing to BHWC

Big Hole Watershed Committee

Drought Response in the Big Hole Watershed

Big Hole River 2017 Snowpack & Climate Forecast

From Mike Roberts, DNRC Hydrologist, and Jacqueline Knutson, MFWP Hydrology Technician

"Snow has started accumulating in the mountains and early season averages are well above normal. The snowfall has put the Jefferson basin at 345% of normal for the water year which began on October 1st. Keep in mind these percentages can change quickly this early in the water year."

Forecast: "Forecasters ... are predicting a weak La Nina event this winter. Even a weak event is good news for our snowpack as La Nina events are characterized by cooler than normal temperatures and higher than normal precipitation in southwest Montana. The forecast is still slightly tenuous with some anomalies in conditions over the Pacific Ocean but NOAA is expecting to issue a La Nina advisory by the end of the month (October) if current observations continue to hold."

Stream Gauges Important to the Big Hole River

BHWC's Financially Supports Stream Gauges to Monitor Flow and Temperature

We need you to help us keep the river from looking like this. *[RIGHT: Big Hole River near Wisdom during the drought of 1988.]* Each year, BHWC foots the bill for 7 Big Hole River stream gauges using your donations. The gauges measure streamflow and temperature, which are both vital to the survival of fish. They are used by irrigators, guides and anglers, and conservation organizations, and critical to the Big Hole River Drought Management Plan. In 2017, fees were \$8,725. Thanks to your continuing support of BHWC, these stream gauges remain operational. However, the commitment is annual and increasing, and we will continue to need your help to keep these gauges online. We are counting on our supporters to help us cover this cost so that we can all enjoy the convenience of online access to river conditions.



2017 Big Hole River Fishing Restrictions Summary

Section	Flow based Fishing Restrictions	Temperature Based Fishing Restrictions
Section I: Headwaters to North Fork Big Hole River	Closed 9/8 to 9/22 (14 Days)	Hoot Owl Restriction: 7/19 to 8/14 (26 days)
Section II: North Fork Big Hole River to Dickie Bridge		
Section III: Dickie Bridge to Maiden Rock FAS		
Section IV: Maiden Rock FAS to Notchbottom FAS		
Section V: Notchbottom FAS to Mouth	Closed: 9/7 to 9/26 (19 days)	Hoot Owl Restriction: 7/19 to 9/7 when moved to closure (50 days)

Drought Management in the Big Hole Watershed

2017 Drought Season Highlights, Drought Plan Utilized

The drought management plan is utilized when river flows decline and/or water temperatures increase to meet set values that are based on a threshold where conditions negatively impact the fishery.

This spring, we saw runoff gear up in May and reach peak in early June as the warmer weather hit. We started the season strong, supported by a snowpack that was 110% of average and May/June precipitation that was above average. River conditions stayed well above drought targets into the end of July. The upper Big Hole began reaching triggers in late July when the first flow plans began being implemented to return irrigation water to the river in an effort to meet minimum flows. It was hot too—water temperatures increased and the first temperature restrictions went into place. Early August voluntary flow contributions continued on the rest of the river as flows declined. The drought response for voluntary action continued through the end of August and September as hot and dry conditions persisted. Even with a good snowpack, wet spring, and drought plan participation, we still reached river closures and restrictions. Here's why:

During the 2017 Season,

Precipitation was below average, temperatures above average.

The Big Hole had the 4th hottest July in 138 Years.

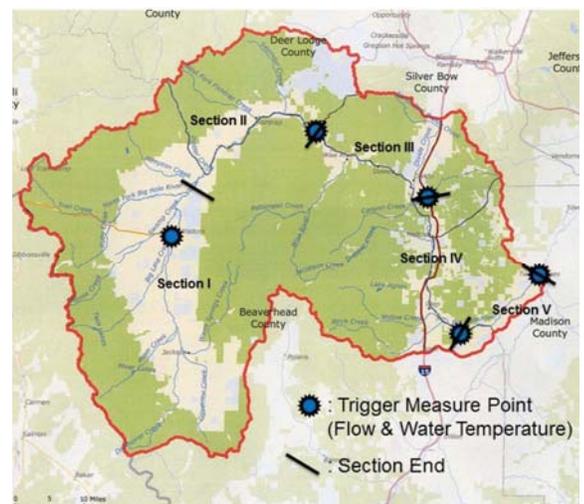
The recorded precipitation was less than 60% of average for the upper river and approximately 15% of average for the lower river for July and August.

By late summer, there was little precipitation coming in and snowpack was melted out. We can only manage drought response with the water we have. The solution — more water late in the season. This is the link between drought response and healthy ecosystems. As we increase natural water storage using wetlands and riparian areas, that water will feed the river later in the season helping support a healthy river, especially when drought conditions reduce available water. This work has been going on for 20 years and even more so in recent years. We likely benefited from this work this year helping the river to hang on during the driest part of this year. *Data Source: Montana DNRC.*

Drought Planning Takes a Community

Collaboration is Key

The Big Hole River Drought Management Plan (DMP) was created in 1997 by BHWC and many technical advisors and partners. It is implemented in partnership between BHWC, Montana DNRC, MFWP, and water users and anglers. The plan manages flow and water temperature conservation targets and river restrictions to benefit the fishery through *voluntary* participation and sets MFWP's fishing restrictions based on river conditions. The DMP is reviewed annually and updated when needed by a team of irrigators, sportsmen, conservation groups, agency personnel, and BHWC. It is supported by a network of USGS measurement stations on the Big Hole River. The full DMP and stream gauge readings are available on our website, bhwc.org. Updates are posted on the River Conditions webpage as they occur. *[RIGHT: Big Hole River DMP Sections and Measure Points.]*



Big Hole Watershed Committee

Fish & Water

Restoring the Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area

Repairing Water & Fishery Resources from Historic Mining, Logging and Smelting

BHWC has been working with MFWP, NRDP, and funders to repair damage done to this area through historic placer mining, logging, and smelting that started in 1864 and continued for nearly a century. The area was placer mined, and the Anaconda Smelter caused severe damages to the uplands through logging and loss of vegetation. The uplands have deteriorated, with thousands of tons of sediment eroded from hillsides into creeks, impairing water quality. BHWC and partners have been working to restore streams degraded on the Mount Haggin WMA aiming to improve water quality and enhance native fisheries. Projects to-date include California Creek (complete), French Gulch & Moose Creek (nearly complete—wrapping up), French Creek (up next), and Oregon Creek (potential project).

French Gulch: Before and After Restoration

The preliminary success of the French Gulch & Moose Creek restoration project can be seen in these monitoring photos. In the 2014 (pre-project) photo, tour attendees can be seen walking on a dry, rocky expanse of mine tailings with a few straggly conifers and some sagebrush beginning to establish the area. By summer 2016, the mine tailings and pine trees were removed and a new stream channel was flowing through what used to be dry placer tailings (See tree used for reference point.) Riparian vegetation bouncing back, and a functional ecosystem is evident at the project site.

June 2014



August 2016



BHWC Experimenting with Drones

Aerial Imagery Captures Superior Media for Monitoring

BHWC Restoration Programs Manager, Pedro Marques, is instituting the use of drone-captured aerial imagery to document and measure results and successes of our Mount Haggin restoration projects. To view some of the footage, find us on YouTube. We're working with two different drone platforms: aerial survey and video drones. Videos take our audiences through the project, so they can see for themselves how our restoration efforts improve our watersheds. Aerial survey technology increases our ability to measure results of our work at the landscape level. This platform, combined with GIS analysis, will help us quantify vegetation changes, hydrologic changes, and erosion control. It is also a cost-effective way to monitor large areas or areas with difficult terrain.

Fish & Water

Soup, Streams, and Sportsters in the Snow

BHWC and Friends Celebrate Project Completion at Sugar Loaf Lodge

On the snowy morning of Friday, September 15th (remember that surprise, fall storm?), 21 brave souls set out to join BHWC at Sugar Loaf Lodge—a.k.a. the Soup Shack—to celebrate the completion of the French Gulch & Moose Creek restoration project. Conditions on Mount Haggin were treacherous,



with close to 6" of snow, limited visibility, and slick roads. A great day for a car tour! (See photo to the right.)

Arrival at the "Shack" was slightly delayed by the weather and "traffic", but once we made it to the lodge,



we were greeted by friendly faces and a crackling fire. We listened to a presentation on the history of Mount Haggin, by Vanna Boccadori with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, as well as a presentation detailing area impairments, restoration techniques, and project results from Pedro Marques, BHWC Restoration Programs Manager. And then we enjoyed some excellent

soup. [LEFT: Tour attendees listen to presentation at the Sugar Loaf Lodge. RIGHT: A car tour of convertible sportsters braved Mount Haggin during a snow storm on the day of the French Gulch & Moose Creek project tour.]

A Note of Appreciation

"My sincerest thanks for those at Big Hole Watershed, FWP, and others for soldiering on and moving good works forward through all obstacles ... We need to be in things for the generational view (unlike too many of our ancestors), not our own individual loss for a couple of years ... Thanks very much for pressing forward with ALL of the aspects that will bolster the Big Hole Watershed." — Tom Bowler, a friend of BHWC

Next Steps at Mount Haggin

More Streams to Restore in the Deep Creek Drainage

Next up for Mount Haggin—BHWC intends to restore the remaining portion of French Creek. The project will construct 2,700 feet of natural stream channel, moving the stream away from high eroding banks and placer mine tailings and eliminating a major sediment source into the Big Hole River. It will also reconnect the channel to its floodplain and wetlands to reduce sedimentation/siltation in French Creek and improve fish habitat conditions. ***This project is part of a larger watershed restoration effort being coordinated among numerous agencies in the Deep Creek watershed, repairing damages to the public resources of the Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area and re-establishing 40 miles of native fishery (Westslope cutthroat trout, Arctic grayling) in the Big Hole watershed, the second largest native fish project in Montana.*** Another species of concern, Pearlshell mussel, is also present in this drainage and requires Westslope cutthroat trout for its reproduction, so it will benefit from this project as well.

Additional restoration areas are under development in this area. These projects reduce sediment entering the waterway, restore natural ecosystems that naturally store water and provide cool, clean water later into the year, provide fish and wildlife habitat, and improve recreation opportunities.

Big Hole Watershed Committee

People

Trapper Creek Ranch & BHWC Plant Willows on River Bank

Big Hole River Incentive Program Helps Landowners Improve River Conditions

Tuesday, October 24th dawned cool and sunny, a perfect day for planting willows. BHWC Restoration Programs Manager, Pedro Marques, and Conservation Programs Coordinator, Tana Nulph, arrived at the Trapper Creek Ranch near Melrose where they met with local rancher, JM Peck. Angela Mallon, grant administrator from Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), soon arrived to help as well. "This is going to be a very experimental day," remarked Pedro. "I hope you don't mind being our guinea pig." JM responded with enthusiasm, "Not at all!"

Pedro was referring to the hydraulic "stinger" he had brought along, on loan from The Nature Conservancy. The stinger is a contraption consisting of a pump, several hoses, and a long metal pipe with cross-bar handles. Once the water is flowing, the pipe is shoved into the ground, and it makes a perfect hole into which a willow stake can be inserted.

Willows are amazing plants in that you can literally chop off a section of branch and jam them in the ground, and with enough water, they will take root and create a new willow plant! Can you imagine if all plants were this way?

After setting up the pump, we found the stinger to be a huge success. Pedro started out slow and methodical, trying to get a feel for the thing. We planted 100 willow stakes along an eroding bank of the Big Hole River on the Trapper Creek Ranch, Pedro "drilling" the hole while the rest of us stuck the willow branches in the ground and trimmed off excess plant matter, which sucks up needed moisture. When these willows become established, they will help hold the river bank in place and slow the existing erosion and sediment input into the river.

After planting about half the bank, we took a break for lunch, eating on the tailgate of a pickup truck facing the river.

After lunch, JM decided to take a try on the stinger. About twenty minutes later, we were done ... and covered in mud. *[ABOVE RIGHT: Pedro and JM operate the "hydro-stinger" to plant willow stakes.]*

In the spring we will check the willow stakes to see how well this worked. Thanks, JM, for letting us get our hands dirty on your beautiful ranch!

Trapper Creek Ranch is enrolled in the Big Hole River Incentive Program to improve their riverside conditions, including excluding grazing from the river bank and planting streamside vegetation. Their work installed 1,400 feet of riparian fence, installed an off-river water source for livestock to keep livestock away from the riverbank, and revegetated the eroded river bank.



About the Big Hole River Incentive Program

The BHRIP pays lower river landowners who provide an ecological service by either reducing sediment input into the river or improving or maintaining floodplain function. Eight projects are currently under development to address 2 miles of streambank sediment issues and floodplain connectivity. In providing payments, we are creating an economic mechanism to financially support landowners whose property conditions create a healthy river. In the Big Hole watershed, the river corridor is predominantly private land, so incentivizing landowners can positively influence direct conservation outcomes.

Wildlife & Uplands

Working Together for Wildlife and People

BHWC Participates in Landowner-led Conflict Reduction Group

BHWC is working with several other Southwest Montana conservation groups and landowners to discuss methods to reduce conflicts between people and wildlife. Eleven groups are working together to support and expand programs that reduce conflict with predators. These groups have applied together for funding to do this work across 12 million acres, but will continue to manage their programs individually. The goal is to support individual, local efforts between the Northern Continental Divide and Greater Yellowstone Ecosystems by working together and thinking regionally.



Why You Should Care about Conflict Reduction

Two of the many things that make the Big Hole watershed such a special place to be are its wildlife and its people, many of whom are ranchers. Ranches benefit wildlife with valuable habitat and migration corridors, but these important areas also can attract predators and invite conflicts with livestock. Losing livestock to depredation costs ranchers frustration and money. BHWC programs help ranching operations and wildlife coexist through the use of nonlethal predator management programs. Our current programs include a range rider, a carcass removal service offered free-of-charge during spring calving, and a carcass compost site.



Mess with the Bull, You Get the Horns

A Word from Our Range Rider

"I discovered one of the bulls, laying behind a small group of trees, some 35 feet north of the trail. I called (the owner), and he asking if the bull was "fit". Asking him to stand by, I approached the bull, who remained in his pose, and managed to approach near enough to give him a light kick on the rump, when he came to his feet, spun 3/4 of a circle, laid back his ears, and lowering his head, gave me a look as if to ask, "Are you really stupid enough to screw with me?" — Chet Robertson, Upper Big Hole Range Rider 2011-Present

Just another instance of Chet showing his dedication to his profession and his community. Chet monitors 7 USFS grazing allotments for 8 ranches from July 1—September 30th each year, checking on livestock condition and observing predator location and behavior. In 2017, there were zero confirmed livestock deaths from depredation on enrolled allotments, although there was plenty of wolf activity and Wildlife Services removed several wolves from nearby areas.

Help Us Welcome John

BHWC Hires New Wildlife Progs. Tech.

Please help us give Johnathan Costa, our new Wildlife Program Technician a warm welcome! John will drive the carcass removal dump truck and manage our carcass compost site. This change comes after our previous technician, Kim Bingen, moved with her husband to Wyoming. Best of luck Kim—we'll miss you!

News from Our Compost Site

Last spring, we opened a livestock carcass compost site next to the Montana Department of Transportation shop near Wisdom. The purpose of the compost site is to provide an efficient, effective method of carcass disposal that does not attract predators. Here are some updates from our first year of operation:

- 7 producers participated
- 46 livestock carcasses composted
- People and Carnivores installed fencing to exclude neighboring livestock.

Big Hole Watershed Committee
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Conservation Through Consensus Since 1995

Mission: To seek understanding and agreement among individuals and groups with diverse viewpoints on water use and management in the Big Hole River watershed of Southwest Montana.

Established in 1995, the Big Hole Watershed Committee (BHWC) is a collaborative organization representing diverse regional interests, including ranchers, sportsmen, conservationists, tourists, and community members. For two decades, BHWC has taken a leadership role in enhancing the vitality of the Big Hole River, the surrounding watershed and communities, and the diverse and rare wildlife that inhabits the Big Hole Valley. The Big Hole River is the lifeblood for the surrounding area's natural and agricultural legacies, and the foundation for the region's economy. By proactively working to conserve this precious resource, BHWC is enriching one of Montana's last, best places for local residents and visitors from around the world.

BHWC is a consensus-driven, multi-stakeholder entity that works closely with other conservation organizations as well as local, State, and Federal agencies on watershed restoration and management plans.

You can donate online.
Visit bhwc.org and click on
our “Donate Here” button.

The Big Hole Watershed Committee is a non-profit, tax-exempt charitable organization under Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. Donations are tax deductible as allowable by law. *Our tax identification number is 11-3737644.*