



Big Hole Watershed Committee

Committee Report & Updates

March 18th, 2020

March Meeting Cancelled due to Coronavirus

Our March meeting was planned for Wednesday, March 18th, 2020, 7pm at the Beaverhead County Fairgrounds 4-H Building in Dillon, Montana. We had planned to discuss Cloud Seeding, and local rancher and BHWC Board Member Jim Hagenbarth was scheduled to present. Unfortunately, we had to make the difficult decision to cancel the meeting in response to Governor Bullock's directive for social distancing to help limit the spread of Coronavirus/COVID-19. It is important to us to protect our stakeholders and staff, but we also want to keep the ball moving and keep our members informed. So in lieu of meeting minute, we are providing this electronic report with committee & project updates as well as information on conservation topics relevant to the Big Hole watershed and its stakeholders.

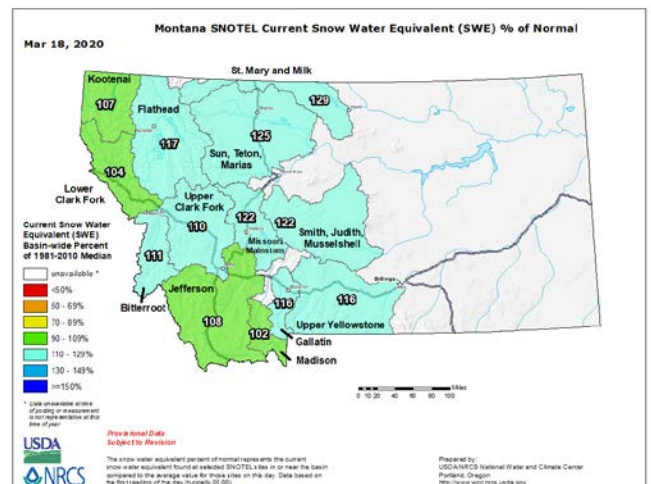
February Meeting Minutes

February 2020 meeting minutes are available here: <https://bhwc.org/about/monthly-meetings/> (scroll down for past meeting minutes). In February, we discussed Land Easement & Partnership Opportunities with the Lemhi Regional Land Trust in Divide. Please contact us at info@bhwc.org if you would like to suggest additions or corrections to the February meeting minutes or to this report.

Reports

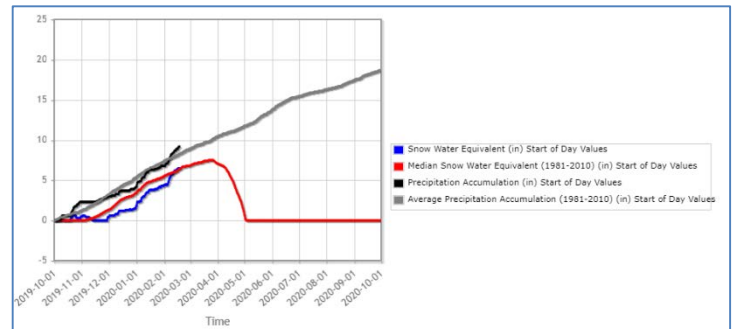
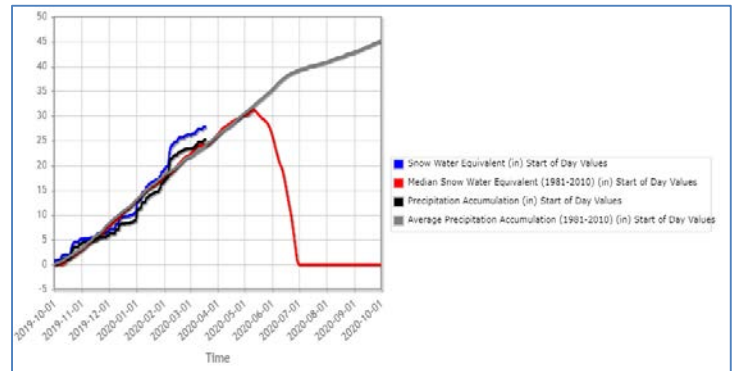
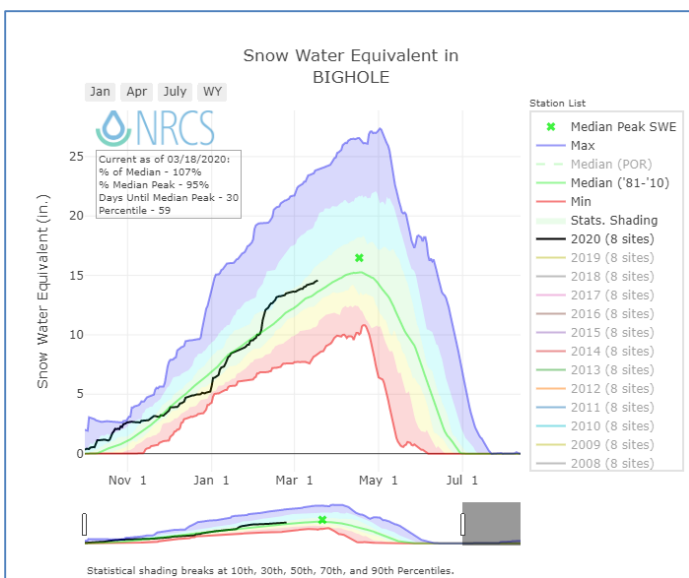
Streamflow/Snowpack Report – Matt Norberg, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

- **Streamflows:** Gages are seasonal and are not currently reporting flows.
- **Snowpack:** Snowpack conditions across Montana are currently above to well above normal. Currently the snowpack in the Big Hole Basin is slightly above average, sitting at 107% of normal and the Jefferson Basin as a whole is 108% of normal. High elevation snowpack conditions for this year are reporting average to above average conditions and well above high elevation 2019 snowpack conditions. Keep in mind that 2019 was an above average snow year but the high elevation conditions (Big Hole) were below to average and the mid to low elevation snowpack was above to well above average which resulted in early runoff and coupled with diminished precipitation during the May and June months streamflow



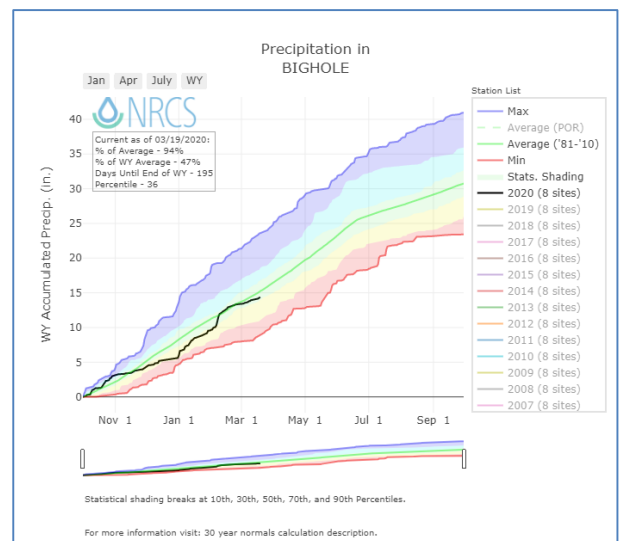
conditions receded earlier than normal. Currently, according to the NRCS, near to above normal snowpack has resulted in Jefferson River basin forecasts that are near to slightly above

Big Hole River Representative SNOTEL Sites		18-Mar-19	Mar 18 2020	1981-2010	
		WY 2019	WY 2020	median	WY 2020
Station	elevation		inches	inches	% avg
Barker Lakes	8250	12.6	13	11.9	109%
Basin Creek	7180	7.7	6.6	6.4	103%
Bloody Dick	7600	9.1	11.2	10.4	108%
Calvert Creek	6430	8.9	7.3	7.4	99%
Darkhorse Lake	8600	23.2	27.8	24.1	115%
Moose Creek	6200	14.2	15.5	14.9	104%
Mule Creek	8300	13	13.4	12.6	106%
Saddle Mtn.	7940	20.4	21.8	21.4	102%
TOTAL		109.1	116.6	109.1	
BASIN AVERAGE %		100	107		



average for the April 1st – July 31st period.

- **Precipitation:** Year to date precipitation across the Big Hole Basin is currently at 94% of average. Precipitation accumulations were below average during the November and December months. January and February brought the precipitation totals to 42% of the total WY average. Currently, month-to-date precipitation for the Big Hole has been variable across the basin with sites reporting total precipitation at 62% of average for the month of March.
- **Forecast:** ENSO-neutral conditions are expected to continue through the spring (65% chance) and into the summer months (50% chance). Generally, the three-month outlook calls for above normal temperatures and equal chances of above, normal, or below normal chances of precipitation



during the March, April, and May time frame. SST have remained at or above the 0.5°C threshold for the last couple of months, but forecasters are still favoring ENSO-neutral conditions instead of El Nino conditions to persist through the summer. Most recent NOAA 3-month outlook is for equal chances of above average temperatures and equal chances of average precipitation through the spring/early summer.

Director's Report – Pedro Marques, Executive Director

- Weighing heaviest on my mind is making sure BHWC has the resources we need to support our staff, which in turn supports the resource and keeps our board engaged and coordinated. I've reached out to many individual donors and foundations in the past month and am heartened by people's renewed commitments to our organization. Private donations from last year's appeal continue to come in!
- BHWC has been awarded a \$100,000.00 grant from the Bureau of Reclamation for water quantity planning in the lower section of the river. This grant will support our work to engage lower river stakeholders in implementing irrigation and restoration projects to improve the availability of late season flows, water use efficiency, and fish habitat. Funds will also provide for contracting hydrology and geomorphology consultants to design a solution to impending problems at Pennington Bridge and also provides capacity for us to update our Watershed Restoration Plan for the Middle/Lower river.
- BHWC was also awarded a \$12,000 capacity grant from Patagonia! Thanks to Eric Thorson and Sunrise Fly Shop, our Patagonia distributor partner, for connecting us to this program!
- Two films funded by the Wildlife Conservation Society demonstrating our work on natural water storage are in final edits. Thank you to Dean Peterson, Randy Smith, and Jim Hagenbarth for providing interviews! We look forward to launching the films at the right time/place given current uncertainties.
- I participated in a workshop of the Beaver Working Group, led by National Wildlife Federation, and co-led a focused discussion on improving the regulatory environment for restoration that mimics or uses beaver to improve the land's natural water storage capacity.

Steering Committee – Randy Smith, Chairman; Jim Hagenbarth, Vice-Chairman; Steve Luebeck, Treasurer; and Roy Morris, Secretary

- Steering Committee is happy with the progress BHWC is making.

Wildlife Report – Jim Hagenbarth, BHWC Vice-Chairman/Rancher; Dean Peterson, BHWC/Rancher; Tana Nulph, Associate Director

- Carcass removal services are available March 1 – middle of May. Call John Costa (*information on attached flier*). Carcasses are hauled to our livestock carcass compost site near Wisdom. Removing carcass attractant from local ranches can help prevent conflict with predators like bears and wolves.
- BHWC also has bear-resistant garbage cans available, free-of-charge, to Big Hole Valley residents. Contact us if you would like to make arrangements to get one of these.
- BHWC has been working with People and Carnivores to put together a Livestock Loss Prevention Loaner Toolkit, which includes scare devices, electric fencing, resource guides, and more. *See announcement included as attachment.*
- Wildlife Speaker Series – We are planning to feature Arctic grayling this year, to commemorate BHWC's 25th Anniversary. (Assuming we are able to hold public meetings in July.)

Restoration Report – Ben LaPorte, Program Manager

- Ben and his wife Joanna, welcomed their little boy Rowan John LaPorte into the world on March 17th! We are thrilled to add a new member to our growing BHWC family! Welcome Rowan and congratulations Ben and Joanna!
- The BHWC in partnership with the Beaverhead Conservation District and USFS submitted a DNRC Reclamation and Development Grants Program (RDGP) Planning Grant proposal to investigate the legacy impacts from historic underground hard rock mining in and around the Elkhorn Mine and Mill on the Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest. The Elkhorn Mine (upper Wise River) has had ongoing significant impacts on water quality and aquatic life in Elkhorn Creek and the Wise River downstream. There is active adit (horizontal mine shaft) discharge of metal laden waters to Elkhorn creek in addition to many seeps that leach through old tailings and discharge to the stream. Our planning grant proposal will look at potential ways to slow the flow of contaminated water coming from the adit and seeps, as well as gain more insight to the level of contamination to the site.
- Ben attended the Beaverhead Deerlodge Working Group meeting in Butte on March 4th.
- Formulating DNRC RDGP Project Grant proposal for French Gulch Fish Barrier project.
- Ben and Pedro are working with Montana Tech to help guide 2020 restoration efforts on the Mount Haggin WMA. Sediment cores (taken in 2019) from an old beaver pond in Muddy Gulch are giving us valuable insight to the levels of contaminated sediment at the site and potential time frame of sediment deposition rates. Applied science and adaptive management at work!

New Business

- None

Special Topics:

- **Census 2020:** This is a Census year, and it is vitally important that all Montanans are counted in order to ensure that Montana receives the correct amount of Federal funding for things like highways, infrastructure, schools, and health care. Montana may even qualify for an additional U.S. House of Representatives seat this year, depending on the results of the Census. Census data is also very critical to understanding local issues, planning, allocating resources, and applying for funding.
 - Here are some ways you can help:
 - Take the Census now at <https://2020census.gov/>. It's really quick and easy!
 - Remind others to complete the Census.
 - Learn more about available resources at <https://census.mt.gov/>.
- **One Montana's Master Hunter Program:**
 - This program, which was presented at a BHWC committee meeting when it was first starting, has generated substantial interest from hunters and landowners alike who want to see more ethical hunting on private land. Ownerships in the Big Hole that want to reduce wildlife depredation on their fields but are wary of allowing more access are encouraged to look into the program. More information is available here: <https://www.mtmasterhunter.com/> and also included in an attachment.

Upcoming Meetings

As we all know by now, the current COVID-19 situation has made things uncertain over the next few months. We will resume our regular monthly meeting schedule (the 3rd Wednesday of each month, 7pm, except for July and December) when conditions allow and will make the necessary announcements when that time comes.