



# Big Hole Watershed Committee

## Monthly Meeting Minutes

June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022 – 7:00 pm at the Divide Grange  
*Zoom option not provided as WiFi was down*

### In Attendance

*In-person:* Tana Nulph, BHWC; Ben LaPorte, BHWC; Tom Bowler, Resident; Betty Bowler, Resident; Jim Hagenbarth, Rancher/BHWC; Paul Cleary, Resident/BHWC; Sandy Cleary, Resident; Randy Smith, Rancher/BHWC; Sam Stone, Big Hole Ranch; Susan Stone, Big Hole Ranch; Catherine McRae, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest; Jim Dennehy, BSB Water/BHWC; Jarrett Payne, MFWP; Cass Kohler, MFWP; Roy Morris, GGTU/BHWC; Dean Peterson, Rancher/BHWC; and Howard Varner, Rancher.

### Meeting Minutes

BHWC monthly meetings are held at the Divide Grange with a virtual (Zoom) option provided thanks to Southern Montana Telephone Company, who donated the internet service. Meeting minutes and recordings are available at <https://bhwc.org/monthly-meetings/> (scroll down for meeting minutes archive). Printed copies are available during in-person meetings. Contact Tana Nulph, BHWC Associate Director, at [tnulph@bhwc.org](mailto:tnulph@bhwc.org) or (406) 267-3421 to suggest additions or corrections.

- **Note: The WiFi at the Grange Hall was not working for the June 2022 meeting. We apologize to everyone who was hoping to join us on Zoom! We'll be sure to get it fixed before our August meeting!**

### Reports

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

- Water storage subcommittee – BHWC is forming a subcommittee to address water storage. Please reach out to Pedro if you would like to join the subcommittee.
  - DNRC, FWP, ATB funding
- Precipitation report:
  - Matt Norberg DNRC was understandable busy due to the flooding on the Yellowstone River.
  - We have been receiving abundant precipitation in the Big Hole watershed, but we are now past the peak, flows are dropping, and we do not expect to see any flooding.
  - 23" SWE (Snow Water Equivalent) at Darkhorse Lake SNOTEL site
- Drought Plan distribution underway:
  - Weekly drought text messages/emails – we are now offering weekly water supply updates via both text message and email. If you're on our email list, you'll receive the emails.
    - To get on the text message list, reach out to any staff member, texts "Drought" to 26989, or contact us at [info@bhwc.org](mailto:info@bhwc.org).
- TNC board position change:

- Sean Claffey to take Sierra Harris's seat as representative of TNC (Sierra left TNC).
- Sean works in Dillon with the Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership (SMSP).

*Steering Committee Report – Randy Smith, Chair; Jim Hagenbarth, Vice-Chair; Roy Morris, Secretary*

- No report this month.

*Wildlife Report – Tana Nulph, Associate Director; Jim Hagenbarth, Rancher; Dean Peterson, Rancher:*

- Range Rider season starts July 1
- Carcass removal & composting season ended May 31
  - 78 total carcasses: 43 cows, 34 calves, 1 horse
  - 6 participating ranches
  - Wood chips donated by Tash T Diamond Post & Pole in Dillon, hauled by John Jackson
  - Use of loader donated by John Jackson
  - Use of dump truck donated by USFWS – Red Rock Lakes NWR
- Removed carcasses in Sage Creek for Centennial Valley Association
- Multiple grizzly bear sightings in the Big Hole this year already and one near Salmon – please pack bear spray when out recreating and be “Bear Aware”.

*Restoration Report – Ben LaPorte, Program Manager:*

- Upper French Gulch Fish Passage Pre-Construction meeting was held on June 14th with Watershed Consulting and MMI. Waiting on USACE and DEQ permits. Tentative start date is late July, early August.
- Ben has continued the Wise River Monitoring project with help from Matt Norberg (DNRC) and MFWP. Flow and temp measurements will be collected through the summer and fall.
- MCC sprayed weeds for a week in the Anaconda Uplands. A lot of good progress on the weed mitigation front!
- Upper Oregon Creek started today (June 15)! Three weeks of fieldwork are slated for June. Big push on Upper Oregon Creek.
- Elkhorn Mine and Mill: Finally have the Notice to Proceed from BoR. Contracted with Pioneer Technical Services to do the Soils Characterization. Biofiltration is gearing up for field implementation.
- Ben and Tana spoke at the MFBF conference (Young Farmers and Ranchers and ACE class) on Monday (June 13th). Great exposure and engagement with the attendees.

**Film Screening:**      *Life in the Land: The Big Hole Valley – 15-minute version*

**New Business**

- None

**Break – 10 minutes**

**Meeting Topic: Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest: Communications and Direction**

*Presented by: Catherine McRae, Public Affairs Officer, United States Fish and Wildlife Service – BDNF*

**Happening on the Forest**

- Disturbance:
  - Last year, had a heavy fire season on BDNF, but only total 4.2% of Forest was actually affected.

- Should be having around 15% disturbance – ideally, the Forest sees disturbance at some point on the landscape every 145 years.
- Disturbance on the BDNF: Wildfire, veg & fuel treatments, prescribed burns.
  - Wildfire is major contributor to disturbance.
- Cultural issue: A lot of Forest staff grew up here and have never really left the area.
  - Pro: ownership, this is THEIR Forest and they want to take care of it.
  - Con: resistant to change.
    - Want to do things the same way, and that’s not always the way it’s going to work. That doesn’t mean that we completely convert to new ways.
    - Some of the old ways work and there are reasons we are still doing some things the same way, but when we have the ability to positively impact things by changing the way that we’re doing things, we at least need to be open to those conversations.
- Unique opportunity right now with leadership changes:
  - New Forest Supervisor – Lisa Timchak
  - New Deputy Forest Supervisor – Carol Hatfield
  - Assessing how well BDNF is doing as a partner. Want to hear feedback – how are we doing? What needs to change? New Forest Supervisor wants to hear critiques, not just positive feedback.
  - NEPAs slow – exploring options to contract out this process to get it done faster.
  - Resource Advisory Council (RAC) funding – Federal Title 2 funding.
    - Commissioners get to decide to put their Title 3 funds into the Title 2 RAC funding and groups can submit project proposals
    - Anywhere from \$2,000-\$50,000
    - Forest projects – including water and watersheds (only one proposal last round)
    - Work with District Ranger to make proposal more viable
- Communication/Analytics:
  - Only 6% of press releases published last year
  - BBC Live interview #1 and #2 fires in the nation – Jim King interviewed, did excellent job
  - Working with staff to speak analytically even when they may be feeling emotional.
    - Example: Last year’s fires in the Big Hole were not “catastrophic” or “devastating”. Only 4.2% of the Forest burned. It was difficult for our communities, but we actually need MORE to burn to maintain ideal conditions on the landscape and have a healthy forest.
    - Not a lot of integrity, but they feel deeply about these communities and are talking about people they know. But we need to remember our message and share it intentionally.
  - This isn’t just about how many likes we get – there are tangible outcomes to consider.
    - For example, BDNF will receive \$20M less than the Flathead NF in Great American Outdoors Act funding over a 3-year period.
    - If we could create more pressure – if we were more known, our needs and contributions were recognized, and the people who are working both on the Forest and in the communities/tied to the Forest had a voice that was heard and seen, we’d see some political pressure.
  - Working to build trust with partners, communities.
    - If there was ever a time when you tried to communicate with the Forest and you felt disheartened or unheard, please reach out again. Ask us how we can be involved and how we can help.

- Lisa, Carol, and Cat are committed to building trust and improving communications within our Forest's communities.
  - Working to get BDNF on a larger stage – each of these things is a vehicle for both BDNF and BHWC to elevate their message to a larger scale. We will have some people around that aren't normally in the area and there will be new opportunities to tell our story:
    - Will have Washington personnel out for the Basin Creek project
    - First black community historic site on the BDNF
    - One Facebook post reached 925,000 people last year.
      - Happy to help elevate any messages BHWC may want to share.
      - Idea – tie beaver historical significance to flooding that is currently happening
- *Discussion:*
  - *We've had a lot of turnover in the BDNF, and that makes it very difficult for Forest staff to get to know the area and the people here.*
    - *One of the problems that you have, that we all know, is the model that extreme environmental activists use to make money through lawsuits. Pretty much stifled any actions that BDNF has tried and has basically destroyed the ability of the USFS to manage the resource for the American People. They're paid through the Equal Access to Justice act and utilize the Endangered Species Act. We have to get some things done politically to stop these folks. They are robbing the American people of their taxpayer dollars and the ability of agencies to manage public resources for the American people. Hopeful that Daines and Tester will push through Legislation to stop this.*
      - *Your comment is well received. We had people calling and asking questions last year – basically fishing for information to use to litigate in regards to the fires that occurred last year. We've had some recent decisions that have been upheld though, and I think it's important to note that as well. It is important to us to find a way to move forward.*
        - *We're (BHWC) here to help you (BDNF). If you need something, you ask us. Thank you for coming, and we look forward to working with you.*
          - *Thank you, and vice-versa.*
    - *Ranching is no longer just feeding and watering cows. If you want to maintain your ranch, you need to get involved with groups like these. I've had a good working relationship with the District Office out of Wisdom.*
    - *Sharing stories about what BDNF/BHWC is doing can serve to not only inform and educate people, but also to motivate people to connect with our groups or do similar work in their watersheds/Forests.*

## Upcoming Meetings

- *BHWC does not have a monthly meeting in July*
- **July 14, 2022: Wildlife Speaker Series: Beavers**
  - 6:00 pm at the Divide Grange (dinner at 6:00 pm, presentation at 7:00 pm)
  - Meat for main dish (burgers) donated by Hagenbarth Ranch
- **August 17, 2022: Of Mushrooms and Mines: Mycelial Filtration Pilot Study at Elkhorn Mine**
  - 7:00 pm at the Divide Grange/Zoom

## Adjourn

get to know your  
**WILDLIFE NEIGHBORS**

**beavers**

SPEAKERS  
Torrey Ritter, Nongame Wildlife Biologist, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks  
Elissa Chott, Beaver Conflict Resolution Specialist, Clark Fork Coalition

**July 14<sup>th</sup> Free Speaker Series**

Get to know your wildlife neighbors!  
This free and virtual speaker series connects community & wildlife in Southwest Montana.

LOCATION	AGENDA	PRESENTED BY
Divide Grange 315 S. Schuyler Ave. SE Dulles, MT 59121	Dinner - 6:00 PM Food & water provided by BHWC Presentation - 7:00 PM	Big Hole Watershed Committee 800.732.2278   <a href="http://www.bhwc.com">www.bhwc.com</a>

Logos for participating organizations: CWA, Big Hole Watershed Committee, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Clark Fork Coalition, Big Hole Watershed Committee, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Clark Fork Coalition, Big Hole Watershed Committee.