



Big Hole Watershed Committee

Monthly Meeting Minutes
 September 18, 2019 – 7:00pm
 Divide Grange – Divide, Montana

In Attendance

Pedro Marques, BHWC; Tana Nulph, BHWC; Ben LaPorte, BHWC; Jim Magee, USFWS-Partners Program; Brian Wheeler, Big Hole River Foundation; Jim Dennehy, BHWC/BSB Water; Jim Berkey, BHWC/TNC; Matt Norberg, DNRC; Roy Morris, BHWC/GGTU; Steve Luebeck, BHWC/Sportsman; Tom Bowler, resident; Betty Bowler, resident; Paul Cleary, resident; Sandy Cleary, resident; Jim Hagenbarth, BHWC/Rancher; Peter Frick, BHWC; Sam Stone, Big Hole Ranch; Craig Fellin, Big Hole Lodge; Vanna Boccadori, MFWP; and John Rich, resident.

Introductions *Attendees introduced themselves.*

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

Reports

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

- **Streamflows:** There are 44 days left for flow-based restrictions in the DMP (as of 9/18/19). Streamflows in the upper basin generally were average to below-average during the spring and summer months. Streamflows in the lower basin overall were average; however, periods of below-average flow and above average flow (precip) helped normalize conditions. Starting the year off, snowpack in the basin was approximately 100% of average, however below-normal precipitation (Wisdom area) resulted in streamflows rapidly declining post-runoff. Localized precipitation events briefly increased flows throughout the summer. Streamflows in the upper basin dropped below CCAA flow targets at the end of June and FWP/USFWS began working with landowners to implement flow plans as the new DNRC hydrologist (me) transitions into the CCAA duties.

06023500	Big Hole River near Jackson MT	09/17 10:15 MDT	0.83	12.9	14.0	--
06023800	Big Hole River ab Spring Creek nr Jackson MT	09/17 11:00 MDT	1.18	9.81	24.0	--
06024020	Big Hole River at Miner Creek nr Jackson MT	09/17 10:15 MDT	0.86	35.7	55.0	--
06024450	Big Hole River bl Big Lake Cr at Wisdom MT	09/17 10:45 MDT	1.84	34.4	33.0	10.7
06024540	Big Hole River bl Mudd Cr nr Wisdom MT	09/17 10:30 MDT	2.54	101	110	--
06024580	Big Hole River near Wise River MT	09/17 10:30 MDT	2.53	172	214	10.7
06025250	Big Hole River at Maiden Rock nr Divide MT	09/17 10:45 MDT	2.82	303	305	12.0
06025500	Big Hole River near Melrose MT	09/17 10:15 MDT	1.53	354	301	12.3
06026210	Big Hole River near Glen MT	09/17 10:30 MDT	2.39	363	297	13.1
06026420	Big Hole R bl Hamilton Ditch nr Twin Bridges, MT	09/17 10:30 MDT	0.860	192	178	14.2

- **Precipitation:** June, July, and August precipitation levels were below average for the Wisdom area. Below average precipitation in the upper basin caused streamflows to rapidly drop after runoff. Early September produced a measurable storm throughout the basin which helped elevate stream flows and decrease water temps.
- **Temperatures:** Temperatures through the summer were slightly below average with the exception of August which was slightly above average. Daily high temperatures in the Big Hole Valley were about 2 degrees below average and daily low temperatures were about 2 degrees below average.
- **Forecast:** ENSO-neutral conditions are favored during the Northern Hemisphere fall 2019 (~75% chance), continuing through spring 2020 (55-60% chance). Given the ENSO-neutral conditions, be sure to closely watch upcoming forecasts as we move into the fall and winter months.
- The outlook through September currently favors average precipitation and above average temperatures.

Director's Report – Pedro Marques, Executive Director

- Big Hole Breezes newsletter back after 84-year break. Should help increase communication in the Upper Big Hole River. BHWC will provide updates and content for the newsletter. (Jane Wigen running it.)
- Intermountain West Joint Venture tour visited the Big Hole a week ago. A collaborative group from 11 Western states. Highlighted collaborative conservation success in the Big Hole; a testament to the many groups and many projects in the Big Hole in the last several years.
- MWCC's Fall Watershed Tour visited BHWC's restoration projects on Mount Haggin (Oregon Creek, French Creek). BHWC staff & board members were present to explain the projects and show support.
- A few years ago, ARCO requested a waiver on remediation standards (prior to beginning remediation work), but after the Public Comment period, EPA denied the waiver. There is another Public Comment period going on now (ends October 4th) regarding the same issue; Pedro will be commenting on behalf of BHWC to ensure that remediation is done correctly – using the methods that we have been using and have found to be successful. EPA has been using our work as the gold-standard example of how to do upland remediation work on this type of landscape; we are trying to show that what it takes to restore this type of degraded landscape is consistent, repeated, low-tech restoration efforts over the course of several years.
- We are working on a Landscape Scale Restoration grant along with the DNRC to hopefully secure funding for forestry projects on private land in the future.
- SB32 ("Jen's Bill") – Pedro participated in a stream gage stakeholder meeting today (September 18th). There is commitment across the board (Tribes, NOAA, MFWP, USGS, DNRC, etc.) to find solutions to stream gage funding gaps. Jen put together a spreadsheet showing all of the gages on the Big Hole River and the cost-shares that fund them, and her initial efforts to highlight the stream gage funding issue laid the ground work for this current effort. Pedro will continue to participate with this group and share BHWC's priorities and needs.

Drought Management Plan – Tana Nulph, Associate Director

- BHWC drought subcommittee met Monday, September 16th to help prepare Pedro for the stream gage stakeholders meeting that he attended today (September 18th). Some major themes emerged from that meeting, including:
 - Matt Norberg, DNRC, is a member of the new stream gage working group and can be our point-of-contact for that group.
 - There has to be a **SHARED OBJECTIVE** for drought management to work – stream gages are great, but without trigger points, flow data will not be enough to incentivize water conservation efforts.
 - In the Big Hole, Arctic grayling were our **catalyst** to address drought. Irrigators are willing to give up \$ in production to prevent the enforcement of regulations related to endangered species. What are the catalysts for other watersheds?
 - Make an effort now or you'll be hit with regulations/legal enforcement later!
 - Irrigation infrastructure is an issue. Some headgates can't be closed even if the irrigator wanted to.
 - There are really no gages that we can give up on the Big Hole River.
 - More gages create flexibility. We have identified 3 priority gages, but if we have to cut back to those, river sections will be longer and more of the river will face restrictions and closures during periods of drought.
 - This could severely affect the guiding & outfitting community and communities along the Big Hole River.
 - SHOULD watershed groups be footing the bill for stream gages?
 - BHWC started this as a temporary solution to fill funding gaps. Now it has become long-term and we are paying 8-10% of the total gage cost annually.
 - How can we step back from this commitment?
 - However, providing funding gives us power/a voice. Would we lose that if we quite paying our portion?

- Is the USGS the right agency to be hosting stream gage data?
 - USGS is expensive – DNRC can provide the same data for a fraction of the cost.
 - USGS provides a cost-share – who would fill that funding gap if we moved away from using USGS? Possibly the State of Montana?
- Department of Commerce/Tourism should be involved in this conversation.
 - A portion of the 4% tax paid by resort towns could go toward stream gage funding.
- Section V Changes:
 - **Recommendation to Full Committee: Update Big Hole River Drought Management Plan Section V flow triggers to reflect lower inflection point (260 cfs), which is consistent with the other 4 BHR Sections.**
 - Section V triggers would be the same as Section III triggers:
 - “Prepare for Conservation”: 250 cfs (currently 200 cfs)
 - “Conservation”: 200 cfs (currently 150 cfs)
 - “River Closure”: 150 cfs (currently 100 cfs)
 - If approved, this change will go into effect next summer. It will likely result in earlier fishing closures next year, but it is the best thing for the fishery, is consistent with the rest of the drought plan, and hopefully will draw attention to the Lower Big Hole River and will get stakeholders in that section participating.
 - An outreach strategy will go along with this change. Eric Thorson, BHWC/Sunrise Fly Shop, will work with the guiding & outfitting community. BHWC staff will work with irrigators & the general public to get everyone on board. We will identify the landowners that will be most impacted by this, start reaching out to them and try to get them on-board.
 - Will put proposal to board members electronically.
 - *Discussion:*
 - *A few years ago, we added a gage at the mouth of the river. The Section V triggers were chosen arbitrarily, whereas inflection points (wetted perimeter) were used for other Sections.*
 - *As you go down the river, the river gets wider so more water is needed for the wetted perimeter, meaning irrigators in this section will have to work harder to keep the flow in the river.*
 - *Haven't we discussed this before and there was some reason for the low flow in Section V?*
 - *Yes, there is a series of ditches that remove water from the Big Hole and put it back into the Beaverhead.*

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

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

Wildlife Report – Tana Nulph, Associate Director; Jim Hagenbarth, Rancher/BHWC

- Upper Big Hole Range Rider program wrapping up its 9th season September 30th. No confirmed depredation on enrolled allotments this year.
- On September 19th the USFWS will put 2 bear boxes and some bear-proof trash cans at the American Legion Park in Wisdom.
- A Grizzly bear was photographed and confirmed by MFWP in the West Big Hole.
- There were 2 separate Grizzly attacks in the Gravellies in the last week. (*MFWP Press Release attached.*)
- *Discussion:*
 - *In the Gravellies, the Grizzly bears are running the range riders right off the allotments. Grizzlies are destroying carcasses before Wildlife Services can identify them & confirm cause of death for producers to be reimbursed. This is a real issue and is going to have real impact on grazing of public lands and eventually hunting.*

- *From Vanna Boccadori, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks:*
 - *Grizzlies are in hyperphagia right now, feeding excessively to prepare for winter.*
 - *Part of the solution to this issue may be to get the Grizzly bear off the Endangered Species List. Delisting will likely go like the wolf delisting went – it will take a Congressional Order. The three states (Montana, Wyoming, Idaho) can't move forward until they can all agree.*

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

- MCC Crews spraying weeds and doing hand treatments (spreading fertilizer and seeds)
- Finished Oregon Creek restoration project and showed it off during the MWCC Fall Watershed Tour.
 - 10 root-wads put in place
 - Pools created, rocks placed to encourage scour
 - Several willows planted
 - Contractors have been a pleasure to work with; have accommodated us as we tweaked the designs.
- Lower French Creek restoration:
 - New channel construction
 - Working with Watershed Consulting
 - Did one contract for both French Creek and Oregon Creek to save money on mobilization (saved ~\$60,000-\$70,000 by combining projects under one contract)
 - *Discussion:*
 - *When will they be done?*
 - *The absolute last date, according to the contract, is December 15th, but the snow will determine when the crews pull out. Ideally, “substantial completion” will be done by the end of the October. After that, there will be some revegetation and tweaks to be done.*

New Business

- Divide Cooperative Weed Spray Day to be held Monday, September 23rd. (Meet 8:00 am at the Blue Moon Trading Post.)
- Board Member Jackets – if you haven't received yours yet, get in touch with Tana.
- Weather modification/cloud seeding: BHWC/BWC had a cloud seeding informational meeting March 2015. Jim Hagenbarth, Ray Shaw, and Jeff Welbourne have championed the issue. They had a meeting with Montana Stockgrowers and asked them to work on the issue as well. Jim presented information to Montana's Water Policy Interim Committee. Trying to change Montana's laws so that cloud seeding is a possibility (current regulations are very restrictive).
 - In Idaho, cloud seeding is done by farm bureaus, cities, individual water districts, private entities, power companies, etc.
 - The North American Weather Modification Council is holding a meeting in Bozeman on October 2nd.

Meeting Topic: Big Hole Sage Grouse Update

Presented by: Jim Magee, United States Fish and Wildlife Service and Vanna Boccadori, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

Background: Members of the Big Hole Sage Grouse Working Group will provide an update on current sage grouse population trends, habitat and collaring projects, and more.

Grizzly Bear Update:

- There were 2 back-to-back, confirmed Grizzly bear sightings in the last week (one in the Big Hole and one at Elk Park). Please be aware when you are out hunting or recreating – we can't assume anymore that we are not in the presence of Grizzly bears – carry your bear spray!
- Picture of Grizzly captured on game camera in the West Big Hole. There was a dead cow there, but it is not believed that the Grizzly bear killed it.
- This is the 4th or 5th season that we've had confirmed Grizzly bear sightings in the Big Hole. It is unknown whether or not it's the same bear.
- Keep in mind that while firearms work if you can stay calm and aim at the right spot, bear spray tends to be more forgiving and more effective.
- Black bear vs. Grizzly bear tracks:
 - Black bear toes are in a curved line (middle 3 toes arc above outside toes); Grizzly bear toes line up in a straight line.
 - Other ways to tell the species apart:
 - Grizzly bears have a hump, small ears, and a dished face; black bears have no hump, bigger ears, and a more sloped snout.
 - Note: Both Grizzly bears AND black bears can be large and brown!!
 - If you see tracks and you're not sure if they're black bear or Grizzly bear tracks, take a photo and send it to Vanna or Craig. The more evidence we can get of Grizzlies expanding out of the Northern Continental and Greater Yellowstone ecosystems, the stronger the case for delisting.
- *Discussion:*
 - *Have any bears been spotted in the Pioneers?*
 - *Several sightings have been reported in the last few years, but none came with photos so they could not be confirmed.*
 - *If a Grizzly bear takes an elk carcass that has been left overnight (for harvest the next day) and the tag is destroyed or eaten, does MFWP issue a new tag to that hunter?*
 - *Vanna: I don't know; I will look into that.*
 - *Jim Magee with the USFWS Partners Program has funding for wildlife conflict reduction, including bear-resistant trash cans, etc. If you have any problems with bears, you can contact Jim for help with solutions.*

Cooperative Big Hole Sage Grouse project:

- Includes several partners:
 - USFWS
 - FWP
 - Big Hole Watershed Committee
 - Big Hole Landowners
 - BLM
 - USFS
 - DNRC
 - TNC
 - Vigilante Coop
- Goal: Proactive collaborative approach to sage grouse conservation in a sustainable working landscape.
- Objectives:
 - Define seasonal habitat use
 - Determine migratory status
 - Identify migration corridors and stop over locations
 - Determine if Big Hole population contributes to genetic connectivity across Southwest Montana and Idaho by migrating during the breeding season.
 - Characterize nesting habitats.

- Core habitat (highest priority), general habitat, historic range
 - The Big Hole includes a large amount of general habitat.
- 2018:
 - Sage grouse capture at the following leks: Spokane, Mud Lake
 - 15 hens captured
 - 5 mortalities
 - 16 total nest attempts (12 1st nests, 4 2nd nests), 1 successful hatch
- 2019:
 - Sage grouse captured at the following leks: Spokane, Mud Lake, Fox Gulch, Spencer, Highland, Palisades
 - 15 hens captured
 - 6 mortalities
 - 20 total nest attempts (17 1st nests, 3 2nd nests), 9 successful hatches (likely more successful in 2019 due to a drier June. Too much precipitation during this early brood period can be harmful to chicks).
 - 3 mammalian predation, 2 avian predation, 6 unknown causes)
 - 6-9 eggs, 28-day incubation
 - Average expected chick survival: 20-50%
- Causes of mortality: (1 avian predation, 2 mammalian predation, 5 unknown predation, 3 unknown causes)
- 4 unit failures
- Currently 15 hens on the air
- Nests:
 - Hens tend to nest within 3 miles of their lek (breeding ground).
 - Majority of currently marked hens are nesting on private lands.
 - Brood checks:
 - 35 days post-hatch
 - Used Willie (dog) to flush hens at most recent location.
 - Of 4 hens checked, 2 had chicks with them.
- Movement: Trackers have shown sage grouse moving across large landscapes, over mountains, and in general, in ways biologists did not initially expect.
- Centennial nest data showed really poor success in comparison to the Big Hole this year.
- Roundup had the best success rate yet – near 80%. Likely due to environmental factors like precipitation.
- *Discussion:*
 - *Have you ever had a hunter shoot a bird with a tracker?*
 - *So far, no. In all the studies done in Montana with marked birds, hunters make up a very small portion of the causes of mortality. Trackers are also marked “Please return”.*
 - *You said you found additional leks. Is your intention now to survey them each year and add that information to your database?*
 - *Yes, the existing leks with a longer history are considered “Adaptive Management Leks”. The others will be surveyed but are not Adaptive Management Leks.*

Pronghorn Study

- In 2020, a pronghorn study will be initiated. The Big Hole is one of the study sites. Pronghorn will be captured and collared at Bannack (goal is to collar 60). There is a similar project going on in the Madison.
- This is the first time a Pronghorn project has been done on this scale in the state of Montana. This is a \$2 million project.
- *Discussion:*
 - *How are you going to address barriers from Interstate 15?*
 - *Well, first we have to figure out if there ARE barriers. Then we will figure that out.*

Upcoming Meetings

- October 16, 2019, 7pm @ the Divide Grange. BHWC Monthly Meeting: Western Pearlshell Mussels and Aquatic Invertebrates.
- November 20, 2019, 6pm @ the Divide Grange. BHWC Monthly Meeting: CCAA Update.
 - *Note the time change from 7pm to 6pm due to daylight savings time.*

Adjourn



FWP NEWS RELEASE

Region 3 Headquarters

1400 South 19th • Bozeman, MT 59718

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THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Sept. 18, 2019

Investigation continues into Gravelly Mountains grizzly attacks

Bozeman, MT — Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is continuing an investigation following two separate grizzly bear attacks that happened Monday in the western Gravelly Mountains.

Two hunters were injured in an attack that happened in the morning, and another hunter was injured in an attack later that evening less than a mile from the first incident. Survivors of the first attack have been released following medical treatment. The man injured in the second attack is still receiving medical treatment in Butte but is in stable condition.

It's still unclear whether the same bear was involved in both encounters.

The four hunters involved in these incidents had taken steps to educate and prepare themselves for hunting in grizzly country. Hunting with a partner contributed greatly to their survival, both in ending the attacks and in being able to get medical attention. Both parties also had a means of defending themselves, which is important when recreating in bear country.

The first attack happened about 7:30 a.m. when two archery hunters from New Mexico were following elk tracks south of Cottonwood Creek, west of Black Butte. The two men said they were walking single file up a hill when they heard a noise. They both turned to see a bear charging toward them. The bear struck one of the men as he was reaching for his bear spray. The man fell to his hands and knees, then the bear grabbed onto his backpack.

The other man deployed bear spray at the bear. When the spray reached the bear's face, the bear let go of the first hunter and attacked the other hunter. The man continued spraying the bear's face, and the bear eventually let go and left.

The two men were able to walk back to their truck, which was nearby, and drive to Ennis to be treated for their injuries.

The second attack happened about 6:30 p.m. as two archery hunters from Washington were walking north toward Cottonwood Creek. They said they heard a noise and saw a bear charging at them. The bear struck one of the men, who initially fell face-down. During the mauling, the man ended up laying on his back with the bear on top of him. The man's hunting partner shot at the bear with a pistol, and the bear stepped away but did not leave initially.

The bear charged two more times but did not make contact with the hunters again as both hunters fired shots at it until it departed. It's unclear how many shots were fired or whether any of them hit the bear.

The two men were able to leave the area on their own. The injured hunter was treated initially in Sheridan and was later transferred to Butte.



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The U.S. Forest Service on Tuesday initiated a closure on Cottonwood Road, which runs through the area where the attacks occurred. Prior to the closure, FWP wardens and Forest Service law enforcement personnel notified other hunters in the area. Both agencies also searched for several hours for a bear in connection with the attacks, but none was located. The investigation will remain active this week despite challenging weather conditions.

Further management action is pending the outcome of the investigation.

Attacks from grizzly bears are most common in surprise close encounters with humans. Bears are especially active during the fall months as they seek protein- and calorie-rich foods in preparation for hibernation. This is also when many hunters are in the field.

FWP reminds all recreationists to be cautious when in bear country. Some recommended practices for avoiding negative encounters with bears include:

- Be prepared and aware of your surroundings.
- Carry and know how to use bear spray.
- Travel in groups whenever possible.
- Stay away from animal carcasses.
- Follow U.S. Forest Service food storage regulations.
- If you encounter a bear, never approach it. Back away slowly and leave the area.

For more information on bear safety, visit fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/livingWithWildlife/beBearAware.

Grizzly bears are currently listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Management authority for grizzlies rests with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which works closely with FWP. For more information on grizzly bear management in Montana, visit jgbconline.org.

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