



# Big Hole Watershed Committee

## Virtual Monthly Meeting Minutes

### September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020 via Zoom

#### In Attendance

Pedro Marques, BHWC; Tana Nulph, BHWC; Ben LaPorte, BHWC; Matt Norberg, DNRC; Sierra Harris, TNC/BHWC; Matt Norberg, DNRC; Chris Edgington, Montana Trout Unlimited; Paul Cleary, Resident/BHWC; Sandy Cleary, Resident; Gary Burnett, Heart of the Rockies Initiative; Roy Morris, GGTU/BHWC; Jared Beaver, MSU Extension; Scott Reynolds, Resident; Dominique Shore, Ruby Valley Conservation District; Wade Fellin, Big Hole Lodge; Jim Hagenbarth, Rancher/BHWC; Peter Frick, Rancher/BHWC; Dean Peterson, Rancher/BHWC; Cole Mannix, Heart of the Rockies Initiative; Ann Schwend, DNRC; Cindy Salo; and Laura Lundquist, Montana Wildlife Federation.

#### August Meeting Minutes

BHWC's August monthly meeting was held virtually via Zoom due to COVID-19. The minutes and recording for that meeting are both available on our website: <https://bhwc.org/monthly-meetings/> (scroll down for past committee reports/meeting minutes). Please contact us at [info@bhwc.org](mailto:info@bhwc.org) to suggest additions or corrections to either the August minutes or this document.

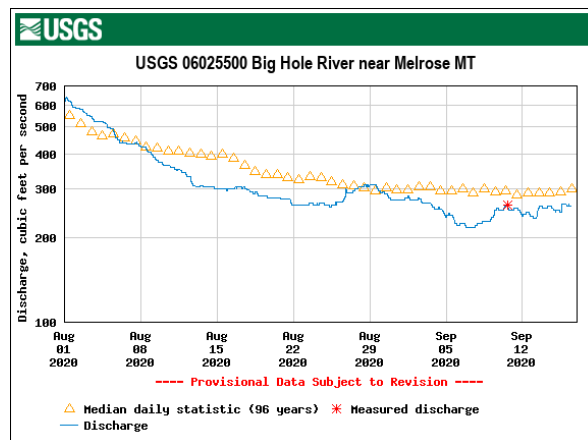
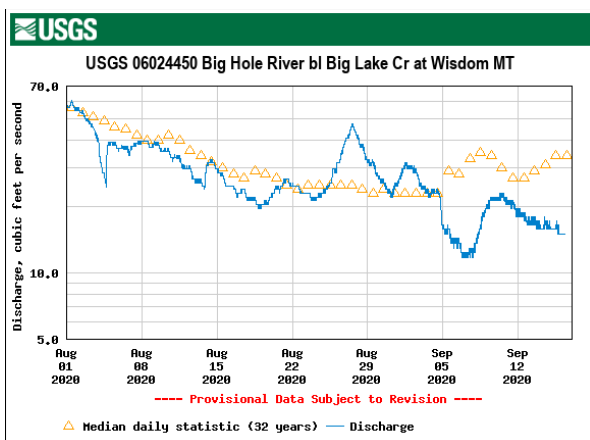
#### Reports

*Streamflow/Snowpack Report as of September 16, 2020 – Matt Norberg, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation*

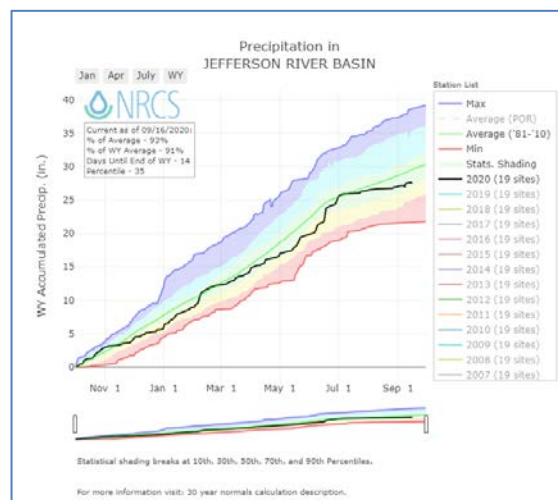
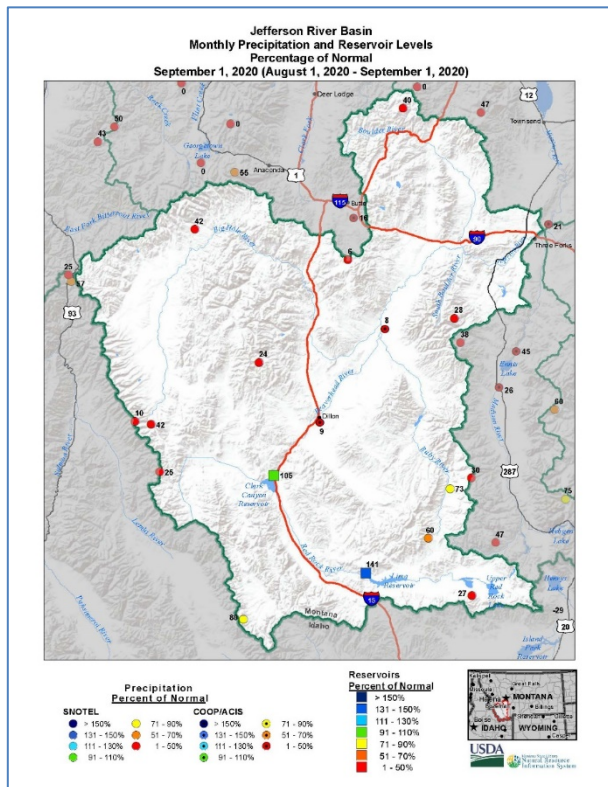
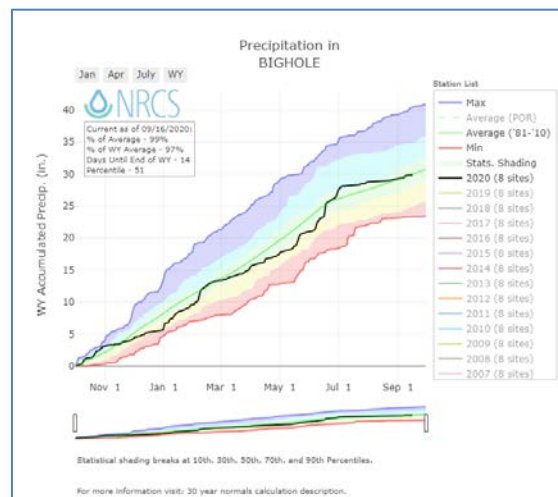
- **Streamflows:** August and September streamflows on the Big Hole have generally been below the long-term median values with some of the sites at or below the 25th percentile. Precipitation throughout the valley has been below average during the late summer months resulting in decreased water availability across the watershed. Streamflows at the Wisdom Bridge (USGS-06024450) have dropped below 20 cfs and continue to remain below 20 cfs

Big Hole Streamgages							
Station Number	Station name	Date/Time	Gage height, feet	Dis-charge, ft <sup>3</sup> /s	Long-term median flow 4/16	Temperature, deg C	
■ UPPER MISSOURI RIVER BASIN							
<a href="#">06023500</a>	Big Hole River near Jackson MT	09/16 15:15 MDT	0.99	14.8	14.0	--	
<a href="#">06023800</a>	Big Hole River ab Spring Creek nr Jackson MT	09/16 16:00 MDT	1.41	17.0	25.0	--	
<a href="#">06024020</a>	Big Hole River at Miner Creek nr Jackson MT	09/16 15:15 MDT	0.80	27.4	54.0	--	
<a href="#">06024450</a>	Big Hole River bl Big Lake Cr at Wisdom MT	09/16 15:45 MDT	1.69	15.7	34.0	14.5	
<a href="#">06024540</a>	Big Hole River bl Mudd Cr nr Wisdom MT	09/16 14:30 MDT	2.56	120	111	--	
<a href="#">06024580</a>	Big Hole River near Wise River MT	09/16 15:30 MDT	2.44	152	214	12.7	
<a href="#">06025250</a>	Big Hole River at Maiden Rock nr Divide MT	09/16 15:45 MDT	2.81	267	309	14.0	
<a href="#">06025500</a>	Big Hole River near Melrose MT	09/16 15:15 MDT	1.39	260	301	13.6	
<a href="#">06026210</a>	Big Hole River near Glen MT	09/16 15:30 MDT	2.30	283	295	<a href="#">Ssn</a>	
<a href="#">06026420</a>	Big Hole R bl Hamilton Ditch nr Twin Bridges, MT	09/16 15:30 MDT	0.700	156	183	15.9	

prompting a fishing closure from the confluence of the North Fork Big Hole to Saginaw Bridge on Skinner Meadows road. Hoot Owl restrictions were lifted on August 27th for Sections 2 and 4, due to decreased water temperatures below 70 F.

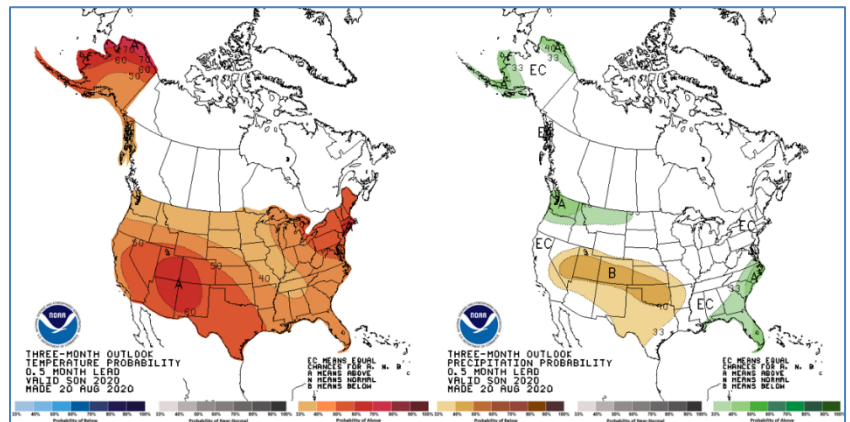
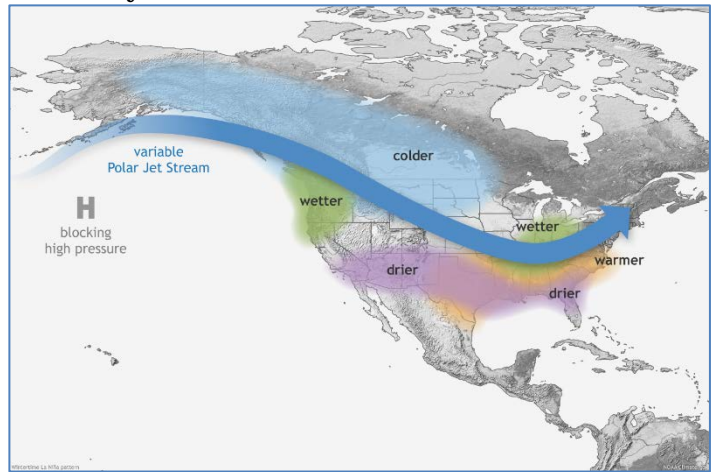


- Precipitation:** Year-to-date precipitation in the Big Hole Basin is currently 99% of average and 93% of average in the Jefferson River Basin. Late spring and early summer precipitation events coupled with average to above average snowpack throughout the basin resulted in above average streamflows in the Big Hole this season until late summer. Precipitation during mid to late summer has been below average causing declining streamflows. For example: Total August (2020) precipitation values recorded at the SNOTEL sites in the Big Hole were 32% of Average. Darkhorse Lake recorded 0.2 inches which is 10% of normal. September precipitation values have fared better than August but are still well below average.



- **Forecast: ENSO Alert System Status: La Niña Advisory**

- Synopsis: La Niña conditions are present and are likely to continue through the Northern Hemisphere winter (~75% chance). What does this mean for Montana and the Big Hole specifically? “Generally,” La Niña winters in the southern tier of the US tend to be warmer and drier, while the northern tier and Canada tend to be colder. These events tend to reach their maximum strength during October-February.
- The 3-month outlook for September/October/November is for above average temperatures and equal chances of above/normal precipitation. This 3-month outlook tends to somewhat disagree with La Niña conditions but models indicate transitioning into wetter conditions as winter progresses.



**Director's Report – Pedro Marques, Executive Director**

- **General/National:**
  - Answer the Census
  - Stream Gage Survey
  - Grayling decision by USFWS
  - Outreach to litigants- Let's move forward
  - Dillon Tribune tomorrow
  - Climate and Covid Refugees: Time for a land use planning reboot!
- **BHWC/Partnerships:**
  - Steering Committee meeting later this month
  - Continue governing board conversations
  - Meeting this moment with engagement, inclusion. Need to move from camps to community
  - Heart of the Rockies
  - Foundation talk on wildlife conflict reduction at the regional level
  - Getting real about “connectivity”- Tonight's talk
  - BVRD Working Group
  - Big Hole Vision
  - Tours on Smelter Hills

*Do you use streamgages?*

**Take the Montana Streamgage User's Survey**

Yes you!

Government Watershed Group  
Irrigator  
Guide  
Recreationist  
Fisherman  
Farmer/Rancher  
Tribal

We need to hear from you!  
Help us understand how people and organizations use streamgage data

Scan the QR code on your smartphone or visit the URL to take the survey now!

[www.surveymonkey.com/r/95jZPPC](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/95jZPPC)



- FWP Personnel
- UM Environmental Studies Work Day
- Volunteer Day tomorrow!
- Drought and Gages:
  - BHWC just paid USGS \$3900
  - Drought response and communications- upcoming drought committee meeting
- Projects:
  - Bureau of Reclamation planning grant:
    - Under Contract!
    - 2-years capacity funding
    - Restoration Plan Update
    - Lower River Engagement
    - Pennington Bridge Design
  - RCPP- 2021:
    - Irrigation Infrastructure
    - Research w/UM Western
    - NRCS and IWJV
  - Forestry Cooperative- DNRC; NFWF \$ for mesic/riparian restoration on/near BLM- Sage Grouse Partnership, TNC
- Communications/Marketing
  - Hold Back Snowpack: 1,000+ views
  - More short films coming soon!"
  - Stay up-to-date by visiting our website, [bhwc.org](http://bhwc.org), [joining our email list](#) and following us on social media!



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

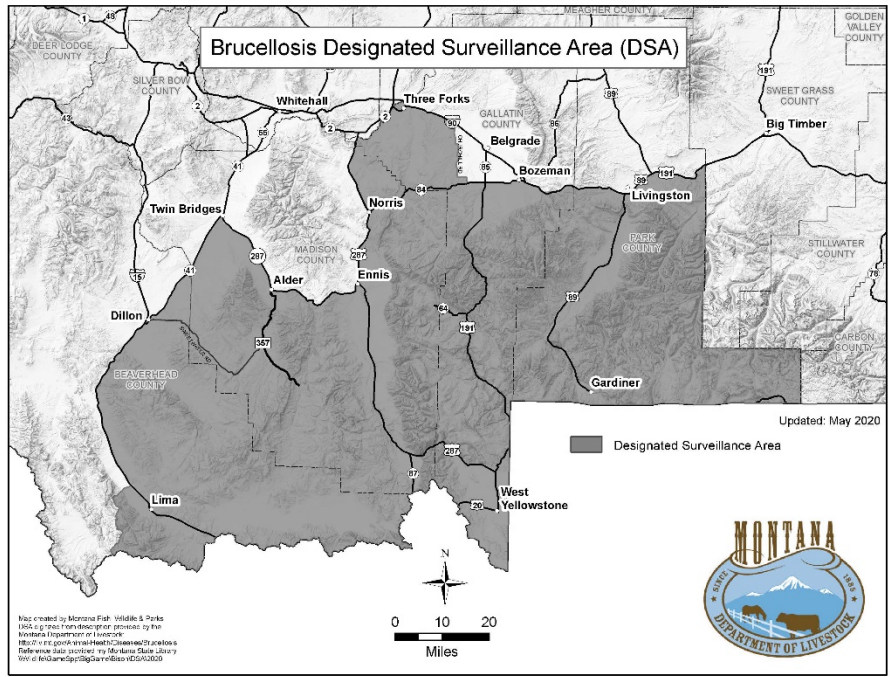
- Steering Committee is happy with the progress BHWC is making.

*Wildlife Report – Tana Nulph, Associate Director*

- Upper Big Hole Range Rider Program:
  - The 11<sup>th</sup> Upper Big Hole Range Rider season is nearly complete (program runs July 1<sup>st</sup>- September 30<sup>th</sup>).
  - Chet Robertson, Upper Big Hole Range Rider, has photographed and tracked several wolves this year and has found a new den site.
- Carcass Removal & Composting:
  - Carcass removal was provided free of charge to Big Hole Valley ranchers during the spring calving season (March-May 2020) to remove predator attractant from area ranches.
  - Wildlife Program Tech. John Costa picked up 53 carcasses from 9 ranches in 2020 and hauled them to our compost site next to the Wisdom MDT Maintenance Shop.
  - BHWC provided carcass removal services to Sage Creek ranchers on behalf of the Centennial Valley Association spring 2020.

- **Loaner Toolkits:**
  - **Livestock Loss Prevention:**
    - Producers can borrow/test.
    - Scare devices, temporary e-fencing, bear spray, resource guides, etc.
    - 2020 funding:
      - Livestock Loss Board.
      - Vital Ground Foundation.
  - **Bear Safety:**
    - Big Hole residents can borrow/test.
    - Scare devices, bear-resistant backpacking containers, resource guides, bear spray, inert practice bear spray, etc.
    - 2020 funding:
      - Vital Ground Foundation.
  - **Contact Tana for more information:**
    - [tnulph@bhwc.org](mailto:tnulph@bhwc.org)
    - 406-267-3421
- **Wildlife Conflict Reduction with Beavers:**
  - BHWC is adding beaver conflict reduction to its wildlife programs.
  - Goal: To reduce human-beaver conflicts using non-lethal and habitat sustaining methods.
  - Upcoming: October 8<sup>th</sup>, 11am-12pm
    - Virtual Field Trip: Non-lethal Beaver Conflict Resolution
    - Hosted by: Clark Fork Coalition, National Wildlife Federation, and Defenders of Wildlife
    - BHWC staff will join as webinar attendees
    - Register here: [https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_KDjl--WwQvOyFG9OhryOng](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_KDjl--WwQvOyFG9OhryOng)
  - **Current Projects:**
    - Beaver Culvert Fence (Sugar Loaf Lodge, private)
    - Mule Ranch Pond Leveler (MFWP)
  - **Potential Projects?**
    - Having problems with beavers? Get in touch! [info@bhwc.org](mailto:info@bhwc.org), 406-267-3421
- **Brucellosis Meeting:**
  - September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020. 5-8pm @ the Jackson Fire Hall
    - Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks: manages elk populations, testing
      - Vanna Boccadori, Wildlife Biologist (West Big Hole)
      - Jesse Newby, Wildlife Biologist (East Big Hole – replaced Craig Fager)
      - Jennifer Ramsey, MFWP Wildlife Veterinarian
    - Department of Livestock: manages Brucellosis testing/DSAs
      - Marty Zaluski, DOL Veterinarian
      - Tahnee Szymanski, DOL Assistant Veterinarian

- Local Ranchers
- About Brucellosis:
  - Bacterial disease caused by *Brucella abortus*: Causes infected cows to abort their pregnancies prematurely.
  - Designated Surveillance Area (DSA) is just outside of the Big Hole watershed.
  - 2 seropositive (blood tested positive) elk found recently in the Ruby Range, prompting concerns about DSA expansion.
- Brucellosis testing (bleeding) in Montana:
  - All sexually intact cattle and domestic bison must be tested for brucellosis within 30 days prior to leaving the DSA or changing ownership.
    - Exceptions:
      - <12 month, for slaughter.
      - When sold to a licensed Montana livestock market (tested upon arrival).
      - Tested after July 16th of previous year – good until February 15<sup>th</sup>.
- Main points from meeting:
  - DSA more likely to expand than decrease in the near future.
    - Based on elk movement & areas of least info.
    - Test elk:
      - All -, DSA stays the same.
      - +, DSA *may* expand.
  - Worst case scenario: Brucellosis expands everywhere with contiguous elk pop.
  - Concerns RE: loss of DSA/financial burden of testing put on producers:
    - Very unlikely (Zaluski).
    - Fed law: won't lose DSA as long as State ID's zone, manages disease within, and does sufficient testing.
- Upcoming/Next Steps:
  - Need for better methods/types of testing, but *Brucella* is on Federal terrorism agent list, which restricts research & development.
    - BHCW sent LOS supporting removal of *Brucella* from list.
  - MT Legislature: build indemnity fund to reimburse for losses due to state-directed testing (DOL).





## *Restoration Report – Ben LaPorte, Program Manager*

- Riverscape Restoration Network:
  - 90+ professionals in the intermountain West who work on low tech, processed based restoration.
  - Opportunity to share projects, issues, monitoring and research on PBR.
- Big Hole Breezes article:
  - Preaching natural water storage and the importance of our work in our watershed.
- UofM student volunteer day:
  - BDA construction in tributary stream of California Creek.
- Anaconda Uplands Construction:
  - 3 large “spreader dikes” and 1 large gully check dam are finished.
  - Muddy Gulch beaver dam restoration project is next.
- Volunteer Event:
  - BHCW held volunteer fence removal day at California Creek on Thursday, 9/17/20. The riparian area was restored here in 2017 with thousands of container plants installed. Vegetation was fenced to protect from browse by ungulates while it became established. Volunteers removed countless t-posts and several sections of fencing, which was given to volunteers and interested landowners.



## **New Business**

- None

## **Special Topics: PLPW Seeking Landowner Input on Wildlife Migration**

- Presented by Gary Burnett & Cole Mannix, Heart of the Rockies Initiative
- Background:
  - In 2018, the US Department of the Interior issued Secretarial Order 3362, Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big-Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors that provided funding and guidance for states and other partners working to conserve migrations. In response to SO 3362, MFWP identified five focal areas for migration-related work as part of its broader ongoing focus to maintain a landscape conducive to wildlife movement:
    1. Continental Divide to Rocky Mountain Front
    2. Yellowstone National Park to Paradise Valley
    3. Anaconda Range to Big Hole, Bitterroot, and Upper Clark Fork
    4. Canadian Border to Musselshell Plains
    5. Heart of the Salish
  - Maintaining transparent communication and engagement with the interests and concerns of landowners and local collaboratives is an essential part of this work. To this

end, Montana's Private Lands Public Wildlife Council (PLPW) will be hosting a panel discussion on Dec 1, 2020 to hear perspectives from landowner representatives from each of the five focal areas on Montana's approach to migration. PLPW will then consider and evaluate ways it can advocate for the state to respond to local interests and concerns surrounding wildlife movement in the focal areas.

- PLPW is hosting local outreach in each of the five focal areas. Each meeting will be an opportunity for landowners and local collaboratives to share their perspectives on how wildlife movements are affecting them, any work they are doing pertinent to migration, and to voice any interests and concerns moving forward. The meeting is also an opportunity for FWP regional staff to provide an update on its ongoing and upcoming migration research projects and share its approach to conserving migrations in Montana.
- Gary & Cole joined us to inquire about BHWC/Big Hole landowner interest in providing landowner input regarding wildlife migration, potentially via in-person meetings.
- Next Steps:
  - BHWC to help gather landowner input.
  - Tentatively will hold 2 in-person meetings in the Big Hole watershed (Wisdom & Divide).
  - More on this soon!

### **Upcoming Meetings**

- BHWC Virtual Monthly Meeting, October 21, 2020 – 7pm via Zoom

### **Adjourn**