

Montana Wetland Council Meeting Summary

January 15, 2009

DEQ Directors Conference Room 111

1520 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT

The next Wetland Council meeting is scheduled along with the biennial Wetland and Watershed Stewardship Award Ceremony for **May 7, 2009** in the Montana State Capitol.

I. Welcome and Introductions.

Lynda Saul, DEQ Wetland Program Coordinator and Wetland Council Chair welcomed more than 55 participants to the winter Wetland Council meeting and asked for self introductions around the room. Please see the [sign in sheet](#) at the end of this summary. Lynda announced the Wetland and Watershed Stewardship Awards Ceremony and joint Council meeting with the Watershed Coordination Council will be in May at the State Capitol. Looking for volunteers for the nominating committee. She also announced that the RFP for Wetland Program Development Grant will be issued from EPA soon and reminded interested parties those proposal ideas for wetland program development need to go through one of the [Strategic Framework](#) Working Groups and address Strategy priorities.

II. Strategic Framework Working Group Reports.

Contact Working Group Chairs if interested in participating in any of the activities described.

Vulnerable Wetlands and Public Policy Working Group update given by [Lynda Saul](#), DEQ. Discussed 6 projects the Working Group is pursuing for 2009 on a task basis. Regarding vulnerable wetlands, the focus is on providing Montana solutions to wetland protection due to changes in the federal Clean Water Act and work to protect floodplains and riparian areas. Regarding public policy, the focus is on state policies and programs to better protect vulnerable wetlands. The projects include working on wetlands and water rights, integrating wetlands into watershed planning and restoration, the possibility of relocating beavers as wetland and watershed restorers, and wetland mitigation on state owned lands

Please see the [Draft 2009 Vulnerable Wetlands and Public Policy workplan](#).

Mapping, Assessment and Monitoring Working Group update given by [Linda Vance](#), MTNHP. The goal of this Working Group is to map all of Montana's wetlands based on the National Wetland Inventory and riparian classification according to Federal Geographic Data Committee standards. While the mapping in Montana has been active with several ongoing projects, there has been a bottle neck with NWI regarding capacity for QAQC. The Montana Wetland and Riparian Mapping Center is working out those issues and has developed a quality control exchange with the CSKT wetland mapping program. If you have an area of map interest contact Linda and she may be able to send draft maps also contact her to discuss options for mapping in your area. [Mapping status by quad](#). Regarding assessments, Linda is on the survey design team for the 2011 national wetlands assessment, also designs for rapid assessment. MTNHP has a grant to

develop rotating basin assessments in Montana. Work group will help plan the next five years.

Restoration Working Group update given by [Tom Hinz](#), MT Wetlands Legacy Partnership

Discussed 4 projects the working group is pursuing: 1) Farm Bill-related activities - WRP and WREP once Farm Bill rule-making is completed. Restoration working group subcommittee hopes to help NRCS identify WRP, EQIP, WHIP projects around the state. 2) Refine Conservation Focus Areas – Legacy strategic plan and 5-Year Strategic Framework both identify the need to focus restoration efforts in priority areas. Restoration working group continues to be motivated to work with partners to refine the emphasis areas for restoration of most benefit to watershed conservation. 3) Creating a new in-lieu fee aquatic resource mitigation program – under Final Rule published by Corps and EPA in April, 2008, ILF sponsor can offer credits in areas where mitigation banks do not have credits to offer. 4) Engage and involve state agencies and programs on wetland and riparian restoration and enhancement on state owned or state managed properties. Need for enhanced collaboration on these areas.

Public Education and Professional Training Working Group given by Steve Carpenedo, DEQ. Announced that this new Working Group is just forming and asked for people with an interest to sign up for this group. The purpose of this meeting will be to identify education and training needs and opportunities and to develop a work plan for 2009. For those unable to attend the MWC meeting and wish to participate, email [Steve Carpenedo](#). The first training identified is a wetlands training for local floodplain managers at the annual [Association of Montana Floodplain Managers conference in Great Falls, March 4-5](#).

III. Council Meeting Presentations

[DEQ's Total Maximum Daily Load Program.](#)
[Presentation by Dean Yashan](#), TMDL Watershed Management Section DEQ.

This overview of the TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) program included legal requirements, TMDL development steps, current status of TMDL progress, and major types and causes of impairments in Montana. In addition, this presentation provided examples of the science behind TMDL development and discussed linkages with wetland protection and enhancement. Particular examples relating to riparian areas along streams and connections to other water quality restoration activities were discussed.

TMDL's are developed at a watershed scale based on how many waterbodies are impaired. Development uses two major steps 1) characterize and quantify sources of the problem (source assessment), and 2) define solutions via the TMDL & associated allocations. Major types of pollutants are sediment, nutrients and metals. The role of streamside vegetation was discussed as possibly providing the most significant source of pollutant load reduction to streams. Conversely, the loss of healthy vegetated areas along

streams and lakes represents perhaps the most controllable source of accelerated pollutant loading in Montana.

Questions and comments included how do you decide where the area is categorized? Some of the decision is professional judgment but also area reconnaissance, data, and testing. Does TMDL take into consideration the development that is taking place? The TMDL sets an allocation and anything outside the allocation could violate the allocation of the TMDL. Other programs should be out there to implement and monitor whether or not activities are consistent with allocations. If it would be inconsistent with the TMDL, then it could represent a violation of Clean Water Act related requirements for some agencies, although the TMDL itself cannot be used as an enforcement tool in the vast majority of situations. How do you single out an area? The TMDL program tries to not target anyone specifically, we usually combine assessment and allocations into groupings such as grazing or crops. DEQ does the science to write the document. If they find a violation, they can contact enforcement to address potential violations, but very few of the activities we are involved with in TMDL development have any enforcement authority, particularly private lands. Who will go in and try to fix the Red areas on the TMDL maps (areas with high pollutant loading)? TMDL implementation is voluntary for most areas. DEQ's non-point source management program provides assistance which was a good introduction for the next speaker.

[DEQ's Nonpoint Source Management Program and Watershed Restoration. Presentation by Robert Ray](#), Watershed Protection Section DEQ.

DEQ's Nonpoint Source Management Program (NPS) provides funding for watershed groups and others to reduce nonpoint source pollution consistent with TMDLs. Developing scientifically-based, locally supported Watershed Restoration Plans provides opportunities to integrate wetland and riparian protection and restoration into actions that achieve water quality and other goals. Clean Water Act Section 319 grant information and examples of voluntarily implemented riparian and wetland restoration projects and opportunities were provided.

DEQ does not have authority to control non-point source pollution, but local governments do have tools through storm water controls, riparian buffers, and other mechanisms available at the local level. The 319 grants for NPS can fund consultants or others to work with local governments on these local tools and mechanisms such as ordinance development. The [NPS management plan](#) includes strategies for protecting water resources (specifically including wetland and riparian areas) and addressing land-use "categories", e.g.: agriculture, forestry, and urban. Strategies have a focus on buffers and filter strips adjacent to waterbodies and included several approaches, including voluntary and regulatory (for point source pollutants) for implementation. Robert stated that there is lots of potential to cooperate on specific projects – both at local watershed level and on State level.

Questions and comments included do watershed restoration grants include restoration of wetland and riparian areas? Yes and also includes education and outreach. Non-federal

match is required, consult Robert for specific situations. The state gets about 2 million dollars a year from EPA for the non-point source program. About half of this goes to DEQ for salaries and to run the program. The other half is for outside grants: 2/3 for restoration projects in TMDL approved watersheds and about 1/3 for groundwater and education projects. When all TMDL are done there is expected to be fierce competition for the grant funds. Additional restoration funding is increasingly important.

[A watershed-based approach to restoring wetland-riparian resources and fisheries habitat on the Flathead Indian Reservation.](#)

[Presentation by Rusty Sydnor](#), CSKT Natural Resources Department, Fisheries Program.

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes are engaged in a watershed-scale restoration effort in the Jocko River drainage. This presentation provided an overview of: 1) project funding, 2) overall restoration goals, 3) identification and prioritization of projects, and 4) projects completed to date. The importance of protecting and/or restoring wetland and riparian habitat in achieving the Tribes' restoration goals was emphasized during the presentation. Case studies of wetland/riparian restoration work in other watersheds were provided.

The CSKT received an \$18.5 million settlement from ARCO and are required in the consent decree to restore, create or enhance 800 acres of wetlands and riparian areas. Because these projects need to be managed in perpetuity, the restoration goal is to restore natural processes and includes reestablishing natural linkages between the terrestrial, riparian, and aquatic parts of the ecosystem. Funding is also used to acquire wetland and riparian habitat within the CSKT reservation. Because the funding is non-federal, many restoration projects leverage significant other restoration funding partners and the Tribes decided to focus restoration efforts on the Jocko and Mission watersheds. Project examples from 350 acre Finley Creek Flats restoration, sediment reduction project and wetland retention basin for Mission Creek/Coleman Coulee. The Jocko River planform redesign and fill to raise the bed elevation were shown and described. Including pictures showing the effective and proper use of the Jock floodplain to dissipate a 25 year flood in the restored channel compared to a downstream straightened channel and the resulting cottonwood seedling regeneration on the active floodplain. (PP slide 29-31)

Questions and comments included interest in the CSKT suitable analysis process to identify priority areas for restoration potential. The Council had an engaging discussion on passive restoration (modify or eliminate harmful practices) versus active restoration (overcome degradation via stream channel reconstruction, re-vegetation, etc.). While noting that sometimes active restoration is needed and sometime the only viable solution, this approach is very costly. The group seemed to agree that passive restoration is a valuable first approach in many instances and often not pursued as much as it should be due to funding emphasis and public perception on big equipment and seeing something done quickly. We discussed looking at funding criteria to ensure passive restoration options were valued.

Wetland Restoration Using Native Plants.
Presentation by Tara Luna, MT Natural Heritage Program

Planning, design and selection of native plant materials for wetland restoration must be based on the project objectives, species and stock type characteristics, out planting timing and appropriate tools. Case studies of riparian and wetland restoration projects illustrating the importance of these factors were presented.

This detailed presentation included points such as; as a general rule need to collect 10% of the population to include 90% of the genetic variation. Cautioned about taking cuttings from a single plant or from single sex especially for populus and salix species which are either male or female. Both are required for self perpetuating population. Planting in water is best done with plugs, not seeds. For example rushes do not do well as seeds, the very small seeds float away. Nursery must condition seedlings for wetland conditions so that plants can withstand inundation during their growth development to be viable in the field. Holdover of woody plants is particularly difficult, so timing of out planting is important to coordinate with nursery. Stem flexibility varies even within willow species, which is an important consideration for streams with ice flows. [List of native plant nurseries](#).

Questions and comments included if you have acidic soil, is it important to condition seedlings for transplanting? She recommended that you add amendments to the soil to bring the condition close to the nursery ph and allowing the seedling to adjust. When you got rid of the tamarisk was there problems after the re-vegetation? It was minimal and all done mechanically without any herbicides. They used burning and mechanical removal and other vegetation that would chock out tamarisk. Minimal hand removal is still ongoing. Is there a source of information on ground preparation? Responded that you will have to do research and every project site is different, important to find information with the closest conditions. Not many plant nurseries in Montana but you can do this on your own or hire people to help gather plant materials and cutting. Look at literature on gathering plant stock. Comment: State nursery, will produce plants if you gather for a minimal fee per plant. With a starter collection the state nursery can continue propagation. If you are collecting this yourself you want to make sure you get native species. When dormant it is hard to determine what is native.

Tools for Restoration Planning and Review.
Presentation by Peter Skidmore, Skidmore Restoration Consulting, LLC

Collaborative effort among federal and state resource agencies, restoration practitioners, and academic researchers to develop resources and tools to improve aquatic restoration projects in the western U.S. Peer reviewed document will include 1) science synthesis, 2) project information checklist, and 3) project evaluation and planning tool.

Described a regional (MT, ID, WA, OR) river restoration science synthesis that evaluated 23,000 projects to determine success, found that less than 7% implemented monitoring

designed to determine if stated goals were met. Developing tools and resources to aid in successful watershed restoration: 1) Educate users, practitioners and funders (document and training), 2) Assist end users (biologists with tools, training, and project-specific assistance), and 3) Foster connection between assessment and design. First product is an evaluation tool - an interactive guide to project planning or evaluation which consists of 6 modules that in concert cover the project development process. Second product is a science synthesis: geomorphology - from the watershed scale to habitat scale, a thorough discussion of the project development process, and restoration design resource. Third product is a checklist, a comprehensive list of information needed to review a project. He offered the eight principles of highly effective restorationists (PP slide 14).

Questions and comments included: is this intended to be a national document/tool? He said it is created for the western states, but designed to be a regional reference and could be used extensively elsewhere. He thought that any project owner, funder, or proponent could find this a useful tool. Expect to have beta versions of the projects in three months. In the next five years he feels there will be more monitoring to learn what funders are getting for their money and as a feedback mechanism for implementing successful restoration.

IV. Integrating Wetlands into Watershed Planning and Activities Facilitated Council Discussion.

How can wetlands be better integrated into watershed plans and activities? How can these plans and restoration activities value and protect the inherent worth of wetlands and riparian areas and not solely rely on them as water quality filters?

Key issues identified include:

- 1) Montana has several examples of integration – Ruby Watershed planning and Flathead Critical Lands project. These could be models for others.
- 2) Need for a prioritization process for restoration projects. Washington State was used as an example of all restoration projects (mines, roads, forestry, riparian) within a watershed considered collectively and plan needs to be in place before State will fund.
- 3) Importance and role of passive/low technology restoration and the need to consider prioritizing passive restoration when site appropriate from a cost effective standpoint and the State is faced with a large restoration need as more and more TMDL's are completed.

Discussion included:

Several examples were identified and discussed: **Ann Schwend**, past Watershed Coordinator for the Ruby River and Conservation District Supervisor. TMDL completed for the Ruby in 2006. Discussed ongoing projects and prioritization, developing a riparian corridor plan, define special management areas, use scientific data to support projects, mapping through the MTNHP and GIS database, management changes and impacts on stream flow. Community meetings visioning what is important to community and provide a visual aid on groundwater and surface water. Overview of scientific data to incorporate in land use planning. Scientific basis instead of political planning. Involving all

community interests - old traditional and newer nontraditional. **Robert Ray** discussed the Flathead Lakers critical area determination. Used a mapping process and GIS to overlay information and determine ownership. Working one on one with landowners to make sure they were aware of the critical benefits of their land and target landowner protection and restoration with willing landowners. Critical area determination may be a model for other watersheds and Saul noted the Lakers received awards for using this planning tool for on-the-ground protection and restoration. Vegetated buffers provide another example of integration of issues important to wetlands and water quality. **Lynda Saul** referenced research on the [scientific recommendation of riparian buffers needed to protect water quality](#).

Linda Brander, the new Governor's Restoration Coordinator, questions if there is overall process for prioritizing projects? FWP is developed a comprehensive plan for identifying critical areas and corridors for wildlife habitat as part of the Western Governors Association priorities. **Jeff Tiberi** mentioned the federal stimulus package, watershed stimulus projects were identified and sent to DNRC to be forwarded to the Governor. The National Association of Conservation Districts identified a number of conservation projects, including \$400 million for NRCS Watershed Improvement Programs. One of the main issues that remains is the methods that will be used to determine priorities as to how these dollars will be allocated. How do you set the priorities? At this time there are no federal guidelines. It is important to spend in a responsible manor, spend properly, and keep integrity on how it's being used. More information is being released soon by the feds.

How do we identify critical wetlands so that we know which ones are most important? In the Ruby the concerns with ponds and irrigation systems was integrated in the understanding of the whole picture. In the Jocko, 800 acres of riparian and wetland habitat must be restored to meet restoration goals. How many acres of that 800 will ultimately be wetlands versus riparian areas which may not be wetland? **Tom Hinz** feels that statewide we are at a point where we must do this integration of watershed, riparian, and wetland planning and restoration work. We need to look at how critical the wetlands are for filtering out the sediments and for restoration.

Tom Hinz talked about the Thompson Creek restoration project in the Gallatin watershed and addressing the recharge of the wetlands with this downcut stream, even though the stream banks may be restored by NRCS, FWP, and other partners. Need to design projects that will restore both the riparian areas and the wetlands jointly. Fisheries concerns below water level (water quality and quantity, temperature, turbidity, etc.) versus wildlife habitat restoration typically above the water dealing with conservation easements, wetland restoration, and in some cases, restoring stream banks through grazing management, vegetative planting, and other tasks. We must bring these aquatic and terrestrial approaches together through perhaps a Montana Watershed and Wetlands Council or something of that nature.

Regarding restoration approach, there was a discussion about prioritizing passive restoration and the need to influence project proponents and funders what can be done

with passive restoration. NPS program supports this as a way to fund larger scale progress and noted that passive restoration is a more cost effective approach. Acknowledge that at times active approach is needed, but would like to see integrated approach. When active is used, than ensure that trajectory is in place to let the passive restoration take over. For example removed dikes and restored natural flow. Encourage project sponsors and funders into using passive and/or active based on site needs.

Peter Skidmore offered Washington State as an example of integrated planning and funding across all types of restoration disciplines – mines, roads, watersheds, forest. The state helps watersheds develop a plan, all restoration is reviewed collectively, and until they have a plan they will not get funding. Gets all the players to participate in the planning. Would be a worth while method for Montana to investigate. It's based on watershed planning and brings public and private together.

In Montana we have that model in place and need to look at the regional level. 319 funding is based on once the TMDL is done for the watershed, then it qualifies for 319 funds. Robert Ray reported that when you receive 319 funds then DEQ becomes the funder. Regarding questions about flexibility that the state has on the criteria for 319 funds? There is some constraint but also flexibility. The five year plan set the priorities and criteria is set from that. **Maureen Kiley** noted that Tribal 319 program is handled very differently. Very competitive process, this year the tribes are given priority to those that link back to a watershed plan. On a national level the EPA is linking tribal funding to this plan.

Mike Philbin would like to see the dates of the wetland council and watershed council coordinated so that people can attend both. Will be a join meeting May 7, 2009 and hope that all will attend.

V. Wetland Updates and Coordination Reports.

Brief round-robin reports from Council participants and other organizations.

Larry Urban, MDT just released the wetland monitoring inventory for MDT mitigation sites. Wetland mitigation reports from 2000 to 2008 are on the MDT web site. Electronic form for wetland assessment has been out since last summer, MDT has copy. Everyone should be using new regional supplements for wetland delineation rather than the 1987 manual for certain areas. Three of them are in some level of use and are online through the Corps of Engineers website. MDT completed two constructed wetlands this year on CSKT and one at Wisdom.

Larry Urban, MDT's 2008 Wetland Monitoring Reports for mitigation sites across the state can be found at: <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/other/environmental/external/wetlands/>

Historic monitoring reports (2000-2008) are also available on the MDT web site. The Revised 2008 MDT Wetland Assessment is also on that website and is being utilized in the field since last summer. MDT is working to provide an electronic form of the Wetland Assessment that will hopefully be out this summer. Everyone should now be

using the new US Army Corps Regional Supplements rather than the 1987 manual for wetland delineations in Montana. The Arid West, Great Plains and Western Mountains and Valleys Regional Supplements are now in use and are online through the US Army Corps of Engineers website. MDT completed the construction and restoration of two wetland mitigation projects this year; the Lone Pine Wetland near Dry Fork Reservoir on the western side of the CSKT Reservation, and the Big Hole Grazing Association Site near Wisdom in the Big Hole River Valley.

Robert Ray, DEQ will be leading the 319 grant decision making process 1/21/09 from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm on for NPS grant funding. Feb 1 due date for education outreach for non point source pollution projects around the state. Watershed Coordination Council meets Tuesday 1/20/09 in the Directors Conference Room.

Karen Newlon, MTNHP submitted a 319 nonpoint source grant application to map wetlands and riparian areas in the Big Spring Creek Watershed near Lewistown. Goal is to help the watershed council incorporate wetlands in to its Water Quality Restoration Plan. Hoping to also partners with southwest Montana watershed councils to help them use wetland mapping in conservation and restoration planning. Currently working with the Ruby Valley watershed group to do this.

Status of the Bighole, working with Jeff Evert. Conserving arctic grayling habitat.

Megan Fyling, Avian Science Center. Survey birds for pre and post restoration success.

Joanna Thamke, USGS conducting a three-year project to assess brine contamination to Prairie Potholes from energy development in the Williston Basin and using rapid-assessment tools to map sites. They are looking for other agencies with interest and expertise in this study area. The USGS has recently published a 'Field Techniques for Estimating Water Fluxes Between Surface Water and Ground Water'. Copies can be downloaded from: <http://pubs.er.usgs.gov>

Eric Vincent, Riparian Repair Project. Looking for potential funding sources for monitoring? Class room monitoring. Applying for mini grants. Great falls tribune had article about a 10,000 dollar funding students for water monitoring.

Jeff Combs, NRCS farm bill proposes adjusted gross income sets limitations on how much a producer can receive. A [news release](#) was issued by the agency on January 15 announcing the availability of the interim final rule for a 60-day comment period. Please take this opportunity to review the program proposal and provide comments to NRCS as appropriate. Tom Hinz also added that FSA and NRCS will be issuing a number of these news releases in coming weeks as other rule-making for CRP, EQIP, WHIP, FPP, etc. are readied by the agencies for public review. These are your opportunities to play a proactive role in helping USDA craft programs applicable to the Montana landscape and the needs of our project partners and producers.

Vicki Sullivan, COE seeing less of heavy handed restoration projects. See success with stream/wetland restoration when working with existing conditions with "minor tweaks" to enhance/restore, which affords more money to spend on more projects in other places in the watershed. Education toward passive verses active and success and failures would be good to promote good projects.

Linda Vance, MTNHP is doing a regional monitoring and assessment (ReMAP) project with CO and WY as part of preparation for the national survey of wetlands, testing proposed indicators and sample frame to ensure they return an accurate picture of Rocky Mountain wetlands. Environmental factors (e.g. drought, short growing seasons, natural salinity) can produce high noise-to-signal ratio. There is some concern too that national survey sample frame will result in too many samples being drawn from alpine and subalpine public lands.

Mary Guokas, DNRC Floodplain Outreach Specialist. The Association of Montana's Floodplain Managers (AMFM), chaired by Laura Hendrix of Ravalli County will be hosting their 10th Annual Conference, March 3rd - 5th in Great Falls. Register by February 15th at: www.mtfloods.org. FEMA is continuing the process of modernizing Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) commonly called floodplain maps. Celinda Adair is the Map Modernization Program Coordinator for the state of Montana. The process is conducted by county and has been completed in Flathead County. The National Flood Hazard Layer (NFHL) allows GIS map viewing for completed counties through Web Map Service in Google Earth or GIS applications. Also, electronic versions of all maps are available. <http://msc.fema.gov>. FEMA announced that they will not be issuing paper versions of flood maps after October 1, 2009.

Lynda Saul, DEQ serves on the Governors Task Force for Riparian Protection and was asked about outreach activities planned for the Task Force. Continue and expand Room to Roam message to 11 communities and to others about the value of riparian areas. The Task Force Consultant will train Task Force members on community outreach and they will in turn provide education and outreach to counties. List of counties include: Ravalli, Missoula, Gallatin, Park, Lewis & Clark, Flathead, Cascade, Teton, Jefferson, Fergus, Petroleum, Musselshell, and Madison.

Bob Sanders, Ducks Unlimited is working with MDT in the northeast to locate mitigation projects. Informing landowners that have important wetlands.

Riparian buffer campaign, partners listed, creates attention to the values of riparian buffers. Billboards, radio and TV will be used. Lynda asked to look for those and see how effective.

Tom Parker, Geum Environmental Consulting. Sub-basin plan currently being developed in Ravalli County. Planning (zoning and streamside setbacks) voted down in November by way of Growth Policy. First Open Lands Bond conservation easement project approved in January.

VI. Council meeting adjourned at 4:00 pm.

Sign In Sheet

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