



Big Hole Watershed Committee
Monthly Meeting Minutes
June 17, 2009 – 7:00 pm
Divide Grange Hall

In Attendance:

Art Christenson, BCD; Bill Cain, BHWC; Cindy McIlveen, BSB; Clayton Huntley, rancher; Corey Meier, BLM; Dave Amman, DNRC; Emma MacKenzie, BHWC; Emma Rens, MFWP; Erik Kalsta, rancher; Garth Haugland, Bvhd Cnty; Hans Humbert, rancher; Harold Peterson, rancher; Jami Murdock, rancher; Jim Hagenbarth, rancher; Jim Magee, MFWP; Liz Jones, rancher; Marty Hovan, BSB Water; Mike Bias, BHRF; Noorjahan Parwana, BHWC; Phil Ralston, rancher; Randy Smith, Chair, rancher; Ray Weaver; Scott Reynolds, GGTU; Steve Parker, BHRF; Tim Coon (rancher)

Introductions/Review of Minutes

Introductions were made and the May minutes were reviewed and Randy Smith requested a change regarding the trip to Washington, DC: the visit was with the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Noorjahan took a moment to explain to the Committee that an annual report is made for each of the projects that BHWC funds and a written final report is also submitted. She also pointed out the work plan that was hanging on the wall. There is not, at this time, adequate staff to complete all the tasks that the Committee had suggested for this year's work plan. She asked the Committee members to take a moment at the break to take a look at the plan and to take the colored dots to indicate each member's priorities. The results are attached to the minutes.

Precipitation and Stream Flow Report

Dave Amman handed out the most recent report (attached to minutes). His update was brief – the snowpack is almost gone except at high elevations. In response to a query from Harold, Dave said that we haven't seen numbers like these since the late 90s.

Status and Trends of Arctic Grayling Populations

Jim Magee, MFWP Arctic Grayling Biologist, presented a PowerPoint on some of his work with the grayling. The PowerPoint is available to anyone interested as a pdf file. Please contact Emma (info@bhwc.org) to get a copy.

Jim reminded that group that there have been tough water years for the Big Hole. There are now more grayling in Jerry Creek, and the system is stable. The lower river is valuable for grayling. In big water years, the fish are flushing down to the lower regions.

There is some loss of grayling into irrigation ditches, but not a lot. There are a few ditches where the way they are lined up in the stream and management can prevent the losses.

Adult mortality is higher than desirable, but have been stable now. There is a shift from a predominance of YOY to adults. In the past, the smaller, younger grayling did better because adults need more resources to survive.

The habitat work that has been done does not give quick answers – it takes about two years to begin to see an impact. Some of the evidence is encouraging, but it's still too early to tell.

Emma Rens spoke briefly about the grazing on Steele Creek and noted that it was rested for five years; then cattle were brought in, in the spring, and again in the fall. They will continue to graze in the fall and she will monitor the willows. She noted that cattle will eat the willows more in the summer because the protein in the grasses goes down at that time and rises in the willows.

Role of BHWC in MSTI

Currently, BHWC serves as a forum to let the Committee and interested people know about the issues and upcoming meetings. At the request of Committee members, a discussion was held to determine if BHWC will take a more active role.

Discussion was held regarding the financial impacts to the communities that the line will move through and the view that the line will go somewhere. There was no consensus on BHWC taking an active role for or against the line. There was agreement that BHWC continue to educate the members; to monitor the situation, the need for mitigation on adverse impacts, and the final choice; and to hold NW Energy to a high standard regarding any impacts on the watershed.

Committee reports

- Land Use Planning

Emma MacKenzie reminded the Committee that the next set of land use education forums would be held in Wisdom, Wise River, and Twin Bridges on June 29 & 30.

- Weed Working Group

Jeanne Caddy was unable to attend the meeting. Emma reported for Jeanne that 1) golden pea is now blooming and it is not yellow toadflax, which has not yet bloomed; and 2) the Angler's Weed Education Day would be held on Saturday, June 27 from 9am through noon at Jerry Creek, Divide Bridge, and Salmon Fly.

- Steering Committee

Randy Smith reported that the position for the new Executive Director is now being advertised. The Steering Committee will go through the initial resumes and choose the most appropriate individuals for a hiring committee to review. He welcomed anyone interested to participate. Scott Reynolds and Ray Weaver volunteered. Noorjahan clarified that she will stay through the hiring process and the transition for the new person.

Randy also mentioned that Senate Bill 787 – the Clean Water Restoration Act – is supposed to be marked up in the Senate. They are not having more public hearings, but

Baucus will be fairly influential in this process. The possible redefinition of 'navigable' could be hard on agriculture.

- Wildlife Working Group

Jim Hagenbarth reported on the Wildlife Working Group meeting on June 16th. The group is developing an action plan regarding management of elk that will be submitted to the commission in October. The next meeting will be on September 22 at the Jackson School at 6pm. Minutes from the meetings will be available on the website.

Harold mentioned that they are considering creating two districts, with a different district in the North Fork. Low elk calf recruitment was discussed and Scott suggested that more data is necessary to understand whether predators need to also be managed.

New Business

- Nomination of New Member

Since the bylaws were changed to allow the addition of new members, Jim Hagenbarth nominated Brad Borst of the Montana Wilderness Association. After discussion, there was no consensus on the matter and the nomination was not confirmed.

- Missouri Headwaters Partnership

Noorjahan reminded the Committee of its participation in this group. Dick Marshall and Nathan Korb are the BHWC representatives. The group is looking to adopt a formal name and bylaws. She passed out copies of the proposed bylaws for the Committee to consider and vote on next meeting. The group is hoping to take advantage of opportunities that could come up for funding as a comprehensive group.

Also, the Headwaters Partnership is interested in attending the Steve Running presentation in September. Noorjahan asked the Committee to consider moving the September meeting to Twin Bridges to accommodate the members of the Headwaters Partnership. Scott suggested that we would have a better turnout from our members in Divide and that Noorjahan invite the Missouri Headwaters Partnership to Divide for their potluck before the presentation. Erik Kalsta offered his cabin for Steve to stay in.

- Odds & Ends

- The new BHWC website is now up.
- The Comprehensive Watershed Act was supported by the Senate and House but not funded. Tester was influenced by his meeting with our steering committee.
- A representative from the Brainerd Foundation (which recently provided the BHWC an \$8,000 grant), will be visiting the Big Hole and many of the Committee members on June 29.

Determine August Agenda

The next meeting will be in August, as July 15 is the annual picnic which will be held in Melrose at the home of Alan and Kristin Manas. Details will be sent out.

Jeff Everett will present on the willow plantings and Shane Vatland will present on the tag study at the August meeting.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 pm.

BIG HOLE BASIN SNOWPACK UPDATE

June 17, 2009

The snowpack is almost gone except at the higher elevation stations. The Darkhorse Lake (at 8600 feet) and Barker Lakes (at 8250 feet) SNOTEL sites still show above normal snow water for this date. Mule Creek (8300 feet) and Saddle Mountain (7940 feet) sites are still registering a little snow. Water Year precipitation sits at 108% of normal.

Percent of Normal Snow Water Equivalent (SWE)

	Mar 3	Mar 18	Mar 23	Apr 15	Apr 30	May 20	June 17
Barker Lakes	110	117	119	128	139	158	232
Basin Creek	87	85	94	102	95	88	0
Bloody Dick	91	103	108	117	134	173	0
Calvert Creek	88	98	101	141	211	0	0
Darkhorse Lake	95	100	101	108	106	121	129
Moose Creek	91	93	91	99	104	100	0
Mule Creek	102	106	109	114	119	128	33
Saddle Mtn.	87	91	91	103	100	116	20
BASIN AVERAGE	94	99	101	114	114	124	102

Big Hole River at Wisdom

The river experienced the snow melt peak on May 26 at 2140 cfs (provisional data). That is slightly earlier and larger than the median peak at this location, and represents approximately the 3-Year to 4-Year return period event.

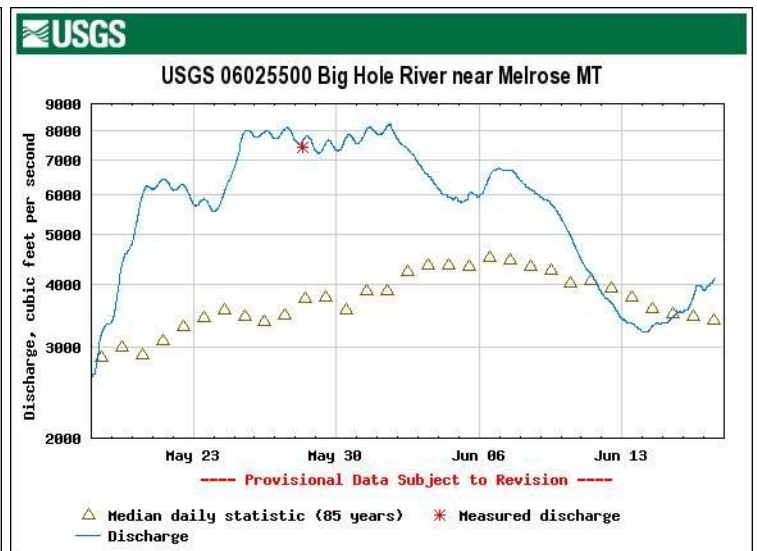
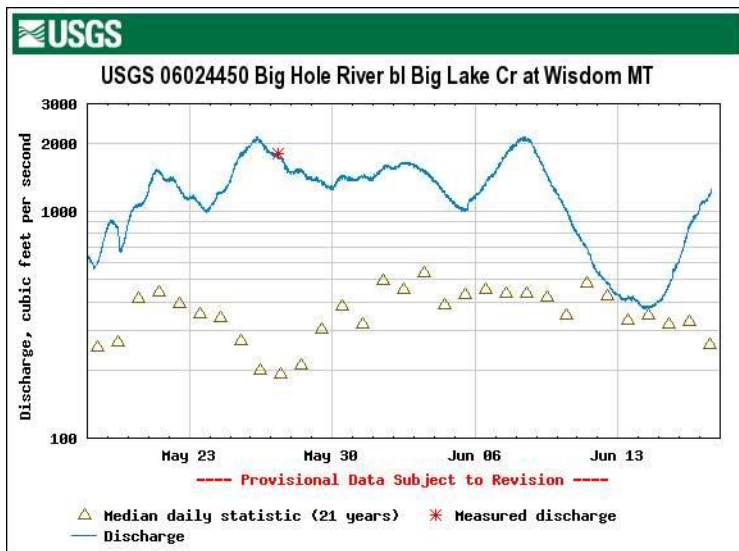
As of June 4, the NRCS forecast at the 50% chance of exceedance is for 130% of normal flow volume at this site. There is a 70% chance of exceeding 102% of normal flow volume.

Big Hole River near Melrose

The snow melt peak occurred at the “near Melrose” gauge site on June 1, at 8230 cfs (provisional data). Similar to the Wisdom gauge, this represents a 3- to 4-Year return period peak.

The NRCS forecast at the 50% chance of exceedance is for 121% of normal flow volume at this site. There is a 70% chance of exceeding 96% of normal flow volume.

Last year the forecast was for 113% and 112% of normal flow volume for these stations (50% chance of exceedance).



The CPC forecast (May 21) is for above-normal air temperatures and below-normal precipitation through January.

