



# Big Hole Watershed Committee

## Monthly Meeting Minutes

November 19, 2025 – 6:00 pm at the Divide Grange  
*Zoom option also provided*

### In Attendance

*In-person:* Tana Lynch, BHCW; Nolan Salix, BHCW; Karly Noetzel, BHCW; Tom Bowler, Butte Resident; Betty Bowler, Butte Resident; Dean Peterson, Rancher/BHCW; Luke Lutz, DNRC; Alta Miller, Big Hole Valley Historical Society/Resident; Dana Miller, Resident; Roy Morris, GGTU/BHCW; Dane Strother, Resident; Stan Strizic, Resident; Tim Fay, Resident; Pete Kamperschroer, Resident; Ayme Swartz, BSB County; Ciara Pares Kempf, Writer/Historian; and Lance Robertson, Rancher.

*Zoom:* Pedro Marques, BHCW; Stephanie Espinoza; Marilyn Mehmke; Steve Luebeck, Sportsman/BHCW; Danika Homes, DNRC; Jim Keenan, BHCW/BSB Water; Erinn Guzik; Karin; and Mike.

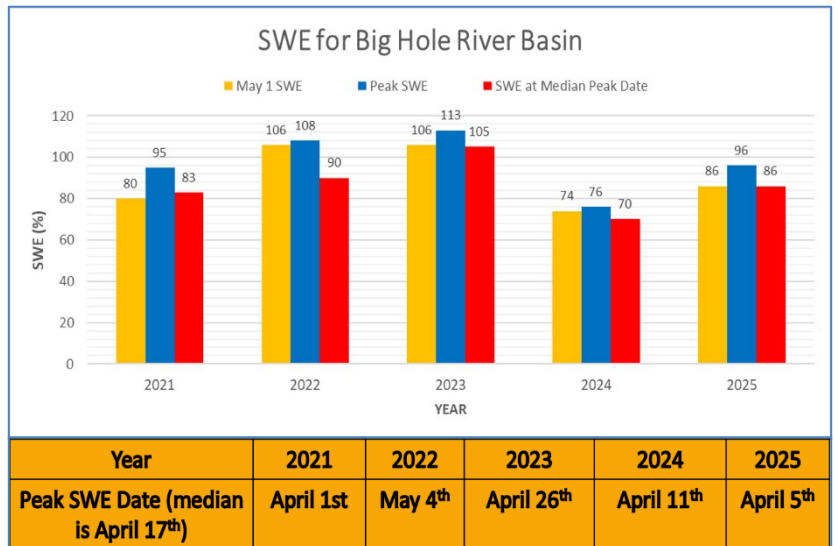
### Meeting Minutes

BHCW 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 Lynch, BHCW Associate Director, at [tlynch@bhwc.org](mailto:tlynch@bhwc.org) or (406) 267-3421 to suggest additions or corrections.

### Reports

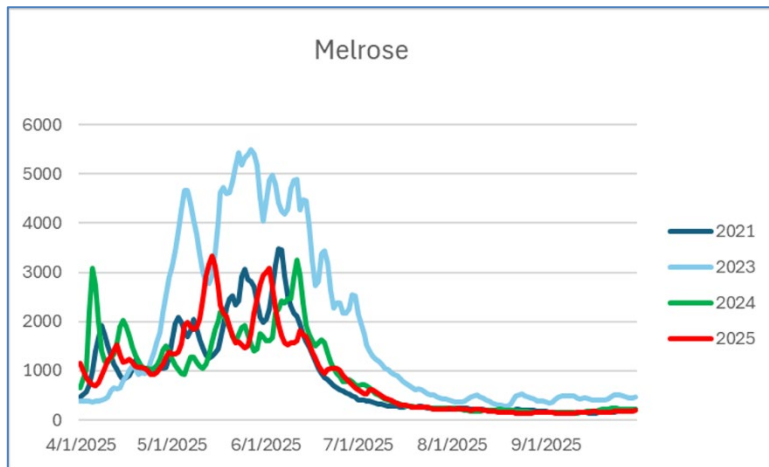
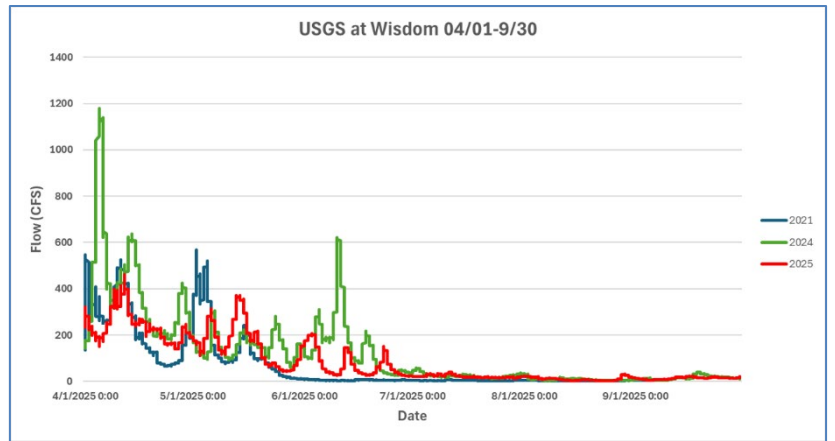
*Water Year 2025 Review/Recent Drought Conditions – Luke Lutz, Hydrologist, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation*

- Stream And Gage Explorer (StAGE): <https://gis.dnrc.mt.gov/apps/stage/>
- Snowpack (Snow-water Equivalent) 2021-2025: see graph to right
- Streamflows (2021- 2025):
  - See graphs next page



(CFS)	2021	2024	2025
Peak	534	1160	463
Low	1.79	3.99	2.1

	2021	2024	2025
Days Below 20 cfs	104	60	69

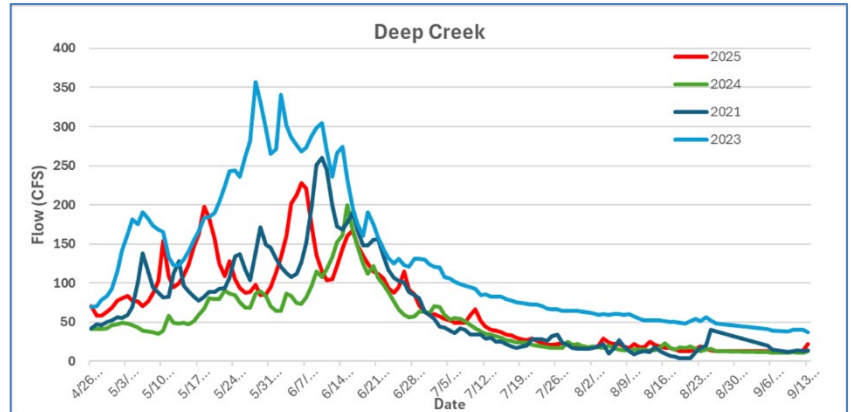


(CFS)	2021	2023	2024	2025
Peak	3480	5490	3260	3330
Low	142	228	146	131

	2021	2023	2024	2025
Days under 150cfs	8	0	1	16

(CFS)	2021	2023	2024	2025
Peak	260.2	356.8	200.1	227.8
Low	7.431	49.27	11.08	12.61

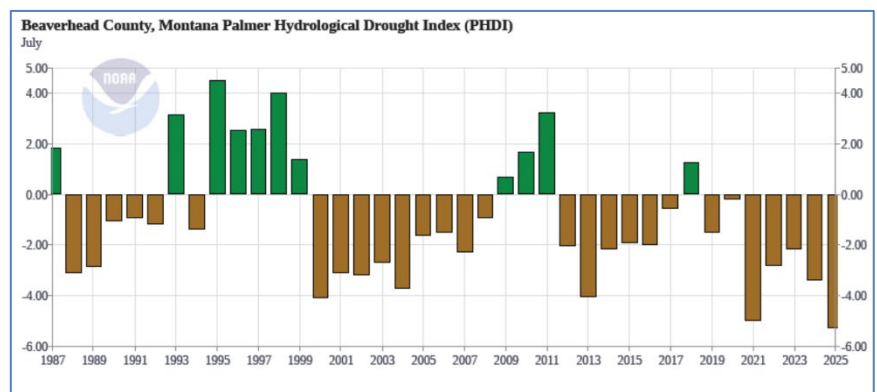
(UIP)	2021	2023	2024	2025
Days Below 18 cfs	26	0	61	47



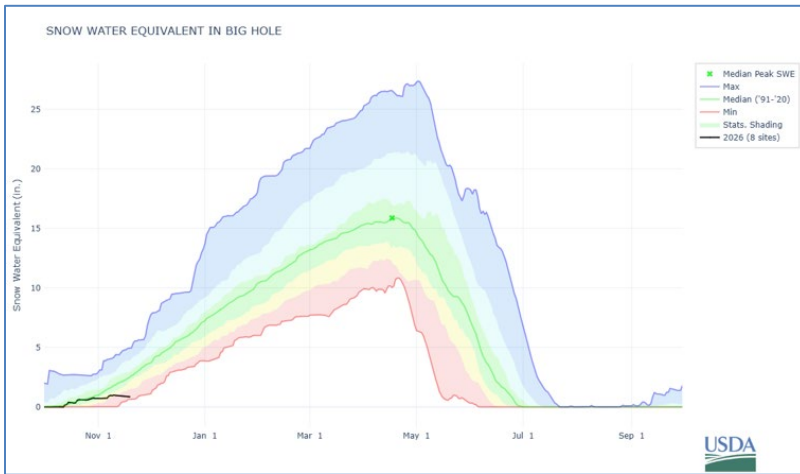
- Palmer Hydrological Drought Index – 1987-2025: Compounding Effects/Recovery of Drought Conditions

PHDI Table	
Normal	0
Mild	-1
Moderate	-2
Severe	-3
Extreme	-4

Year	PHDI (July)
2021	-4.98
2022	-2.81
2023	-2.16
2024	-3.38
2025	-5.27

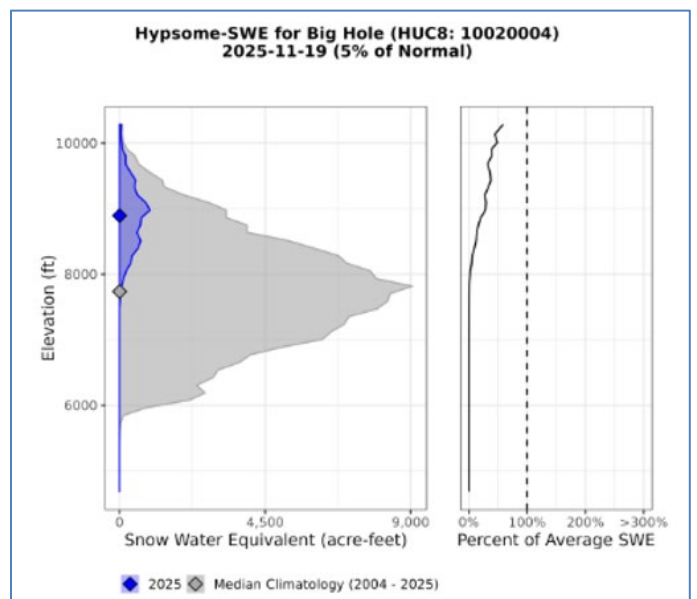
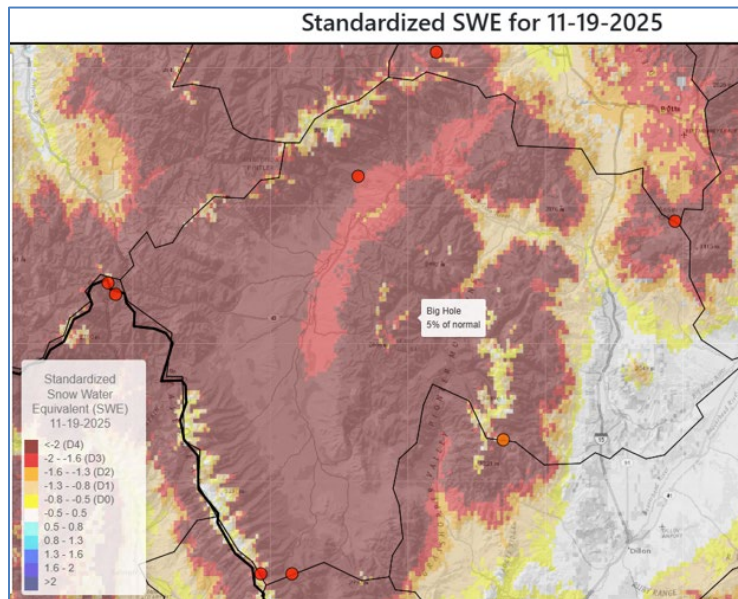


- Snowpack (NWCC) for WY 2026

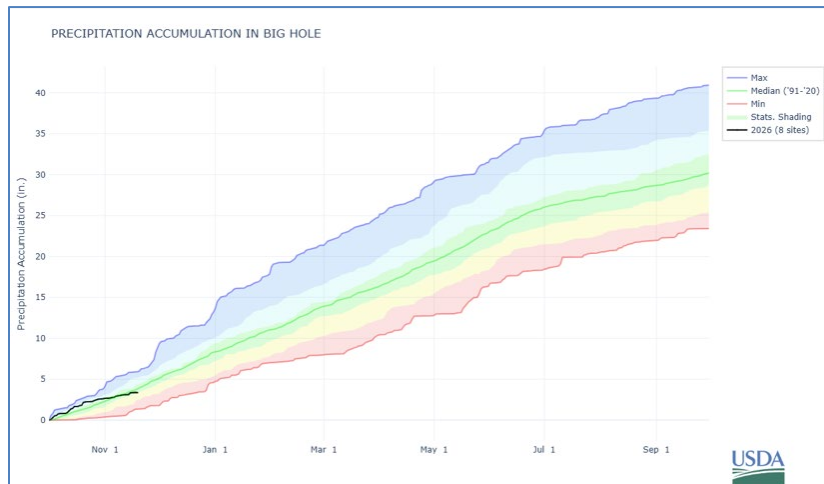


Station	Network	Elev. (ft.)	Obs	NRCS Median	% NRCS Median
Barker Lakes	SNOTEL	8,250	1.2	3	40%
Basin Creek	SNOTEL	7,120	0	1.6	0%
Bloody Dick	SNOTEL	7,570	0	1.6	0%
Calvert Creek	SNOTEL	6,410	0.1	0.6	17%
Darkhorse Lake	SNOTEL	8,930	2.6	5.4	48%
Moose Creek	SNOTEL	6,170	0	1.7	0%
Mule Creek	SNOTEL	8,300	1.7	2.9	59%
Saddle Mtn.	SNOTEL	7,890	1.2	3.2	38%
Slagmelt Lakes	SNOTEL	8,600	2.6		
<b>Basin Index</b>					<b>34%</b>

- Snowpack (UMRB) for WY 2026

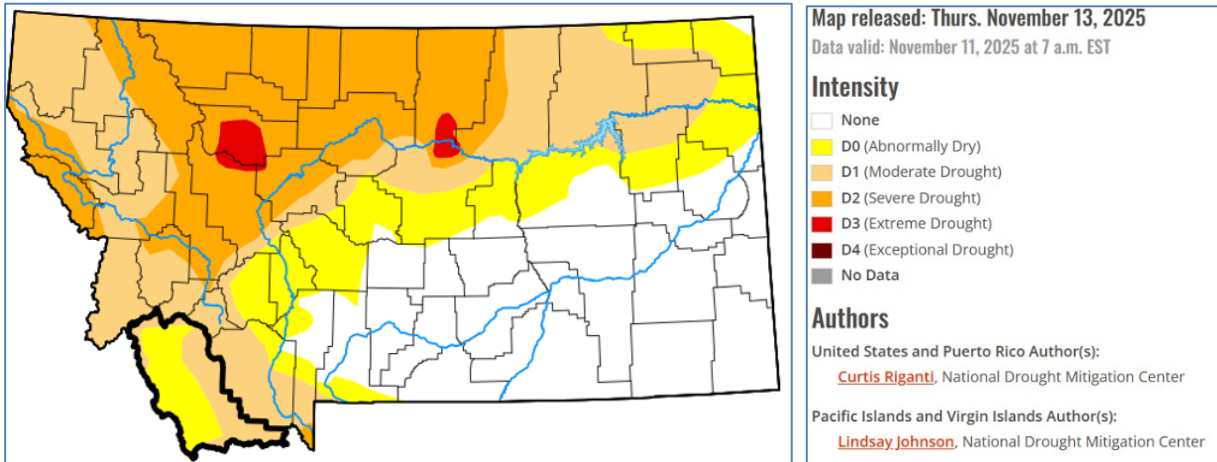


- Precipitation (NWCC) for WY 2026: 88% of average (1991-2020)



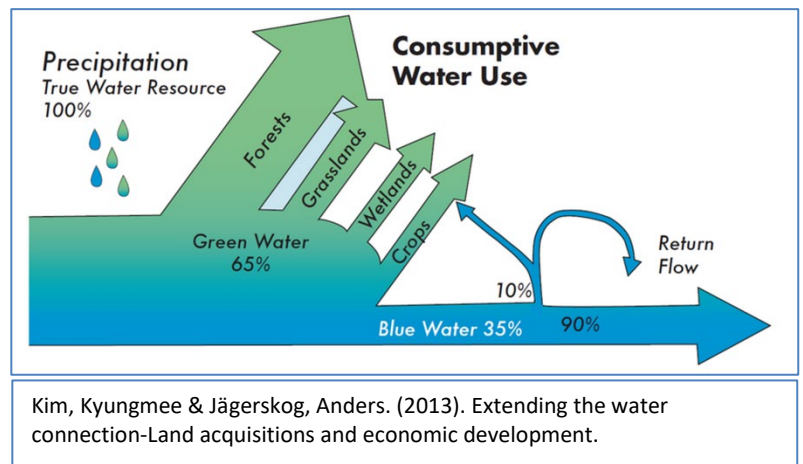
Station	Network	Elev. (ft.)	Obs	NRCS Median	% NRCS Median
Barker Lakes	SNOTEL	8,250	5	3.6	139%
Basin Creek	SNOTEL	7,120	2.1	2.8	75%
Bloody Dick	SNOTEL	7,570	3.2	3.6	89%
Calvert Creek	SNOTEL	6,410	2.9	2.4	121%
Darkhorse Lake	SNOTEL	8,930	5	6	83%
Moose Creek	SNOTEL	6,170	2.8	4.2	67%
Mule Creek	SNOTEL	8,300	2.8	4	70%
Saddle Mtn.	SNOTEL	7,890	3.1	4	78%
Slagmelt Lakes	SNOTEL	8,600	5		
<b>Basin Index</b>					<b>88%</b>

- **Climate Outlook (NOAA):**
  - *Outlook:* The 8-14 day outlook predicts slightly below normal temperatures and slightly above normal precipitation.
  - *Seasonal Outlook:* The seasonal outlook predicts slightly below normal temperatures and slightly above normal precipitation.
  - *ENSO Conditions:* La Niña is favored to continue into the Northern Hemisphere winter, with a transition to ENSO-neutral most likely in January-March 2026 (61% chance).
- **U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook:** Moderate to severe drought persists in our watershed.



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

- Kim Giannone in Hospice: Thank you Kim for keeping us going this winter and your enthusiasm for our work!
- **Funding:**
  - Charlotte Martin Foundation! (\$20,000)
  - NRDP: NGO Partners (Nov.20)
- **Letters of Support:**
  - FWP Beaver Translocation EA
  - UMWestern Land, Water and Sky Center
  - TU Alder Creek project
- **Other Important Topics:**
  - Exempt wells lawsuit
  - Lengtung Tungsten and Garnet Mine



#### Restoration Project Update – Pedro Marques, Executive Director

- **Projects Completed:**
  - Sage Smith Springs wetlands
  - Rock Creek fish barrier – R.E. Miller
  - East Pioneers Conifer Encroachment- MDF, RMEF, USFS, BLM
- **Contracts Underway:**
  - High Meadow Storage Capacity – WGM Group
  - Smith Sage Springs ditch siphon design – Confluence Consulting

- Elkhorn Mine (through Beaverhead CD)
- California Creek “demo area” design – WET
- Next Up:
  - Elkhorn Preserve/Lazy S Ranch: Landowner Agreement ready
  - Smart Creek: Permits secured from Army Corps
  - Kamperschroer Riparian: Negotiating with contractor for reduced scope
  - California Creek Designs: Low Intensity Option under design: FY '26 Contract Signed
  - East Pioneers: 5-Star Forestry - >1000 acres done
  - Elkhorn Mine and Mill: Mill structure being designed, biofiltration design contracted
  - Moose Cr. Headwaters: Beaver and dynamite!
- Projects to be contracted (in design, scoping, funding):
  - MCC – Selway and Trail Creek meadow
  - Elkhorn Preserve
  - Johnson Creek area fencing
  - Wise River headgate
  - Melrose Diversion
  - Jerry Creek headgate
  - Moose Creek headwaters: TNC, USFS
  - Pennington Bridge Phase 2: (through Madison County)
  - Burma Road sediment project

*Steering Committee Report – Dean Peterson, Vice-Chairman; Roy Morris, Secretary; and Steve Luebeck, Treasurer*

- The steering committee is happy with the progress BHWC is making.

*Communications and Wildlife Report – Tana Lynch, Associate Director*

- Communications:
  - Shopify store:
    - Shop to support BHWC!
    - [bhwc.org/shop-to-support](https://bhwc.org/shop-to-support)
    - BHWC gear
    - Supports the Big Hole Conservation Fund
  - Speaking Opportunities:
    - Conflict Reduction Consortium Annual Meeting
      - November 13
      - UM-Western, Dillon
      - Tana featured on panel
    - Range Riding Workshop
      - November 14-15
      - UM-Western, Dillon + Field day
      - Western Landowners Alliance and Rae Nickerson, Utah State University
      - Chet Robertson featured on panels, attended field day
        - Tana attended classroom portion
  - Annual Drought Review Meeting prep:
    - Review & possibly update Big Hole River DMP
    - January 26, 11-3



- Fairmont Hot Springs Resort
- Big Hole River Drought Subcommittee
  - If you have interest in attending, please RSVP to Tana!
- Wildlife:
  - Carcass removal
    - Hiring Compost Site Manager/Driver
    - Feb-June, part-time
    - Reqs: CDL, experience with heavy equipment, great communication skills
  - Range Rider
    - Done for the season (season is July 1 – Sept 30)
    - Added 2 allotments
    - Building capacity
    - Assessing producer needs for possible expansion or earlier start to season
  - Funding:
    - 2026 Livestock Loss Board: \$8,500
    - 2025-2027 America the Beautiful Challenge: \$194,000
    - Donations: \$2,300
      - 4-wheeler for Range Rider
      - Donate online:
        - [bhwc.org/#donate](https://bhwc.org/#donate)
        - Or send a check to: BHWC, PO Box 21, Divide, MT 59727 (if you want it to support the 4-wheeler, please write that in the memo field.)

#### **New Business**

- None

#### **Break – 10 minutes**

### **Meeting Topic:**

### ***Coolidge: The Life Behind the Ghost Town***

### ***Cultural and Archeological Resources at the Elkhorn Mine and Mill***

Presented by: Ayme Swartz and Ciara Pares Kempf

*Background:* Once a bustling mountain company town, Coolidge comes to life again through newly uncovered photographs and personal stories of its former residents. Presenters Ayme Swartz and Ciara Pares Kempf will explore what life was like for the people of Coolidge during its 1920s heyday and share insights into a new interpretive plan designed to enhance the visitor experience at the ghost town. Ciara, based in Anaconda, specializes in uncovering the untold stories and underrepresented communities of the West and is an active member of the Big Hole Valley Historical Society. Ayme serves as a Historic Preservation Commissioner for Silver Bow County.

#### Welcome Back to Coolidge

- Reopening mill site to visitors in 2026
- Establishing a self-guided walking tour
- Public input and assistance in the future

### Reclamation Work

- Begun in 1980s to address toxic heavy metals and arsenic runoff into the watershed
- Removed toxic tailings piles, capped ponds, stabilized streambanks
- Currently stabilizing the mill footers, reclaiming waste dirt, stabilizing the mine adit entrance

### Why is Coolidge in ruins?

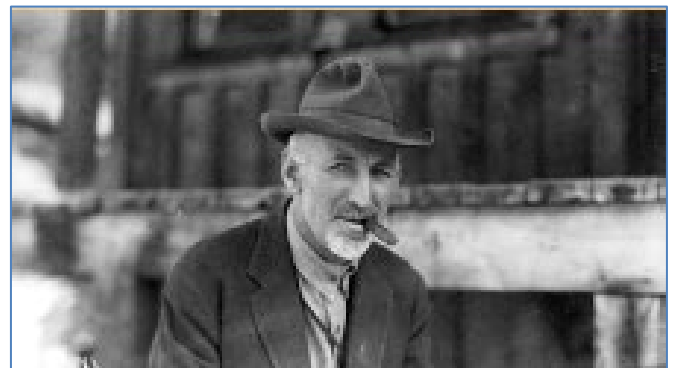
- Snow
- Visitors
- The role of the caretaker

### Elkhorn Discovery

- 1873 by Mike Steel & F.W. Pahnish
- Named by Bill Roe who found shed horns
- Silver camp, popularity crashed following the demonetization of silver in 1892
- Renewed interest beginning in 1903

### W.R. Allen Gets Big Ideas

- 1911: William R. Allen (right) buys 1600 acres
- S.W. Hall encourages delusions of grandeur
- 1916-1919 Allen builds a railroad, electrical, and telephone infrastructure



### The Elkhorn Mill

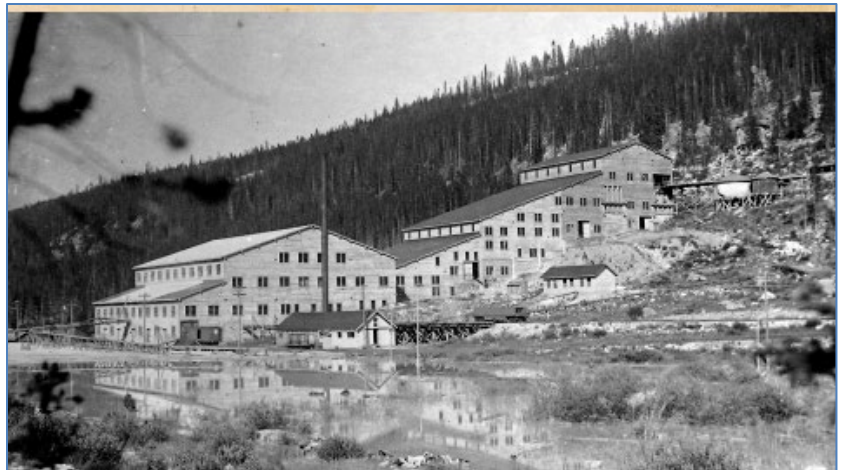
- Pictured right

### A Quick Rise and a Sharp Drop

- Receivership 1920s, reorganized 1925
- Flood 1927, reorganized 1928
- Great Depression 1929
- In a coma 1930s-1952

### When the Camp was Hopping

- Heyday 1921-1929
- 250-300 residents
- Entirely white
- Majority male
- 50-60% US citizens
- 20-30 children at most



### What was there to Do in Coolidge?

- *"There is nothing to do here but lay around and it sure gets tiresome. There is no place to go- this will be a good place for you to keep me home as I haven't left the shack since I've been here."* – letter from Harry Renz, miner at Coolidge, to wife Jessie Shafer Renz, 1922

## Wild Times in the Old Town

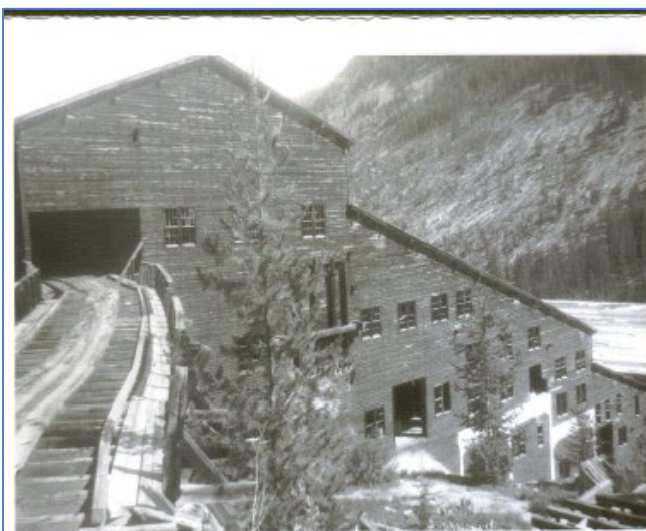
- *"A school benefit dance was given at the school house New Years night. Mr. Richards, the mine foreman, brought up and installed his radio and we all danced to Los Angeles music. Refreshments were served during the evening and tickets sold resulted in a substantial sum."* – Big Hole Basin News, January 8, 1925
- *"There is going to be a dance tonight. The train comes up (from Wise River) you see and they will bring a crowd from below."* – Letter from Harry Renz, miner at Coolidge, to wife Jessie Shafer Renz, 1922
- *"Note: Wise River wives who let their husbands come to Coolidge unattended on dance nights. We cannot possibly be responsible for stolen or damaged property."* – Doings of Coolidgeans, Big Hole Basin News, March 26, 1925

## Social Clubs

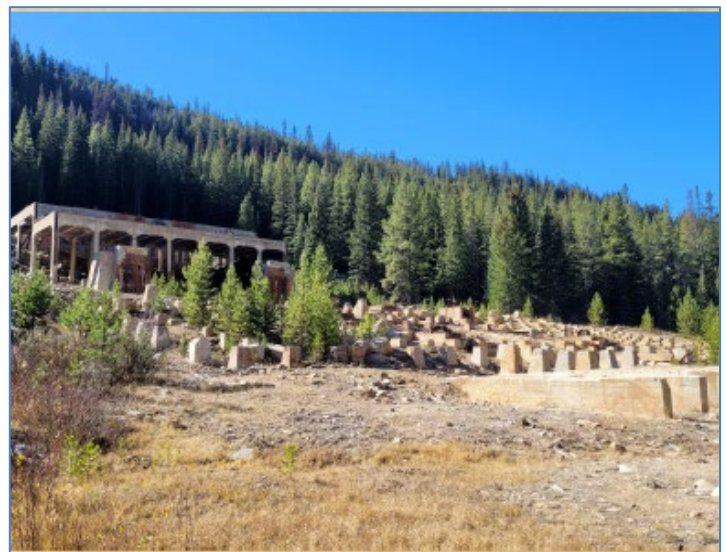
- Alta Vista Club
- Ski Club
- Crafting Club

## Landmarks in Town Today

- Tyro House: *"Mr. Frank Tyro went out on December 17<sup>th</sup> and he and Mrs. Tyro (nee Muriel Paddock of Bannack) returned the 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Coolidgeans gathered together and gave them an old-fashioned charivari, after which a pleasant evening of music, cigars, and candy was spent at the Tyro's new bungalow."* – Doings of Coolidgeans, Big Hole Basin News, January 1, 1925
- The Sauna: In the 1920 census, 25% of Coolidge's population came from a Nordic country where sauna use was prevalent.
- The "Schoolhouse" (pictured above right)
  - It's NOT the schoolhouse ... so what is it?
    - Cold storage for food/meat?
- The Elkhorn Mill:



The mill in 1921- note the concrete archways at lower right



The mill in 2025



- Ore Chutes
- Assay Office
- Stables
- Mysteries we're still unraveling:
  - What did this thing (right) do?
  - What did this machinery (below, left) operate?



- This mysterious pile of toothed metal (below, left) was originally compressed into a thick sheet, and has delaminated over time. But what the heck is it?



- Boxcar-like structure, about 6 feet wide by 24 feet long (below, right)
  - Probably stood up like a chimney (but surprisingly intact if it fell over)



- Has several large opening, not just the single opening you'd expect at the bottom for a ventilation shaft.
- Sits a few hundred yards to the north of the mill site, near the compressor pad
- Possibly for boiler ventilation?

### Call to Action!

- We are collecting memories! Do you know someone who worked or lived at Coolidge from the 1920s to the 1940s? We'd love to talk with them!
- How can we optimize the public interest in this site, to preserve it rather than let it slowly disappear beneath snow and casual thievery? Would you be interested in being part of a Friends of Coolidge volunteer group?

### Contact Us!

- Ayme Swartz: [Ayme.swartz@gmail.com](mailto:Ayme.swartz@gmail.com) or 406-560-5250
- Ciara Pares Kempf: [ciarainmontana@gmail.com](mailto:ciarainmontana@gmail.com) or find her on Facebook at Ciara Pares Kempf Montana Genealogist & Property Historian
  - Or Instagram: Ghosttownsmokeshow

### **Upcoming Meetings**

- Wednesday, February 18, 2026: BHWC Monthly Meeting
  - 6:00 PM at the Divide Grange Hall/Zoom – Topic: Big Hole Wildlife Update: Mountain Lions

### **Adjourn**