



Big Hole Watershed Committee

Monthly Meeting Minutes

June 17, 2026 – 7:00 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; Tom Bowler, Butte Resident; Betty Bowler, Butte Resident; Paul Siddoway, Sportsman; Howard Varner, Rancher; Diane Hutton, Wisdom Resident/BHWC; Danika Holmes, DNRC; Brooks Munyer, BLM; Mark Kambich, Rancher/BHWC; Stephen Frazee, WET; Lance Robertson, Rancher; Steve Luebeck, Sportsman/BHWC; Clayton Elliot, MTU; Erik Kalsta, Rancher/Western Landowner Alliance/BHWC; Dirk Nelson, Almonty; Taylor Sulik, Mithril Mining; Andy Bobst, MBMG; Ben Raffety, Montana Mining Association; Matt Vincent, Montana Mining Association; Steve Allen, Almonty; Liz Jones, Rancher/BHWC; Roy Morris, GGTU/BHWC; Jim Hagenbarth, Rancher/BHWC; Jim Keenan, BSB Water Treatment/BHWC; Mike Raffety, Rancher; Mark Raffety, Rancher/BHWC; Marieke Jeffrey, BHWC Summer Intern; and BHWC's summer Watershed Field Technician crew: Simon Shepherd; Madelyn Hanson; Noah Dowler; and Cora Johnson.

Zoom: Kim Wheatley, BHWC.

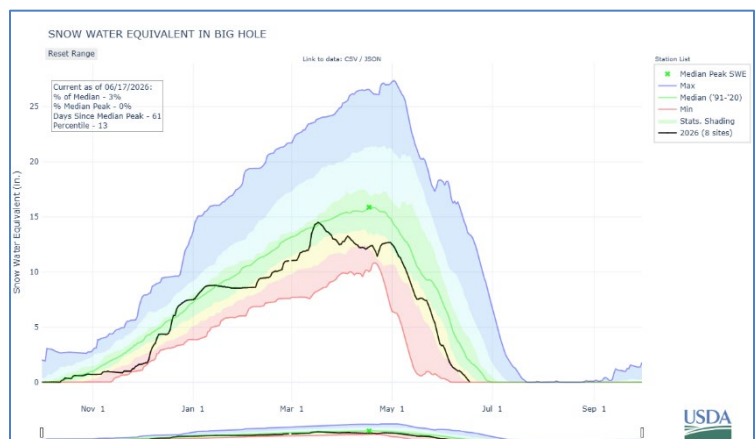
Meeting Minutes

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.

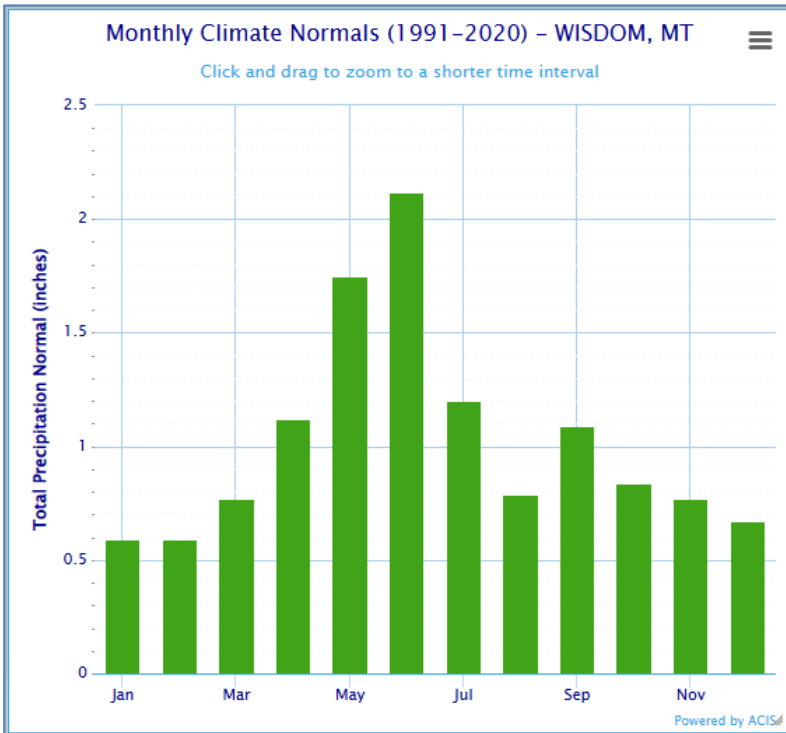
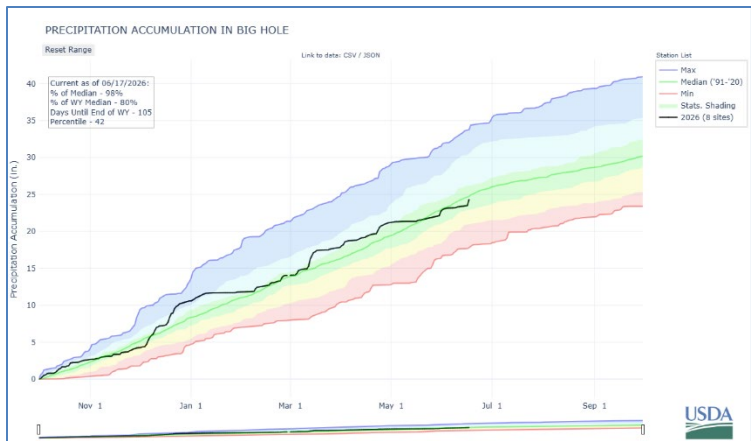
Reports

*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: 3% of median*
- *UMRB SWE – Montana Climate Office*

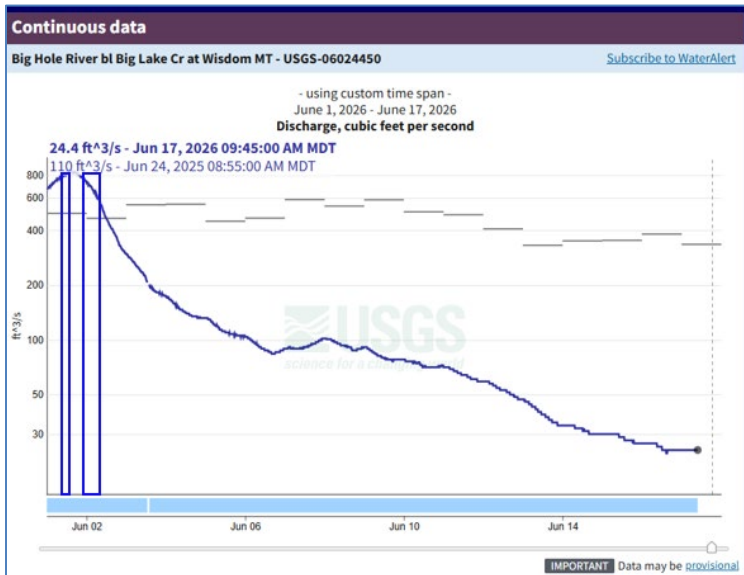
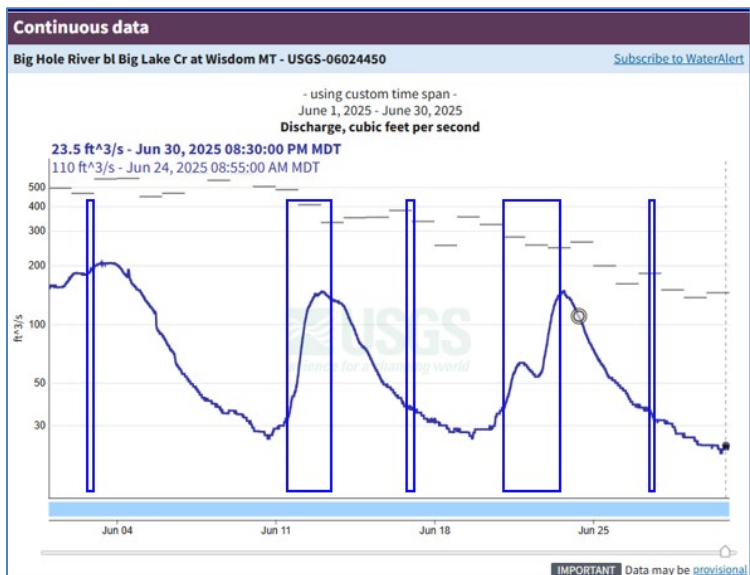


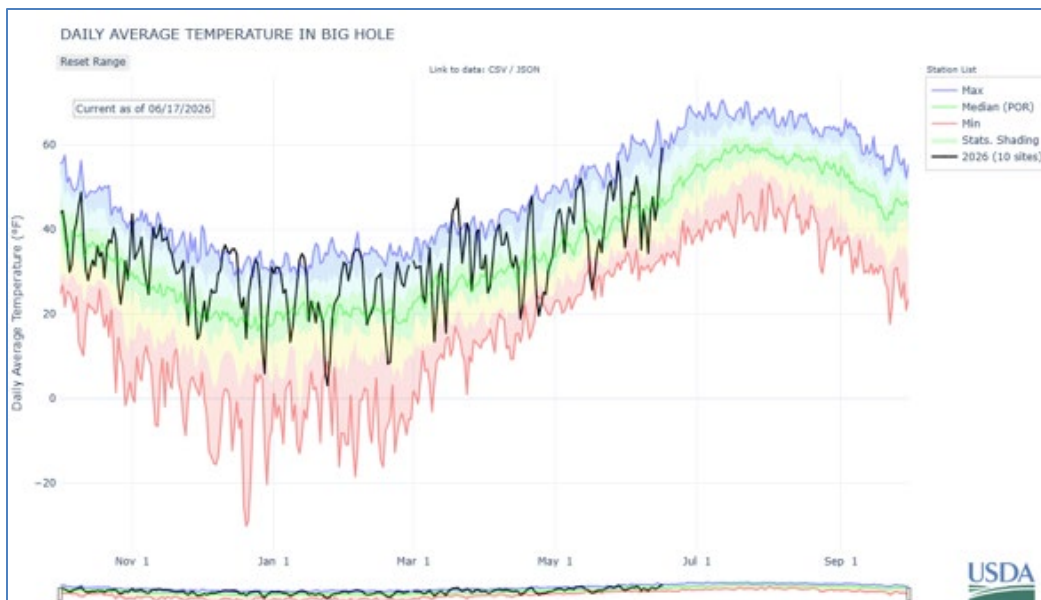
- **Precipitation:** 93% of median
- **Monthly Climate Normals (1991-2020)**
- **Hypsoma-SWE:** 66% of Normal
- **Rain Events**
 - June 2025 vs. June 2026
- **NWCC Basin Average Temperatures**
- **Climate Outlook (NOAA):**
 - **Outlook:** The 8-14 day outlook predicts slightly above normal temperatures and slightly above normal precipitation.



Month	Total Precipitation Normal (inches)
January	0.59
February	0.59
March	0.77
April	1.12
May	1.75
June	2.12
July	1.20
August	0.79
September	1.09
October	0.84
November	0.77
December	0.67
Annual	12.30

- **Seasonal Outlook:** The seasonal outlook shows above average temperatures and equal chances of above or below normal precipitation.
 - El Niño conditions are present and expected to strengthen into the Northern Hemisphere winter 2026-27.





- 83% Chance of “El Niño” (20% chance of “strong El Niño, 13% chance of “very strong El Niño”)
- *U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook:* Drought is predicted to persist in the Big Hole Watershed during the period of June 1 – August 31, 2026.
 - The Big Hole watershed is characterized as abnormally dry to severe drought as of June 9, 2026.

Director’s Report – Pedro Marques, Executive Director

- Drought: Flows are dropping fast – get ready
- Funding:
 - WHIP grants
 - Kamperschroer
 - Company Ditch
 - High Meadow storage and maintenance
 - USFS Partner Agreements:
 - Fencing
 - Lease improvements
 - Encroachment thinning
- Big Hole River Foundation dissolution – legacy of George Grant
- Partnerships!!
 - Beaver Translocation Area approved – Moose creek Beaver relocation
 - BeaverCon here we come! (Broad Reach Foundation)
 - LOS- TNC Virtual Fencing trial
 - Montana Farm Bureau
 - Smart Creek- Wise River Club

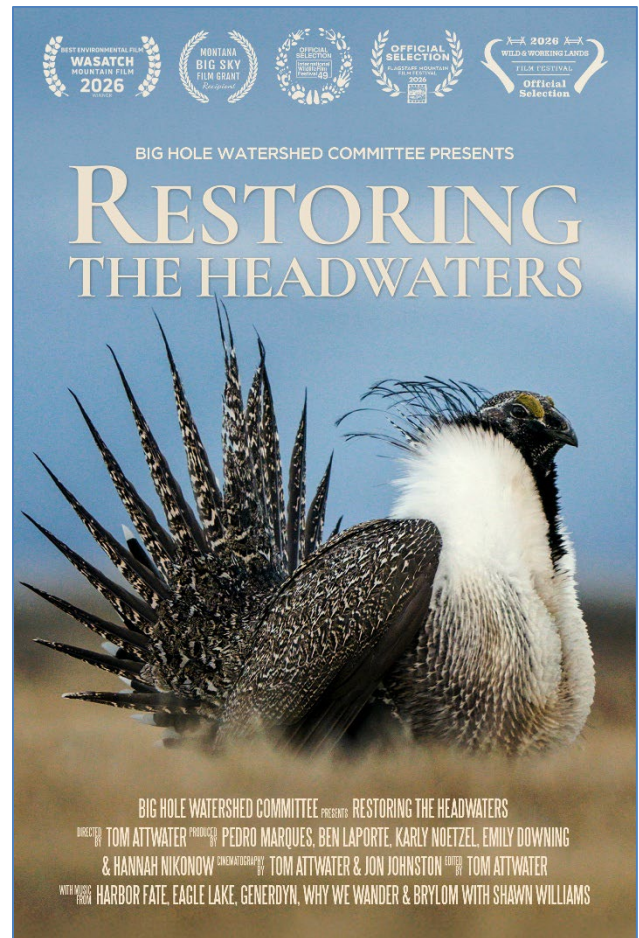
Steering Committee Report – Dean Peterson, Chairman

- The steering committee has no update as it has not met since the last regular monthly meeting. (They meet quarterly.)
- The next steering committee will be held in late August or early September.

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
 - Upcoming Meetings:
 - June 17 – Reduced or Ceased Water Use Reporting Process (DNRC)
 - July – No Meeting
 - August 19

- Restoring the Headwaters film showing
- Summer Update from Watershed Field Technicians (High Alpine Meadow Rapid Assessment)
 - September 16 – Grizzlies and Range Riding (FWP & BHCW)
 - October 21 – Invasive Weeds (Big Hole counties & agencies)
 - November 18 – Wisdom MAR Update (GWIP)
- 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
- Welcome, Kim!
 - BHCW hired Kim Wheatley as our new Communications Coordinator!
 - 15+ applicants
 - Several interviews
 - We are confident that Kim will be an excellent addition to our team! Please help us welcome her.
- Spring newsletter coming soon!
- Wildlife:
 - Carcass Removal and Composting:
 - BHCW picks up livestock carcasses from Big Hole & Grasshopper Valley ranchers free of charge. Carcasses are hauled to our compost site on Highway 278 near Wisdom. Justin Cottingham resigned
 - Now operating (winding down for season)
 - Eric Lewis, Conflict Reduction Coordinator
 - Based in Melrose
 - Dump trailer rented from Western States Cat



- Supporting wildlife and a working landscape
- Recently featured in the Montana Standard!
 - Contact Eric at:
 - ☎ (307) 343-3803
- Range Riding:
 - Monitors USFS grazing allotments in the Upper Big Hole to prevent conflicts between grizzly bears & wolves and livestock, identify injured & sick livestock, and locate carcasses to instigate investigations for potential reimbursement by the State.
 - Chet Robertson, Rang Rider (2011)
 - Preparing for 2026 season
 - Started June 1
 - 2 new allotments in 2026
 - Range Rider workshop – Western Landowners Alliance
 - Chet attended as both student and teacher
 - April 27 - May 1 in Grand Junction, CO
 - Chet invited to another conference in August

Restoration Report – Nolan Salix, Restoration Specialist

- Current projects:
 - Kamperschroer Springs fish habitat project: fundraising
 - \$143,000 in hand, \$365,000 estimated project cost
 - Secured Future Fisheries Improvement Program grant for \$85,000
 - Requesting additional funding via FWP's WHIP grant, Trout and Salmon Foundation, Skyline Sportsmen's Association
 - Smith Sage Springs Phase 2 – Reconnect: Awaiting start date (October)
 - No change
 - Mt. Haggin WMA: Ongoing, mechanized work complete
 - Marieke Jeffrey, BHWC Intern
 - Cabbage Gulch emergency project
 - Timberland Excavation installed check dams using 92 hemp bales donated by IND Hemp!
 - *See photo, above right*
 - Continued handwork (Beaver Dam Analog Maintenance)
 - MCC
 - Wild Rockies Field Institute (WRFI)
 - Watershed Restoration Group
 - Elkhorn Mine and Mill: Designing, Data Collection
 - Tech Students took water samples to assess water quality in Elkhorn Creek



- Lazy S: Active
 - Willow trenches completed
 - Weed barrier: 6 of 7 completed
 - Fencing: June 22nd
 - Regrading: Fall 2026
 - Planting: Spring 2027
 - August: In-Depth presentation
 - 7 exclosure plots
 - Next steps:
 - Fencing
 - Spring 2027 planting
- McCartney/Burma Rd:
 - Requested DEQ-319 funding: not secured
 - Waiting for DNRC Environmental Assessment
 - Kalsta Ranch storing 300 hemp bales
 - Kalsta dryland gully restoration
 - Local producer utilization
 - IND Hemp donated materials for restoration (hemp bales):
 - BHWC has extra materials available to local producers
 - Please reach out to Restoration Specialist Nolan Salix @ (406) 925-3643
- Eastern Pioneers LTPBR/Conifer Encroachment projects: Active/Contracting
 - Conifer Reduction:
 - Lost Creek-contracting
 - Trapper Creek-contracting
 - Stream Restoration
 - Browns Tributary
 - Active July 14th
- Upper Moose Creek LTPBR and potential beaver reintroductions: Planning + Data + Active
 - July 7th – Volunteer Day
 - Permits secured to relocate beaver into Moose Creek

Moose Creek Volunteer Day



Help improve stream health and protect infrastructure during our beaver habitat volunteer day!

Date & Location

July 7, 2026
Meet at Feely Exit 111 off I-15
9 AM to 4 PM

Lunch and gloves provided!

What to Bring

- Waders or irrigation boots
- Hat and sun protection
- Bug spray
- Water









Sign Up:
<https://sagesteppe.org/volunteer>

Contact:
Nolan Salix - BHWC Restoration Specialist
nsalix@bhwc.org



- Volunteer Day- connecting our community and especially our youth to our landscape
 - Beaver deceiver installations
 - PBS Film Crew “*The American Land*” (set up by Kim Wheatley!)
 - Sign up at sagesteppe.org
- High Meadow Water Storage Capacity Assessment: Collecting Data + Active
 - August meeting topic: Top Five Watershed High Meadow Water Storage Projects and How to collect a Big Hole Resource Site Survey with Survey 123
 - Presented by BHCW’s summer Watershed Field Technician crew (pictured above).

New Business

- Tungsten Mining in the Big Hole Watershed:
 - Montana Mining Association (MMA):
 - Modern mining is much more regulated than historic mining, and for good reason (lessons learned from the past).
 - Hard Rock Mining Impact regulations
 - Montanans don’t have to choose between recreation and mining – we can have both.
 - Not everyone who mines is a member of the MMA
 - Members are voted in based on meeting standards
 - Almonty and Mithril are both members
 - BDNF has most or 2nd most mining claims of any National Forest in the lower 48 states
 - Almonty Gentung Montana Corps
 - Steven Allen, Chief Operating Officer, and Dirk Nelson, Professional Engineer (PE)
 - Recently relocated headquarters from Toronto to Dillon, MT
 - Purchased old mill near Glen
 - Updating existing mill – making sure it’s safe and functional
 - Tungsten mine will not be an open pit mine. It will be underground. But it will take years (5+) to get everything ready to go.
 - Water use – water will be recycled and reused on site
 - Mithril Mining:
 - Taylor Sulik, Founder/CEO
 - Evaluating the Calvert Mine to determine if material has any viable Tungsten in it
 - Last major drilling: 1971
 - Processing facility in Philipsburg
 - Tech student studying the mine
 - Currently no water rights
 - Proceeds/community benefits:
 - Keeping it local
 - Beaverhead County will get ½ the gross proceeds
 - 1/3 to government, 1/3 to schools, and 1/3 to hard rock mining fund

Break – 10 minutes

Meeting Topic:

Reduced or Ceased Water Use Reporting

Presented by: Danika Holmes, Upper Missouri Regional Water Planner
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

House Bill 580

- 85-2-404, MCA, explains abandonment of a water right resulting from non-use **and** the intent to abandon.
- The voluntary reduction or cessation of water use during drought **and** in compliance with a drought plan does not *by itself* represent an intent to abandon a water right.

What are the abandonment law updates?

- The passage of HB 580 clarifies that the reduction in water use or nonuse by itself does not represent an intent to abandon a water right if:
 1. The place of diversion or use is within a county experiencing D1 (or worse) drought, as designated by the U.S. Drought Monitor (USDM).
 2. The reduction of use or nonuse is compliant with a drought plan filed with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC).
 3. A *Report of Reduced or Ceased Water Use* (form attached) is filed with DNRC.

What do participating water users need to do?

- To comply with the requirements of 85-2-404(4), MCA, water users need to:
 1. Confirm that the USDM has **designated drought conditions as D1** (moderate) or worse.
 - a. Water users can sign up to receive USDM notifications when their counties go into or out of different levels of drought.
 2. Ensure a **compliant drought plan** exists for their geographic area.
 - a. Users can contact the DNRC water planning section (DNRCPlanning@mt.gov) or their regional water planner for assistance.
 3. File the *Report of Reduced or Ceased Water Use* form by **December 30 of the same year** that reductions in use or nonuse occurred.

What is a Drought Plan?

- Drought plans guide preparation and response.
 - Per 85-2-404(4), drought plans referenced in a *Report of Reduced or Ceased Water Use* must be filed with DNRC.
- Requirements:
 - Metrics or criteria that compel voluntary diversion reductions (i.e., response actions).
 - Covered geography (e.g., county or watershed).

Trigger	Actions
600 CFS*	Alert of declining flows; request voluntary conservation and angler awareness
280 CFS*	Voluntary reduction (irrigation and municipal) and weekly meetings
73° F	Angling prohibited between 2 p.m. and midnight

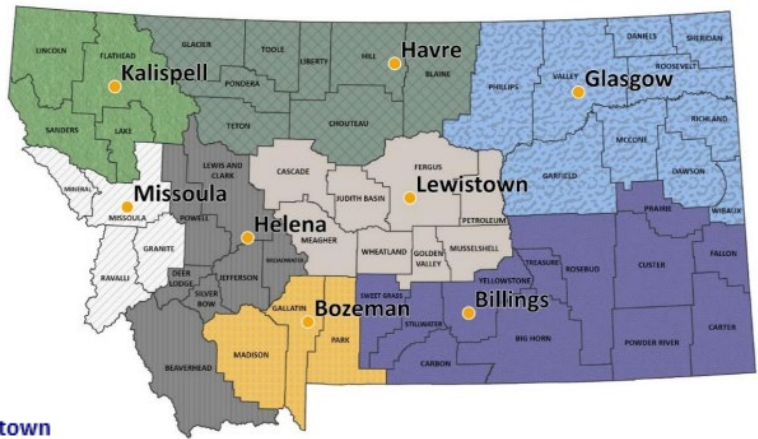
Jefferson River Watershed Council Drought Management Plan
*CFS=cubic feet per second.

DNRC Regional Water Planners

- Valerie Kurth, Section Supervisor
 - Clark Fork and Kootenai Rivers
 - VKurth@mt.gov
- Danika Holmes
 - Upper Missouri River
 - DHolmes@mt.gov
- Planning Section
 - DNRCPlanning@mt.gov

Water Resources Regional Offices

WATER RESOURCES REGIONAL OFFICES



Billings (406) 247-4415	Havre (406) 265-5516	Glasgow (406) 228-2561	Lewistown (406) 538-7459
Bozeman (406) 586-3136	Helena (406) 444-6999	Kalispell (406) 752-2288	Missoula (406) 721-4284

Upcoming Meetings

- Wednesday, August 19, 2026: BHCW Monthly Meeting
 - 7:00 PM at the Divide Grange Hall/Zoom – Topic: High Meadow Water Storage: Top 5 Projects and How to Collect a Big Hole Resource Site Survey with Survey123
 - Presented by BHCW’s summer Watershed Field Technician crew
 - Noah Dowler, Madelyn Hanson, Simon Shepherd, and Cora Johnson

Adjourn



The Montana Department of
**Natural Resources
& Conservation**

Report of Reduced or Ceased Water Use

85-2-404(4), MCA

(Revised 10/2025)

For Department Use Only

Received By _____

Water Right # _____

D1 or Greater in County ☐

Drought Plan _____

WHEN TO USE THIS FORM:

- To notify The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation of reduced or ceased water use in compliance with a drought plan.
- The place of diversion or use for your water right(s) is within a county that experienced D1 or greater drought, as designated by the U.S. Drought Monitor, during the time of reduced or ceased use. Drought designations can be found at the U.S. Drought Monitor website, <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>.
- The reduction or cessation of use complies with a metric or criterion (e.g., a streamflow level trigger) in a local, regional or state drought plan filed with the department.
- File this form by December 30 in the year the water right use was reduced or ceased.

1. Water right owner(s) information:

Name(s) _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____ Email _____

2. County with D1 (or greater) drought designation: _____



3. Name of drought plan compelling voluntary reduction or non-use:

☐ This drought plan is already on file with DNRC. Visit <https://drought.mt.gov/resources> and select the "Local and Regional Drought Plan Repository" tab to view the list of drought plans currently on file.

☐ This drought plan is not currently on file with DNRC.

Note: Attach your drought plan to this report OR provide a link to a digital version here.

4. List all water rights that were reduced or ceased:

Water Right #: _____ Dates of Reduced or Ceased Use: _____

Water Right #: _____ Dates of Reduced or Ceased Use: _____

Water Right #: _____ Dates of Reduced or Ceased Use: _____

Water Right #: _____ Dates of Reduced or Ceased Use: _____

Water Right #: _____ Dates of Reduced or Ceased Use: _____

5. Optional: Please describe or estimate the flow rate or volume of water conserved from voluntarily reduced or ceased water use. Examples: "reduced water use by [x] percent," "did not irrigate [x] acres," "rotated pivot use," etc.

Signatures:

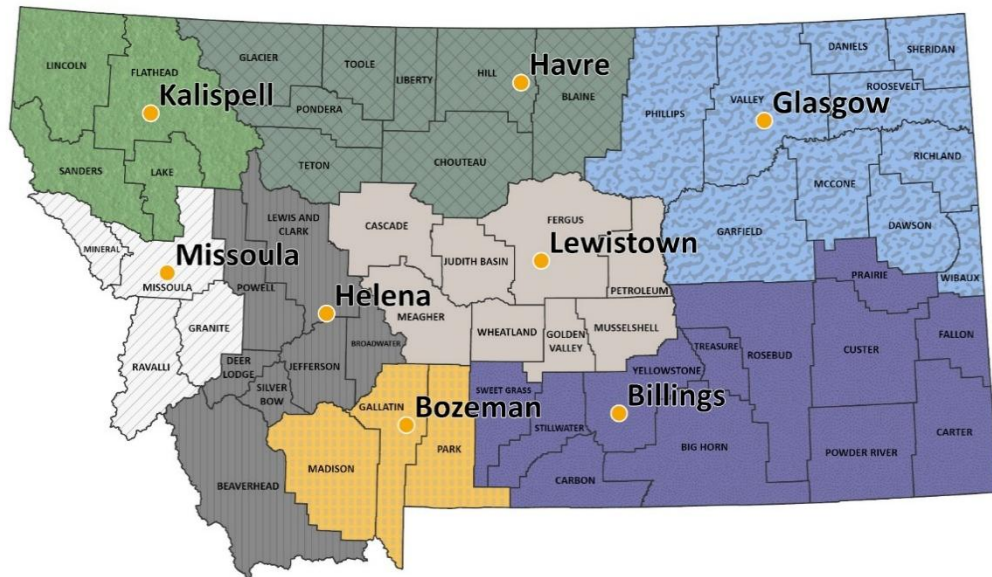
I DECLARE UNDER PENALTY OF PERJURY AND UNDER THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF MONTANA THAT THE FOREGOING IS TRUE AND CORRECT.

Authorized Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____ Title _____



WATER RESOURCES REGIONAL OFFICES



• BILLINGS

Airport Industrial Park, 1371 Rimtop Drive
Billings, MT 59105-9702
PHONE 406-247-4415 FAX 406-247-4416
EMAIL DNRCBillingsWater@mt.gov

Big Horn, Carbon, Carter, Custer, Fallon, Powder River, Prairie, Rosebud, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Treasure, and Yellowstone Counties

• BOZEMAN

2273 Boot Hill Court, Suite 110
Bozeman, MT 59715-7249
PHONE 406-586-3136 FAX 406-587-9726
EMAIL DNRCBozemanWater@mt.gov

Gallatin, Madison, and Park Counties

• GLASGOW

222 6th Street South, P.O. Box 1269
Glasgow, MT 59230-1269
PHONE 406-228-2561
EMAIL DNRCGlasgowWater@mt.gov

Daniels, Dawson, Garfield, McCone, Phillips, Richland, Roosevelt, Sheridan, Valley, and Wibaux Counties

• HAVRE

210 6th Avenue, P.O. Box 1828
Havre, MT 59501-1828
PHONE 406-265-5516
EMAIL DNRCHavreWater@mt.gov

Blaine, Chouteau, Glacier, Hill, Liberty, Pondera, Teton, and Toole Counties

• HELENA

1424 9th Avenue, P.O. Box 201601,
Helena, MT 59620-1601
PHONE 406-444-6999 FAX 406-444-9317
EMAIL DNRCHelenaWater@mt.gov

Beaverhead, Broadwater, Deer Lodge, Jefferson, Lewis and Clark, Powell, and Silver Bow Counties

• KALISPELL

655 Timberwolf Parkway, Suite 4
Kalispell, MT 59901-1215
PHONE 406-752-2288
EMAIL DNRCKalispellWater@mt.gov

Flathead, Lake, Lincoln, and Sanders Counties

• LEWISTOWN

613 Northeast Main Street, Suite E
Lewistown, MT 59457-2020
PHONE 406-538-7459
EMAIL DNRCLewistownWater@mt.gov

Cascade, Fergus, Golden Valley, Judith Basin, Meagher, Musselshell, Petroleum, and Wheatland Counties

• MISSOULA

2705 Spurgin Road Building C, P.O. Box 5004
Missoula, MT 59806-5004
PHONE 406-721-4284 FAX 406-542-5899
EMAIL DNRCMissoulaWater@mt.gov

Granite, Mineral, Missoula, and Ravalli Counties