



Big Hole Watershed Committee

Monthly Meeting Minutes

June 19, 2019 – 7:00 pm

Divide Grange – Divide, Montana

In Attendance

Pedro Marques, BHWC; Tana Nulph, BHWC; Ben LaPorte, BHWC; Craig Fager, FWP; Vanna Boccadori, FWP; Jacqueline Knutson, FWP; Peter Frick, BHWC/Rancher; Randy Smith, BHWC/Rancher; Jim Hagenbarth, BHWC/Rancher; Tom Bowler; Betty Bowler; Jarrett Payne, FWP; Alex Hogle, Madison County Planning; Julia Nave, TNC/BSWC; Chris Edgington, Montana TU; Paul Cleary, BHWC; Sandy Cleary; Chuck Otto, Anaconda Sportsman’s Club; Dave Storm, Anaconda Sportsman’s Club; Zach Owen, BWC; Murray Strong, Pioneer; and Jerry Sullivan, Sportsman.

Introductions *Attendees introduced themselves.*

Meeting Minutes *May 2019 meeting minutes were reviewed, no additions or corrections.*

Reports

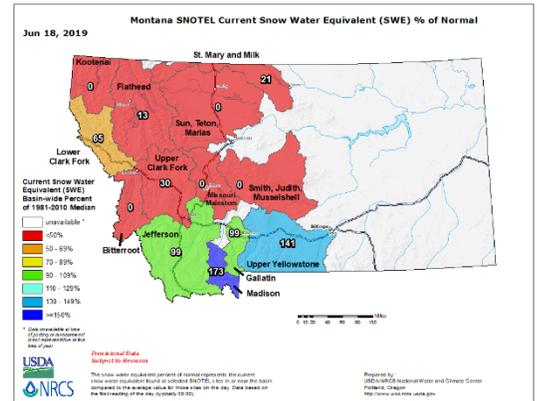
Streamflow/Snowpack Report – Jacqueline Knutson, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

- **Streamflows:** Seasonal gages are below average at every site in the watershed except for the gage at Glen (which has some interesting “painting” data which may be impacting accuracy). In the CCAA management sections we have come within the seasonal Grayling flow targets in two management sections already; although weather and irrigators helped us bump back above flow targets before calls had to be made. The gage at Saginaw was completely replaced this spring and has been reporting since the replacement. This weekend looks to continue the cool and wet weather we’ve seen the past two weeks but is expected to taper off and we may see continued drops in flows if warm and dry weather return and the water supply system shifts from snowpack driven to precipitation driven. Streamflow forecasts for the April 1st – July 31st period are below average for the Big Hole River so please keep an eye on forecasts and be ready for potential shortages if July precipitation is sparse once again.

06023500	Big Hole River near Jackson MT	06/18 18:15 MDT	2.00	111	236
06023800	Big Hole River ab Spring Creek nr Jackson MT	06/18 18:00 MDT	2.29	86.8	192
06024020	Big Hole River at Miner Creek nr Jackson MT	06/18 18:15 MDT	2.05	328	910
06024450	Big Hole River bl Big Lake Cr at Wisdom MT	06/18 18:45 MDT	2.85	247	335
06024540	Big Hole River bl Mudd Cr nr Wisdom MT	06/18 18:30 MDT	3.59	999	997
06024580	Big Hole River near Wise River MT	06/18 18:30 MDT	4.12	1,660	3,150
06025250	Big Hole River at Maiden Rock nr Divide MT	06/18 17:45 MDT	4.84	2,390	3,990
06025500	Big Hole River near Melrose MT	06/18 18:15 MDT	3.50	2,440	3,610
06026210	Big Hole River near Glen MT	06/18 18:30 MDT	4.20	2,860	2,690
06026420	Big Hole R bl Hamilton Ditch nr Twin Bridges, MT	06/18 18:30 MDT	3.233	2,170	4,180

- **Snowpack:** At this time the Big Hole Basin is at 100% of average. The Jefferson Basin in its entirety is at 99% of average but remember that that average is based on snowpack on this day exactly; 100% of not a lot is still not a lot and the surrounding basins are now free of snow. The water supply forecast doesn’t look great for the Big Hole this summer and we will certainly be hoping for favorable (wet) weather patterns for the rest of June through the irrigation season.
- **Precipitation:** Precipitation was below average in the southwest corner of Montana in May. The Jefferson basin saw 86% of its average May precipitation. We continue the pattern of productive precipitation followed by a dry spell. With no major changes in the long range forecast I imagine this will continue through the summer to some extent. This will be important as our water supply will depend on receiving normal precipitation from now until August to avoid water shortages toward the end of the irrigation season.

- **Temperatures:** May temperatures were generally average throughout the state although we were a little closer to above average on the western side of Montana. This did nothing to slow snowmelt this season and we are ahead of schedule. The slowdown in our melt (and the reason that we are still average for our remaining snowpack) came in the third week of May but we rapidly caught back up with warmer temperatures the last week of May and in early June.
- **Forecast:** El Nino continues to be present and is expected to persist (66%) through the rest of the summer. The odds of El Nino lasting through the fall and early winter is lowering, now down to 50-55%. I expect, then, that the weather patterns that we've been seeing this El Nino will continue with warmer temperatures and average precipitation coming in to replace some of the cool weather we've had the last month or so. The three-month outlook currently favors above average precipitation and a continuation of the above average temperatures we've seen over the last few months now. These outlooks will be updated at the end of the week and I recommend that people take a look at these as they get updated.



Drought Management Plan – Tana Nulph, Associate Director

- Big Hole River Drought Management Plan goes into effect on July 1.

Director's Report – Pedro Marques, Executive Director

- Apex Solar Development: 1,300 acres of public grazing land being developed into solar panels. Public comment due July 1 (handout attached).
- Sent a letter asking that the Governor include the NRDP in the list of state agencies able to contract projects under the Community Service Act. The list of agencies currently does not include the NRDP, which prevents them from hiring the Montana Conservation Corps under newly passed legislation (HB260) that made it easier for agencies to hire community service organizations.
- Newsletter is at the printer and will hit your mail boxes soon.
- Working on stream gage funding issue/working group. Each member of the drought subcommittee will appoint someone to partake in the stream gage working group. Currently, there is no state-appointed position for grassroots organizations like ours to participate in the working group. Figuring out how to work around that; there is an opportunity for us to get our voices and concerns heard and voiced through this group. What does a fully functioning stream gage infrastructure system look like for our watershed? Please be thinking about this and contact Pedro directly if you have priorities that you want heard. The Blackfoot Challenge, the Musselshell Watershed, and the Big Hole Watershed Committee are tasked with presenting the needs of watershed groups to the stream gage working group.
- Submitted our French Gulch film to the American Society of Mining and Reclamation's film festival and WE WON! Our film was awarded Best in Show. (Pictured, right.)
- Working on transitioning our administrative stuff; streamlining our processes.
- Delivered check from R.E. Miller today for the Burma Road project. BHWC was able to gather ~\$41,000 for this project through your donations. This is a testament to what BHWC can accomplish when a local resident comes to us with an issue they need resolved.



Steering Committee – Randy Smith, Chairman and Jim Hagenbarth, Vice-Chairman

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

Wildlife Report – Tana Nulph, Associate Director

- Range Rider program starts July 1.
- Carcass removal & composting program picked up 123 carcasses this year. Program ran early March through mid-May.

Restoration and Land Use Planning Report – Ben LaPorte, Program Manager

- East Fork Divide Creek: Beaver Dam Plug Project
 - Had a volunteer beaver dam plug project May 22-23. Plugged ~20 historic beaver dams with available natural material. After about 30 minutes of work, the area was completely saturated. Plugging the beaver dams increases natural water storage which will keep water on the landscape for later in the season. Thank you to the volunteers who attended and to Jerry Sullivan for fixing the flat tire on our ATV!



East Divide Creek

Before

After

- Smelter Hills Maintenance: Labor crews from MCC and Watershed Consulting are on Smelter Hills for the next 2 weeks maintaining, repairing, and improving on the heavy earth moving work that was done last year. No heavy machinery will be used this year, just hand crews. Because so much earth was moved last year we need to add strength and complexity to the structures to account for fresh sediment transport. This is an important year for us to monitor and add to last year's project. Seed is starting to come up from our aerial applications last fall and this spring.
- Volunteer opportunity coming up July 19th. We will be removing plastic fencing from our French Gulch and Moose Creek restoration area. We hope to see you there! *Flier with more information attached.*

New Business

- Governor Bullock signed HB286: prohibiting DNRC from filing for stock water rights on public ground. This is good for the landowner.
 - *Discussion:*
 - *Is this retroactive?*
 - *No, but you should be able to get the DNRC to take their name off your water right now that this has been signed.*
- HJ40 will be heard by the Water Policy Interim Committee September 11th in Dillon. This will coincide with the MWCC's Fall Watershed Tour, which will highlight one of our project sites.

- Moving forward with the macroinvertebrate study proposed by Craig Fellin. We are working on defining the scope of the study – what questions are we trying to answer? Setting the stage to get this work done. Sunrise Fly Shop held a fundraiser last weekend and raised funds to support this study.
- Montana Outdoor Heritage Project: Conversations around ways to find funding for state parks, working lands, wildlife, etc. Not entirely clear why working lands are included in the discussion. Trying to get rural voices included. Will gather more information about this project before the next meeting. Can also read more about it on the website: <https://montanaheritageproject.com/>.

Discussion:

- *Jerry Sullivan attended Montana Range Days in Dillon. It was an eye-opening experience for him as a sportsman. Listening to issues that large landowners deal with – like economic loss from elk eating hay on the Matador Ranch – amazed Jerry as to what landowners have to go through to preserve what they're doing. He was also amazed by how much these landowners care about the habitat on their property. The sacrifices these guys make are incredible. "Montana Range Days will be back next year in Dillon and I encourage you to attend; it was an amazing experience."*
 - *Side note: Some of these tours may be held in the Big Hole next year.*

Meeting Topic: Big Hole Watershed Wildlife Update

*Presented by: Vanna Boccadori, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (Butte); and
Craig Fager, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (Dillon)*

Background: Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Wildlife Biologists, Craig Fager and Vanna Boccadori, closely monitor Big Hole wildlife populations to monitor trends and inform hunting district management decisions.

Big Hole Watershed Wildlife Update – Craig Fager

- Email Craig at cfager@mt.gov to join his email list for more regular updates.
- Season-setting:
 - Done biannually.
 - Determined that hunting regulations in Montana are very complicated. Over 150 different license types. Working to reduce thickness or regulations and apply uniform regulations across a broader landscape.
- Elk:
 - Pioneer EMU- HD329, 331, and 332:
 - Counts came in just under the bottom of the target range.
 - Harvest was down last year compared to the 2 previous years. Likely because of the warm, dry fall. Several unused elk tags.
 - Bull ratios rising.
 - Calf production highest in ~30 years. Hopefully this can be sustained.
 - HD329:
 - 1,117 elk (several hundred over objective – landowners seeing significant impacts from elk grazing their livestock forage – FWP will likely implement damage hunts in this district)
 - 31 calves: 100 cows
 - 27 bulls: 100 cows
 - 74% of bulls were yearlings
 - 67% of all elk observed were classified
 - HD331:
 - 753 elk
 - 34 calves: 100 cows
 - 21 bulls: 100 cows
 - 46% of bulls were yearlings

- 66% of all elk observed were classified
 - HD332: Tried to get up there immediately after elk capture in mid-January. Every time they headed that way, they found fog. Had to fly this district twice to get a population estimate. First flight – in January – elk ran into the timber. Second flight – March – elk were particularly thin and wouldn't even stand up for the plane. Snapped a quick picture and let them be so as not to stress them too much. Observed 1 mortality and 1 near mortality.
 - 742 elk
 - 35 calves: 100 cows
 - 7 bulls: 100 cows
 - 9% of bulls were yearlings
 - 66% of all elk observed were classified
 - Tendoy EMU – HD300, 302, 329: Have new real-time collars on some of these elk because of Brucellosis study. Of the 30 collars put on in 2018, had a high rate of failure – at least 10% of these elk moved to Idaho, which has some implications for Brucellosis moving across the landscape.
 - *Discussion:*
 - *Do these elk have brucellosis or you're just monitoring them for it?*
 - *None of them tested positive in 2018.*
- Mule Deer:
 - East Pioneers:
 - 38% below LTA
 - 46 fawns: 100 adult deer
 - Either-sex since 2016
 - Doing a mule deer study across 11 districts – since the implementation of either-sex regulations in 2016, the mule deer population has increased by 24%. Fawn recruitment has improved slightly, but is still 1/3 lower than from 1970-1983.
 - Hypothesis: Annual forage and weather conditions plus competition with other ungulates and predation will be the short-term population driver while habitat quantity and quality will be the long-term driver. Mule deer need to be managed within this modern capacity; trying to stock more of them on a landscape that cannot hold them would lead to large starvation events (i.e. we need to fix the landscape and habitat before we can have more deer).
 - Habitat is the key – doing conifer encroachment projects to maintain landscape for both wildlife and livestock.
 - Landscape scale habitat – working with Sean Claffey, Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership. Map – 180,000 acres in the High Divide that exceed 4% sagebrush cover (greater than 4% is detrimental to sage grouse). About 30,000 acres in the Greenhorn Range identified for conifer reduction.
- Antelope:
 - HD310: Will be doing census surveys soon. Would guess their population is slightly down. Will be able to look at their populations and make estimates before antelope tags are drawn in August. Available licenses were decreased in 2017 following drop in population. Do these flights every other year; 2019 flight should tell us more.
- Sage Grouse:
 - Looking at 22 leks in Southwest Montana; these leks are well-distributed and representative of sage grouse leks in the area as a whole. Three of these leks have a history that goes back ~50-60 years. Populations are down by ~24%. Young of the Year are down ~12%. This seems to be the trend statewide. The FWP Commission will look at sage grouse numbers and trends and determine how bag limit & season length may be affected.
- *Discussion:*
 - *Have you had any litigation issues related to your conifer reduction projects?*

- *No, the sage grouse program precluded us from using prescribed fire to treat slash, which was restrictive. At what point does conifer encroachment prevent the landscape from providing sagebrush/sage grouse habitat? Fire is a useful tool because it also addresses cones and seedlings, whereas manual conifer removal does not.*
 - *Do you consider the Bull count in HD332 to be a reliable number?*
 - *Not this year, no. There are a lot of elk that come into HD332 from other districts until the snow flies. HD332 gets an incredible amount of bow hunting pressure.*

Wildlife Updates along the Big Hole River – Vanna Boccadori

- Elk:
 - HD319: total count and Fleecer count below target range. Did flight in March during period of intense cold and deep snow. Fleecer was totally covered. Cold temperatures actually helped count because usually bulls move into trees when the sun comes up, but when it's -20, nothing really moved, they just feed and feed. One thing that saved a lot of elk this year was the mild December/January – not as many elk moved to Fleecer, which helped because there wouldn't have been enough forage for all of them. Some elk were moving out of HD319 when the count was done, so they may have just been in a different district.
 - Harvest:
 - 195 total (119 bulls, 75 antlerless – harvested by youth and those with special permission to hunt from their vehicles)
 - 46/400 B licenses filled
 - 47 out of 119 bulls 6-point+
 - FWP purchased land at base of Fleecer, which helped with elk management. Managing the land to provide forage for winter grazing. Last year, had MSU Extension test the land which resulted in adding some fertilizer. Paid off in March – the elk made a lot of use of that property.
 - HD340: Counted just over 1,200 elk so a little above the target range. Some may have come over from HD319. Will keep the 16 day either-sex season.
 - Harvest:
 - 344 total (150 bulls, 194 antlerless)
 - 39 out of 250 permits filled
 - 257 out of 150 bulls were 6-point+
 - HD334: Summer range – will be doing counts in July. Split off from HD321 in 2010 because there were 2 distinct elk herds. No set population objective for this area – roughly expect/hope for 600-800 elk. Fluctuation in HD334 may be due to elk moving back and forth between the Bitterroot to the Big Hole.
 - Harvest:
 - 128 total (57 bulls, 71 antlerless)
 - 34 out of 250 B licenses filled
 - 41 out of 57 bulls were 6-point+
 - HD321: No set population objective – aim for 800-1,000 elk. Majority of harvest happens in first 2 days of season. Popular district for bow hunting. Bull populations decreasing due to hunting pressure.
 - Harvest:
 - 171 total (70 bulls, 101 antlerless)
 - 13 out of 200 B licenses filled
 - 31 out of 70 bulls were 6-point+
- Mule Deer:
 - HD319: Spring survey was not successful. Seems to be a steep decline in this district. Hope to get a good count next year to get a better idea of what's happening. Harvest was low in 2018.
 - HD340: Counted ~300. Slightly down from last year. Not flying the whole district, but count is meant to be indicative of the whole district. Female harvest spiked due to introduction of either-sex season.

- Either-sex season (2018-2019):
 - Objective 1: Improve harvest opportunity by providing a sustainable population
 - Metric: Population count and recruitment trends using data from spring aerial surveys.
 - Objective 2: Provide private landowners with unlimited tool to manage populations on their lands within their tolerances.
 - Metric: Game Damage Complaints
 - Results: No game damage complaints. LO's report increased harvest.
 - Objective 3: Improve mature buck harvest opportunity by using antlerless harvest to reduce harvest pressure on bucks, especially young bucks.
 - Metric: Trends in harvest data (# does, # bucks, # bucks < 4 points, # bucks >= 4 points).
 - Result: Smaller buck harvest actually increased, but it was only 1 year so hard to draw firm conclusions. Will continue to watch and see how it goes.
- Highlands Big Horn Sheep
 - ~120-150 sheep (population doing better than in previous years when they have struggled with respiratory issues)
 - Will use collared females to locate & count
 - Issued 2 tags in 2018; will offer 2 again in 2019.
- Grizzly Bear:
 - Tracks near Elk Park
 - Report any potential Grizzly Bear sightings to your local FWP Wildlife Biologist (Craig or Vanna). Try to include photos of the animal and/or the tracks. If we can confirm presence of Grizzly Bear out of the recovery zones (GYE, NCDE), the case will be better for delisting from the ESA.
- Sage Grouse:
 - Year 2 Upper Big Hole Sage Grouse project, studying:
 - Seasonal use of valley and migratory status
 - Nesting brood-rearing, winter habitat
 - Genetic connectivity to SW MT and ID
 - Vanna has logged several hours doing sage grouse surveys in the middle of the night along with Jim Magee and Adam Braddock with the USFWS Partners Program.
 - Using GPS trackers to monitor birds. Collect 5 GPS locations every 24 hours as long as the bird is alive and the tracker is still on. Trackers cost ~\$4,000 each and run on solar power.
 - The major result of this study is to find out how sage grouse use the landscape, where the critical nesting areas are, etc. This will inform practices to be beneficial to sage grouse.
 - Sage grouse show high fidelity to their nesting sites – at what point will loss of habitat or high instances of predation cause the female to find a new nesting site?
 - 2019 count:
 - 17 hens with GPS trackers (5 from 2018)
 - 6 mortalities this spring (one confirmed by an eagle, others likely from canines)
 - 19 1st nests
 - 4 re-nests (4 of the 19 1st nests were not successful and the birds have laid eggs again this season. If these are not successful, they will be out of time to nest for 2019)
 - 7 broods
- Montana Moose Study:
 - 3 sites:
 - Cabinet-Fisher
 - Big Hole Valley: a little lower than other study areas in terms of adult females. Some type of disease or sickness is the main cause of mortality. If you see a sick or dead moose, contact your local Wildlife Biologist (Vanna or Craig).
 - Rocky Mountain Front
 - Calf survival: 44 out of every 100 survives each year. In the middle on calf survival in terms of study areas.

- Population growth rates: Big Hole is just under 1, which means a declining moose population. Vanna is monitoring and has reduced available moose tags in the valley.
- Mountain Goats:
 - One population shared between Idaho and Montana. In the past, 5 districts had hunting tags for this population. In 2006, all districts were shut down.
 - Counted 64 goats on both sides of the hill. About 13 kids: 100 adults (not a stellar kid ratio). Goats take a long time to rebound from overharvest and typically don't reproduce until age 3. Give maternal care to the kid and the yearling. No sexual dimorphism between males and females (both have horns), so hunters will often kill the largest female, taking out 3 generations (mother, yearling, kid). Probably not opening up seasons on these goats any time soon.
- Fleecer WMA Cheat Grass Test Plots:
 - Stuart Jennings has come up with micro-fertilizer for cheat grass. Works best on areas that are both seed grass and native grasses. Causes cheat grass to grow too fast and "blow itself up", then you reapply the fertilizer and native plants will fill in the void where the cheat grass was.
 - Has shown to be successful. After first use/growing season, cheat grass cover was at 40%. Next season (without reapplication), down to 20%.
 - Not a chemical treatment – put it out in pellet form ahead of growing season and it's ready when the cheat grass starts growing.
- Antelope:
 - Will capture 60 on wintering grounds in Bannack. Hoping at least half will come up through the Big Hole.
- Discussion:
 - *Do you have all the collars you need for the sage grouse study?*
 - *We do, Kelly Bockting with BLM has been supplying us with collars.*
 - *Do the moose in the Big Hole have the meningeal brain worm?*
 - *We haven't seen any here, but we do see the carotid worm.*
 - *Typically, how mobile are the sage grouse?*
 - *This is where having the GPS collars is helping us understand that. Some don't move at all. Some move 10-15 miles to get to wet areas where the brood can feed.*
 - *Do they winter in the same place or do they move?*
 - *They typically winter in the same areas. In 2018, 2 moved.*

Upcoming Meetings

- August 6, 2019, 6pm @ the Divide Grange. Annual Wildlife Speaker Series event. Topic: Otters
 - *Event includes a community potluck starting at 6pm with presentation at 7pm. Main course provided by Liz Jones of the Rafter Ranch; please bring a side or a dessert. Kids welcome!*
- August 21, 2019, 7pm @ the Wisdom Community Building. BHWC Monthly Meeting. Topic: Conifer Encroachment + Arctic Grayling Update.

Adjourn



BIG HOLE
WATERSHED COMMITTEE
Conservation Through Consensus.

Calling all Volunteers - We Need YOU!

(To Help Remove Plastic Fencing from Plants at the French Gulch and Moose Creek Restoration Area)

When: Friday, July 19, 2019

Where: French Gulch and Moose Creek-Mt. Haggin Wildlife Management Area

Time: 10:00am – 4:00pm

Directions: Meet at the Moose Creek turnoff, located on Highway 569 (between Wise River and Anaconda), ~4 miles SW of Sugar Loaf Lodge.



Why: During the construction of the French Gulch and Moose Creek Restoration projects (completed in 2017), plastic fencing was placed around hundreds of freshly planted shrubs and trees to protect the young plants from deer, elk, and moose browse during plant establishment.

The plastic fencing has done its job and now it's time to remove it from around the plants and let them breath and grow.

*Please join the Big Hole Watershed Committee on **Friday, July 19th** to help out!*

Lunch will be provided.

RSVP to Ben LaPorte, Program Manager, at blaporte@bhwc.org or (303) 808-5611

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION

Trust Land Management Division

STEVE BULLOCK, GOVERNOR

1625 ELEVENTH AVENUE



STATE OF MONTANA

DIRECTOR'S OFFICE: (406) 444-2074
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HELENA, MONTANA 59620

May 29, 2019

Clenera, LLC

APEX SOLAR COMMERCIAL LEASE

Environmental Impact Statement

SCOPING NOTICE

Clenera, LLC has proposed a commercial lease for a utility scale photovoltaic solar project on 1,308 acres in Beaverhead County upon parts of state-owned parcels: **Sections 27, 28, 33, and 34 in Township 5S, Range 9W**, as shown on the attached project area map.

The proposed commercial lease would authorize development of the entire acreage for the solar project including placement of panels, a substation, an operations and maintenance building, a grid of internal service roads, perimeter fencing, and equipment storage area. The project area would be categorically closed to recreational use, and the land would be reclassified from grazing to allow for commercial development. The proposal, and the commercial lease, along with frequently asked questions, are available for the public to view at DNRC's Dillon Unit Field Office at 840 North Montana St, or online at www.dnrc.mt.gov/solar.

The purpose of this scoping notice is to solicit input from federal, tribal, state and local governments, interested persons, and groups to help identify possible issues and alternatives to be considered in the EIS. The draft EIS will evaluate the potential direct, secondary, and cumulative impacts of the proposed solar project. The attached maps show the project area and proposed preliminary layout. In the draft EIS, DNRC will evaluate alternatives including the no action, proposed action, and other alternative(s). From the alternatives presented, DNRC will identify a preferred alternative. The purpose, need, and proposed action are described in more detail below.

PURPOSE AND NEED

DNRC's purpose and need in conducting the environmental review is to act upon the proposed commercial lease for a utility-scale solar project, determine any necessary lease amendments, finalize the reclamation plan, and determine the amount of bonding appropriate for the solar project.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action would develop 1,308 acres for solar power facilities including placement of panels, a substation, an operations & maintenance building, equipment storage area, service roads, and perimeter fencing. Clenera, LLC is seeking to install crystalline silicon glass panels over most of the acreage and install a substation and operations and maintenance building near the center of the development. The panels are approximately six feet tall and installed via steel driven piles with racking.

The entire perimeter will be surrounded by an eight-foot tall chain-link security fence. The solar project is anticipated to take 12 months to fully install and is proposed to be operational in early 2021. The proposed commercial lease includes a 15-year operating term, with four, five-year renewal options. A map of the project area is attached.

The project area is currently leased for grazing and is encumbered by one active irrigation ditch and Northwestern Energy power lines. Under the Proposed Action, the grazing leases would be withdrawn, and the project area would be categorically closed to recreational use. The irrigation ditch and power lines would continue to be fully accessible to the owners for maintenance purposes.

The Proposed Action would generate increased revenue for the trust beneficiary, as mandated in the Montana Constitution, the Enabling Act, and Montana law MCA § 77-1-601. In Fiscal Year 2018, grazing revenue from the 1,308-acre project area totaled \$2,430. Once operational, the proposed commercial lease for the solar project would generate \$480,000 per year for the trust beneficiary for the first 15-years.

COMMENTS

The scoping period for the Apex Solar Commercial Lease Draft EIS is Wednesday, May 29, 2019, through Monday, July 1, 2019. The DNRC invites all written comments and suggestions concerning this proposal. Comments already submitted to the DNRC regarding this proposal will be considered as part of this scoping, and do not need to be resubmitted. Comments may be submitted electronically by email to:

DNRCApexSolar@mt.gov

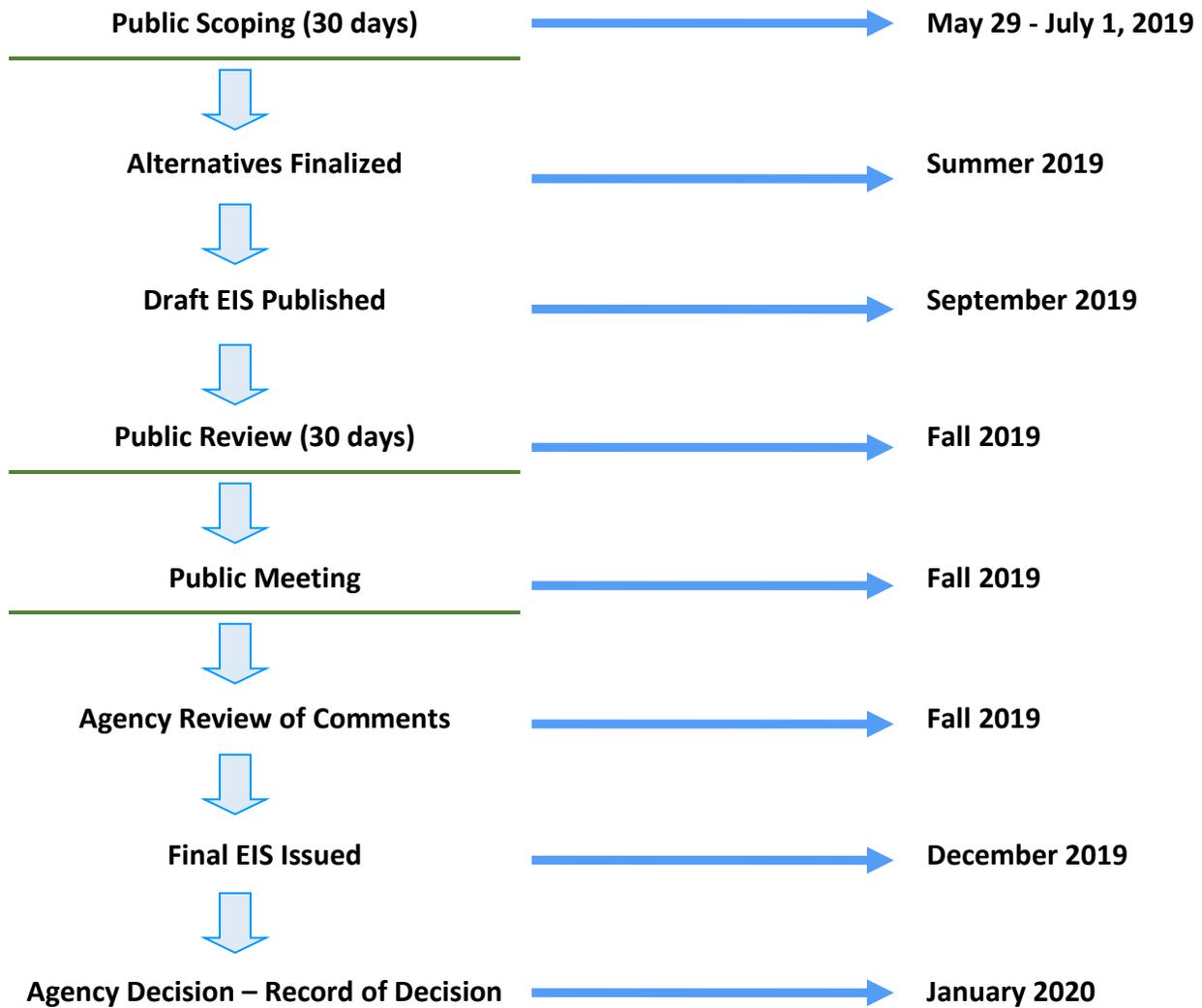
Or by mail to:

Tim Egan, Manager
DNRC Dillon Unit
840 N. Montana Street
Dillon, MT 59725

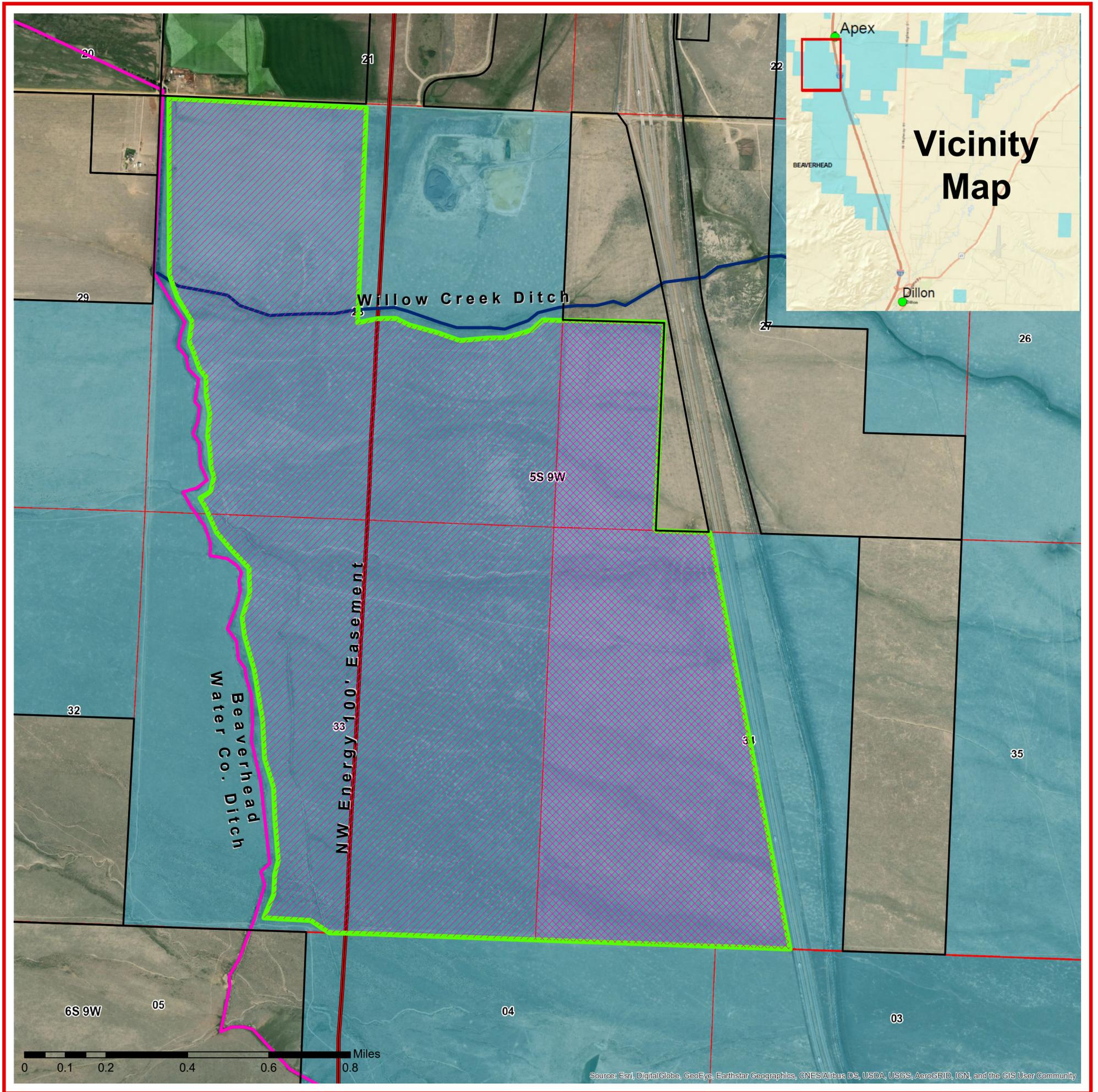
Please provide sufficient detail so that we can accurately address your comment. **All comments must be received by Monday, July 1, 2019.**

MEPA PROCESS OUTLINE

EIS POTENTIAL SCHEDULE



APEX SOLAR COMMERCIAL LEASE Project Area



Legend

- Apex Solar Project Area
- Grazing Leases #1335 & 6846
- Grazing Lease #6683
- Willow Creek Ditch
- Beaverhead Water Co. Ditch NW
- Energy Transmission Line
- Trust Land

Location: Beaverhead County, MT Date: 5-23-2019
 Prepared By: REMB Staff Member
 Projection: NAD83 Montana State Plane



Apex Solar

Preliminary Layout

