

SUMMARY MONTANA WETLAND COUNCIL

January 25, 2001

10:00 – 4:00

Metcalf Building – 1520 East 6th Ave; Helena MT 59620

Note: The next Montana Wetland Council meeting is scheduled for Thursday **May 31** in Helena.

Council meeting summaries, Council agendas and other wetland announcements are also distributed electronically. If you would prefer to receive this information via e-mail or wish to be removed from the mailing list, please contact Lynda Saul at 444-6652 or lsaul@state.mt.us.

10:00 Welcome and Introductions

Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Wetland Coordinator, Lynda Saul, welcomed attendees to the Montana Wetland Council meeting and asked all in attendance to introduce themselves (please see attached sign in sheet).

Follow up from Oct 12 Council meeting

- 1) Summary of October 12 meeting and the press release on the Wetland Stewardship Award were sent out to over 300 individuals on the Wetland Council mailing list.
- 2) Montana Wetland Stewardship Awardees, Mary Bradshaw and Brian Maiorano, were nominated for National Wetlands Awards. National Award winners will be decided in May.

10:15 Peatlands of Western Montana – Ecology and Conservation.

Steve Shelly, US Forest Service Regional Botanist and Natural Area Coordinator, shared his research and extensive knowledge of peatlands in western Montana. Peatlands are represented by fens in Montana; although small in average size and total acreage, these specialized wetlands contain numerous rare species and plant communities.

Conservation of these habitats is critical to maintain biological diversity in the state. Steve reported on results from extensive field surveys of western Montana peatlands including:

- 1) a geographic inventory and classification of peatlands in Western MT
- 2) an inventory of peatland vegetation and flora
- 3) a summary of conservation and management needs

Summary conclusions:

Western Montana peatlands are an uncommon landscape feature and are represented by poor to rich fens (determined by bedrock material), including mixed mires. Patterned fens are rare. Most Montana fens are small in size but harbor great biological diversity. Of floristic vascular plants, 43% of all families and 18% of all genera are present in fen habitats.

Peatlands play an important role in water storage and flood control. It is critical from a management standpoint to maintain larger intact areas around fens. Steve distributed copies of the USDA publication titled “Peatlands on National Forests of the Northern Rocky Mountains: Ecology and Conservation.” Chadde, S.W., Shelly S.J. et al. Please contact Steve; 329-3041 or sshelly@fs.fed.us if you would like a copy or have fen related questions.

11:20 Maintaining our focus: It's water that distinguishes wetlands from all other ecosystems on the landscape...and from each other. Brad Cook, PhD Candidate University of Montana, has worked with Ric Hauer on developing the hydrogeomorphic approach to assessing wetland functions. They have received several EPA wetland protection grants and assistance from other organizations to support their work. Brad summarized his research on 15 wetlands on the Bandy ranch near Ovando and discussed management and conservation implications. He looked at hydrogeomorphic shape of isolated and connected wetlands and compared discharge to non-discharge locations. Found that plant species composition are significantly different between the isolated and connected wetlands. Both hydrology and geomorphology indicate that these wetlands function differently. Conclusion is that wetland function is intimately dependent on the landscape. Important in light of recent Supreme Court decision affecting isolated wetlands. Brad stated his study empowers educators and landowners to manage wetlands based on data.

1:00 Wetland Education and Stewardship.

Jen Elliott, Montana Watercourse Wetland Education Specialist discussed 4 ongoing wetland education activities.

1) Planning is underway for 6 wetland community workshops that will be held this spring and fall. The workshops will be community based and community driven and focus on wetland information for landowners. Planning teams will be developed locally in each community with wetland experts pulled in from resource agencies.

- Beaverhead, Big Hole, Jefferson, Ruby - first planning meeting Feb.23.
- Boulder Hot Springs - workshop scheduled for May 4, planning is underway.
- Fort Belknap – workshop scheduled for May 23, planning is underway.
- Lewistown – first planning meeting Feb 8.
- Rocky Boy – planning is underway.
- Upper Yellowstone – workshop scheduled for March 3, planning is underway.

For communities that are interested, the workshops can include a wetland education component and fun wetland activities for children. If you are interested in getting involved in any of the workshops, please contact Jen at 994-6634 or jelliott@montana.edu.

2) 2001 Wetland Stewardship awards. Want to build on and expand very successful first Montana Wetland Stewardship award ceremony. It not only recognizes those who protect or restore wetlands but also publicizes projects going on around the state to protect with wetlands. Planning for next award ceremony and call for nominations will begin late spring for fall awards ceremony.

3) Four wetland brochures are available for distribution. The publications focus on wetlands 101, incentive and voluntary programs, laws and permitting, and recreational impacts to wetlands. Brochures have been mailed to government agencies, watershed groups, conservation districts, etc. Let Jen know if you want additional copies.

4) Wetland Guide for Planners. This new guidebook will focus on helping local governments, elected and appointed officials and planners manage and advocate for wetland restoration and protection. Jen will put together a wetland planning review committee to help review and provide input on this new project.

1:20 Programs of the Northern Rocky Mountain Science Center.

Dr. Dick Jachowski and Rick Sojda, Northern Rocky Mountain Science Center.

Center Director, Dick Jachowski, reported that the Center was established in December of 2000 and is an experiment in integrating the 4 USGS divisions: water resources, geology, mapping and biological resources. The Center is based in Bozeman and is pioneering new ways to break through administrative barriers. Working on bison populations, reasons for the decline on the amphibian populations, wetland work, etc. Using modeling to try to address natural resource management needs. Programs intend to have a strong management component for state and federal agencies. Believe in the importance of forming partnerships and views the Wetland Council as an important link. The center depends on information from other agencies to develop analytical tools.

Wetland ecologist, Rick Sodja, reported on his interests and work in the areas of adaptive management, advanced technologies, decision support and montane wetlands. He showed examples of his work from the web site <http://swan.msu.montana.edu/wetlands>, helping resource managers in the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem determine water levels for swan management. The next portion of his presentation focused on expert systems: Migration paths in the Flyway: help managers manage for swans in the flyaway <http://swan.msu.montana.edu/cygnet>

2:00 Wetland Updates and Coordination Reports.

State Agencies: DEQ, DNRC, NRIS, MNHP, DFWP, MDT, Dept of Ag, Military Affairs.
Federal Agencies: EPA, USFWS, NRCS, BLM, USFS, COE, BOR, USGS, FHA.
Tribal Governments, Flathead Basin Commission, Flathead Biostation, Montana Riparian and Wetland Association, Riparian and Wetland Research Program, Watershed Coordination Council, MT Watercourse, MT Natural History Center, Non-profit organizations, Consultants, Industry, Others.

MDEQ – Lynda Saul

- 1) The Montana Wetland Grant Review Team recommended 7 projects to EPA for full funding: DEQ, DFWP, MT Natural Heritage Program, Gallatin County Water Quality District, MT Natural History Center, Bitterroot Water Forum and Montana Water Course. One additional project was submitted for other funding opportunities. EPA funding decisions will be made by mid-April.
- 2) The US FWS Status and Trends Report on wetland losses for 1986-1997 period was released on internet earlier this month. <http://wetlands.fws.gov/bha/SandTReport.html>
The NRCS National Resource Inventory on wetland losses for 1992-1997 was also recently released <http://www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/land/index/wetlands.html>
Reports focus on acres and agreed fairly closely. Acreage loss estimates have been reduced to 32,600 to 58,500 per year, but notes that wetland conditions can be impaired without identifying it as a wetland loss. Losses due to types of landuse changes are also reported.
- 3) New Executive Order 13186 details the responsibilities of Federal agencies to protect migratory birds.
- 4) National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in partnership with NRCS and Nat'l Assoc. of Conservation Districts – support stewardship of country's private lands. \$3 million

available nationally for challenge grants. Support projects that engage private landowners (farmers and ranchers) in conservation and enhancement of wildlife and natural resources on working lands.

5) Two wetland conferences in Orlando this spring

Assessing the Health of Wetland Life: Policy, Science and Practice, May 14-16

<http://ww.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/bawwg/agenda2001html>.

American Wetlands Campaign: Communities Working for Wetlands, May 16-18

http://www.iwla.org/sos/aws/m/c_agenda.html

6) Toll free wetlands information hotline 1-800-832-7828. EPA sponsored. Lots of fact sheets on background, why wetlands are important, regulatory information, federal and state programs, and planning and partnerships.

7) Montana Association of Floodplain Managers 2nd Annual conference will be held in Billings May 24-25. "The Next Level - Increasing Your Knowledge of Floodplain Management". Call for abstracts - due March 6. floodsinmt@aol.com for information.

DNRC – Tom Hughes

1) Study of trend in private hobby ponds in response to residential development: looked for a sponsor for a bill, unable to find a sponsor because it needs more study; feel it needs to be approached from a rule making

Discussion from consultant on hobby ponds - How do we create wetlands when private individuals want to create trophy ponds?

2) DNRC trust lands: just built a 400 acre pond; development with fish and wildlife services; restoration of school trust lands; working on agreement w/ MDT to do wetland restoration and mitigation on school trust lands; grant in to FW&P to develop a new stream restoration technique.

DFWP - Tom Hinz

1) Projects that in the past have been built for waterfowl and wildlife benefits, DFWP is looking at a broader perspective. Looking at trumpeter swan restoration.

2) MT Wetlands Legacy grant proposal to EPA for \$72,000. Have raised most of the other expenses (\$135,000) to staff the 3-year pilot. Still need some additional funds. Goal - protect 50,000 acres of wetlands and riparian areas using voluntary and incentive-based means for on the ground projects through acquisitions, conservation easements, etc.

Outreach materials presented are the first effort to get the word out about the Legacy.

Jan 31 is next Legacy working meetings, working on tracking protocols and focus areas.

NRIS - Velda Welch

1) Clearinghouse of natural resource information; through the Internet.watershed access tool. Wetland Clearinghouse site <http://nr.is.state.mt.us/wis/MWICedit.html>.

MT mapping tool includes 404 permits approved in Montana and acreage/linear feet of wetland/riparian impacts. Has a help guide, does lots of outreach/workshops and is available for phone consultation to help people use these applications.

MDT – Reported by Lynda Saul

- 1) Wetland legislation – HB 166 has passed out committee. Allows MDT to sell encumbered property (as long as encumbrance is related to federal regulatory wetland mitigation). Requires easement to be managed by a nonprofit or state or federal agency. Gives original owner the 1st right to re-purchase the property with the easement. If easement has narrow public access, then expand access only if landowner agrees.
- 2) Regarding SWANCC case, because MDT uses Federal Aid, they don't see any changes to how they operate their wetland mitigation programs. MDT will continue to mitigate for all wetland impacts.

COE - Jean Ramer

- 1) SWANCC case involved Clean Water Act jurisdiction over isolated, non-navigable intrastate waters used as habitat by migratory birds. Supreme Court decision limits the scope of COE regulatory permitting program (section 404) as it applies to isolated waters. COE attorneys - even though area is still a wetland; can no longer use migratory bird rule to regulate wetlands, COE attorneys says don't regulate those wetlands. Lots of questions as to "adjacent wetlands". And questions as to If/how State and local agencies would fill in the gap left by this decision. Discussion – lots of Internet information/interpretation available, contact COE, EPA or Lynda Saul if want more information.

EPA - Steve Potts

- 1) Discussed EPA Region VIII new One Stop Shopping process for wetland and other grants. Funding for states and reservations to get funding for wetland development; past – a single discreet program, this year EPA Region VIII integrated this program with other grant programs and consolidated the request for proposals. EPA Denver will send a list of proposals to Steve and Lynda. EPA Denver has formed committees within regional office and will decide which projects get funded.
- 2) What is happening w/ EPA involvement in the 404 program? Hiring freeze, so can't fill position vacated by Dick Blodnick. Other EPA staff are pitching in and working with the 404 program. EPA Helena is interested in consolidating all wetland activity with one staff person.
- 3) Distributed an EPA issue paper on bank erosion and stabilization to get comments back from this group.

Montana Watercourse - Tammy Crone, project consultant

Feb 6 meeting to explore needs for volunteer wetlands monitoring in MT. Survey on back table, please fill out. May hold a workshop for monitoring or may put out a guidebook, meeting will help direct next steps.

Consultant - Russell Smith

- 1) Building a greenhouse facility; focusing on wetland plants and possible growing endangered species; wants input about plant needs in MT www.wetbuilders.com

Wetland Trust – Charles van Hook

Wants to put on climate change workshop for legislators.

UM Grad Student - O'Brian Hollow

Trying to assemble graduate students involved in water, land and wildlife to get them to network w/ different people in the state so we know what others are doing to share the information.

Fort Belknap Indian Community - Dennis Longknife

- 1) An application for National Wetland Inventory maps (38 quads) has been submitted to US Bureau of Reclamation.
- 2) The Aquatic Resource Protection Ordinance has been presented to the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council for review/comment. Next step is resolution for approval presented to Tribal Council.
- 3) Planning a wetland stewardship conference with Montana Watercourse assistance.
- 4) Delineations and functional assessments were performed on King Creek and Little Peoples Creek. 16 other sites within Peoples Creek watershed have been identified for additional work.

3:45 Potential Agenda Items for Next Wetland Council Meeting and Set Meeting Date.

The group brainstormed the following potential agenda items for future Council meetings:

- 1) Wetland Education: MT National History Center and others (Wendy, Debbie, others)
- 2) What is available and useful wetland information on the Internet (Velda, Lynda)
- 3) Higher education representation and exchange between grad students and Council (UofM: Lisa D., O'Brien)
- 4) Tribal wetland programs in Montana.
- 5) Wetlands losses and riparian areas losses to development – Environmental Legislative Council; conservation easements and subdivisions (Jesse A.)
- 6) Remote sense data for wetland change (Rich Sodja)
- 7) Effects of road network on wetlands and mitigation that could be applied to wetland protection (Steve Shelly)

4:00 Adjourn

Sign-In
Montana Wetland Council
January 25, 2001

Jim Domino	Dept. Natural Resources Conservation, State Water Projects
Walt Timmerman	MT Fish Wildlife and Parks, Parks Division
Kathy Lloyd	Self
Drake Barton	Self
Jolene Jacobson	Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
Jeff Berglund	Western EcoTech
O'Brien Hollow	Self
Tammy Crone	Consultant/ MT Watercourse
Marc Jones	MT Natural Heritage Program
Tom Hinz	MT Fish Wildlife and Parks
Velda Welch	Natural Resource Information System
Susan Palermo	Lewis & Clark Water Quality Protection District
Russell Smith	Aquatic Design Construction Inc.
Steve Potts	US Environmental Protection Agency
Kris Krutson	US Environmental Protection Agency
Jess Aber	MT Dept. Natural Resources Conservation
Charles van Hook	Montana Wetlands Trust
Dennis Long Knife	Ft Belknap Indian Community, Wetlands Program
Justin Kucerra	Bureau of Reclamation
Lynn Bacon	Wetlands West
Jen Elliott	Montana Watercourse
Dick Jachowski	US Geological Survey
Rick Sojda	US Geological Survey
Mary Clare Weatherwax	Blackfeet, Environmental Section
Steve Shelly	US Forest Service
Cathie Jean	MT Natural Heritage Program
Tom Hughes	MT Dept. Natural Resources Conservation
Tina Bernd-Cohen	Blackfoot Challenge
Pete Husby	Natural Resource Conservation Service
Alan Steinle	US Army Corps of Engineers
Jean Ramer	US Army Corps of Engineers
Lynda Saul	MT Dept Environmental Quality