



Big Hole Watershed Committee

Monthly Meeting Minutes

February 18, 2026 – 6:00 pm at the Divide Grange

Zoom option also provided

In Attendance

In-person: Pedro Marques, BHWC; Tana Lynch, BHWC; Nolan Salix, BHWC; Luke Lutz, DNRC; Katelin Killoy, MFWP; Tom Bowler, Butte Resident; Betty Bowler, Butte Resident; Paul Siddoway, Sportsman; Jim Hagenbarth, Rancher/BHWC; Tiffany Oswald; Jesse Newby, MFWP; Eric Lewis, BHWC; Dean Peterson, Rancher/BHWC; Diana Peterson, Rancher; Kristina Kennedy, MFWP; Tom Caddy, Divide Resident; Jeannie Caddy, Divide Resident; Mark Kambich, Rancher/BHWC; Kelly Cozby, Divide Resident; Julie Golla, People and Carnivores; Diana Morris, Divide Resident; and Mike Wilkinson, Wise River Resident.

Zoom: Karly Noetzel, BHWC; Diane Hutton, Wisdom Resident/BHWC; Lance Robertson; Merilynn Mehmke; Jeffrey Marieke; James (no last name given); Sam Klusmeyer, Ripple; Danika Holmes, DNRC; and Jim Olsen, MFWP.

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 Lynch, BHWC Associate Director, at tlynch@bhwc.org or (406) 267-3421 to suggest additions or corrections.

Reports

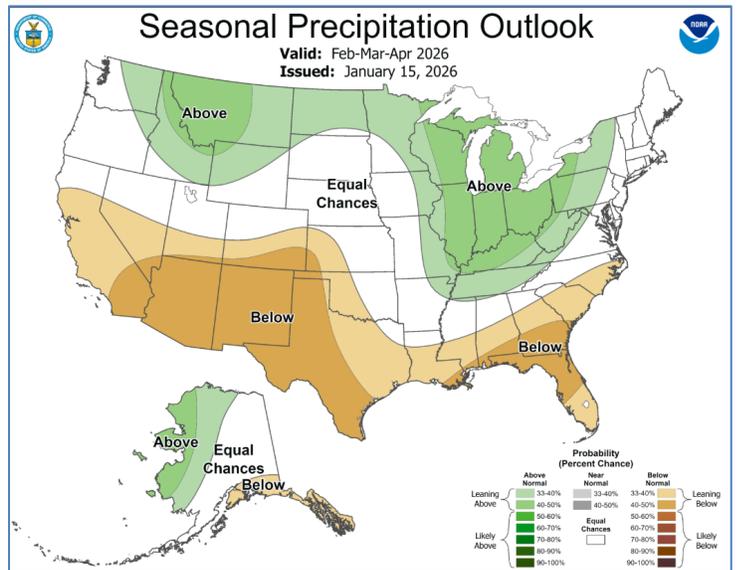
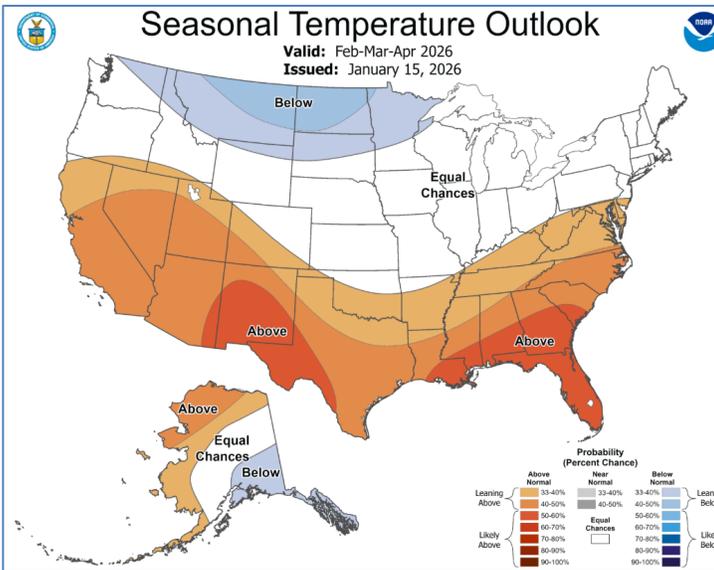
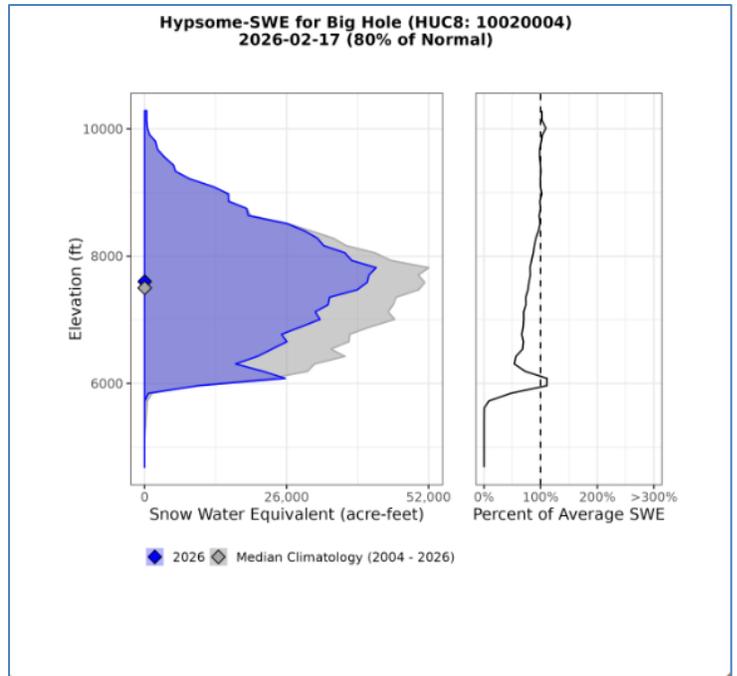
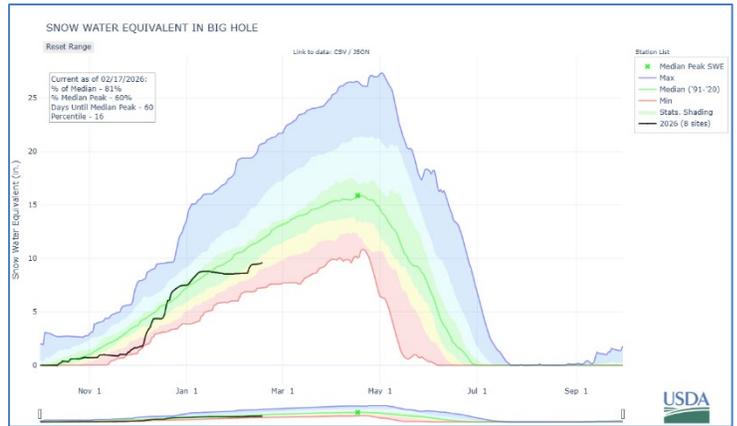
Streamflow and Snowpack Report – Luke Lutz, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

- *Stream And Gage Explorer (StAGE):* <https://gis.dnrc.mt.gov/apps/stage/>
- *NWCC Snow Water Equivalent:*
 - Big Hole: 81% of median
- *Precipitation:* 101% of median
- *Snow Water Equivalent:*
 - 101% of median
 - 42% of WY median
- *Hypsom-SWE:* 80% of Normal
- *Climate Outlook (NOAA):*

| Station | Network | Elev. (ft.) | Obs | NRCS Median | % NRCS Median |
|--------------------|---------|-------------|------|-------------|---------------|
| Barker Lakes | SNOTEL | 8,250 | 6.6 | 9.6 | 69% |
| Basin Creek | SNOTEL | 7,120 | 3.4 | 5.4 | 63% |
| Bloody Dick | SNOTEL | 7,570 | 6.9 | 9 | 77% |
| Calvert Creek | SNOTEL | 6,410 | 6.2 | 6.7 | 93% |
| Darkhorse Lake | SNOTEL | 8,930 | 19.4 | 22 | 88% |
| Moose Creek | SNOTEL | 6,170 | 8.5 | 12.6 | 67% |
| Mule Creek | SNOTEL | 8,300 | 10.6 | 11.2 | 95% |
| Saddle Mtn. | SNOTEL | 7,890 | 15.1 | 17.7 | 85% |
| Slagamelt Lakes | SNOTEL | 8,600 | 21.4 | | |
| Basin Index | | | | | 81% |

- **Outlook:** The 8-14 day outlook predicts near normal to slightly below normal temperatures and slightly above normal precipitation.
- **Seasonal Outlook:** March, and April expected to be colder with above-average precipitation.
- **ENSO Conditions:**
 - CPC adopts Relative Oceanic Niño Index (RONI) for reliable, responsive monitoring and tracking of ENSO (11 Feb 2026).
 - A transition from La Niña to ENSO-neutral is expected in February-April 2026 (60% chance), with ENSO-neutral likely persisting through the Northern Hemisphere summer (56% chance in June-August 2026) (12 Feb 2026).

- **MT Drought and Water Supply Advisory Committee:** The Big Hole Watershed is characterized as slightly dry to moderately dry as of January 8, 2026.
- **U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook:** The Big Hole watershed is characterized as abnormally dry to moderate drought as of November 13, 2025.



Director's Report – Pedro Marques, Executive Director

- Job Openings
 - BHWC hiring up to 4 technicians for ground-truthing high meadow storage opportunities
- Board Changes and Recruitment
 - Thank you Jim H.!
 - Welcome Dean and JM!
 - Governing Board packet- review
- 2026 Drought Management Plan
 - Draft in progress
- Water Priorities
 - Crafting letter to push: Cloud Seeding, Off-stream storage, Vegetation Management
- DEQ- Circular updates
 - Big Hole River and N.Fk Big Hole, Deep Creek and Wise River- new listings for pH
 - Elkhorn Creek- Delist for As, Pb
- Pedro speaking at TEDx talk (March 21st at 4 pm)
- Conservation Spending in the West:
 - See graphics below
 - <https://westernlandowners.org/landowner-investment/>

Divide Grange #142

THE EARLY HISTORY OF DIVIDE, MONTANA



Alta Miller, Tim Fay, and Dana Miller will present the history of Divide, Montana and surrounding areas through pictures and stories

Open to the public
No charge
Refreshments



Books on the history of the Big Hole Valley for sale. Cash or check only.

**Sunday, 22 February 2026
2:00pm
Divide Grange Hall**

TEDx University of Montana Western

March 21st, 2026 | Beier Auditorium

University of Montana Western
710 S, Atlantic St. Dillon, MT 59725

Table 1. Landowner Conservation investments per acre and total spending

| Conservation Category | Per Acre | Total |
|---|---------------|----------------------|
| Wildlife Management | \$0.79 | \$62,229,000 |
| Range management | \$1.58 | \$124,196,000 |
| Water resource management | \$1.18 | \$93,112,000 |
| Forest management | \$0.88 | \$69,025,000 |
| In-kind contributions | \$0.42 | \$32,998,000 |
| Other contributions that benefit wildlife and land conservation | \$0.33 | \$25,960,000 |
| Overall | \$5.18 | \$407,520,000 |

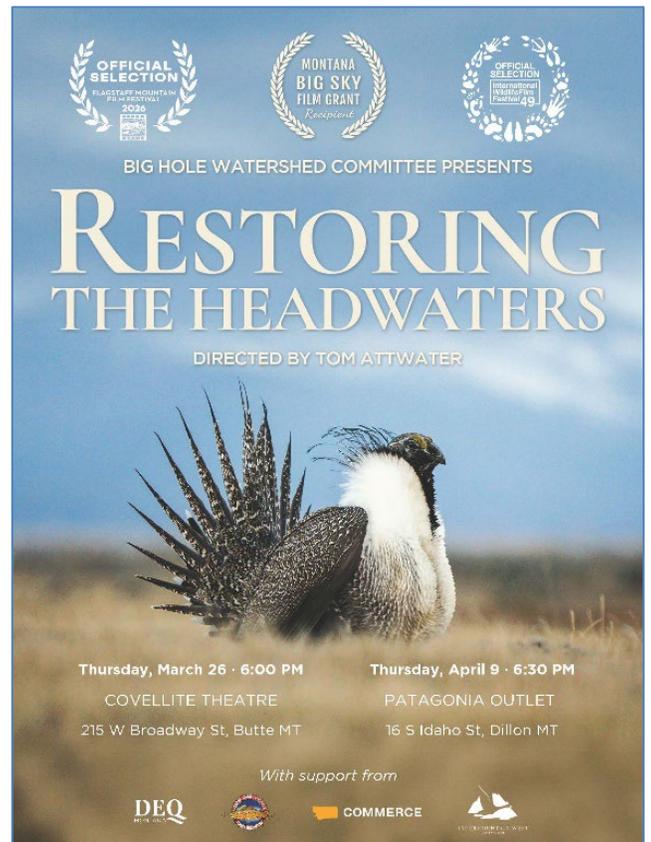


Steering Committee Report – Dean Peterson, Chair

- The steering committee is happy with the progress BHWC is making. Dean expressed gratitude and appreciation for previous steering committee members and invited them to attend future steering committee meetings if they choose.

Communications and Wildlife Report – Tana Lynch, Associate Director

- Communications:
 - Shop to Support BHWC and get your own BHWC gear at bhwc.org/shop-to-support
 - Film screenings:
 - Restoring the Headwaters Film
 - Butte: March 26th at the Covellite Theatre
 - Dillon: April 9th at the Patagonia Outlet
 - Weekly drought updates:
 - Current streamflow
 - Temperature
 - River status by section
 - Long-term average flows
 - Text DROUGHT to 26989 & register
 - Also sent via email
 - Sign up at bhwc.org
- Wildlife:
 - Carcass Removal and Composting:
 - 2025
 - Justin Cottingham resigned
 - Truck borrowed from Benton Lake NWR
 - 32 carcasses picked up/composted
 - 6 ranches
 - 2026:
 - Eric Lewis (Hiring)
 - No CDL
 - Will lease dump trailer
 - Funded through LLB and AtBC grants
 - Range Riding:
 - Chet Robertson, Rider (2011)
 - 8 USFS allotments (7 producers)
 - July – September
 - Monitors: livestock condition, carnivore activity
 - Reports: Injured/sick/dead livestock, carnivore activity & approximate location
 - 2025:
 - No confirmed depredations on enrolled allotments
 - New 4-wheeler (thank you for your donations!)
 - \$2,700 raised toward cost of 4-wheeler (\$8K)
 - 2026:



- 2 new allotments
- Start season earlier?
- Bear Resistant Garbage Infrastructure and Attractant Management:
 - Bear resistant garbage cans for local residents & businesses
 - Looking into grizzly-proofing the Wisdom Transfer Station
 - Working with People & Carnivores to identify additional opportunities

Restoration Report – Nolan Salix, Restoration Specialist

- Watershed restoration in the winter = planning, designing, contracting, permitting, fundraising
- Current projects:

- Lazy S-Elkhorn Ranch (streambanks with little native riparian vegetation)

- W of Wise River
- In contracting phase
- To include:
 - Riparian fencing to exclude cattle grazing adjacent to river (1.61 mi)
 - Wildlife exclusion plots (5): planting aspen, willow, and cottonwood
 - 8' high
 - 200' x 50'
 - Bank regrading and revegetation
 - Behind riparian fencing
 - 912 linear ft regrading
 - Willow trenches
 - Benefits:
 - River cooling/shade
 - Sediment reduction
 - Fish and wildlife habitat improvement



- California Gulch contracting
 - Mount Haggin WMA (MFWP)
 - Projected last major tributary needing largescale restoration with heavy equipment.

- McCartney Mountain:

- Sediment containment structures (pictured above, right) on Burma Road and private property near Glen
 - Burma Road:
 - Armoring channel with rock
 - Revegetating adjacent to channel



- Burma Road is being washed out and sediment from unnamed canyon (pictured, right) is flowing directly into the Big Hole River.

New Business

- None

Break – 10 minutes

Meeting Topic:

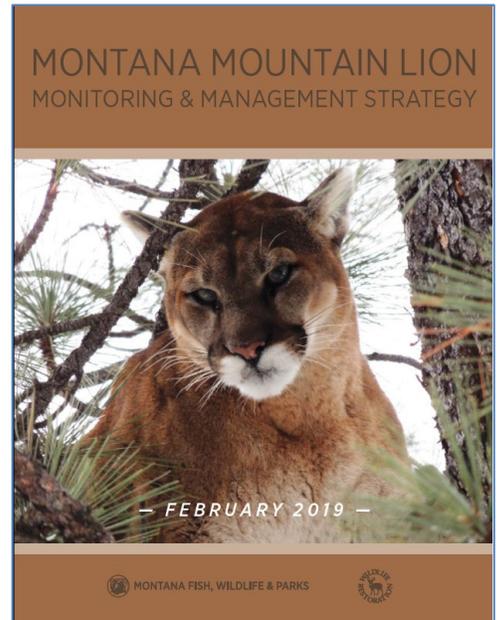
Mountain Lion Management and Monitoring in the Big Hole Watershed

Presented by: Jesse Newby, *FWP Dillon Area Biologist*, jnewby@mt.gov

Research and data provided by Ashley Hodge, *FWP Mountain Lion Monitoring Biologist*, ashley.hodge@mt.gov

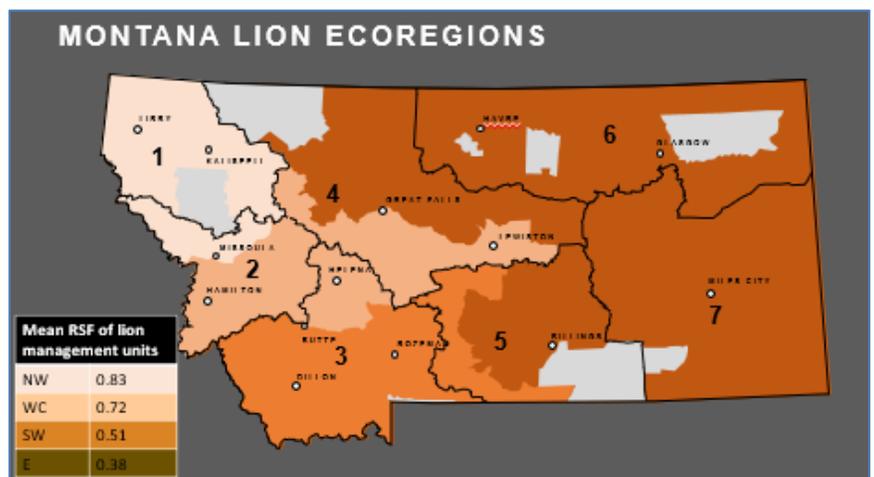
Lion Social Structure

- Females often philopatric
- Males disperse from natal range
- Female’s home range (~ 100 sq. miles)
- Adult males hold large territories overlapping females (~ 135 - 235 sq. miles)
- Males aggressively defend territories from other males
- Infanticide common with incoming males
- Males disperse from natal range
- Adult males hold large territories (~ 135-235 sq. miles)
- Overlapping smaller female home ranges (~ 100 sq. km)
- Females often philopatric
- Males aggressively defend territories from other males
- Infanticide common with incoming males
- More of a social life than you might think

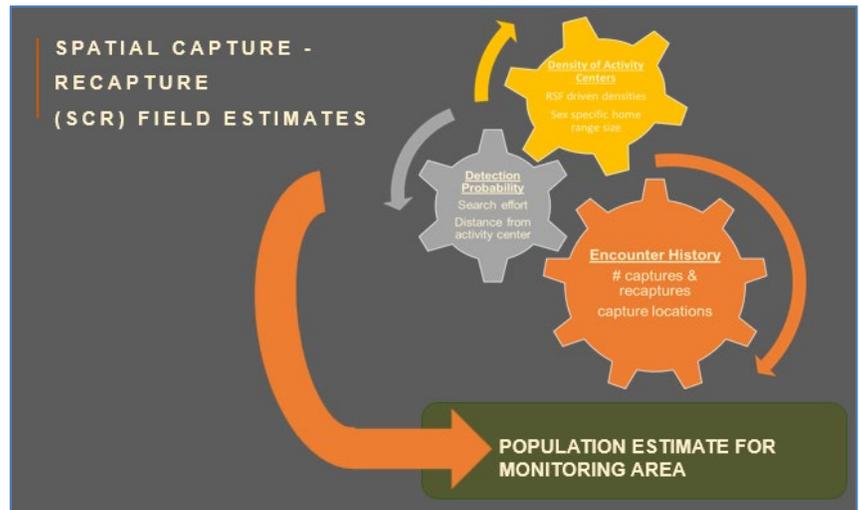


Montana Mountain Lion Monitoring and Management Strategy

- “An important goal of this Strategy is to provide the public and the Department with accurate and timely information so that both populations and harvest are more stable over time.”
- Period lion abundance estimates
 - Spatial capture-recapture (SCR) field estimates
 - Capture-mark-recapture
 - Key principle: learn about lion abundance via the proportion of marked animals.
 - Integrated Population Model (IPM)
 - Rates included from literature:

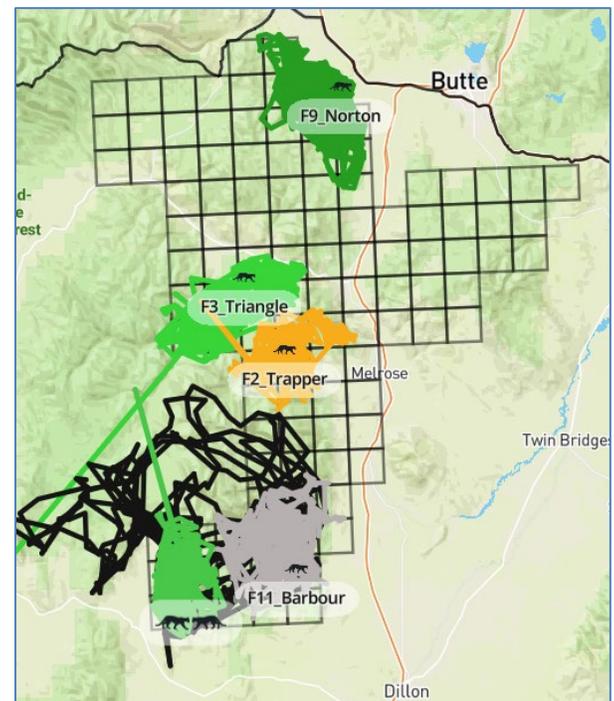
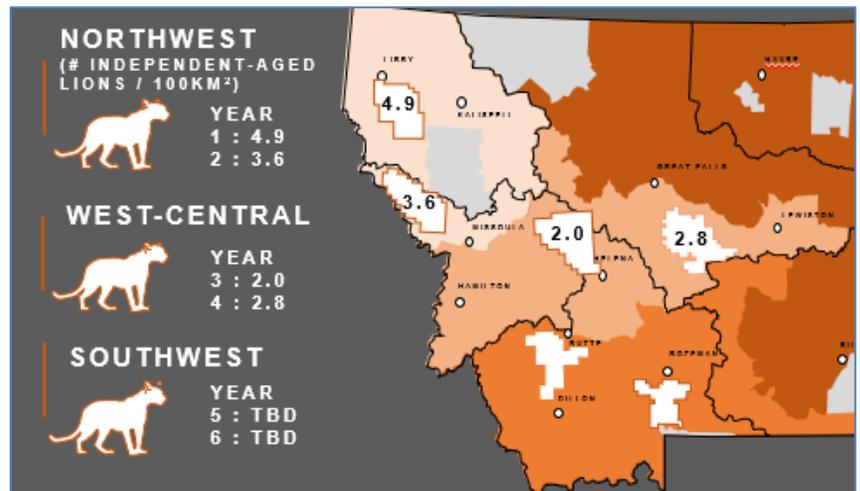


- Survival
- Harvest mortality
- Other mortality
- Pregnancy
- Fetal Counts
- Data inputs
 - SECR Estimates
 - Annual Harvest
 - Harvest Age



Winter Field Season (2024-2025)

- Year 6
- Preliminary Search Effort and Samples
 - Samples:
 - 50 biopsy
 - 1 scat
 - 3 hair
 - 39 harvest
 - Individuals: 27
 - 15 males
 - 13 females
 - 11 recaptures
 - Capture Dec 2024 – Mar 2025:
 - 6 females collared
 - 5 on-air
 - 7 males collared
 - 2 on-air
- Adaptations and improvements:
 - Habitat model validation
 - RSF Validation
- Other opportunities provided by collars:
 - Space use (see image to right)
 - Kill site investigations
 - Fate/survival
 - Reproduction/age data



Future Steps

- Incorporate telemetry data into SECR model
- Improve habitat model
- Redesign integrated population model

- Improve accuracy and precision of population estimates
- Improve our ability to translate results into management

Upcoming Meetings

- Wednesday, April 15, 2026: BHWC Monthly Meeting
 - 7:00 PM at the Divide Grange Hall/Zoom – Topic: Flexible Grazing

Adjourn