

Big Hole Watershed Committee
April 18, 2007
Monthly Meeting Agenda
6:30 pm – Divide Grange Hall

6:30 - Introductions and review of minutes

6:35 - Snowpack update - Dave Amman, DNRC

6:40 - General updates

- Results of DC trip - Randy Smith and Steve Luebeck
- Announcement of issuance of Big Hole Decree - Jan Langle. DNRC
- Funding Update
- Other

7:00 - Grayling Report - Jim Magee, FWP Grayling Biologist

7:30 – Break

7:40 - Report on Land Use Planning Conference - Harold Peterson

Update and assessment of Big Hole Development Standards Review Board process and activities

8:55 - Set May meeting agenda

Big Hole Watershed Committee
Monthly Meeting
March 21, 2007
6:00 pm – Divide Grange Hall

IN ATTENDANCE:

Dennis Havig, USFS; Art Christensen, Bvhd. Cons. District; Noorjahan Parwana, BHCW; Mike Bias, BHRF; Sam Hochhalter, FWP; Bruce Rich, FWP; Dick Oswald, FWP; Scott Reynolds, GGTU; Disck Marshall, Rancher; Steve Luebeck, Sportsman, Andrew Hanson, Complete Fly Fisher; Ray Weaver, Rancher; John Dooling, Rancher; John Peck, EPESP; Jim Hagenbarth, Rancher; Rndy Smith, Rancher; Garth Haughland, Bvhd. Co. Comm.; Kristina Swanson, BHCW; Ginette Abdo, MBMG; Marty Hovan, BSB Water; Mike Roberts, DNRC; Jeff Everett, USFWS-MTPFW; Dan Downing, USFS; Mike McLance, Helena; Dave Ammen, DNRC-Helena; Steve Parker, BHRF; Matt Norberg, DNRC; Stan Bradshaw, TU; Adam Petersen, FWP; Peter LaMothe, FWP; John Reinhardt, Rancher; Jeanne Caddy, BHCW.

Introductions were made.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Art Christensen received a distinguished service award from Dillon Jaycees.

Jeanne Caddy was introduced as the new weed coordinator for the Big Hole Watershed Weed Committee. Jeanne was serving as minute taker at the meeting as Jill was away from work due to her father's recent death.

Fred Provenza, a world class animal behavior specialist, will be conducting a workshop at the Twin Bridges Fairgrounds on March 30, 2007. He will focus on how behavior influences food and habitat selection and how to utilize this understanding to change the distribution of grazing

animals to manage invasive plant species, protect riparian areas, increase biodiversity and enhance wildlife values. The workshop is sponsored by Ruby Conservation District and Ruby Watershed Council.

GRANT PROPOSAL UPDATES

DNRC HB223 grant requests were approved to fund the Carpenter Project and the Rock Creek Project. The projects will not begin until fall due to conflict with irrigation season. Multiple bids have been received on Garrison Diversion. Design will be contracted within the month.

The Sonoran Institute Planning Conference will be held at Chico Hot Springs March 26 through March 28 and the BHWC has been awarded a spot at the conference. Representing the BHWC will be Garth Haughland, Harold Peterson, Jim Hagenbarth, Steve Hess (BSB Planner), Nathan Korb, and Noorjahan Parwana.

2006 WATER YEAR REVIEW AND 2007 STREAMFLOW FORECAST –

Mike Roberts (DNRC Hydrologist)

A review of last year's water year revealed snowpack at 102% in the spring of 2006. An early melt of snow followed by a very dry summer resulted in low flow conditions once again in the months of July and August. Data observed at some of the long-term inflow gaging stations indicate a successive decline in summer and fall base flows over the past nine years, indicating the persistence of cumulative drought conditions.

As of 3/20/07, Big Hole basin snowpack is at 76%, a decline of nearly 10% in the past month. The NRCS forecast for streamflow volume, provided there is average precipitation, should be 64% to 74% from April through July. Both the Darkhorse Lake and Calvert Creek SNOTEL sites melted off two to three weeks earlier than normal last year and snowpack readings this year show Calvert Creek snowpack melting several weeks earlier than last year.

CCAA - Water rights compliance – Headgates were checked for compliance with flow rate and period of use. Some flow rate exceedances were documented as well as leaky headgates and improperly functioning measuring devices. All non-compliances will be addressed through CCAA implementation.

Voluntary flow reduction – Under a volunteer agreement with irrigators flow was cut back at some headgates and 121cfs was put back into the river from June through August. Eighteen cfs was released back into diversions.

Flow targets – Although the CCAA has yet to be implemented, a positive trend in meeting CCAA flow targets has been observed over the past couple years despite continued drought conditions. This is due to landowner cooperation during low flow periods.

Forecast – The 10-day forecast calls for unsettled conditions which may lead to a change in the high pressure pattern we are presently experiencing. This could result in some snow and rain. We still have another month of snowpack accumulation. In 2006, snowpack increased dramatically from March to April. It will take a similar situation as well as supplemental summer precipitation to bail us out of another tough summer season. That said, indications at this time are for similar low flow conditions as we have seen in recent years.

PROJECTS

Six projects were recommended for funding by the Advisory Panel from the 2006 appropriation. The Advisory Panel met on January 22, 2007 to hear proposals. Due to time constraints, three presentations were made at the March meeting. The remaining three recommended by the panel were presented at this meeting.

Ralston Riparian Enhancement Project – Jim Magee

The purpose of this request is to build 2.7 miles of riparian fence on the mainstem Big Hole River and 0.5 miles on Bryant Creek. The fence will enhance native vegetation resulting in improved fish habitat, bank stability, channel morphology, and flood plain function. Fence will break property into multiple pastures and is in conjunction with a grazing management plan developed by the landowner and NRCS for the CCAA Program. A stock water well will be developed that will provide water to livestock in two pastures. A wildlife exclusion fence will be constructed to protect haystacks. Two measuring devices will be installed in irrigation diversions in project area to allow landowner to better manage diverted water.

This project will improve riparian vegetation that will stabilize banks, provide shade and cover, create flood plain roughness, create pool habitats and decrease sediment input into the Big Hole and Bryant Creek. Project will also allow better management of diverted flow by installing measuring devices and assist with instream flow conservation. Project will result in enhanced riparian vegetation thereby enhancing stream health, fish habitat and carrying capacity. Project will allow landowner to implement a grazing management plan developed by landowner and NRCS that will enhance riparian function and maintain an economically viable operation. Total project cost - \$45,353; Request \$10,000. Project was approved for funding. However, Art Christensen was concerned about the cost and location of the electric fence.

Landscape – Scale Thermal Habitat Assessment for fluvial Arctic grayling on the Big Hole River – Jim Magee

(Note-This project was not approved by the Advisory Panel. Instead, the request was tabled pending responses to questions and concerns by members of the panel. Jim was permitted to make the presentation to the BHWC. Noorjahan also noted that, should this request be approved for funding, the funding would come out of the “Studies” budget of the 2006 Appropriation, not out of the habitat restoration budget).

Concerns expressed by BHWC members ranged from the value of readings because the readings would be taken during different times of the day and may give uneven results. Steve Parker said the advisory panel thought the expense of the project wasn't worth the uncertain amount of data that may be gained. The BHWC agreed to abide by the recommendation of the Advisory Panel at their May meeting.

Fish Screens – Design Costs for Fish Exclusions – Peter LaMothe

The purpose of this request is to secure funding to cover the design and planning costs associated with installing four fish exclusion devices within irrigation ditches in the upper Big Hole Watershed. The project would provide the design and planning information necessary for pursuing additional cost-share, completing the project permitting process, and implementing the installation of fish exclusion devices. Often the installation of these devices requires controlled and/or reduced irrigation withdrawals often leading to improved irrigation management and improved streamflows. Total Project Cost and Request: \$37,500.00

Scott Reynolds was concerned with putting screens in ditches where grayling didn't tend to entrain. Steve Luebeck suggested funding half of the project and only putting screens in the two ditches/creeks that have hard entrainment data. North Fork Projects 1 & 2 were deemed most important by Peter, followed by Lamarche Creek and then Rock Creek. Subsequent to additional discussion and concerns, the decision was made to NOT fund this project pending more hard data on entrainment and ditches.

Rock Creek Headgate and Fish Ladder – Peter LaMothe

The purpose of this request is to secure funding to cover the cost associated with the new headgate for the Rock Creek Reconnection Project. The project would provide the partial funds necessary to install a screw-headgate on the old channel of Rock Creek that would allow for improved management of irrigation water and control streamflows through the new stream channel in the project area. The cost of a headgate was included in the original project design

package but the cost of a diversion was not included in this package. The existing funds were used to cover the cost of the diversion and we are asking for additional funds to cover the cost of the headgate. Total Project Cost - \$11,000; Request - \$2,000. Approved for funding with little or no discussion

MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON

Randy Smith and Steve Luebeck will be traveling to Washington DC in late March in an effort to secure federal funding for 2008. The BHWC is seeking help from partners to defray the costs of the trip.

DROUGHT MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENTS

The Drought Management Plan subcommittee met on March 12 to recommend changes to improve the DMP. Those recommendations were presented to the BHWC for approval. Noorjahan handed out the updated version of the DMP with the amendments added to the body of the document and the amendments listed again at the end of the document.

Addendum 2007 – Proposal to replace original language in the Drought Plan with the accepted Amendments.

Rationale: The current format of the Drought Plan is confusing. The initial read lists criteria that are no longer in affect and the Amendments in the back appear to contradict the Plan.

Recommendation: The original language of the Plan should be replaced by the current appropriate Amendments. Maintain the list of Amendments in the back of the Plan to maintain the history and reasoning behind the changes.

Addendum 2007 (a) – Split the lower reach into two reaches and incorporate a thermal series into the new lower reach (R. Oswald, MFWP)

Rationale: The present reach from Dickie Bridge to the mouth is 74 miles in length and spans a very wide range in flows, species composition, and thermal regime. A single set of triggers often spans a flow range of 200 cfs or more and temperature ranges of 8 degrees or more. Moreover, trout species domination from approximately Melrose downstream favors brown trout which data show to be more severely affected by low flows than rainbow trout which increase in dominance upstream from Melrose.

Recommendation: Split current reach from Melrose Bridge (Salmon Fly Fishing Access) (about 39 miles downstream and 35 miles upstream) into the Dickie Bridge to Melrose Bridge Reach and the Melrose Bridge to the Mouth Reach. In the Melrose Bridge to Mouth Reach, maintain original flow triggers generated below the WETP Minimum Flow. Return Dickey Bridge to Melrose Bridge Reach to original 1994 calculations of 260 -200 -140 cfs (see Addendum 2007(b)). Incorporate a series of Thermal Triggers similar to those in place for the upper reaches of the river to be measured at FWP Thermographs at Notch Bottom.

***Consider adding an additional component for PM closure under any flows below 260 cfs when temperatures at Notch Bottom or Pennington Bridge exceed 72 degrees for more than 8 hours per day for 3 consecutive days with lifting of closure when daily temperatures do not exceed 70 degrees for more than 8 hours per day for at least 3 consecutive days.

Addendum 2007 (b) – Return Dickey Bridge to Melrose Bridge Reach Flow Triggers to original 1994 calculations of 260 -200 -140 cfs (R. Oswald, MFWP).

Rationale: The original triggers were generated from FWP WETP Minimum Flow (and Instream Flow Reservation) of 260 cfs which represents a 40% depletion of wetted perimeter from the Upper Inflection Point Flow of 60 cfs. The original closure trigger was calculated to be 140 cfs, representing an additional 21% depletion in Wetted Perimeter from the minimum and closely approximating the August 95% Exceedence flow at the USGS Melrose Gauge. The second stage trigger represents the mid-point between the Upper and Lower Trigger Flows. Dropping the Stage 3 Closure Trigger from 150 to 140 cfs represents an additional loss in Wetted Perimeter of 5 feet and 4% of the total 21% depletion from the 260 cfs minimum. This would maintain a better biologically defensible base for the triggers and bring the Stage 3 (Closure) Trigger into compliance with current FWP statewide Drought Policy.

Recommendation: Adjust the Dickey Bridge to Melrose Bridge Reach Triggers as recommended.

Most discussion centered around monitoring the lowest reach of the Big Hole below Notch Bottom. Steve Luebeck expressed the concern Trout Unlimited has over the lack of information concerning the conditions of the river below Notch Bottom. He said he is fine with the split of the lower portion of the river but would like to see a real time monitor/gage put in for the river below Notch Bottom. Discussion also took place concerning the phone tree process and how effective it is. Dick Oswald said FWP is considering meetings with landowners when flows approach the second trigger point so everyone is aware of what is going on. Noorjahan said she will get a landownership map in an attempt to find out land ownership so better communication can take place. A news article should also be prepared about the dmp for public education purposes. Scott Reynolds suggests FWP employees gather flow information from the Melrose gage and below to create a flow history.

April Agenda

- Jim Magee will give a grayling presentation
- Kristina Swanson will give an update on the grayling recovery support
- Jeanne Caddy will give an update on the efforts of the BHW Weed Committee
- Dave Amman will present the snowpack update.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm