

Big Hole Watershed Committee

SPRING 2020 NEWSLETTER

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



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bhwc.org

2020 — the year of perfect vision. The 25th year of the Big Hole Watershed Committee. A year to take stock of our impact over a quarter century and chart a stable path into the future to continue delivering consensus-based conservation for the resources and livelihoods of the Big Hole. Back in January and February anyway, that's how I thought this year would go. Then the global pandemic hit. No more public meetings, recreation businesses shut down, commodity markets volatilized, volunteer events and wildlife speaker series cancelled. The pain caused by these changes is real and for some people things will never be the same again.

But as we've settled into the rhythm of life in quarantine, I've come to see that in some of the most fundamental ways, this pandemic changes ... absolutely nothing. 2020 is still a year for clarity, and I am seeing this pandemic as a gateway between two worlds, giving us a moment to pause and assess the world as it was and envision a future world we can create together. After all, the Big Hole River keeps flowing and its rise and fall still depends on snow-pack, weather patterns, and management decisions. Our small towns still thrive when our recreation economy does well, and it's all based on the quality of the resource we, together, sustain.

Moving forward with clear vision, what do we see when we cut through the fog created by the pandemic? We find the same thing the founders of the BHWC saw 25 years ago — that locally rooted solutions are the longest lasting and most valuable ones. When people are connected, the landscape is connected and we can make small but meaningful improvements to the resource, for the benefit of all the wildlife and the livelihoods dependent upon it.

You'll see in this issue that we still have the power to create wetter, more resilient habitats with restoration projects. Our wildlife programs are ever more integrated into ranching life in the upper Big Hole. We're at the table in statewide efforts to secure sustainable funding for our streamgauge infrastructure and are attracting new funding to bring partners together to envision a more sustainable landscape- through mine reclamation and watershed planning.

People still depend on each other, and strong communities are still built on neighbors looking out for each other. For a taste of what I mean, read the monthly [Big Hole Breezes](#) or see the latest issue of [Montana Outdoors](#), which beautifully summarizes what makes our watershed unique. Pandemic or not, small communities of people with different perspectives coming together to find common ground, seeking and sharing knowledge with state and federal resource managers, and working with skilled contractors to execute projects — this is the path to resilience. These are things that don't change, and I encourage you to join us in keeping this watershed great for the next 25 years!



Credit: Sunrise Fly Shop

—Pedro Marques, BHWC Executive Director

Big Hole Watershed Committee

Our Governing Board:

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BVHD Cty. Commission
Andy Suenram
Resident
Eric Thorson
Guiding/Outfitting
Paul Cleary
Resident
Mark Raffety
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Brian Wheeler
Big Hole River Foundation

Our Staff:

Pedro Marques
Executive Director
Tana Nulph
Associate Director
Ben LaPorte
Program Manager
Chet Robertson
UBH Range Rider
Johnathan Costa
Wildlife Program Tech.

Our Focus Areas:

- Fish & Water
- Wildlife & Uplands
- People

Member Spotlight: Eric Thorson, Sunrise Fly Shop

Getting to Know our Members

Our "Member Spotlight" features key board members, partners, and supporters of the BHWC and highlights their commitment to conservation and the Big Hole watershed. This edition features Eric Thorson, Board Member and part-owner of [Sunrise Fly Shop](#) in Melrose. Sunrise recently partnered with us to obtain \$12,000 to restore tributary streams through Patagonia's Wholesale Grant Program, an effort initiated by Eric!

1. *How long have you been a member of or participating with BHWC? "I have been attending BHWC public meetings on and off for about 8 years, but it wasn't until about 3 years ago that I became more involved and joined the board of the BHWC."*

2. *Why did you join BHWC and what is your role with the committee? "I am one of the Outfitter/Guide Representatives on the BHWC board. As an user of this resource both recreationally and commercially, I felt it was important to not only add my opinions and knowledge to conservation projects and management decisions but also to volunteer my time and energy to help protect the greatest watershed in the state."*



3. *What work of BHWC do you find the most important/of greatest interest to you? "I wouldn't say that it is a specific project that is of greatest interest, but rather people of different backgrounds and beliefs coming together with the common goal of protecting this precious resource."*

4. *What do you like the most about the Big Hole River watershed? "The Big Hole is one of the most dynamic and diverse rivers I've ever seen. It is a freestone river that goes from several thousand CFS in the spring to just a few hundred in late summer. It has three distinctly different sections (the upper section, the canyon, and the lower section) that are very different in their features and characteristics. It has Browns, Rainbows, Brook Trout, Cutthroat, Whitefish, and of course Grayling. It is open, rural, uncrowded, and beautiful. It is such a unique and spectacular place and I feel so fortunate to live and work here."*

5. *What do you love most about conservation? "I love how conservation/restoration projects generally have benefits that go far beyond the visible outcome of the project. A passerby may only see the willows that have been planted on a degraded bank, but the long lasting benefits that those willows have on the water, the soil, the insects, the fish, and the wildlife may not be nearly as visible. Visible or not, those benefits are real and they are significant."*



Bravo!

Awards Won by BHWC over the Years

1. **Conservation Organization of the Year**, GGTU, 1998
2. **Montana Watershed Stewardship Award**, MWCC, 1999
3. **Montana Arctic Grayling Conservation Award**, MFWP/USFWS
4. **Riparian Challenge Award**, AFS—Western Division, 2008
5. **Engineering Excellence Honor Award**, American Council of Engineering Companies of MT, 2018
6. **Film Festival Major Award**, American Society of Mining and Reclamation, 2019
7. **Montana Watershed Stewardship Award** — Jen Downing, E.D., MWCC, 2019

Watch Our Films



on our
**YouTube
Channel!**

<http://ow.ly/T1ID50zNOAr>

25 Years of Conservation through Consensus

BHWC Celebrates Anniversary

For a quarter of a century, a group of committed, cooperative Montanans has been working together despite differing interests & viewpoints to do what is best for a place they consider worthy of conserving—the Big Hole River watershed. Over the years, the main players have changed, projects & priorities have come and gone, and our organization has grown; but our founding principles remain the same.

The Big Hole Watershed Committee (BHWC) was created in 1995 when a group of ranchers, concerned over worsening conditions on the river and impending listing of Arctic grayling under the Endangered Species Act, got together to address issues on the Big Hole River. A series of water right holder meetings was held that spring, and other interests were invited to participate, including water utility, businesses, conservation groups, guides & outfitters, local government, and sportsmen.

In February 1996, we adopted our four guiding principles that have driven our work over the last 25 years. BHWC is committed to:

1. Involving all interests that are willing to seek practical solutions that benefit all interests;
2. Promoting common understanding among individuals and groups w/ diverse viewpoints;
3. Fostering the ability of local individuals & groups to create effective solutions to local problems; and
4. Seeking long-term solutions based on sound information.

In 2020, we are weathering the changes brought by the COVID-19 outbreak and also awaiting the results of the USFWS' review of the 2014 decision that Arctic grayling were not warranted for ESA listing. This is a banner year for BHWC—one in which the fruits of our labor—both in building our organization & enhancing our watershed—come to bear. Our purpose and guiding principles remain unchanged, and we are as committed as ever to maintaining the health of our beloved river.

Local Paper Makes Outreach a “Breeze”

Revived ‘Big Hole Breezes’ Connects Community

The *Big Hole Breezes* newspaper is back! After a rather long intermission (81 years), the local publication is back on shelves and in businesses in the Big Hole Valley, helping residents stay informed and connected in an area rarely covered by larger newspapers. Monthly printed editions can be found in local businesses, while a digital version is posted online at: highholebreezes.com.

The newspaper includes reprints of old stories from the late 1800s and early 1900s—and sometimes you have to check the date to see if it's modern-day or historic! It seems not much has changed in the Big Hole—we're still ranching, fishing, recreating, dealing with large carnivores, spending time with our families and neighbors, and loving our beautiful valley. And we are so thankful the *Big Hole Breezes* is back and helping us connect with our community!



Big Hole Watershed Committee

Activities & Events

Coronavirus Takes Us Virtual

BHWC Monthly Meetings, Events On Hold Due to COVID-19

Normally, BHWC has monthly public meetings. In January, we have our annual business meeting with board members & staff, and we take breaks in July and December. But the rest of the year, you can usually join us the 3rd Wednesday of the month for in-person discussion, committee updates, and presentations on topics & issues relevant to the Big Hole watershed.

But in mid-March, Governor Bullock issued directives for stopping the spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) that included social distancing measures and restricted gatherings of more than 10 people. On June 1st, Montana entered Stage 2 of reopening, allowing groups of <50 to convene. We are now considering how to proceed, and when we do reconvene we will implement necessary social distancing and safety measures.

In the meantime, our work continues! We have several restoration projects in the works (read on for more information), and we have been providing monthly committee reports via email with updates from our resource specialist partners. We will resume our public meetings when possible, but for now you can join our email list to receive regular updates and monthly committee reports. Join via our website, bhwc.org, or reach out to us directly and we will add you to the list.



Up-close view of the Coronavirus.

Businesses Keep the Valley Vibrant

BHWC Looking to Local Businesses in Partnership for Clean, Cold Water

We understand that local businesses are a critical part of the Big Hole's community & economy and we know that if not for the river, no one would ranch here or build homes here and visitors wouldn't flock from around the world to fish our unspoiled waters. A healthy river system, in fact, drives traffic to many local businesses, and BHWC has been in the business of improving the resource and the quality of the experience people have had here for 25 years.

Therein lies value to all who visit and a great opportunity to drive more traffic to local businesses and in return multiply the impact businesses can have on the health of the river. **All it takes is 1%.**

After a successful day fishing or hunting or a glorious day recreating on the Big Hole, is it worth an extra \$1 to know the hotel you stayed in will give that money to a Big Hole Watershed Fund that BHWC can turn into \$2 or \$3 to improve the resource for your next visit? Is it worth an extra \$5 on a guided trip to an out-of-state fisherman to know the Big Hole won't become overfished or de-watered because the outfitter they use gives to a Watershed Fund? **We think it is.** As one major donor recently relayed to us, their choice of investing in BHWC nearly 10 years ago was because of our power to leverage donations, doubling and often even *tripling* the impact every donated dollar can have on the resource!

Thanks to generous donations by the Azeez and Driggers Family Foundations — non-resident homeowners who love the Big Hole — we are in the beginning phases of rolling out our new **1% for the River** program. We recognize many businesses are in a tough spot now. But as the pandemic fades into the rearview, BHWC wants to help local businesses thrive again by developing a positive feedback partnership between business growth and resource improvement. If you are a local business (that means in the watershed or in Butte, Anaconda, or Dillon), please reach out and let's discuss opportunities for sponsorships, advertisement, and more! Email pmarques@bhwc.org for details.



Paying it Forward

Help Us Maintain the Big Hole River Watershed for Future Generations to Enjoy

*"Last year, I became a parent, and it changed every single aspect of my entire life. More importantly, it changed my **perspective** on life. In everything I do now, I think about my daughter and what is best for her. I am seeing EVERYTHING through new eyes (which is pretty amazing!), and thinking, in-turn, about what I want those beautiful baby blues to see as she grows up.*

I want my daughter to grow up in a place where different interests work together to find solutions that benefit all interests. I want her to



BHWC Program Manager, Ben LaPorte, and wife Joanna welcomed son, Rowan, in March.

fish & float the pristine waters of the Big Hole River and grow up with wildlife & livestock for neighbors. I want her to know the ethic of 'shared sacrifice, shared success', because in life, we can choose to take care of only ourselves, but it's better for everyone if we don't. It's better if we participate, cooperate, and engage with our community. The way we do that right now looks a little different than it used to, but staying connected & engaged is more important than ever!

If you're reading this publication, you probably love the Big Hole River & watershed, like I do. You may even have children, like I do. Regardless, I'm sure you understand & agree that the Big Hole is a place worthy of visiting, maintaining, and protecting.

Help us manage & enhance our river & community through education, outreach, and restoration by making a donation, today. I'll start the process with a donation of my own, because I believe in the work of the committee and I believe this land & water is worth conserving for our next generation & beyond. Please join me."

- Tana Nulph, Associate Director, Big Hole Watershed Committee

Your contributions are tax deductible and can be targeted to any of our work areas.

Donate online at bhwc.org or by mail using the envelope provided.



BHWC Associate Director, Tana Nulph, and daughter Lyla admire the Big Hole River at Notch Bottom.



BHWC Executive Director, Pedro Marques, knows that getting his kids, Gabriel and Clarice, outdoors is a vital part of raising compassionate stewards of our planet.

Big Hole Watershed Committee

Building Drought Resilience in the Big Hole

Spring/Summer 2020 Snowpack & Climate Forecast

From Matt Norberg, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

Streamflow. The mid- to low elevation snowpack began melting in mid-April and into the beginning of May. Streamflow forecasts for the April 1st—July 31st period are now predicted to be below-average for the Big Hole River, so please keep an eye on forecasts and be ready for potential water shortages if summer precipitation is sparse.

Snowpack. The Big Hole had an average to slightly above-average snowpack up until May. The low to mid-elevation snowpack melted off beginning in April and this continued through the first part of May. With an average snowpack this year, our streamflow and irrigation will most likely rely on late-season precipitation and we'll be watching runoff timing closely. With the long-range forecast indicating warmer temperatures over the next few months, we may see high elevation snowpack come off more quickly than we would like.

Forecast. There is a ~65% chance of ENSO-neutral conditions in the Northern Hemisphere this summer, with chances decreasing through the fall (to 45-50%). The NOAA's 3-month outlook for April, May, and June is for average to slightly wetter than average precipitation and normal to above-normal temperatures.



“Gaging” the Importance of Stream Data

Take the Montana Streamgage User's Survey Today

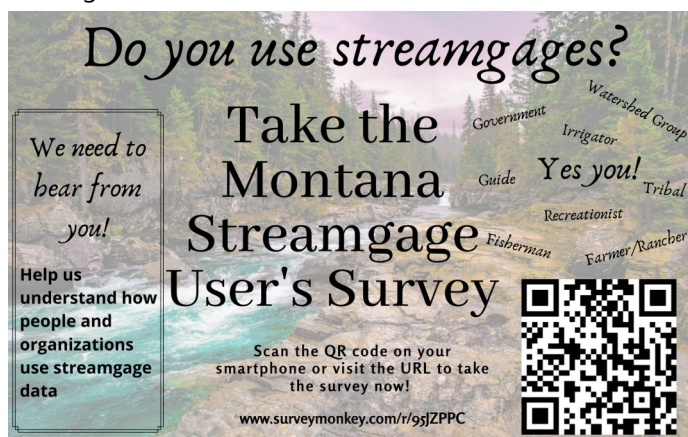
Do you check streamgage data in Montana for flooding information, stream flow data, or water rights?

Please take the survey today: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/95JZPPC>. The Montana Streamgage User's Survey was created by representatives from local nonprofits, including BHWC, and state and federal agencies to help us understand how people and organization are using and accessing data.

Montana is home to 264 gages funded and maintained by state, federal, and local governments; private companies; and nonprofits. The Big Hole River alone hosts 10 stream gages with another 1 on Wise River.

Each organization has its own goals and needs for the gage data. For most of the gages, the data is publicly available through apps and websites. We know that gage data sites are being visited much more over the last 5 years, but we don't know who is checking the data or why. Public funding for gage maintenance has remained flat or decreasing over the last decade. BHWC was integrally involved in passing SB32, which created the [Streamgage Oversight Work Group](#) to find a long-term solution to financially support stream gaging in Montana.

Regardless of who you are and how you use water, your input on streamgages is needed. Please take the survey, and be sure to pass this along to your friends or colleagues who may be gage users, too!



Building Drought Resilience in the Big Hole

Cooperation & Engagement Key to Enhancing River

BHWC Secures Funding to Work with Irrigators, Outfitters on Lower River

Last fall, the Big Hole River Drought Subcommittee identified Section V of the Big Hole River (Notch Bottom to the river's mouth at Twin Bridges) as a priority focus area for water conservation, irrigation infrastructure upgrades, and stakeholder engagement. Section V is as important as any other stretch of the river, but has historically seen low flows and less participation in the Big Hole River Drought Management Plan than the upper four river sections.

This project builds on previous studies funded by BHWC that summarized conditions and areas for improvement in the lower river. It will also include updating our Watershed Restoration Plan for the middle-lower river and developing solutions that safeguard property and infrastructure at Pennington Bridge while improving the fishery and water supply. BHWC was awarded \$100,000 from the BoR and \$3,000 from the SWCDM/DEQ Environmental Education & Outreach Mini-Grants program for this project.

This project will give us the resources to convene lower river stakeholders, whether one-on-one, virtually, or in public meetings as conditions allow, in order to bring together all voices that want to collaborate to ensure the best outcomes for the resource and livelihoods.

Stay tuned for more updates, and feel free to contact us for more information or to get involved.



Up Next: Morris Ranch 2.0

Increasing Natural Water Storage on East Fork Divide Creek — Phase 2

In 2020, we will continue work on the Morris Ranch, where we installed over 60 Beaver Dam Analogues (BDAs) on Divide Creek last spring. Using lessons learned from 2019, we will build the structures in strategic locations to re-activate offsite water storage locations. The planned beaver mimicry structures and bank work will treat approximately 6,400 feet of stream channel, impacting 16 acres of floodplain.



This Beaver Dam Analogue (BDA) mimics a real beaver dam by allowing the stream to overtop its banks and soak the previously dry floodplain, storing more water on the landscape.

Similar to natural beaver dams, BDAs slow water velocity, allowing sediment to settle and build up behind them. As the sediment accumulates, the streambed rises, and with it the elevation of the surrounding water table. The BDAs will also enable the stream to overtop its banks and reconnect with its floodplain, improving water availability for the surrounding pasture. BDA projects such as this one help to prolong peak flows, maintain base flows, lower water temperatures, and capture sediment.

BHWC is committed to enhancing natural water storage on the landscape as a drought management and climate adaptation tool. Keeping water on the landscape for longer periods of time has been a priority for BHWC for nearly 15 years. Low-tech, process-based restoration projects are just one way we accomplish this goal. Project partners included The Nature Conservancy in Montana, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the Montana Watershed Coordination Council.

Big Hole Watershed Committee

Fish & Water

Bare Hills No More

Seeing the Fruits of our Labor at Joyner Gulch on the Mount Haggin WMA

This year is shaping up to be another big restoration year for the [Anaconda Uplands Superfund site](#). Following our large-scale restoration of Joyner Gulch in 2018, we spent 2019 measuring the project's response and maintaining & enhancing the project's structures. In our opinion, everything is looking great up there; take a look at these before and after photos and see for yourself!

Before & After Photos: These photos were taken in West Joyner Gulch - one of the most degraded drainages in the Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area. The before photos were taken right after construction was completed in 2018. The after photos were taken at the same time, one year later.



Top: Grass establishment in the newly constructed portion of West Joyner Gulch. What was once a 25-foot-deep gully that couldn't grow vegetation is now on its way to recovery!



Bottom: Grass establishment in W. Joyner dozer basins. Grass was previously not able to grow on this steep & eroding hillside. After re-contouring the hillside by filling approx. 700 feet of a 25-foot-deep gully and installing dozer basins (big bumps & depressions to slow water and give seeds a place to grow), grass can now take root and "hold" the dirt together.

This year, we will get the big yellow machines out again to construct another large-scale restoration project aimed at improving water quality in the California Creek Drainage. This will be another sediment control/revegetation project, similar to that on Joyner Gulch. Over the winter, we developed conceptual restoration designs and have been working with Pioneer Technical Services to turn them into a complete bid package with supporting final design drawings. The project will include:

- ◆ Installation of innovative spreader dikes to catch sediment and re-wet meadows;
- ◆ Construction of large, engineered check dams to capture contaminated sediment;
- ◆ Restoration of an abandoned beaver dam;
- ◆ Fertilization and seeding of 54 acres of disturbed ground by helicopter;
- ◆ Installation of copious amounts of gully check dams (large and small) by hand crews; and
- ◆ Spot-spraying of critical, low-density weed incursions.

Fish & Water

To refresh your memory...

Mount Haggin is a State-owned Wildlife Management Area in the Deep Creek drainage. The first gold strike in the Big Hole occurred here at French Gulch in 1864, and as a result the area was extensively placer mined. Logging to feed the Anaconda Smelter left hillsides bare, and emissions from the smelter poisoned the soil, preventing regrowth. Mining and smelting activities continued for nearly a century. In the years since, the uplands have deteriorated, and thousands of tons of sediment have eroded from the hillsides into the creeks below, leaving the entire Deep Creek drainage with impaired water quality due to high volumes of sediment from headwater streams, California, Oregon, and Sixmile Creeks, to the larger tributaries of French and Deep Creeks. BHCW is working with MFWP, NRDP, Watershed Consulting, and Pioneer Technical to repair the damage done to this area, improve water quality, and enhance native fisheries.

Up Next: A New Project on The Horizon

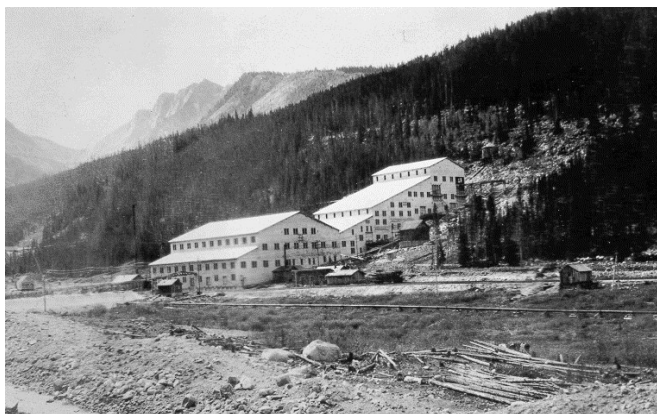
Elkhorn Mine & Mill Water Quality Improvement Project

BHCW was awarded \$42,500 from the DNRC's Reclamation and Development Grants Program to investigate legacy impacts from historic underground hard rock mining in and around the Elkhorn Mine and Mill (Coolidge Ghost Town) in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. The Elkhorn Mine (upper Wise River) has caused significant ongoing impacts to water quality and aquatic life in Elkhorn Creek and the Wise River, downstream. The mining resulted in the export of thousands of tons of sediment and heavy metals to downstream reaches of Elkhorn Creek, Wise River, and the Big Hole River. While heavy metal concentrations have decreased dramatically since active mining ceased (and some reclamation and remediation occurred in the early 2000s), Elkhorn Creek still exceeds aquatic life standards for heavy metals. It also provides poor quality habitat for native Westslope Cutthroat trout and Arctic grayling.

The largest environmental concern in the area is an active flowing adit (horizontal mine shaft, shown right) that discharges an estimated 150 gallons-per-minute of orange-ish brown, metal-laden waters into Elkhorn Creek. There are also old waste dumps with seeps that flow into the creek. Past restoration activities have made some improvement to these environmental hazards, but the site clearly needs more work. With the planning grant we've been awarded, we will look at potential ways to slow the flow of con-



This horizontal mine shaft is a remnant of Elkhorn Mine.



Elkhorn Mill, circa 1919.

taminated water coming from the adit and seeps, as well as gain more insight to the level of contamination to the site.

Project partners include DEQ, DNRC, Beaverhead CD, and USFS. BHCW contracted Watershed Consulting to do a site investigation to inform restoration activities. This is a very high priority site in our watershed and we are excited to sink our teeth into this area!

Bonus! BHCW also received \$4,212 through the DEQ's Volunteer Monitoring Lab Analysis Support Program. These funds will cover water quality sampling & lab analysis costs associated with the Elkhorn Mine & Mill project.

Big Hole Watershed Committee

Wildlife & Uplands

Creative Solutions Help Ranchers Live with Wolves & Bears

BHWC Offers Loaner Livestock Loss Prevention Toolkit

Late in 2019, BHWC received funds from Montana's Livestock Loss Board to put together a wildlife conflict prevention toolkit. The kit is now available for local ranchers to borrow to protect vulnerable livestock from carnivores like wolves and bears. Any or all of the tools are available to borrow or test.

The kit includes:

- **Scare devices** (Fox lights, CritterGitters, an air-horn, a radio, etc.).
- **Field guides** related to livestock depredation, carnivores, tracks & scat, livestock protection dogs, etc.
- **Tarps** to cover carcasses if animals are killed by carnivores (to protect them from scavenging until Wildlife Services can get there to investigate, determine cause of death, and process reimbursement). **AND MORE.**



BHWC's New Loaner Toolkit for Livestock Loss Prevention.

We developed this toolkit with help from People and Carnivores. We also received funding from the Vital Ground Foundation to add bear safety tools to the toolkit. To borrow the kit or any of its contents, contact Tana Nulph, BHWC Associate Director, at 406-267-3421 or tnulph@bhwc.org.

Time to Turn Your Bear Brain Back On!

Montanans—Both Human and Bear—Venture Outdoors as Spring Sets In

Spring is finally here, and with events & gatherings cancelled and school & work being done from home due to COVID-19, many Montanans are trying to get outdoors as much as possible.

Getting outdoors is great for the body, mind, and spirit, but don't forget that bears are also excited for spring! Female bears with cubs begin emerging from their dens around late-April to early May. Be prepared by bringing your bear spray and being alert to the possible presence of bears around you. **It also helps to travel in groups, make plenty of noise, avoid "beary" situations such as carcasses, and remember to NEVER run from a bear.**

Now is also a good time to secure bear attractant around the homestead. **Garbage, birdfeeders, pet & livestock feed, barbeques, gardens & fruit trees, chicken coops, and beehives can all attract bears — take measures to secure these items.** BHWC has bear-resistant garbage cans available to BHWC residents, free-of-charge. Make plans to pick one up in Wise River by contacting Tana Nulph, Associate Director, at 406-267-3421 or tnulph@bhwc.org. They also make great feed containers!

Bear safety information in this article was borrowed from the [Southwest Montana Bear Education Working Group's April 2020 Newsletter](#).



Stock photo of the Toter garbage cans BHWC offers to residents.

Wildlife & Uplands

What Can You Do with a Rotting Livestock Carcass?

Give it to Us to Compost!

We just wrapped up our 5th season of providing free livestock carcass removal to Big Hole Valley ranchers to reduce predator attractant on the landscape. We do this during spring calving and lambing to protect vulnerable animals from depredation, because rotting, stinking carcasses can be a strong attractant to bears, wolves, coyotes, and other carnivores and scavengers.

In 2020, we removed 53 carcasses from 9 ranches. Wildlife Program Technician, John Costa, picked up the carcasses with a dump truck on loan from the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and hauled them to our compost site near Wisdom. At the compost site, carcasses were broken down into what is essentially dirt using wood chips, water, and time.

Composting is a low-tech, effective solution to carcass disposal that can also help prevent predators and scavengers from entering your homestead and calving/lambing areas.



Finished compost at our Livestock Carcass Compost Site near Wisdom.

Celebrating a Decade of Partnership

Upper Big Hole Range Rider Program Turns Ten

This is a special year for BHWC — we're celebrating not only our 25th Anniversary, but also the 10th anniversary of our Upper Big Hole Range Rider program! We first hired Chet Robertson in 2010 to monitor USFS grazing allotments during summer months. Chet watches for sick & injured livestock, livestock carcasses & remains, and predator sign & activity. The program was initially started to address problems ranchers were having with wolves killing their cattle and sheep. Project partners include MFWP, People and Carnivores, WCS, NFWF, and local ranchers.



Range Rider, Chet Robertson, and program partners make plans for the developing range rider program back in 2010.

Ranching is an important part of what makes the Big Hole — the Big Hole. Our valley wouldn't be as wild and beautiful as it is without all of the sprawling ranches providing open space for both wildlife and livestock to live and move. But ranchers shouldn't be run out of house and home by carnivores like wolves, bears, and mountain lions killing their livelihoods.

Livestock producers enrolled in the program have reported that having an extra presence on the landscape is helpful in terms of knowing what's going on with both livestock, & carnivores and being able to respond quickly when carcasses are found. Timeliness is im-

portant in these matters as Wildlife Services has arrive, investigate, and confirm that the cause of death was depredation by a qualified carnivore (wolf, grizzly bear, or mountain lion) for ranchers to be reimbursed for their loss by the State. Bears, wolves, and other scavengers will often eat carcasses before they can even be found and investigated. That's where Chet comes in.

This summer, Chet will again patrol 6 USFS allotments for 7 livestock producers. We also purchased 3 new "Stealth Cam" game cameras and hope to get some great wildlife photos to share with you this season!

[Join our email list](#) or follow us on social media (handles on next page) for more updates.



Part of Chet's job entails identifying tracks & scat of wolves & bears. This is a wolf track.

Big Hole Watershed Committee
P.O. Box 21
Divide, MT 59727

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SPRING 2020 NEWSLETTER



**BIG HOLE
WATERSHED COMMITTEE**
Conservation Through Consensus.

**Big Hole Watershed
Committee**
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Phone: 406-960-4855
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/bigholewatershed



/bigholewc



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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.

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.*

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