

SUMMARY MONTANA WETLANDS COUNCIL MEETING

September 5, 2002

9:30 am – 4:30 pm

DEQ Directors Conference Room, Helena MT

Note: The next Montana Wetlands Council meeting is scheduled for December 12 in Helena. The meeting will focus on the proliferation of man-made ponds in Montana and the considerations in evaluating the net benefits and impacts of ponds. The Montana Wetlands Legacy will meet December 11 in the same room. Agendas will be distributed prior to the meetings.

Welcome, Introduction, Update

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

The last Council meeting focused on wetland regulatory issues. Lynda updated the Council on recent federal legislation (SB2780, HR5194) introduced to amend the Clean Water Act. The proposed legislation would replace the term ‘navigable waters’ with an inclusive definition of ‘waters of the United States’. This would effectively override the SWANCC decision that removed federal protection from some isolated wetlands. The findings section of the bill makes 32 statements about the values wetlands provide to society including; flood protection, navigation, pollution control, recreation, economic, wildlife habitat, agricultural, etc.

This Council meeting focused on ongoing wetland grant projects used to implement priority activities identified in the draft Conservation Strategy for Montana’s Wetlands and the Recommendations from the Wetlands Situation Assessment.

Wetland Grants Program – Lynda Saul, DEQ

Reviewed the draft Conservation Strategy for Montana’s Wetlands (7/97) and Situation Assessment Recommendations (3/98) as the tool that DEQ uses to guide funding priorities for the wetland grants program. EPA’s purpose for the wetland grants program is to build the capacity of state, local and tribal governments for wetlands protection. DEQ administers state and local grants. EPA administers Tribal grants. Currently DEQ has 5 open grants from EPA representing 34 projects; 18 have been completed, 16 contracts are ongoing.

The federal register notice was posted 8/26/02 for this year’s funding cycle. The national priorities are the same as last year: 1) developing a comprehensive wetland monitoring and assessment program; 2) improving the effectiveness of compensatory mitigation; and 3) refining the protection of vulnerable wetland and aquatic resources. EPA Region 8 will issue their RFP October 1. DEQ guidance and additional state funding priorities will be issued shortly thereafter. Draft proposals are due electronically to DEQ by October 25. Project sponsors should plan to meet with the Montana Grant Review Team November 7 or 8. Final proposals will be due electronically to both EPA and DEQ by December 3, 2002. Federal guidance is posted on the Montana Wetland Clearinghouse website. Additional information will be posted there as it becomes available.

[http://nris.state.mt.us/wis/wetlands/2003national_wetland_grant_guidance .htm](http://nris.state.mt.us/wis/wetlands/2003national_wetland_grant_guidance.htm)

Overview of Montana's Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Program – Lynda Saul, DEQ

As a result of the Montana Conservation Strategy Situation Assessment priorities, Clean Water Act section 305(b) reporting requirements and federal funding priorities, Montana embarked on a project to develop a comprehensive wetland monitoring and assessment program. Program goals include incorporate wetlands in overall water quality monitoring program and determine the status and trends of wetland water quality and ecological condition. Four projects were funded from FY2002 EPA/DEQ wetland grant to begin this program. The project sponsors worked collaboratively to develop a comprehensive Quality Assurance Project Plan to guide the project. As an integrated watershed based approach, the monitoring and assessment program attempts to determine the water quality of Montana's wetlands and their ecological condition including both physical and functional loss and gains. This involves three levels of analysis: landscape, site-specific, and rapid assessments. Two pilot 6th code HUC's were chosen from different ecoregions for site-specific field sampling. Twenty-seven depressional and riverine wetlands were randomly selected from within 4th code HUC's that were stratified based on different human disturbance gradients determined from landscape assessment. Sampling parameters for this first year include: vegetation, soils, land use, diatoms, aquatic insects, water chemistry, amphibians and aquatic reptiles.

Next steps include discussing the first year of fieldwork and sample design with EPA, other states working on wetland monitoring and federal land management partners. This working meeting is planned for Sept 24-26 in Missoula. Some of the topics include the following. Add and refine sampling parameters and additional wetland types to help determine ecological condition and watershed health. Modify the landscape approach to help stratify sub-watersheds for sampling. Address the challenges with physical access and sampling design and if possible, develop rapid assessment methods. DEQ anticipates that the development phase will take 5 years, with program implementation integrated within the states water quality monitoring program.

Amphibian Monitoring – Bryce Maxell, University of Montana

This contract for the wetland monitoring and assessment program is part of a larger western Montana amphibian and aquatic reptile inventory. Project goals include, survey all standing water bodies in 9 randomly selected 6th level HUC's in the Red Rocks 4th level HUC and 20 6th level HUC's in the Northern Rocky Mountains ecoregion, develop a statewide sampling scheme, field protocols, and database for inventorying and monitoring lentic waters for amphibians and aquatic reptiles, evaluate survey methodology (variation and detection issues), determine which local and landscape habitat variables have the strongest impact. Sampled randomly selected 6th code watersheds that had 30 percent state or federal ownership. Time survey using visual observation and dip netting depending on the site. Detection issues, surveyed to determine if the species are in the watershed and occupy what percent of waterbodies. Previous sampling has minimized private lands, however found that most people are willing to have monitoring done on there land, estimate at least 85 percent. For overall comprehensive monitoring plan, private land also needs to be included. The habitat needed for amphibians to survive includes breeding, overwintering and foraging habitat. Trying to assess what each species needs for survival. Eastern part of the state need to sample twice per year.

Program highlights included establishing new state high elevation records for 7 species and extended the known range for several species. Bryce identified some data and program needs

including; assessment and monitoring of disturbance regimes that created wetland, (analogous to fire in forests) such as beavers, flooding, and human disturbance, adding birds and mammals, developing a state wide sampling design for the assessment and monitoring program. Bryce highly recommends the use of use personal data assistance (hand held computers) for field data collection. The presentation included a handout on decontamination procedures for people working in wetlands and information about fungal pathogens in amphibians.

Vegetation Monitoring - Marc Jones, Montana Natural Heritage Program

This contract also helped develop the sampling design and applied the wetland monitoring and assessment sampling design to vegetation monitoring, land use and soils in the Middle Milk 4th code HUC. For data collection, used quadrats to sample the vegetation community in different geomorphic zones for riparian and depressional wetlands. Continued to gather information until no new species were found. Recorded species information, occurrence and abundance. Documented discharge locations and non-discharge location and disturbance or non-disturbed areas. Used the digital coverage of National Wetland Inventory maps which were critical to applying the sampling design and enabled easy use of a GPS to navigate and locate wetland sites. Found that the landscape assessment stratification was not that useful to distinguish disturbance gradients. For depressional sites, showed slides of temporarily flooded and seasonally flooded wetlands in the Middle Milk HUC. Grazing and agriculture are the big disturbances of these wetland systems with the biggest influence caused by drought. Climate seems to be the most important disturbance. Weeds didn't seem to be an issue in potholes. For riparian systems, grazing had more of a factor. Land use changed the character of some lands, causing loss of stream to access its flood plan and loss of the complexity of the flood plan. Down cutting was noticed more at the base of the tributaries. Woody vegetation was sparse. With the absence of woody habitat there is a significant loss of species.

Marc raised several questions and issues as a result of the fieldwork such as; could beaver elimination have caused problems? Are long enough stream reaches being sampled? Need for more reference areas that have not been disturbed for comparison. Is it possible to integrate a baseline concept, for example in the plains ecoregion, beavers, bison, are no longer present. What is the future direction for indicators, amphibian, vegetation, water quality, diatoms, etc.? Observed that localized land uses give a better handle on the environment than the GIS level landscape assessment work. Brad Cook, University of Montana is also working on a contract associated with the wetland monitoring and assessment program. Brad's project focuses on vegetation, soils and land use in the Red Rocks HUC.

Ashley Creek Wetland and Riparian Assessment - Steve Buckley, Watershed Consulting

This was a recently completed EPA/DEQ wetland contract. The project goal was to improve water quality in Ashley Creek for local residences and improve Flathead Lake water quality. Ashley creek is a main polluter of Flathead Lake and is a wetland rich watershed. The project characterized the watershed using air photos to assess wetland and riparian areas and then gathered field data. The following on-site conditions were assessed; floodplain features and landform shape, channel geometry and confinement, bed features and aquatic habitat, vegetation cover type, channel straightening, nature of the stream changes and alteration of channels, spatial and temporal trends in water quality. Used the MDT method of assessment of wetlands. Ranked reaches and floodplain areas very poor, poor, and fair conditions, several reaches were in good condition and some very poor with a severe lack of vegetation.

The end result of the project was to develop a monitoring and restoration plan for the watershed. Regarding some of the worse impacted areas and monitoring: continue to monitor the data, work with the watershed group, sample water quality, monitor streamflow, identified site-specific stream restoration, facilitate efforts with landowners and watershed group, bioengineering to reduce sedimentation and erosion, worked to get riparian vegetation growing and performed some stream restoration (with non-EPA grant funds) and used that as a demonstration for local landowners. Continue to work with Ashley Creek watershed group, landowners and Flathead Basin Commission. Have written several other grants for additional stream restoration and monitoring work. Steve encouraged folks to think long term, it will take a long time to achieve watershed restoration and water quality goals.

EPA Award - Steve Potts EPA

Announced that Lynda Saul was recognized on September 4 in an EPA awards ceremony with a Region 8 Environmental Achievement Award for “outstanding achievement in development of a coordinated and effective wetland protection program in Montana”. Lynda acknowledged and thanked the Council for helping to further wetland protection and management in Montana.

West Nile Virus - Todd Damrow, Montana State Epidemiologist DPHHS

Dr. Damrow presented current information about West Nile Virus (WNV) at the brown bag lunch. Amy MacKeckenzie, Dept of Public Health and Human Services Vector Control Program was also present as an informational resource. Discussion included the need to keep WNV in perspective compared to other health threats. The Council agreed that it’s important to work with DPHHS, Department of Agriculture and DEQ on mosquito abatement programs.

Gallatin Valley Wetland and Riparian Assessment - Curtis Kruer, Wetland Consultant

The purpose of this contract with the Gallatin Water Quality District is to identify historical wetland areas and compare to National Wetland Inventory maps completed in the mid 1980’ and current wetlands from a September 2002 flyover of the 600 square mile greater Bozeman Valley. This information will be used for water quality planning purposes, management options and to identify wetlands that are threatened or in need of restoration. A large outreach component is a part of this project. Voluntary and incentive-based wetland restoration programs and land conservation options will also use this information. The GIS information will be completed by the Gallatin County GIS Department for use by planners, water quality district, conservation district and others. This georeferenced aerial imagery will be a great resource for all types of county planning and resource management.

The Water Quality District is planning on lumping NWI wetland categories to make it simpler to use (4 or 5 wetlands types or classes). Examples of categories include; along active channels, non-woody grass, wooded areas, naturally occurring, and artificial wetlands. Contact Alan English, Gallatin Water Quality District manager if you want more information or are interested in assisting with this project. The scheduled completion date is July 2003.

Missoula Area Wetland Education and Outreach Activities - Deb Fassnacht, Clark Fork

Watershed Education Network (CFWEN) and Wendy Sturgis, MT Natural History Center, MNHC. This contract involves a partnership effort of the MNHC and the CFWEN and Save Open Space to; 1) expand public outreach and education with community wetland walks and interpretive signs, and wetland media campaign and wetland video; 2) expand school programs with teacher

workshops, curriculum packets and expanded field trips, and a pilot wetlands educational trunk; and 3) coordinate stewardship activities and vegetative restoration for two local urban wetlands.

Debbie and Wendy described their education outreach programs and brought along and passed out contents of the newly created educational masterpiece, a Wetlands Trunk. The trunk contains expert resources from professionals, tools, books, videos, and field practice materials, reference materials, aquarium. Material was sought based on teacher input including; classification and description of wetlands, wetlands in Montana poster, wetland animal tracks and track guide, rocky mountain plants of Montana, plant identification, historical stories about wetlands, Wetlands by the Audubon Society, frog guide, the wonder of wetlands curriculum from the watercourse, story books about wetlands for kids, beavers book, in class pond recipe, food chain games, Montana science standards and other material. There will be some Missoula area training offered to help educators use the trunk. The project sponsors were besieged with questions about how to get the trunk in their community, if it could be duplicated and availability of educator training to use the trunk and teach about wetlands. The trunk can be checked out for 2-3 weeks at a minimal cost from MNHC. Another aspect of their project is teacher workshops, the next is scheduled for Sept 18-19 in Missoula.

Montana Watercourse Education and Outreach - Karen Filipovich, Director

The Montana Watercourse is working on three wetland contracts encompassing a broad range of wetland components directed at awareness, education and stewardship of the state's wetlands. In the past year and a half, they published the Land Owners Guide to Wetlands and 4 pamphlets and held four wetland stewardship workshops, reaching more than one hundred landowners across the state. For students and teachers, they've held 9 community wetland festivals, reaching 2,057 people. Additionally over 400 teachers were reached through 23 WET/WOW! (Wonders of Wetlands) workshops and four Watershed Tours for Teachers have been held in the Blackfoot and on the Clark Fork, strongly emplacing the role of wetlands. These activities are designed to help teachers and students understand the importance of wetlands, and to give teachers the tools they need to bring wetland related activities into the classroom.

Currently, work is being completed for a Planners Guide to Montana's Wetlands and Riparian areas is being finished in partnership with Janet Ellis at Montana Audubon. A draft is out for review by planners, wetland experts, and interested community members. If anyone else is interested in reviewing let her know right away. After the guide is completed, they will hold two workshops for planners in winter or early spring. Additionally, they will conduct three more Wetland Stewardship Workshops for landowners. Outside of DEQ based activities, Montana Watercourse is also working with the Ft. Belknap Indian Community and their Wetland Program to conduct a Wetland Stewardship workshop, and is working with Region VIII EPA to develop a pilot citizen wetland monitoring protocol and site.

Montana Watercourse is also looking for nominations for the 2nd Montana Wetland Stewardship awards to recognize both a landowner and organization for exemplary wetland restoration, protection and/or management. Volunteers for the selection committee are also welcome. Award recipients will be recognized at the spring Wetlands Council meeting.

Evaluation of Army Corps of Engineers 404 Program and Assessment of Cumulative Impacts in the Yellowstone Basin - Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon

Janet is the main author of the MT Watercourse contract on the Wetland Planning Guide, she commented that they want wetland experts to look at the draft along with planners. All case studies have been reviewed. The Planning Guide should be available in January.

The 404 evaluation and cumulative impacts contract is in response to the national funding and state priority to improve the effectiveness of compensatory mitigation. The 404 evaluation will be an update to a similar 1993 guide developed by MT Audubon. It will include permit types, locations, area impact for wetlands, and linear feet impact for Montana's streams. Information will be broken down by County. Using the MNHP 404 database (a user friendly interpretation of the Army Corps of Engineers (COE) Rams database) and working with the COE to ensure that they agree with the numbers or caveats and descriptions of the data. This evaluation has taken longer than expected and has been more involved than anticipated. Over 5000 nationwide permits have been issued in MT since 1990 involving 34 different categories of nationwide permits. This report is a paper review on what the COE permit authorized; no ground truthing will be done.

The second aspect of the project is a report of all the permits needed for stream/water related activities on the Yellowstone River in Yellowstone County. It also is a paper review with a goal of understanding how much overlap of permitting is occurring and how to better exchange information. It is on hold until the Planning Guide and 404 evaluation are complete. All components of this project are scheduled to be done by June 2003. Both reports will go out for review, let Janet know if you want to be involved in the review process for either report.

Montana Wetlands Legacy - Tom Hinz, Legacy Coordinator

The Montana Wetlands Legacy is a voluntary, incentive based program to conserve and restore wetland and riparian areas in Montana. Twenty-five organizations came together to form the Legacy. The partnership has set a five-year goal to protect 250,000 acres of important wetlands, riparian areas and associated uplands. Tom showed a brochure directed to landowners potentially interested in wetland restoration or conservation and the Legacy web site <http://www.wetlandslegacy.org/>. Tom presented a slide show to demonstrate some of the completed and ongoing wetland projects from the Legacy partnership. It included wetland acquisitions, conservation easements, restoration projects, land exchanges and mitigation. Also described funding for preservation for fish and wildlife habitat, prairie pothole preservation, breeding habitat for waterfowl, restoration of spawning habitat for trout. The Legacy is coordinating a September 10-12 workshop for North American wetlands conservation act grant writing.

Other opportunities on the horizon include significant new funding sources for wetland and riparian restoration and protection including: Wetlands Conservation Act: Senate and House mark-ups of Department of Interior FY03 Budget - \$43.5 Million; NRCS Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program for the Madison/Missouri Watershed - \$40 Million; PPL Montana 2188 mitigation for operation of nine main stem Missouri River dams - \$10 Million; In Lieu Fee Mitigation Program for Montana - \$500K - \$1M annually. The Legacy's funding was instigated by an EPA/DEQ wetland grant, with other major additional funding from Montana Department of Transportation. Many other agencies and entities are contributing either financially or in-kind through project work to make this partnership work for wetland and riparian protection.

Building Cooperation and Support to Protect Critical Lands in the Flathead Watershed - Constanza von der Phalen, Flathead Lakers

The Flathead Lakers are a non-profit organization run by volunteers. The critical lands project got started due to research showing water quality deteriorating in the Lake since 1978. In addition, Flathead Lake was listed by DEQ as an impaired water body. So the Lakers felt it was time to take preventive action. Project goals are to identify, protect and restore lands and water. In 1999 the Lakers launched the project by calling together a diverse group of people, increasing collaboration and pulling together resources. They developed criteria to define critical lands. Community support was significant. They hosted workshops where people agreed that water quality should be a main concern. The focus is on Flathead valley area that has the greatest impact on terms of water quality; wetlands and riparian areas. The Lakers discussed conservation projects, worked to develop a strategic plan, distributed sensitivity analysis maps, working on implementation of strategic plans and prepare annual critical lands status report.

The EPA/DEQ wetland contract includes work to strengthen partnerships, develop a network, support existing efforts, offer a critical lands workshop, provide education and outreach, develop a web page and produce a Flathead River education map.

Bitterroot Wetland Project – Linda Dowark on contract with Bitter Root Water Forum

This community-based project funded by the EPA/DEQ grant program is working to determine how to identify wetlands and wetland values that are important to citizens and the community. Ravalli County is unique in that the county boundaries and watershed boundaries coincide. The County is working with it's citizens to write a land use policy that addresses citizen concerns and Linda mentioned that 'wetlands' have not yet been mentioned in the public forums but many of the values wetland support have been voiced. So the questions being posed now is how do we identify the wetlands that are important? What do we need to protect? This project has shifted from identification to how we can integrate wetlands with land use. How do wetlands support agriculture, water quality, etc? This project is working to build collaborations.

Wetland Updates and Coordination Reports

(My apologies to those who presented updates, we missed recording some of your names and comments. This highlights the advantage of submitting a written copy of your update to make sure that your information is correctly transferred in the Council summaries.)

Montana Water Center, Michelle White. Working on a guide on fish habitat restoration projects for the web. She would like information about projects that are completed and where follow-up monitoring can be done. Mewwhite@montana.edu

Montana Watershed Coordinating Council, Bill Milton. Watershed coordinators have a 2.5-day to discuss their work and network with other coordinators from around the state. The next Watershed Coordinating Council meeting is October 29 in Lewistown.

Michael LaMere, Rocky Boys, is working on NWI maps for the Rocky Boy Reservation.

Confederate Salish Kootenai representative. Working on a mesh between the wetland and water quality programs. They have found it hard to get funding for education and outreach and will work with EPA to get this included for the tribe.

Missoula County Floodplain Administrator, Brain Maiorano. Update on Milltown dam superfund site, optimistic that EPA will agree to remove the dam. Public comments show that most want to remove dam and sediments. Hope to get a decision by spring.

Yellowstone Park, Mary Hektner. Several wetland restorations project going on in Wyoming. In Montana, a mine-tailing removal project involves working with a private landowner outside the Park boundary. This is the largest source of pollution in the Yellowstone River.

Environmental Protection Agency, Steve Potts. Mainly doing EIS work with forest service and 303(d) listed streams. Forest service is closing roads, which will result in improvement to water quality.

Potential agenda items and suggestions for next Montana Wetland Council meeting.

General brainstorm of issues participants would like to hear about in the future:

Mosquito abatement

Legislative update

Update on wetland definition

Fish ponds

Gravel pit ponds

Update on projects

Request update reports so they can be incorporated in the minutes

Wetland monitoring and assessment project

Plumb creek timberland sales

COE policy for levees, when cottonwood get to be a certain size they cut them down.

Need to promote that having wetlands on your property is beneficial and increases the value.

Assessment, of birds for riparian indicator, would like to use this as an indicator.

Develop a DEQ wetland team

Sign in sheet - Montana Wetlands Council meeting. September 5, 2002.

<u>Name:</u>	<u>Representing:</u>
Roy Gabel	Yellowstone Conservation District
Steve Buckley	Watershed Consulting
Constanza Von Der Pahlen	Flathead Lakers
LaVerne Ivie	Yellowstone Conservation District
Clint McFarland	Yellowstone Conservation District
Steve Potts	Environmental Protection Agency
Mary Hektner	National Park Service
Heidi Anderson	National Park Service
Rob Hazlewood	U.S Fish and Wildlife Service
Tom Hinz	Montana Wetlands Legacy
Gordon Stockstad	Montana Department of Transportation
Dan Lipscomb	Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribe Shoreline Protection
Kris Knutson	US Environmental Protection Agency
Lou Moore	MT Dept. Environmental Quality
Keith Gopher	Chippewa Cree Tribe Wetlands Program
Marc Jones	Montana Natural Heritage Program
Paula Webster	Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe
Nancy Heil	Missoula City-County Office of Planning & Grants
Brian Maiorano	Missoula County
Jim Wilbur	Lewis & Clark County – Water Quality Protection District
Linda Dworak	Bitter Root Valley Wetlands
Rick Walsh	North Western Energy
Ron Le Cain	Confluence Consulting
Scott Woods	University of Montana, School of Forestry
Michael LaMere	Rocky Boy Reservation
Sam Martinez	MT Dept. Environmental Quality
Peter Lesica	Self
Bill Milton	Watershed Coordination Council
Lynda Saul	MT Dept. Environmental Quality
Michele Fither	MT Dept. Environmental Quality/SWS
Wendy Sturgis	WEN & Nature Center of Fort Missoula
Janet Ellis	Montana Audubon
Karen Filipovich	Montana Watercourse
Deb Fassnacht	Watershed Education Network
Dennis Loreth	US Natural Resource Conservation Service
Tina Laidlaw	US Environmental Protection Agency
Dennis Dellwo	US Natural Resource Conservation Service
Justin Kucera	Bureau of Reclamation
Sundi West	Department of Military Affairs
Mary Manning	US Forest Service
Michelle White	Water Center
Curtis Kruer	Self
Bryce Maxell	University of Montana, Wildlife Biology