

**MONTANA WETLAND COUNCIL
MEETING SUMMARY
Kalispell, Montana.
Thursday October 10, 2013.**

Welcome and Round-Robin Introductions. The Wetland Council held its fall meeting in Kalispell with the help of local input from Constanza von der Pahlen, Flathead Lakers and Gael Bissell, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks. Despite the federal government furlough, approximately 35 people attended the Montana Wetland Council meeting held in Kalispell. Please see the last page for sign-in sheet.

Lynda Saul, DEQ Wetland Program Coordinator/Wetland Council Chair

Handed out copies and provided a brief overview of "[Priceless Resources: A Strategic Framework for Wetland and Riparian Area Conservation and Restoration in Montana 2013–2017.](#)" In keeping with the meeting focus, she pointed out that local municipalities play a key role in filling the gaps in wetland protection because they have primary responsibility for local land use. Local actions are particularly critical in states such as Montana that do not have specific state wetland protection programs. She highlighted priorities in the Strategy that emphasize and engage local actions.

Honoring Larry van Rinsum. Lynn DuCharme, CSKT, gave a heartfelt tribute to long time Flathead area conservation champion, Larry van Rinsum. Lynn announced a memorial fund in Larry's name, to contribute please contact Flathead Conservation District (406) 752-4220.

**Meeting Focus – Resources to Advance Wetland and Riparian
Restoration and Conservation at the Local Level**

Resources identified during presentations and discussions:

Montana FWP has compiled fish and wildlife recommendations for subdivision development in the state:
<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/livingWithWildlife/buildingWithWildlife/subdivisionRecommendations/>

Tools for protecting streams and wetlands in land use planning decisions can be found here:
<http://www.mtaudubon.org/issues/wetlands/planning.html>

A revegetation and study and guide for the Flathead River basin was prepared in 2010 and is located here:
http://www.flatheadrivertolake.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/FlatheadRiver_RevegetationStudy2010.pdf

DEQ is working on a web site showcasing bioengineering and other green techniques for river and stream restoration with case studies from Montana. Stay tuned.

Presentations: (PowerPoint presentations are linked to talk titles and e-mail addresses are linked to names)

Flathead River to Lake Initiative – A Conservation Success Story

Laura Katzman, Flathead Land Trust

Flathead River to Lake Initiative partners assessed the Initiative's conservation success over the past ten years in protecting its focus area along the Flathead River between Columbia Falls and Flathead Lake and on the north shore of Flathead Lake. Susannah Casey, American Bird Conservancy, worked with the Land Trust and conducted a GIS analysis of the existing protection of key resources and future priorities for conservation of those resources in the focus area. The collaborative effort has yielded

protection of nearly 5,000 acres of critical lands adding to a network totaling nearly 11,000 acres of protected private and public lands include 41% of the 100-year floodplain, 51% of wetlands, and 49% of quality riparian areas.

Flathead River Steward Pilot Project

Constanza von der Pahlen, Critical Lands Program Director, Flathead Lakers, and Kirstin Gruver, River Steward, Big Sky Watershed Corps

With the help of a yearlong intern, five River to Lake Initiative partners teamed up to test a collaborative River Steward position to increase their capacity to conduct outreach to landowners along the Flathead River about technical and financial assistance available for riparian restoration projects, develop an outreach strategy to engage volunteers, and help River to Lake Initiative partners better coordinate project planning, implementation, maintenance and monitoring, as well as outreach activities.

Spring Bird Migration Focuses Land Trust Efforts

Gael Bissell, Wildlife Biologist, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and Laura Katzman, Flathead Land Trust

An ongoing coordinated Spring Migratory Waterfowl project began in 2010 and is helping focus land trust conservation efforts in the Flathead and Smith Valleys. In March and April each year, volunteers and others count waterfowl and other birds in randomly selected areas. The project is intended to document the numbers and species that move through these valleys each spring and what habitats they use. The first 4 years indicate a high use by migratory waterfowl in flooded agricultural lands, burned and harvested croplands, as well as the area's many wetlands. The study will conclude in 2014 and result in several habitat based models. The Flathead Land Trust is using this information to work with private landowners where these birds tend to use both fields and wetlands and has used the volunteer efforts to match an Intermountain West Joint Venture Capacity Grant.

Wetland and Riparian Restoration in the Swan Valley

Anne Dahl, Executive Director, Swan Ecosystem Center

Through collaboration and partnerships, people in the Swan Valley have developed a wetland and riparian restoration program for public and private land. Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC), federal and state agencies, county governments, nonprofits and citizens have created a watershed restoration plan that addresses aquatic and terrestrial issues and directs projects. Funding comes from several sources to restore wetlands and reduce sediments from forest roads. National Wetland Inventory maps have been completed for the Swan Valley which enhances protection and restoration opportunities. Partner funding has enable SEC to hire a wetland coordinator to work with landowners.

Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes Forestry Greenhouse: Growing Native Plants for Wetland and Riparian Restoration. Program Manager, Forest Development

Jean Matt, Forest Development Program Manager

The Forestry Greenhouse is part of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes Forestry Department, under the Forest Development Program and specializes in growing native plants from locally collected seedlings for forest, riparian and wetland restoration. The Forest Development Program also completes work on planting sites, mechanical site preparation for reforestation efforts, seed collection, seed storage, hazard fuel reduction and pre-commercial thinning. CSKT Forest Development have been involved in stream/river bank restoration projects on and off Flathead Indian Reservation, including the Clark Fork restoration project at Milltown Dam (superfund site), Opportunity Ponds wetlands (Super Fund Site) near Butte, Moiese Wastewater, Jocko Demonstration site. Matt discussed several of these projects, the process of seed collection, propagation of 50-60 species, and restoration lessons learned.

Brokering a Solution - Averill Viking Creek Wetland Preserve in Whitefish

Mike Koopal, Executive Director, Whitefish Lake Institute

In 2009, the Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI) was gifted 28.82 acres of upland/wetland habitat near the shores of Whitefish Lake. The gift, as part of a development package, was the result of two years of negotiations between WLI, the developer, and a local neighborhood group. The development package also included funding towards restoration of a disturbed upland area. Between 2009 and 2013, WLI fundraised and provided project oversight for an interpretive nature trail that opened in July, 2013. The trail has already become a highly valued natural area and enjoyed by numerous school groups.

Channel Migration Easement, In-Lieu Fee, and MARS: New Opportunities for Wetland and Riparian Conservation

Tom Hinz, Manager, Ecolegacy Consulting, LLC

Montana Aquatic Resources Services, Inc. (MARS) is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to restoring and enhancing Montana's wetlands, streams and lakes through private and public collaboration. MARS was established in 2011 and is a statewide sponsor for in-lieu fee mitigation. In addition to providing a new funding resource for local projects, MARS embarked on developing a Channel Migration Easement program for the Yellowstone River which could be used as a model for other streams and rivers.

Evaluation of Riparian and Wetland Area Management in Missoula County Subdivisions

Michelle Hutchins, Environmental Health Specialist, Missoula County

The Missoula Valley Water Quality District evaluated the management of riparian and wetland areas that have been designated "areas of riparian resource" under City and County subdivision regulations adopted in 1995. The regulations require riparian management plans to protect these areas from inappropriate use and development. The WQD identified all subdivisions with designated riparian and wetland areas, compiled corresponding plans for each area, created and published a GIS layer, and visited each area to evaluate land use and compliance with adopted management plans. The information was used to more effectively implement the regulation and better protect riparian and wetland resources. An educational packet was sent to each landowner.

Riparian Management Plans in Flathead County

Alex Hogle, Planner III, Flathead County

Flathead County's Subdivision Regulations have included requirements for development within wetland areas since 2007. When the January 15, 2009 subdivision regulations became effective, big changes were implemented for the development of wetland, floodplain, and stream riparian areas. Since 2009, there have been two additional revisions to the subdivision regulations. The most recent revisions, effective June 1, 2012, have attempted to address additional mitigation techniques for the review of subdivisions containing areas previously considered unsuitable for subdivision review. The discussion outlined Flathead County's mitigation techniques for reviewing subdivision proposals, including Riparian Resource Management Plans, wetland delineations, and the concept of No-Build Zones.

Field Tour – Foy's Bend on the Flathead River.

Carpool to Foy's Bend field site from Wetland Council meeting – limited parking

Foy's Bend is a natural oxbow bend in the Flathead River located south of Kalispell and the Flathead River Islands. Foy's Bend includes wetlands and black cottonwood forests which provide significant wildlife values and protect water quality. Cottonwood forests at Foy's Bend support a wide range of songbird species dependent on riparian habitat. Bull and westslope cutthroat trout, which use the Flathead River system during migration, overwinter in deep pools and fallen logs found in the river where water flows are slow, temperatures are moderate and there is some cover or protection from predation. The water levels in the wetlands are influenced by the fluctuating water levels in the river and depth to the water table in the 100-year floodplain is less than five feet below the surface. Bank erosion and collapse are extensive along the Flathead River to just north of Foy's Bend and the north shore of

Flathead Lake. Hundreds of acres have been lost to the river, caused by fluctuations in the lake level resulting from Kerr Dam operations. Elevated lake levels create an artificial flood stage in the river upstream to Foy's Bend. Revegetation of the riverbank between Flathead Lake and Foy's Bend are complicated by water level fluctuations regulated by Kerr Dam.

On site talks and group discussions:

Evaluating Ways to Prevent Rodent Damage to Improve Riparian Planting Success

Kris Tempel, FWP Resource Specialist

As part of Kris's masters degree research, she is investigating vegetative planting success in backwater slough environments at Foy's Bend on the Flathead River. This field talk described an experimental riparian restoration project involving three sample plots testing the effectiveness of rodent protection mechanisms in a previously grazed riparian area. The project was initiated in spring 2013.

A Revegetation Study and Guide for the Flathead River Basin: Information & Lessons Learned

John Wachsmuth, FWP Fisheries Conservation Specialist

Numerous riparian restoration projects were being considered for FWP/BPA fisheries conservation easement property's on the Lower Flathead River riparian corridor. The need for a compilation of information regarding the geology, soils, current riparian issues and conditions, and management recommendations would help state and private landowner projects now and in the future for the lower Flathead River corridor. Components of the study and guide provide a useful product and approach to a river corridor of this size. This type of resource guide would be highly valuable and should be considered and utilized when planning riparian restoration projects in other similar large watersheds throughout Montana.

Next Montana Wetland Council Meeting: January 23, 2014 in Helena

For additional information contact Lynda Saul, Montana DEQ, (406) 444-6652 or lsaul@mt.gov.

Website: [Montana Wetland Clearinghouse](#)

MONTANA WETLANDS COUNCIL
Sign In Sheet
10/10/2013

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