

SUMMARY-MONTANA WETLANDS COUNCIL MEETING

October 21, 1999

9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Metcalf Building - 1520 E 6th Ave, Helena MT 59620

Note: The next Wetland Council Meeting is scheduled for January 27, 2000 in Helena.

The Council meeting summaries and Council agendas are now distributed electronically to 115 individuals. If you would prefer to receive this information electronically or wish to be removed from the mailing list, please contact Lynda Saul 444-6652 with your address. lsaul@state.mt.us

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

II Wetlands Assessment - Where are we going? A general understanding of wetland assessments and how to use them. Different methods for assessing wetlands for different purposes.

Randy Apfelbeck, Montana Department of Environmental Quality

Discussed biocriteria and TMDL criteria for wetlands, streams, and lakes, and how to tell if a wetland can support beneficial use. All credible data is used to assess and make decisions. He explained why data is collected, and how the data is used to assess wetlands. Sufficient credible data is collected and examined to see if the water can support beneficial use. Sufficient credible data is whatever type of data that is used to determine if a water body is in compliance with water quality standards. Sufficient credible data is used mostly to determine stream impairment; however, Randy has recommendations on how to apply the criteria for use on wetland assessments. He distributed handouts on Proposed Beneficial Use Support Decision Guidelines and Sufficient Credible Data for Making Beneficial Use Support Decisions.

Larry Urban, Montana Department of Transportation

Explained the MDT form to be used for wetlands assessment. The new form is less opinionated than the old form and more user friendly. The MDT form is based on the 1987 COE manual. NRIS and MDT are working to put the wetland assessment form into electronic format and on the web for easier access by the public and automated calculations. Question arose on designated scenic highways in Montana. There are no state designated scenic highways in Montana, however the Forest Service has designated scenic routes.

Ric Hauer, Flathead Lake Biological Station

Discussed the differences in bio-assessment and functional assessments including, IBI (Index of Biological Integrity), HGM/FCI (Functional Capacity Index) based on field data and compared to reference site, MDOT/PFC (Proper Functioning Condition) categorical data based on "best professional judgement", and HEP (Habitat Evaluation Process). Ric discussed and distributed a paper he published in Freshwater Biology "The

hydrogeomorphic approach to functional assessment of riparian wetlands: evaluating impacts and mitigation on river floodplains in the U.S.A.

Brad Cook, Flathead Lake Biological Station

Explained that the only biological assessment form developed for use in wetlands is HGM. HGM assesses ecological functions and is not an assessment of economic values. Two guidebooks have been developed for use in Montana; the Intermontane Depressional Wetland Guidebook is available at <http://www.umt.edu/biology/flbs/wetlands/front.htm> The Alluvial Floodplain or Riverine Guidebook will be available this spring. The Army Corps of Engineers HGM web site is <http://www.wes.army.mil/el/wetlands/natdoc.html>

Dave Heilig, Natural Resource Conservation Service

Announced that the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on wetland delineation for federal agencies NRCS, EPA, USFWS, COE is being revised. A draft MOA is now available and currently uses the MDT methodology of assessing wetlands. NRCS has 24 trained wetland delineators and operates only under landowner request. NRCS wetland delineations are protected as private information, Privacy Act and USDA exemptions, no FOIA allowed.

Jean Ramer, US Army Corps of Engineers

Announced a reaffirmation of The Army Corps Engineers position that HGM is to be used for the 404 permit program when completed guidebooks are available for that wetland type and a functional assessment is required; individual permit process, mitigation and long term monitoring. In absence of HGM, HGM light should be used. Jean explained that functional assessments are critical and needed to answer questions such as: What is the wetland doing? Is mitigation needed? When is assessment required? And long term impairment, how much impact does an activity have on the wetland?

Council discussion.

Question - when is a functional assessment required and what are the criteria needed to perform an assessment? Participants expressed the need for a workshop on how to assess wetlands. In light of COE's announcement that HGM would be required, Council participants were interested in HGM training. General agreement that the last HGM training sessions were too long (5 days) and that needs of end users should be included in the training. A three-day training session was discussed, as was an incremental session (two days now and two days later on). Two different HGM guidebooks are currently available. Lynda will look into training options.

III Wetlands Updates and Coordination Reports

Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Lynda Saul reported on the EPA Wetland Grants program. The Wetland Grant Review Team met the previous day and offered comments to project sponsors and ranked the draft proposals. A list of draft proposals submitted for wetland grant funding was distributed. Announced that the MT Department of Transportation interagency working group is evaluating the Wetland Council proposal to contribute \$200,000 to National Wetland Inventory mapping in Montana in exchange for 33 acres of non-jurisdictional wetland acres impacted by historic transportation projects that are

still on the ledger. The EPA and tribal wetland coordinators are meeting October 22 in Helena; Lynda has been invited to attend.

National Resource Information System (NRIS). Duane Anderson reported that the wetlands clearing house web site grant is finished and that the web site is operational <http://nr.is.state.mt.us/wis/MWICedit.html>

NRIS is also working on the data entry portion of the wetland data access grant and a state wide mapping system for the web incorporated into ARCVIEW. With this system, people will be able to call up sites by latitude and longitude and get an area map of the location.

Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP). Jack Greenlee discussed the MNHP program to identify and inventory ecologically important wetlands across the state. Published the final report on Ecologically Significant Wetlands in the Flathead, Stillwater and Swan River Valleys in June and he has been working on the Yellowstone inventory.

Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks (DFWP). Tom Hinz introduced himself as the new waterfowl coordinator at DFWP replacing Jeff Herbert. Tom has had extensive work experience in the prairie pothole region of northeast Montana including wildlife activities associated with wetlands. He reported that DFWP receives about \$220,000 annually from duck stamp sales that go to restoring wetlands in grassland habitats.

Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). Larry Urban discussed several specific wetland mitigation projects that are ongoing to mitigate impacts to wetlands from road construction activities. Including Kleinschmidt Creek in the Blackfoot and the Sula area in the Bitterroot. Larry reported that MDT is planning about 250 acres of wetland mitigation in 8-9 separate projects this year.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Steve Potts reported that in addition to participating on the Montana Wetland Grant review team, he is also on the EPA Region VIII team to determine how wetland grant funds are distributed though out the 6 state region.

US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). Rob Hazlewood reported that the Bald Eagle has been proposed for delisting, there is a one-year review period. The Final EIS on the FERC hydropower relicensing is complete and requires implementing fish and wildlife enhancement measures on the Madison and Missouri rivers. Researchers are reporting a new threat to wetlands; encephalitis outbreaks in several regions of the US has health officials looking to drain wetlands to rid areas of mosquito's which may carry this disease.

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Dave Heilig discussed the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). There are 17,000 acres of wetlands under WRP conservation easements in Montana, 7,000 of which required restoration. The Wetland Reserve Program has spent \$11.5 million on easements and restoration in Montana. NRCS currently has 9,000 additional acres of permanent conservation easement requests from private landowners. A fairly new flood plain easement program with wildlife habitat restoration as a primary emphasis has \$13 million available for emergency situations. Finally, Dave reported that there will be a planning meeting to develop an agenda for training for consulting companies working with Federal and State programs on wetland and riparian restoration.

US Forest Service (USFS). Mary Manning reported that a Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) training session in Butte was well attended. Let Mary know if you are interested in any of the upcoming PFC training sessions. She would like to see PFC training incorporated into HGM training.

Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE). Jean Ramer reported that nationwide permit 26 expires January 5, 2000 – this has since been extended to April 14, 2000 when new modified nationwide permits are expected to take effect.

Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). Rick Blaskovich reported that BOR wetland funds were recently cut by 50 percent. He is working with the Flathead Biostation on slope wetlands and is interested in partnering on other potential projects.

Blackfeet Tribe. Mary-Claire Weatherwax reported on wetland issues the tribe is working on dealing with the Blackfoot College campus. They have also worked on an inventory of wetlands on the reservation.

Watershed Coordination Council. Next meeting is January 5, 2000 in Helena, 9:30-3:30. The Sun River Watershed group won a national award for their work.

Upper Yellowstone River Task Force. Liz Galli-Nobel reported that they are starting the major data collection phase including biological assessments and economic assessments.

IV Wetland Education Activities - Drew Overholser, Montana Watercourse

Drew was recently hired by Montana Watercourse to implement wetland education activities funded under the EPA Wetland protection grants. Drew is resurrecting the wetland education committee, 8 individuals volunteered to participate. The education committee will meet the day before Wetland council meetings and other times as needed. Contact Drew at 994-6634 if you're interested in participating. Four items that he will immediately tackle include:

- 1) Montana Watercourse will host 5 workshops throughout Montana based on the Landowners Guide published May 1999. Drew sent letters to 327 communities and organizations groups looking for interest and will customize workshops according to the community where workshop will be held. The workshops will be facilitated by wetland experts, let Drew know if your interested in helping out. Likely places include the Musselshell, Upper Yellowstone, Bitterroot, Flathead and Gallatin.
- 2) Produce 4 brochures to expand upon issues identified in the Landowner guide.
- 3) Two Public Service Announcements for TV. Drew showed a draft PSA illustrating a ranching landowner who is a good wetland steward. The draft was well received and will begin airing January 2000. He's looking for suggestions on another PSA topic.
- 4) Montana Watercourse will develop and initiate a Wetland Stewardship Awards program. Drew will continue to report on and bring wetland education items up for discussion and review before the whole Montana Wetland Council.

V. Permit Data Base Data Collection Project - Duane Anderson, NRIS

Wetland Council participants, at the February 24, 1999 meeting, identified the need for an accurate database on the location and authorized impacts to wetland and riparian areas from 404 permits. Since that time a data base subcommittee developed a project proposal, secured funding and work is underway. The project involves reviewing COE 404 permit files back to 1990 to determine accurate location and impact information; wetland acres filled or river feet stabilized (approximately 4,600 records). Duane distributed a handout describing the project objectives and summary of nationwide permit types used in Montana by year and by type. The project also involves creating public access to the information in the COE permit database and making the database interactive and user friendly thorough the Montana Wetland Clearinghouse site.

VI. Wetland Grant Proposals - Lynda Saul, DEQ

Lynda has been working with wetland contractors from past EPA wetland grants to complete projects. She reported that in the last year and a half, 21 wetland projects have been completed. There are still 4 ongoing projects from 1995, 1996 and 1997; three expire June 30, 2000. Twelve projects from 1998 and 1999 are on track and work is progressing. She distributed a summary sheet outlining work product, grant amount, contractor and status. Contact her if you would like a copy. Twelve draft proposals were submitted for FFY00 EPA wetland grant funds. Lynda has established a Wetland Grant review committee to help review and rank proposals.

VI. Next Council Meeting - Thursday January 27, 2000 in Helena.

Council participants proposed the following agenda items for the next Council meeting:

Wetland education including Public Service Announcement ideas and national wetland education
Mitigation banking in Montana – what's the status?
Replacement Nationwide permits
Federal MOA and wetland creation and restoration tracking
Overview of local government projects or highlight specific project
Wetlands and water rights - beneficial use or not? - DNRC.
Update on DEQ wetland grant recommendations to EPA

**MONTANA WETLAND COUNCIL MEETING
21 OCTOBER 1999
SIGN-IN SHEET**

NAME

Brad Cook
Mark Dickerson
Rob Hazelwood
Frank D. Rollefson
Bruce Waage
Pat Mullen
Lou Moore
Kelly Shields
Rick Blaskovich
Larry Urban
Jean Ramer
Steve Potts
Dave Heilig
Jack Greenlee
Duane Anderson
Randy Apfelbeck
Mary Manning
Mary Clare Weatherwax
Bernadette Tsosie
Liz Galli-Noble
Bill Tash
Drew Overholser
Jim Hadlock
Michael LaMere
Richard Hauer
Charles Van Hook
Lynda Saul

REPRESENTING

University of Montana
Realtors & Bitter Root Land Trust
US Fish and Wildlife Service
Northern Cheyenne Tribe
Western Energy Company
Maxim Technology
MT Dept. of Environmental Quality
MT Dept of Commerce
Bureau of Reclamation Mt Area Office
MDOT Environmental
US Army Corps of Engineers
US Environmental Protection Agency
NRCS Bozeman
Montana Natural Heritage Program
Natural Resource Information System
MT Dept. of Environmental Quality
US Forest Service
Blackfoot Tribe
US Environmental Protection Agency
Gov's Upper Yellowstone River Task Force
HD 34 Beaverhead Co
Montana Watercourse
Land & Water Consulting
Rocky Boy Reservation
Flathead Lake Biological Station
Montana Wetlands Trust
MT Dept. of Environmental Quality