



Big Hole Watershed Committee

Monthly Meeting Minutes

August 19, 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; Kim Wheatley, BHWC; Luke Lutz, DNRC; Tom Bowler, Butte Resident; Betty Bowler, Butte Resident; Paul Siddoway, Sportsman; Howard Varner, Rancher; Diane Hutton, Wisdom Resident/BHWC; Jim Hagenbarth, Rancher/BHWC; Kristina Kennedy, FWP; Bill Booth, Resident (Butte); Jim Griffin, Resident (Butte), Dean Peterson, Rancher/BHWC; Dianna Peterson, Rancher; Mike Wilkinson, Resident (Wise River); Jon Peterson, Rancher/BHWC Summer Hydrology Technician; JM Peck, Rancher/BHWC; John Reinhardt, Rancher/BHWC; Marieke Jeffrey, BHWC Summer Intern; Noah Dowler, BHWC Watershed Field Tech; and Cora Johnson, BHWC Watershed Field Tech.

Zoom: Simon Shepherd, BHWC Watershed Field Tech; Jim Keenan, Butte-Silver Bow Water Utility/BHWC; and Roy Morris, GGTU/BHWC.

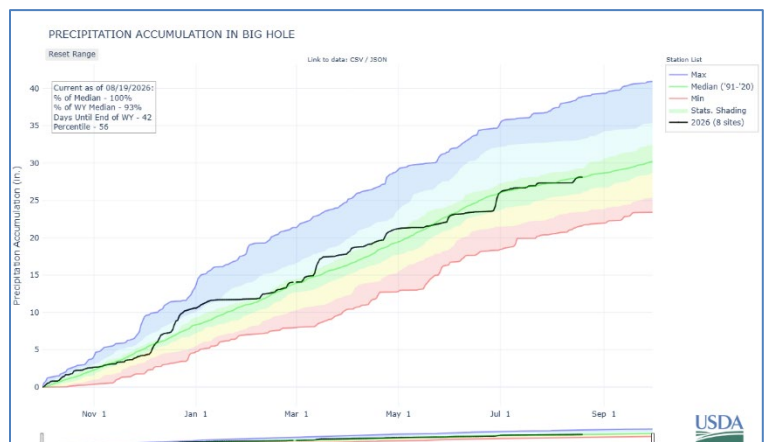
Meeting Minutes

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 Precipitation to Date:* 100% of median
- *Streamflows by River Section:*
 - Section 1: USGS Wisdom (06024450): 26.1 cfs
 - July 1 – October 31
 - 60 CFS- CCAA Target Goal



- CCAA water uses are off or already at their agreed SSP maximum diversionary rates
- Big Hole River Drought Management Plan
 - 60 CFS- Prepare for Conservation
 - 40 CFS- Conservation
 - 20 CFS- MFWP River Closure
- Drought Closure in effect since August 13
- Section 2: DNRC Dickie Bridge (41D 08000)
 - July 1 – October 31
 - 170 CFS- CCAA Target Goal
 - Big Hole River Drought Management Plan
 - 170 CFS- Prepare for Conservation
 - 140 CFS- Conservation
 - 100 CFS- MFWP River Closure
- Section 3: USGS FWP Maiden Rock (06025250): 317 cfs
 - Big Hole River Drought Management Plan
 - 250 CFS- Prepare for Conservation
 - 200 CFS- Conservation
 - 150 CFS- MFWP River Closure
- Section 4: USGS Melrose (06026210): 292 cfs
 - Big Hole River Drought Management Plan
 - 250 CFS- Prepare for Conservation
 - 200 CFS- Conservation
 - 150 CFS- MFWP River Closure
- Section 4: USGS Glen (06025500): 275 cfs
 - Big Hole River Drought Management Plan
 - 250 CFS- Prepare for Conservation
 - 200 CFS- Conservation
 - 150 CFS- MFWP River Closure
- Section 5: USGS Big Hole nr Twin (06026420 “Hamilton Ditch”): 161 cfs
 - Big Hole River Drought Management Plan
 - 200 CFS- Prepare for Conservation
 - 150 CFS- Conservation
 - 100 CFS- MFWP River Closure
 - Drought Closure in effect since August 13

Station	Network	Elev. (ft.)	Obs	NRCS Median	% NRCS Median
Barker Lakes	SNOTEL	8,250	30.2	30	101%
Basin Creek	SNOTEL	7,120	17	21.6	79%
Bloody Dick	SNOTEL	7,570	24.4	23	106%
Calvert Creek	SNOTEL	6,410	21.3	17.4	122%
Darkhorse Lake	SNOTEL	8,930	44.5	41.8	106%
Moose Creek	SNOTEL	6,170	30.6	29.2	105%
Mule Creek	SNOTEL	8,300	25.4	28	91%
Saddle Mtn.	SNOTEL	7,890	31.5	34	93%
Slagmelt Lakes	SNOTEL	8,600	45.6		
Basin Index					100%

- *Climate Outlook (NOAA):*

- *Outlook:* The 8-14 day outlook predicts above normal temperatures and above normal precipitation.
- *Seasonal Outlook:* The seasonal outlook predicts above normal temperatures and above normal precipitation.

- El Niño is strengthening, with a greater than 90% chance of a very strong event during the Northern Hemisphere fall and winter 2026-27 (13 Aug 2026).
- *U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook:* Drought is predicted to persist in the Big Hole Watershed during the period of August 1 – August 31, 2026.
 - The Big Hole watershed is characterized as abnormally dry to moderate drought as of August 13, 2026.

Director's Report – Pedro Marques, Executive Director

- Water Quality
 - Eutrophication and DO listing- Assessment protocol public comment
- Water Quantity/Drought
 - Whose job is it to measure and monitor water?
- Funding
 - Elkhorn Biofiltration (DNRC)
 - Pennington Bridge (BoR)
 - BLM Wildlife
 - BLM Aquatics (fingers crossed)
 - Wildlife, data-driven project development
- LOS/Speaking
 - TU
 - Support for multiplier for predation losses
 - Rainmaker efforts
 - TIE document
 - October 8- Private Industry event- Belgrade
 - Salt Lake City (Nolan) and Reno (Pedro) speaking events
- Thought for the day:
 - On Lichens: “These ancients carry teachings in the way that they live. They remind us of the enduring power that arises from mutualism, from the sharing of the gifts carried by each species. Balanced reciprocity has enabled them to flourish under the most stressful of conditions. Their success is measured not by consumption or growth, but by graceful longevity and simplicity, by persistence while the world changed around them. It is changing now.” – Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

Steering Committee Report – Dean Peterson, Chairman

- The steering committee met at the end of June and discussed a lot of what was discussed here tonight.
- No updates.

Communications and Wildlife Report – Tana Lynch, Associate Director

- Communications:
 - New Communications Coordinator Kim Wheatley (hired June 2026)
 - Today's topic: BHWC's digital media strategy and how we can make the most of these channels together
 - Our digital media channels:
 - Primary channels: Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn
 - Current goal, all channels: grow our followers

- Followers range from new supporters, to current & future partners, to state and national orgs that open doors to broader networks and funding
- The payoff: consistent posting builds momentum — a snowball effect for who we reach, who we learn from, and who funds our work
- We are ALL comms:
 - Board, partners, volunteers, techs — all of us are communicators for BHWC
 - The dedication to stewardship is here! - hundreds of years of combined experience and loyal networks
 - It would be a missed opportunity to not to harness that to lift up the organization even more
- Why Personal Networks Matter:
 - Massive reach expansion: personal stakeholder networks carry content over 5x farther than a branded page alone
 - Algorithmic boost: platforms favor human engagement — likes, comments, and shares from board members and friends push our posts into more newsfeeds
 - Trust factor: people trust individual recommendations far more than institutional accounts (92%+)
 - Bottom line: we can post constantly, but the reach multiplies when stakeholders and leadership engage too
- The LinkedIn Opportunity:
 - 42% of surveyed donors use LinkedIn to research organizations before giving
 - 98% of LinkedIn users say they donate to a cause at least once a year
 - Highest donor-conversion rate of any social platform for nonprofits
 - Only ~43% of nonprofits currently use LinkedIn for fundraising — an opening for orgs that show up well
 - Personal profiles > org page: funders tend to give to people they trust, not just organizations
- Let's Give it a Try!
 - Think of LinkedIn as a national conference:
 - Invite = a handshake & your business card.
 - Follow = a visit to our booth and other org's booths.
 - Like/share/comment = handing out our cards (and firing off the t-shirt cannon!)
 - The ask: set up your profile (or enlist a family member!), then spend 10 minutes a week — like, share, comment, post, tag us
 - The math: 22 board members × 10 min × 4 weeks = ~14.5 hours/month
→ 176 hours/year of trust-powered visibility for BHWC. It's only a matter of time where this can take us!
- Upcoming Monthly Meetings:
 - September 16 – Grizzlies and Range Riding (FWP & BHWC)
 - October 21 – Invasive Weeds (Big Hole counties & agencies)
 - November 18 – Wisdom MAR Update (GWIP)
 - *December – No Meeting*
- Shop to Support BHWC:
 - bhwc.org/shop-to-support
 - Branded BHWC gear

- Supports the Big Hole Conservation Fund
- Let us know if there's anything you want to see in the store!
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- Wildlife:
 - Carcass Removal and Composting:
 - BHWC 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.
 - Returned dump trailer to Western States Cat for now
 - 31 total carcasses (2026)
 - Eric Lewis, Conflict Reduction Coordinator
 - Based in Melrose
 - Hired Feb. '26
 - Supporting wildlife and a working landscape
 - **Need for Fall pickup??**
 - 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.
 - July – Early August
 - 0 confirmed livestock depredations
 - Wolf activity increasing — 3+ individuals documented in July
 - Black bears widespread across monitoring areas
 - Mountain lion repeatedly detected in Englebaugh/Saginaw area
 - Hot, dry conditions + declining water
 - Sand Creek Fire affecting the landscape
 - Ongoing livestock, predator & camera monitoring
 - What Chet is Seeing on the Range:
 - Increasing predator activity: Early August cameras again captured a black wolf, and a local observer reported hearing a wolf howl in the Saginaw area. A bear was also photographed at Anthill Gate.
 - Hotter & drier conditions: Water availability declined substantially during July, with springs, creeks, lakes, and ponds showing reduced flows.
 - Wildfire impacts: The Sand Creek Fire emerged as a major concern at the end of July, adding another challenge for livestock, wildlife, access, and range conditions.
 - Bottom line: The program is providing a consistent presence on the landscape during an increasingly challenging summer—keeping eyes on livestock, documenting predator activity, communicating with producers, and identifying potential problems early.

Restoration Report – Nolan Salix, Restoration Specialist and Marieke Jeffrey, Watershed Restoration Intern (Mt. Haggin)

- Current projects:
 - Mt. Haggin WMA
 - Cabbage Gulch emergency project
 - MCC- Muddy Gulch and North Fork CA Creek

- WRFI Restoration Ecology classes and work at North and West Forks of CA Creek
- Montana Conservation Corps
 - Beaver Dam Analog maintenance at North Fork California Creek
 - Weed spraying at Muddy Gulch
- Wild Rockies Field Institute classes
 - WRFI Restoration ecology alum – how Marieke found out about BHW
 - Students from two classes – June and August
 - Site tours with Pedro and work days rebuilding BDAs at North and West Fork California Creek
- PhotoPoints and Monitoring:
 - Uploaded PhotoPoints for 9 sites
 - Used OnX and Solocator
 - Created organizational system for future monitoring
 - Wrote monitoring reports for MCC and WRFI work
 - Wrote 2026 Report of Activities for work done at Mt. Haggin so far
- Upper Moose Creek Volunteer Day – July 7th
 - Beaver reintroduction – active
 - 60+ volunteers!
 - PBS film crew
 - 25 BDAs, 1 reinforced dam, 1 starter lodge w/ food cache
 - 3 culvert enclosures
 - Revisited site with Basecamp W.A.T. kids!
 - Beaver education & BDA building
- Elkhorn Mine and Mill – Data collection & grants for hemp:
 - Montana BioAgriculture Lab tested a biofiltration system to remove heavy metals from acid mine drainage water at Elkhorn Mill
 - Bioremediation of acid mine drainage water
 - Using *Rhizopus arrhizus* fungal spores on medium– bark chips & hemp
 - Visited the lab in Missoula!
 - Phase 3 of project now underway
 - Helping research and write background for a DNRC Reclamation & Development grant
 - Presenting to Beaverhead CD tomorrow
- Smith Sage Springs Phase 2- Reconnect – Awaiting start date in the fall
- Lazy S – active implementation:
 - Visited the lab in Missoula!
 - Phase 3 of project now underway
 - Helping research and write background for a DNRC Reclamation & Development grant
 - Presenting to Beaverhead CD tomorrow
 - Reducing plastics in restoration using hemp materials
- McCartney-Burma RD-DEQ 319 Proof of concept – Awaiting DNRC Permitting:
 - Recently rained 3 inches here in an hour, highlighting the importance of this work
- East Pioneers LTPBR/Conifer Encroachment projects – Need contracts:
 - Fall implementation
- Kamperschroer Spring Creek habitat restoration project – fundraising:
 - Current Funding: \$206,947
 - Current Estimate: \$366,522

- Current Need: \$142,848
- 2026 Montana Conservation Corps:
 - Mt Haggin: stream restoration and water storage
 - Brownes Gulch: stream restoration
 - Moose Creek: water storage and beaver reintroduction
 - Trail Creek: water storage and beaver habitat
 - Saginaw Creek: water storage and wet meadow
 - Van Houten Lake: spring protection
 - Pintler Meadows: water storage and wet meadow restoration

New Business

- *Restoring the Headwaters* film screening

Break – 10 minutes

Meeting Topic:

High Meadow Water Storage:

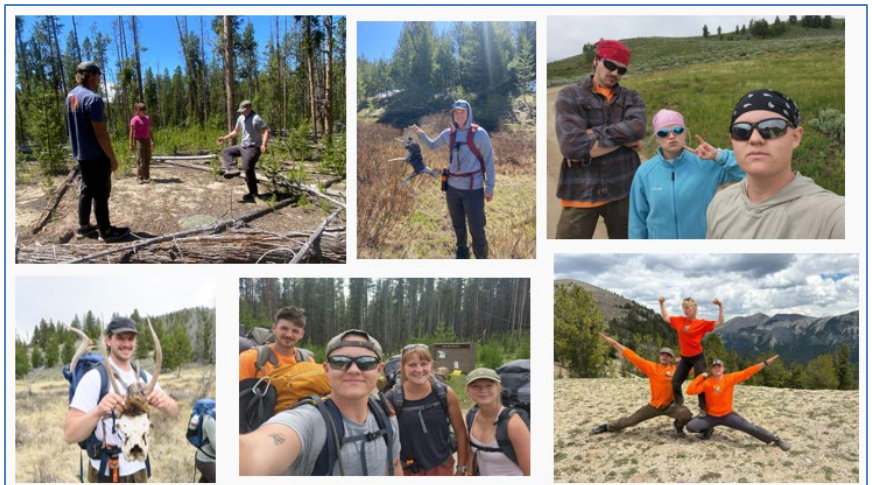
Top Five Projects and How to Collect a Big Hole Resource Site Survey with Survey123

Presented by: Noah Dowler, Madelyn Hanson, Simon Shepherd, and Cora Johnson,
BHWCC's summer 2026 Watershed Field Technicians

Summer Goal: Assess wet meadow complexes throughout the Big Hole Watershed to determine potential sites for restoration projects, water storage, and beaver reintroduction/active beaver locations.

Data Collection Process

- Reach Assessments:
 - Reach assessments were created and completed using ArcGIS Survey123. Assessments determined if a site had good potential for water storage or restoration projects.
 - Reach assessments also assisted in determining the logistics of a meadow being a potential site work by noting the distance from a road/access point, if the site was on a trail or road, and potential hazards at each site.
 - Information included in assessment:
 - Beaver activity (active, legacy, or inactive)
 - Water storage potential (high, medium, low, or none)
 - Channel flow (dry, base flow, bank full, or overbank)



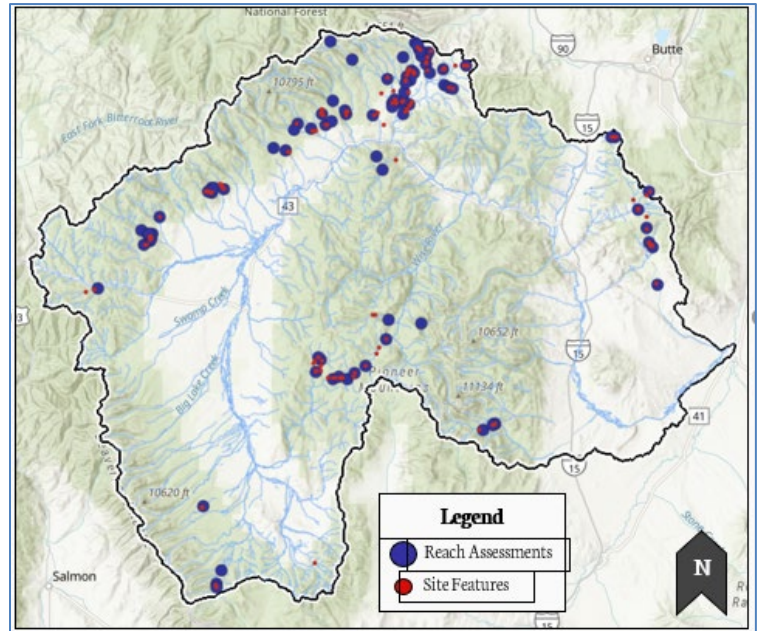
- Gradient
- Access logistics
- Site Features:
 - These surveys were used to note specific points of interest for water storage action and restoration projects.
 - These points specify Degradation Features:
 - Headcuts
 - Hummocks
 - Incisions
 - Conifer encroachment
 - Erosion
 - Water Storage Opportunities:
 - Plugging beaver dams
 - In-channel structures (BDAs)
 - Channel/Valley structures
 - Mechanized solutions

Sites Surveyed – 2026:

- See map to right

Watershed Technician Recommended Project Sites

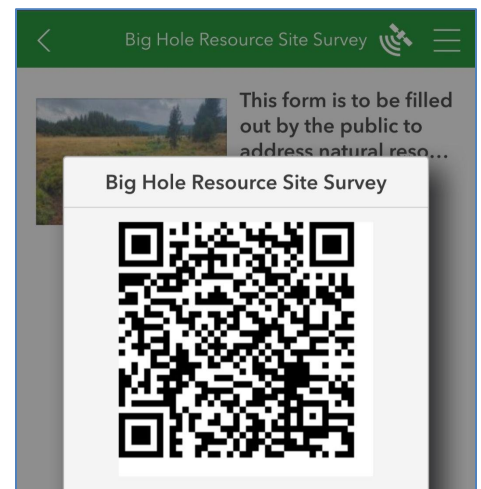
- Camp Creek:
 - Valley with large relic beaver dams and sedge meadows. Grazing pressure from cattle is present as well.
 - Project Action:
 - Fix and plug relic beaver dams
 - Place several small BDAs (2-3 feet wide) down creek
 - Manage cattle pressure
 - Access:
 - Alongside Camp Creek road (Truck access)
 - State Land
 - Desired Outcomes:
 - Beaver reintroduction within 5-10 years
- Clam Valley:
 - Large valley dominated by sedge that was beginning to dry out in (insert date here), overgrazed willow, and beginning signs of conifer encroachment.
 - Project Action:
 - Large BDA at mouth of the valley.
 - Smaller structures higher in the valley to decreased channel incision and store water throughout sedge flat.
 - Address conifer encroachment.
 - Access:
 - USFS Road 1278
 - Truck/ATV
 - Desired Outcomes:



- Increase water presence later into the summer by building BDAs and removing encroaching conifer.
- East Fork of Divide Creek:
 - Previous project area with around 10 preexisting BDAs that have fallen apart due to time in a broad valley that is primarily dominated by sedge and rushes. Materials in the form of conifers and rocks are readily available in the valley. Relatively small scale project and easily achievable.
 - Project Action:
 - Repairing of BDAs (roughly 8-10)
 - Implementation of new ones where needed
 - Conifer removal,
 - Access:
 - Permission required
 - Drive in through Morris Ranch up to access OR
 - ATV on old FS road from South Buxton Road
 - Desired Outcomes:
 - Repaired BDA for water storage/restoration purposes
- Mudd Creek:
 - Blown-out legacy beaver dams and cuttings (from within 5 years). Larger dams located in private irrigation canals.
 - Project Action:
 - 6 BDAs/plugged beaver dams
 - Access:
 - Road access (car/UTV)
 - Desired Outcomes:
 - Beavers move downstream, water storage.
- Upper Ten Mile:
 - Healthy willow dominated riparian area with many large relic beaver dams near the top of the valley.
 - Project Action:
 - Use 8 BDAs to plug relic beaver dams.
 - Access:
 - USFS Road 2525
 - Truck/ATV
 - Desired Outcomes:
 - Increase water storage in old beaver habitat on Ten Mile creek.

Public Resources Survey

- How To:
 - Download mobile app or go to website Survey123
 - No login/account needed, “continue without signing in”
 - Scan QR code or go to:
 - <https://survey123.arcgis.app/?itemID=10b6a60e71ab49f88c892dd436a7ad34>
 - *accessing form requires internet connection but can be filled out offline and submitted when back in service*



Upcoming Meetings

- Wednesday, September 16, 2026: BHWC Monthly Meeting
 - 7:00 PM at the Divide Grange Hall/Zoom – Topic: Grizzly Bears and Range Riding in the Big Hole Watershed

Adjourn