

Big Hole River Drought Management Plan

Version 2016-2020

Protecting the Big Hole River fishery during drought with voluntary conservation & state enforced fishing restrictions

Version 2016 stands until a new version replaces it (Version 2016 remains in place for 2020)



BIG HOLE
WATERSHED COMMITTEE
Conservation Through Consensus.

Shared Sacrifice, Shared Success

Big Hole River Drought Management Plan



BIG HOLE WATERSHED COMMITTEE

Conservation Through Consensus.

The Big Hole River Drought Management Plan (DMP) coordinates conservation measures during periods of drought to protect the fishery. The plan sets flow and water temperature targets on the mainstem Big Hole River, which is divided into five river sections. In a drought year, the plan begins with voluntary conservation participation by river users, particularly outfitters/anglers and irrigators. The model promotes working together to protect the fishery voluntarily in order to prevent stress on fish during drought.

When conditions worsen beyond voluntary conservation targets, state-managed fishing restrictions are put in place and enforced by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Fishing restrictions can be triggered by high water temperatures, low streamflows, or both. Re-opening criteria vary by river section and can be found in the DMP.

The DMP was created in 1997 by the Big Hole Watershed Committee (BHWC) and its many technical advisors and partners. The plan was developed in order to coordinate working together voluntarily to address extreme low flows during drought years. It is implemented in partnership between the Big Hole Watershed Committee, Montana DNRC, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The Drought Management Plan is reviewed and updated annually by the Big Hole River Drought Subcommittee, a team of conservationists, irrigators, sportsmen, agency and agency personnel led by BHWC.

The DMP is supported by a network of USGS measurement stations on the Big Hole River.

River Conditions and Drought Management Plan Information

On Our Website!

Real-time Big Hole River conditions

Map of current Drought Management Plan status by section

Big Hole River Drought Management Plan documents

Stream Flow Forecasts

Mobile device ready

Visit BHWC.org and click "[River Conditions](#)"

Get Updates by E-Mail

Visit bhwc.org to [Sign Up for Email Updates](#)

Or let us know by email at info@bhwc.org

Contact Us:

Big Hole Watershed Committee

PO Box 21, Divide, Montana 59727

406-960-4855 info@bhwc.org

Note: Personnel and contact information have been updated, but no major changes have occurred to the Big Hole River Drought Management Plan since 2016. The plan is reviewed annually, but changes are not made every year. The 2016-2020 version stands until replaced by a new version.

Big Hole River Drought Management Plan

Shared Sacrifice – Shared Success



BIG HOLE
WATERSHED COMMITTEE

BIG HOLE RIVER

DROUGHT MANAGEMENT PLAN

THE BIG HOLE WATERSHED COMMITTEE

ADOPTED 1997

Version: 2016-2020

Amended 1999, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2012, 2012 V2, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016

BHWC Drought Management Plan Amendments are recorded in a separate document.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Drought Management Plan (DMP) is to mitigate the effects of low stream flows and lethal water temperatures for fisheries (particularly fluvial Arctic grayling) through a voluntary effort among agricultural operations, municipalities, businesses, conservation groups, anglers, and affected government agencies.

OVERVIEW

The Big Hole Watershed Committee (BHWC) has agreed to this DMP to help mitigate impacts to fish populations during dry years as indicated by flows and temperature. This plan has been designed to take into account the interests of all affected parties including ranchers, municipalities, anglers, and conservation groups. It is operated in partnership with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). The BHWC agrees that if the DMP is to be successful, it will need broad-based support and understanding. BHWC members are committed to securing the support of their constituencies for the successful implementation of this plan. This plan is intended to be modified based on the lessons learned from research projects, information reported from river gages, and from the experiences gained by implementing this plan. The DMP is reviewed annually by the BHWC and modified as needed.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Big Hole Watershed Committee roles:

- ❖ Educate interested and affected parties;
- ❖ Develop, adopt, and modify the DMP annually;
- ❖ Receive and act on information regarding stream conditions and snowpack levels throughout the year;
- ❖ Notify interested and affected parties of implementation and secure support; and
- ❖ Evaluate the environmental, social, and economic impacts of the plan.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP), Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), and the United State Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) roles:

- ❖ Provide accurate, timely information regarding stream conditions and snowpack levels throughout the year;
- ❖ Provide technical assistance in reviewing the plan and monitoring its implementation;
- ❖ Ensure coordination of efforts among all affected government agencies; and
- ❖ Provide public notice of MFWP actions for fishing restrictions, closures and re-opening.

DEFINITION OF DRY YEAR CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The BHWC will monitor snowpack levels and forecasted low stream level information provided by the DNRC, USGS, MFWP, and NRCS throughout the year in order to prepare for potential water conservation measures. Streamflow information gathered from gaging stations will be used to initiate specific voluntary actions to conserve water and mitigate the effects of dry year conditions on fish populations from **April 1 through October 31, unless otherwise noted.**

DETERMINING PROXIMITY TO FLOW TRIGGERS

Flow trigger levels are based on the Average Daily Flow measured in cubic feet per second (cfs). Therefore, flow will be reviewed the following day to determine low flow trigger levels and fishing closures. Average daily flow is calculated on the USGS real-time streamflow website: <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/rt>

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS (MFWP) STATEWIDE DROUGHT CLOSURE POLICY

MFWP has a statewide river closure policy that is referenced in each of the Big Hole River sections described in this document. MFWP mandates that river closures follow the local drought plan or when absent the Montana Statewide Drought Closure Policy. The [MFWP Statewide Drought Policy](#) contains triggers for the Big Hole River in three sections; however, the BHWC Drought Management Plan supersedes the Montana Statewide Drought Policy. Decisions on MFWP river closures and reopening follow the following process:

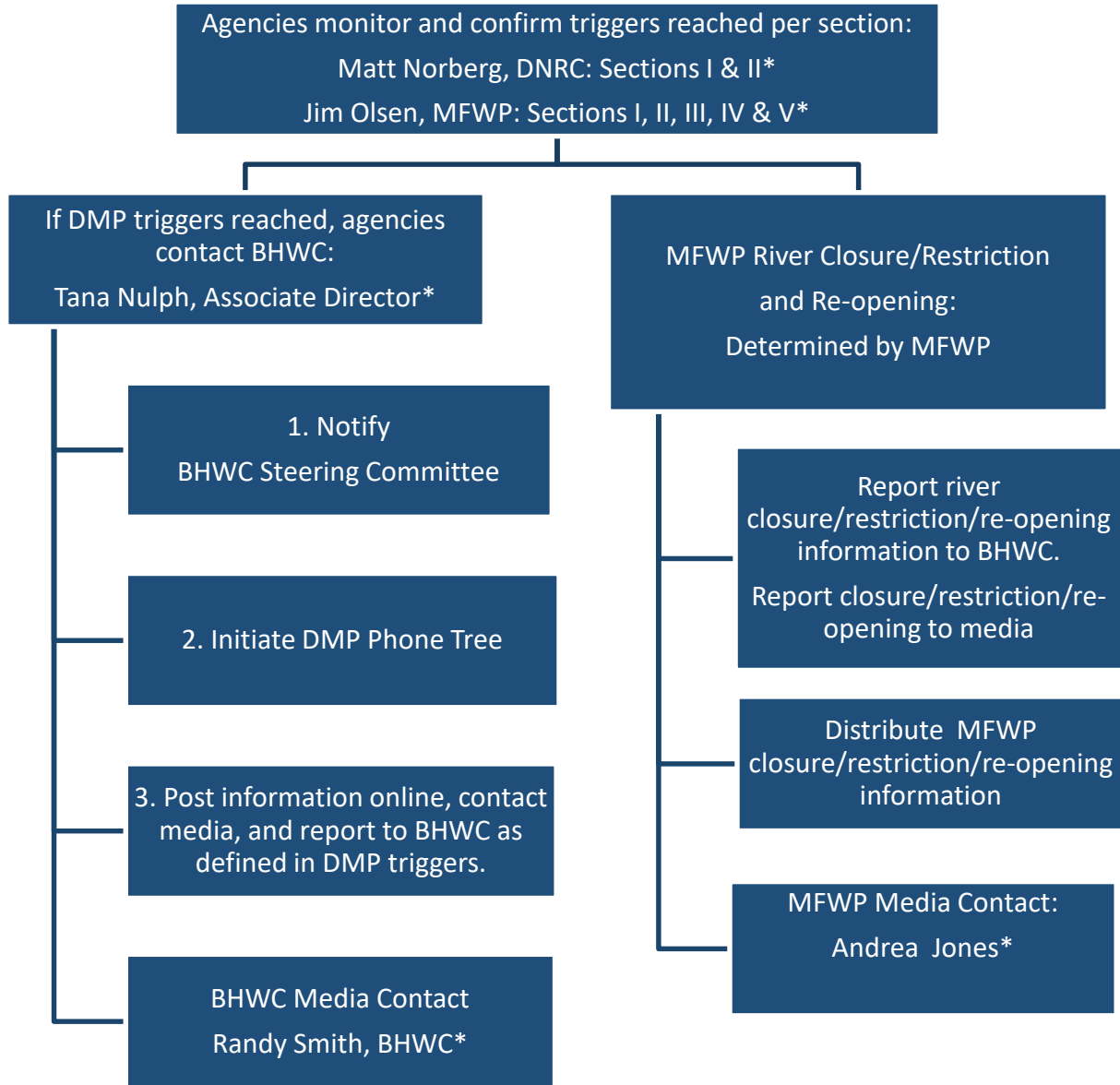
1. River closure or restriction recommendations from the MFWP District Biologists;
2. Recommendations reviewed by the Regional Fish Manager, Fish Bureau Chief, Regional Supervisor, and State Drought Commission. Final determination is made by MFWP Director; and
3. River closures or restrictions due to high water temperature are automatically lifted September 15. River closures or restrictions due to low streamflow are automatically lifted October 31. The river may re-open when these dates are reached or when flows and temperatures meet the re-open criteria (whichever comes first).

View MFWP River closures and re-openings statewide: <http://fwp.mt.gov/news/drought/waterClosure.html>.

HIGH WATER TEMPERATURE AND FISH HEALTH

Water temperature above 70°F is generally considered stressful to salmonids. Warm water temperatures typically occur between July 15 - September 1 in the Big Hole River. Although water temperature above 70°F can occur before and after this period, cooler night temperatures alleviate long periods of warm daytime temperatures. The upper incipient lethal water temperature (e.g. that temperature that is survivable indefinitely for periods longer than one week by 50% of the population) for Arctic Grayling is 77°F (Loher et. al. 1997). Critical thermal maximum temperature for Arctic grayling is 85°F resulting in instantaneous death. Thermally-induced stress as observed by trained, experienced observers may include any of the following: observed mortality in significant numbers of Age I and older mountain whitefish and other salmonid species in lieu of other logical sources of mortality; outbreaks of stress related piscid diseases such as Bacterial Furunculosis; extraordinary concentrations of fish in thalweg or riffle tailout habitats; hyperactivity (e.g. gasping, rolling, jumping, etc.) of large, concentrated numbers of fish; and frenzied feeding activity at inappropriate times and under inappropriate conditions.

BHWC DROUGHT MANAGEMENT PLAN DECISION TREE



* See page 12 for contact information.

DMP SECTION I:**SAGINAW BRIDGE ON SKINNER MEADOWS ROAD TO MOUTH OF THE NORTH FORK OF THE BIG HOLE RIVER**

Unique to the upper and middle reaches of the Big Hole River is the implementation of the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for Arctic grayling restoration. While this program is in place, DNRC and MFWP will be responsible for contacting water users to engage in water conservation measures in response to the flow triggers specified for this reach. All other facets of this plan, including contacting outfitters, sportsmen, and the media, will be implemented as described below. For more information on the CCAA visit http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/fish/grayling/CCAA_June2006.pdf.

FLOW TARGETS: APRIL 1 - OCTOBER 31

Monitored at the [USGS Wisdom Gage: "Big Hole River bl Big Lake Cr at Wisdom", Number 06024450](#)

160 cfs *April 1 - June 30.* Water users with CCAA site plans will be required to implement their plans. Non-CCAA water users will be contacted by DNRC and MFWP, advised of flow conditions and encouraged to implement conservation measures. This target is specific to the CCAA goal of maintaining spawning and rearing flow requirements for Arctic grayling.

July 1 – October 31

60 cfs *Prepare for Conservation:* DNRC and MFWP officials will present data to the Big Hole Watershed Committee and formulate options including CCAA implementation, voluntary reduction of irrigation, stock water diversions, municipal water use, angling, and encouragement of the use of stock watering wells; and prepare to take action. The DMP Phone Tree is initiated to notify water users and outfitters and anglers of low water conditions and encourage conservation measures. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org) as well as BHWC social media platforms.

40 cfs *Conserve:* The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to provide notice to outfitters and anglers requesting they voluntarily limit their angling activities to earlier, cooler hours of the day. The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to contact water users and encourage water conservation. The BHWC will contact the media to inform public of low flow conditions. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org) as well as BHWC social media platforms.

20 cfs *MFWP River Closure:* MFWP will close the Section I to fishing and will not conduct electrofishing surveys (subject to approval or change by the Arctic Grayling Technical Workgroup, a part of Arctic Grayling Recovery Program). MFWP will provide public notice to inform of fishing closures and encourage public conservation efforts. MFWP will provide river closure/re-opening information to BHWC for distribution. The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to contact water users and outfitters/anglers to advise of river closure and extreme low water conditions and to encourage conservation measures. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org), via BHWC social media platforms, and on the MFWP website.

TEMPERATURE TARGETS: MAY 1 - SEPTEMBER 15

Monitored at the [USGS Wisdom Gage: "Big Lake Creek at Wisdom", Number 06024450](#)

- Step 1: **MFWP Hoot-Owl Fishing Restrictions:** Hoot-owl fishing restriction will be in place in Section I when daily maximum water temperature reaches or exceeds 73° F (23° C) for at least some period of time during three consecutive days. Hoot-owl fishing closure prohibits fishing between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. (Midnight). They will remain in place until September 15 or until re-opening criteria are met. MFWP will provide public notice if hoot-owl restrictions are implemented.
- Step 2: **MFWP River Closure Due to High Temperatures:** River closure in Section I based on water temperature may be implemented if hoot-owl restrictions are inadequate to protect the fishery (e.g., prolonged period where water temperatures exceed 73° F and forecasts are not favorable for cooler temperature, thermal stress in fish observed by biologist, etc.). River closure will remain in place until September 15 or until re-opening criteria have been met. MFWP will provide public notice if a river closure is implemented.

MFWP RE-OPENING CRITERIA IN SECTION I

Average daily flow at the [USGS Wisdom Gage: "Big Lake Creek at Wisdom", Number 06024450](#) are greater than 40 cfs for 7 consecutive days and water temperatures are less than 70° F for 3 consecutive days *or* restrictions based on temperature are lifted September 15 and restrictions based on flow are lifted October 31. MFWP will determine re-opening and will provide public notice.

NOTES

The wetted stream perimeter (i.e. flow below which standing crops of fish decrease) of the upper Big Hole River is 60 cfs (DNRC 1992). While this flow may be reasonable to maintain in ample moisture years and should be the goal for flow preservation efforts, in most years it is not a realistic quantity. Fish population and flow data indicate 40 cfs is feasible to maintain while still sufficient to protect the Arctic grayling population. A minimum survival flow of 20 cfs will provide flows necessary to maintain a wetted channel, provide connectivity to thermal or flow refugia habitats, and ensure survival of the grayling population during brief, critical periods.

DMP SECTION II:**MOUTH OF THE NORTH FORK OF THE BIG HOLE RIVER TO DICKIE (DICKEY) BRIDGE**

Unique to the upper and middle reaches of the Big Hole River is the implementation of the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for Arctic grayling restoration. While this program is in place, DNRC and MFWP will be responsible for contacting water users to engage in water conservation measures in response to the flow triggers specified for this reach. All other facets of this plan, including contacting outfitters, sportsmen, and the media, will be implemented as described below. For more information on the CCAA visit http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/fish/grayling/CCAA_June2006.pdf.

FLOW TARGETS: APRIL 1 - OCTOBER 31

Monitored at [USGS Dickie Bridge Gage: "Big Hole River near Wise River, MT", Number 06024580](#)

450 cfs *April 1 - June 30.* Water users with CCAA site plans will be required to implement their plans. Non-CCAA water users will be contacted by DNRC and MFWP, advised of flow conditions and encouraged to implement conservation measures. This target is specific to the CCAA goal of maintaining spawning and rearing flow requirements for Arctic grayling.

July 1 - October 31

170 cfs *Prepare for Conservation:* DNRC and MFWP officials will present data to the Big Hole Watershed Committee and formulate options including CCAA implementation, voluntary reduction of irrigation, stock water diversions, municipal water use, angling, and encouragement of the use of stock watering wells; and prepare to take action. The DMP Phone Tree is initiated to notify water users and outfitters and anglers of low water conditions and encourage conservation measures. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org) as well as BHWC social media platforms.

140 cfs *Conserve:* The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to provide notice to outfitters and anglers requesting they voluntarily limit their angling activities to earlier, cooler hours of the day. The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to contact water users and encourage water conservation. The BHWC will contact the media to inform public of low flow conditions. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org) as well as BHWC social media platforms.

100 cfs *MFWP River Closure:* MFWP will close Section II to fishing and will not conduct electrofishing surveys (subject to approval or change by the Arctic Grayling Technical Workgroup, a part of Arctic Grayling Recovery Program). MFWP will provide public notice of fishing closures and encourage public conservation efforts. MFWP will provide river closure/reopening information to BHWC for distribution. The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to contact water users and outfitters/anglers to advise of river closure and extreme low water conditions and to encourage conservation measures. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org) as well as BHWC social media platforms.

TEMPERATURE TARGETS: MAY 1 - SEPTEMBER 15

Monitored at [USGS Dickie Bridge Gage: "Big Hole River near Wise River, MT", Number 06024580](#)

- Step 1: **MFWP Hoot-Owl Fishing Restrictions:** Hoot-owl fishing restriction will be in place in Section II when daily maximum water temperature reaches or exceeds 73° F (23° C) for at least some period of time during three consecutive days. Hoot-owl fishing closure prohibits fishing between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. (Midnight). They will remain in place until September 15 or until re-opening criteria are met. MFWP will provide public notice if hoot-owl restrictions are implemented.
- Step 2: **MFWP River Closure Due to High Temperatures:** River closure in Section II based on water temperature may be implemented if hoot-owl restrictions are inadequate to protect the fishery (e.g., prolonged period where water temperatures exceed 73° F and forecasts are not favorable for cooler temperature, thermal stress in fish observed by biologist, etc.). River closure will remain in place until September 15 or until re-opening criteria have been met. MFWP will provide public notice if a river closure is implemented.

MFWP RE-OPENING CRITERIA IN SECTION II

Average daily flows at the [USGS Dickie Bridge Gage: "Big Hole River near Wise River, MT", Number 06024580](#) are greater than 140 cfs for 7 consecutive days and water temperatures are less than 70° F for 3 consecutive days *or* restrictions based on temperature are lifted September 15 and restrictions based on flow are lifted October 31. MFWP will determine re-opening and will provide public notice.

DMP SECTION III: DICKIE BRIDGE TO MFWP MAIDEN ROCK FISHING ACCESS SITE

FLOW TARGETS: MAY 1 - OCTOBER 31

Monitored at [USGS Maiden Rock Gage: "Big Hole River at Maiden Rock nr Divide, MT", Number 06025250](#)

- 250 cfs *Prepare for Conservation:* DNRC and MFWP officials will present data to the Big Hole Watershed Committee and formulate options including CCAA implementation, voluntary reduction of irrigation, stock water diversions, municipal water use, angling, and encouragement of the use of stock watering wells; and prepare to take action. The DMP Phone Tree is initiated to notify water users, outfitters, and anglers of low water conditions and encourage conservation measures. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org) as well as BHWC social media platforms.
- 200 cfs *Conserve:* The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to provide notice to outfitters and anglers requesting they voluntarily limit their angling activities to earlier, cooler hours of the day. The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to contact water users and encourage water conservation. The BHWC will contact the media to inform public of low flow conditions. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org) as well as BHWC social media platforms.
- 150 cfs *MFWP River Closure:* MFWP will close Section III to fishing, and will not conduct electrofishing surveys (subject to approval or change by the Arctic Grayling Technical Workgroup, a part of Arctic Grayling Recovery Program). MFWP will provide public notice and inform of fishing closures and encourage public conservation efforts. MFWP will provide river closure/reopening information to BHWC for distribution. The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to contact water users and outfitters/anglers to advise of river closure and extreme low water conditions and to encourage conservation measures. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org), via BHWC social media platforms, and on the MFWP website.

TEMPERATURE TARGETS: MAY 1 - SEPTEMBER 15

Monitored at [USGS Maiden Rock Gage: "Big Hole River at Maiden Rock nr Divide, MT", Number 06025250](#)

- Step 1: **MFWP Hoot-Owl Fishing Restrictions:** Hoot-owl fishing restriction will be in place in Section III when daily maximum water temperature reaches or exceeds 73° F (23° C) for at least some period of time during three consecutive days. Hoot-owl fishing closure prohibits fishing between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. (Midnight). They will remain in place until September 15 or until re-opening criteria are met. MFWP will provide public notice if hoot-owl restrictions are implemented.
- Step 2: **MFWP River Closure Due to High Temperatures:** River closure in Section III based on water temperature may be implemented if hoot-owl restrictions are inadequate to protect the fishery (e.g., prolonged period where water temperatures exceed 73° F and forecasts are not favorable for cooler temperature, thermal stress in fish observed by biologist, etc.). River closure will remain in place until September 15 or until re-opening criteria have been met. MFWP will provide public notice if a river closure is implemented.

MFWP RE-OPENING CRITERIA IN SECTION III

Average daily flows at the [USGS Maiden Rock Gage: "Big Hole River at Maiden Rock nr Divide, MT", Number 06025250](#) are greater than 200 cfs for 7 consecutive days and water temperatures are less than 70° F for 3 consecutive days *or* restrictions based on temperature are lifted September 15 and restrictions based on flow are lifted October 31. MFWP will determine re-opening and will provide public notice.

DMP SECTION IV: MFWP MAIDEN ROCK FISHING ACCESS SITE TO MFWP NOTCH BOTTOM FISHING ACCESS SITE

FLOW TARGETS: MAY 1 - OCTOBER 31

Monitored at [USGS Glen Gage: "Big Hole River near Glen, MT", Number 06026210](#)

- 290 cfs *Prepare for Conservation:* DNRC and MFWP officials will present data to the Big Hole Watershed Committee and formulate options including CCAA implementation, voluntary reduction of irrigation, stock water diversions, municipal water use, angling, and encouragement of the use of stock watering wells; and prepare to take action. The DMP Phone Tree is initiated to notify water users, outfitters, and anglers of low water conditions and encourage conservation measures. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org) as well as BHWC social media platforms.
- 240 cfs *Conserve:* The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to provide notice to outfitters and anglers requesting they voluntarily limit their angling activities to earlier, cooler hours of the day. The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to contact water users and encourage water conservation. The BHWC will contact the media to inform public of low flow conditions. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org) as well as BHWC social media platforms.
- 190 cfs *MFWP River Closure:* MFWP will close Section IV to fishing according to the MFWP River Closure Policy and will not conduct electrofishing surveys. MFWP will provide public notice and inform of fishing closures and encourage public conservation efforts. MFWP will provide river closure/reopening information to BHWC for distribution. The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to contact water users and outfitters/anglers to advise of river closure and extreme low water conditions and to encourage conservation measures. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org), via BHWC social media platforms, and on the MFWP website.

TEMPERATURE TARGETS: MAY 1 - SEPTEMBER 15

Monitored at the [USGS Glen Gage: "Big Hole River near Glen, MT", Number 06026210](#)

- Step 1: **MFWP Hoot-Owl Fishing Restrictions:** Hoot-owl fishing restriction will be in place in Section IV when daily maximum water temperature reaches or exceeds 73° F (23° C) for at least some period of time during three consecutive days. Hoot-owl fishing closure prohibits fishing between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. (Midnight). They will remain in place until September 15 or until re-opening criteria are met. MFWP will provide public notice if hoot-owl restrictions are implemented.
- Step 2: **MFWP River Closure Due to High Temperatures:** River closure in Section IV based on water temperature may be implemented if hoot-owl restrictions are inadequate to protect the fishery (e.g., prolonged period where water temperatures exceed 73° F and forecasts are not favorable for cooler temperature, thermal stress in fish observed by biologist, etc.). River closure will remain in place until September 15 or until re-opening criteria have been met. MFWP will provide public notice if a river closure is implemented.

MFWP RE-OPENING CRITERIA IN SECTION IV

Average daily flows at the [USGS Glen Gage: "Big Hole River near Glen, MT", Number 06026210](#) are greater than 240 cfs for 7 consecutive days and water temperatures are less than 70° F for 3 consecutive days or restrictions based on temperature are lifted September 15 and restrictions based on flow are lifted October 31. MFWP will determine re-opening and will provide public notice. *Note: Section IV begins at the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Maiden Rock ("Maidenrock") Fishing Access Site, not the Bureau of Land Management Maiden Rock Fishing Access Sites.*

DMP SECTION V: NOTCH BOTTOM FISHING ACCESS SITE TO CONFLUENCE OF THE BIG HOLE RIVER WITH THE JEFFERSON RIVER

FLOW TARGETS: MAY 1 - OCTOBER 31

Monitored at [USGS "Big Hole R bl Hamilton Ditch nr Twin Bridges, MT", Number 06026420](#)

- 200 cfs *Prepare for Conservation:* DNRC and MFWP officials will present data to the Big Hole Watershed Committee and formulate options including CCAA implementation, voluntary reduction of irrigation, stock water diversions, municipal water use, angling, and encouragement of the use of stock watering wells; and prepare to take action. The DMP Phone Tree is initiated to notify water users, outfitters, and anglers of low water conditions and encourage conservation measures. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org) as well as BHWC social media platforms.
- 150 cfs *Conserve:* The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to provide notice to outfitters and anglers requesting they voluntarily limit their angling activities to earlier, cooler hours of the day. The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to contact water users and encourage water conservation. The BHWC will contact the media to inform public of low flow conditions. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org) as well as BHWC social media platforms.
- 100 cfs *MFWP River Closure:* MFWP will close Section V to fishing according to the MFWP River Closure Policy and will not conduct electrofishing surveys. MFWP will provide public notice and inform of fishing closures and encourage public conservation efforts. MFWP will provide river closure/reopening information to BHWC for distribution. The DMP Phone Tree will be initiated to contact water users and outfitters/anglers to advise of river closure and extreme low water conditions and to encourage conservation measures. Information will be posted online on the BHWC website (bhwc.org), via BHWC social media platforms, and on the MFWP website.

TEMPERATURE TARGETS: MAY 1 - SEPTEMBER 15

Monitored at [USGS "Big Hole R bl Hamilton Ditch nr Twin Bridges, MT", Number 06026420](#)

- Step 1: **MFWP Hoot-Owl Fishing Restrictions:** Hoot-owl fishing restriction will be in place in Section IV when daily maximum water temperature reaches or exceeds 73° F (23° C) for at least some period of time during three consecutive days. Hoot-owl fishing closure prohibits fishing between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. (Midnight). They will remain in place until September 15 or until re-opening criteria are met. MFWP will provide public notice if hoot-owl restrictions are implemented.
- Step 2: **MFWP River Closure Due to High Temperatures:** River closure in Section IV based on water temperature may be implemented if hoot-owl restrictions are inadequate to protect the fishery (e.g., prolonged period where water temperatures exceed 73° F and forecasts are not favorable for cooler temperature, thermal stress in fish observed by biologist, etc.). River closure will remain in place until September 15 or until re-opening criteria have been met. MFWP will provide public notice if a river closure is implemented.

MFWP RE-OPENING CRITERIA FOR SECTION V

Average daily flows at [USGS "Big Hole R bl Hamilton Ditch nr Twin Bridges, MT", Number 06026420](#) are greater than 200 cfs for 7 consecutive days and water temperatures are less than 70° F for 3 consecutive days or restrictions based on temperature are lifted September 15 and restrictions based on flow are lifted October 31. MFWP will determine reopening and will provide public notice.

NOTIFICATION AND MONITORING PROCESS

MFWP and DNRC will keep the Big Hole Watershed Committee fully informed throughout the year regarding streamflows, water temperature, and snowpack data. This will allow for timely information to help in encouraging appropriate courses of action.

Streamflow conditions, water temperature, and snowpack levels will be a standing agenda item at each Big Hole Watershed Committee meeting. Based on the year-long monitoring of weather conditions that may influence flow, the Big Hole Watershed Committee will publish a notification of impending dry year conditions. Notifications will be sent to the press, ranchers, municipalities, outfitters, conservation and sportsmen groups, and posted online on the BHWC website and social media sites.

While most attention is on late summer conditions, spring flows are equally important for channel maintenance, bed load and sediment movement, and spawning habitat for spring and early summer spawners including Arctic grayling, rainbow trout, cutthroat trout, long nose and common suckers.

The BHWC will issue during drought periods.

The BHWC will work with MFWP on press releases and other public outreach efforts. The BHWC will work with local newspapers and televisions to secure flow updates in these communication mediums.

The BHWC will issue an annual update in the form of a mailing (hard copy and electronic) which will include: a copy of the most recent Drought Management Plan, flow forecasting, updates on water conservation programs and assistance, and other related news items.

MFWP and DNRC will offer assistance to irrigators who are willing to cut back on water diversions. The BHWC will hold an open public meeting to present the information and conduct discussions with all parties concerning proposed actions.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

The BHWC will develop and distribute educational material with agency assistance, describing the need for a drought management plan, its provisions, and anticipated benefits.

Information will be provided on the possible actions people can take to mitigate damage from drought years including, but not limited to:

- ❖ Voluntary reduction of irrigation and diversion stock watering during critical times;
- ❖ Water conservation policies by municipalities and industries during sensitive times;
- ❖ Emergency water reduction policies by municipalities and industries during critical times;
- ❖ Reduced recreation uses during sensitive times;
- ❖ Elimination of fall recreation uses at critical times; and
- ❖ Encourage Big Hole watershed residents to reduce unnecessary water use including lawn watering, small irrigation systems, washing, etc.

RESOURCES

INFORMATION CONTACT

Randy Smith	BHWC Chairman	406-925-1545	6sranch@3rivers.net -- Media Contact
Tana Nulph	BHWC Associate Director	406-267-3421	tnulph@bhwc.org

OTHER CONTACTS

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP)

Jim Olsen, Big Hole River Fisheries Biologist 406-533-8451 jimolsen@mt.gov

Andrea Jones, Information & Education Manager 406-994-6931 anjones@mt.gov -- Media Contact

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)

Matt Norberg, Hydrologist 406-444-6041 mnorberg@mt.gov

Montana Drought Monitoring 406-444-5354

RESOURCES

NRIS Drought Report: <http://nris.mt.gov/drought/>

USGS Real Time Flow Data: <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/mt/nwis/current?type=flow>

NRCS Snowpack Monitoring: <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/snow/>

Surface Water Program – DNRC/MBMG (Wise River Gage):
<http://data.mbm.mtech.edu/beta/Mapper.asp?view=Swamp&>

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Drought & River Restrictions: <http://fwp.mt.gov/news/drought/droughtDetails.html>

Montana Statewide Drought Closure Policy

<http://fwp.mt.gov/news/drought/closurepolicy.html> <http://fwp.mt.gov/news/drought/>

Big Hole Watershed Committee: <http://bhwc.org/>

BHWC Drought Management Plan Phone Tree (DMP Phone Tree): The DMP Phone Tree is a separate document that lists the phone contacts made when DMP triggers are reached and used by phone tree leaders.

BHWC Drought Management Plan Amendments: The DMP is reviewed annually. When changes are made to the plan, they are recorded in the amendments with reasoning for the change. The amendments are provided in a separate document.



BIG HOLE WATERSHED COMMITTEE

BIG HOLE RIVER DROUGHT MANAGEMENT PLAN - VERSION 2016-2020

QUICK REFERENCE

SECTION	FLOW TRIGGERS APRIL 1 - OCTOBER 31	TEMPERATURE TRIGGERS
I: Saginaw Bridge on Skinner Meadows Road to North Fork Big Hole River Mouth	160 cfs - April 1 to June 30 target for Arctic grayling spawning. 60 cfs – Low Water 40 cfs - Conservation 20 cfs - MFWP River Closure Measured at USGS Wisdom Gage (06024450)	<p>Step 1: MFWP Hoot-Owl Fishing Restrictions: Hoot-owl fishing restriction will be in place when daily maximum water temperature reaches or exceeds 73° F (23° C) for at least some period of time during three consecutive days. Hoot-owl fishing closure prohibits fishing between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. (Midnight). They will remain in place until September 15 or until re-opening criteria are met.</p> <p>Step 2: MFWP River Closure Due to High Temperatures: River closure based on water temperature may be implemented if hoot-owl restrictions are inadequate to protect the fishery (e.g., prolonged period where water temperatures exceed 73° F and forecasts are not favorable for cooler temperature, thermal stress in fish observed by biologist, etc.). Closure will remain in place until September 15 or until re-opening criteria are met.</p> <p><i>Sections temperature measured at:</i> I: USGS Wisdom Gage II: USGS BHR near Wise River III: USGS Maiden Rock IV: USGS Glen Gage V: USGS Hamilton Ditch Gage</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MFWP Statewide River Restrictions and Closures</p> <p>Contact: Big Hole Watershed Committee Bhwc.org info@bhwc.org 406-960-4855</p>
II: North Fork of Big Hole River confluence to Dickie Bridge	450 cfs - April 1 to June 30 target for Arctic grayling spawning. 170 cfs – Low Water 140 cfs - Conservation 100 cfs - MFWP River Closure Measured at USGS Big Hole River near Wise River Gage (06024580)	
III: Dickie Bridge to MFWP Maiden Rock Fishing Access Site	250 cfs – Low Water 200 cfs - Conservation 150 cfs - MFWP River Closure Measured at USGS Maiden Rock Gage (06025250)	
IV: MFWP Maiden Rock to Notch Bottom Fishing Access Sites	290 cfs – Low Water 240 cfs - Conservation 190 cfs - MFWP River Closure Measured at USGS Glen Gage (06026210)	
V: Notch Bottom FAS to confluence of Big Hole River with Jefferson River	200 cfs – Low Water 150 cfs - Conservation 100 cfs - MFWP River Closure Measured at USGS Big Hole River below Hamilton Ditch near Twin Bridges Gage (06026420)	



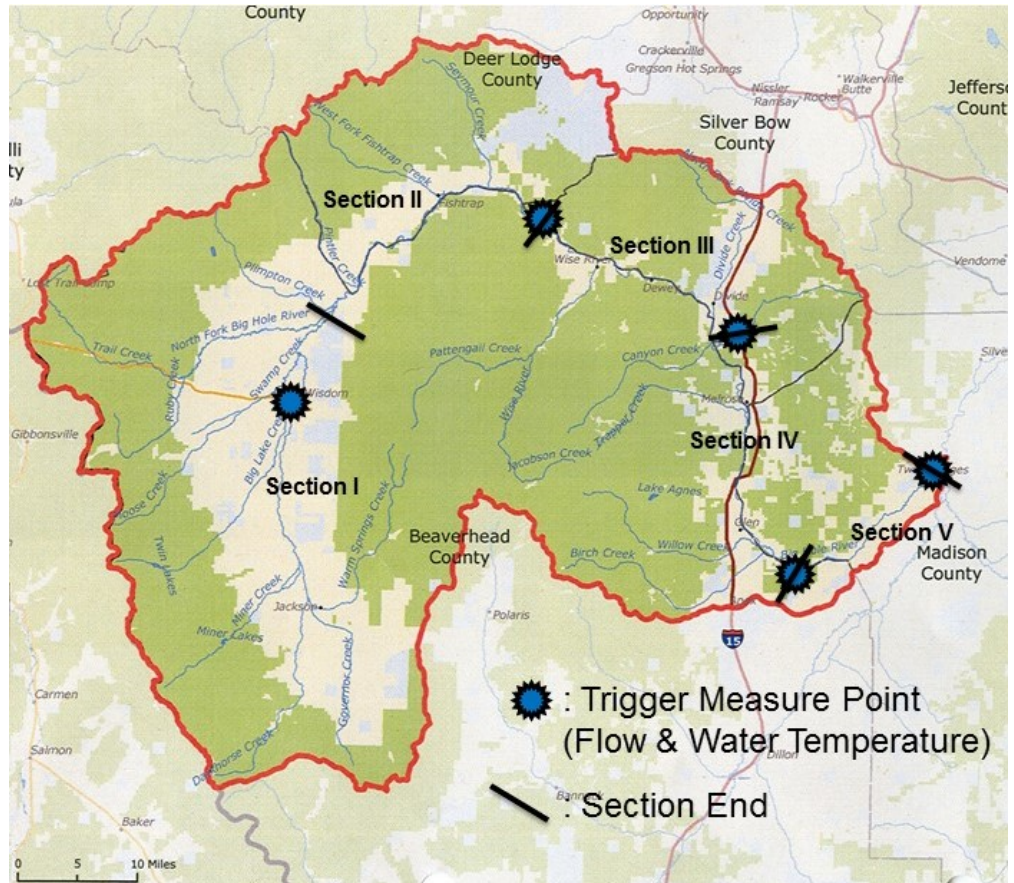
BIG HOLE
WATERSHED COMMITTEE

BIG HOLE RIVER DROUGHT MANAGEMENT PLAN 2016-2020

MAP OF RIVER SECTIONS AND MEASUREMENT POINTS

**Big Hole River
Drought
Management
Plan 2016-
2020**

**River Sections
and Measure
Points**



The map above marks the 2016-2020 Big Hole River Drought Management Plan river sections and their measure points. The Big Hole Watershed is outlined in red. The river sections are marked as Sections I-V. The Big Hole River originates in Section I and flows downstream to Section V.