

**DEQ Mini-Grant Program**  
**Lolo Watershed Group WQPB-MG08-11**  
**FINAL REPORT**  
**April 14, 2008**

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) awarded the Lolo Watershed Group a \$1,500 mini-grant in February of 2008 to develop a website and produce two maps of the Lolo Creek watershed. The mini-grants are distributed twice each year from federal Clean Water Act Section 319 funds to provide support for local education and outreach projects that improve water quality in Montana.

**Goals of Project:** The goals of the LWG website and maps were to:

- a) Increase the capacity of the LWG to recruit and communicate with board members, advisory board, staff, general members, volunteers, local residents and partner organizations and agencies;
- b) Improve people's access to information and resources to allow all of the above parties to better identify, understand, and prioritize local issues, which will help us streamline and update our workplan;
- c) Increase our capacity to educate a broader audience on local nonpoint source, water quality, and water quantity topics;
- d) Increase our capacity to publicize local efforts and generate funding and in-kind support for on-the-ground projects, events and community activities;
- e) Increase public participation in on-the-ground conservation and restoration efforts in the watershed;
- f) Track the number of "hits" on website to monitor the effectiveness of our outreach efforts.

**Water Quality Issue Addressed:**

The website and maps have enabled the Lolo Watershed Group to educate the public about local nonpoint source pollution and water quality concerns, and also engage them in local conservation and restoration efforts. Lolo Creek is on DEQ's 303(d) list of impaired waters due to excessive sediment from logging roads and increased erosion from channelization by US Hwy 12. TMDL implementation strategies include reclaiming forest roads, improving and upgrading existing culverts, reducing barriers to fish passage, improving plowing and guardrail cleaning techniques, and the use and maintenance of sediment traps along the highway.

Other issues include impacts of housing developments and agriculture along Lolo Creek, including sediment; nutrients from sewer, septic, fertilizer and livestock; herbicide and pesticide use; misuse of stormdrains; leaking irrigation ditches, and de-watering from over-allocated water rights or excessive use of water. The website and maps educate citizens about how these activities impact Lolo Creek, as well as connect them to appropriate contacts for information, resources and funding to reduce these impacts. The website and maps have also enhanced our efforts to recruit new board members, members and volunteers, as well as generate income from membership fees.

**Activities Completed:**

- 1) We **developed a website** which can be found at [www.lolowatershed.org](http://www.lolowatershed.org).

The initial site and format was developed by Tom Morarre, website designer (and now a LWG Board member), using Microsoft Office Live. Subsequent additions to content and format were made by LWG

Director Wendy Sturgis. Website content includes tabs titled: Home, About Us, Meetings and Events, LWG News Updates, Publications/Newsletters, Accomplishments, Current Projects, Water Resources and Links, Membership Info, and Contact Us. (See attached report for number of visits and increased usage as the site was promoted.)

2) We also **developed two maps** of the Lolo watershed (See cd included with report).

Initial brainstorm sessions were conducted by the LWG Board members during board meetings, and ideas were shared with LWG Advisory Board members. (See attached map brainstorm list).

It was clear from past board meetings and conversations with our partners at Montana Water Trust (MWT) that we needed our own maps before we could effectively pursue projects in our workplan. Discussions of the map project were ongoing during our summer water monitoring sessions with MWT, and they enthusiastically agreed to produce the maps for us. We determined that a general map of the watershed was needed, and the next priority was to have access to water rights information and know the location of irrigation ditches. This information is essential as we work to maximize instream flow and begin the process of developing a drought management plan (goal 1 of our workplan).

Ideas for the map project were shared with members at various public meetings. Numerous draft maps were created and reviewed by board members throughout late fall and winter, and the final drafts were shared at the LWG's general meeting on February 4, 2008. Input from Advisory Board members and general members who attended this meeting were incorporated into the final drafts.

Ten sets of the maps were printed by the City of Missoula as an in-kind donation by the Missoula Water Quality District. Each board member received a set and a set will be available for display at our public meetings.

Map 1 - Lolo Watershed: A general watershed map showing key geographic features:

- towns of Lolo and Florence
- major roads
- streams and rivers
- mountain peaks (with elevations)
- floodplain boundaries
- public & private land ownership (including Plum Creek/Montana Legacy Project)
- Lolo National Forest, Bitterroot National Forest and wilderness boundaries
- Missoula/Ravalli county line

Map 2 - Water Rights: Shows water rights (by number) and irrigation ditches; map is accompanied by a chart that shows the priority date, type of water use and flow rate for each water right.

### **Collaborative Parties Involved:**

The website was created by LWG Board and staff, with input from Advisory Board members and general members at the LWG's public meeting on February 4th..

The maps were developed in collaboration with the **Montana Water Trust**. Damon Pellicori, MWT Water Resources Manager, and Katie Gaut, MWT GIS Specialist, spent numerous hours brainstorming with us on content and honing in on what would be the most useful and important information to show on the maps.

Invaluable assistance for the map project was also provided by Travis Ross of the **Missoula Water Quality District**, who made suggestions on content and arranged for in-kind printing of the full-color maps by the City of Missoula printing office. Maps were also reviewed by Traci Sylte, Shane Hendrickson and Taylor Greenup of the **Lolo National Forest**.

## **Knowledge, Skills & Abilities Developed for Project Participants:**

Through our locally-generated website and links, local residents, LWG members, board members, staff and volunteers now have access to a centralized location for information, resources and funding to support on-the-ground conservation and restoration projects in the Lolo Creek watershed.

The website also will provide for improved communication between other organizations in Lolo – the Lolo Community Council, the Lolo Community Center, the Lolo Community Club, and other primarily volunteer organizations with limited budgets that have had a difficult time publicizing meetings and communicating with the public about important issues. We will be able to link to these organizations and post their meetings and events, which will increase visibility for the LWG.

This mini-grant provided for a professional website consultant/designer to develop our website and teach the LWG Director how to add content, edit and maintain the website, so updates and additions will be ongoing, affordable and sustainable within the budget of our current membership revenue.

## **Conclusions, Outcomes and Long-term Impacts from the Project:**

Conclusion: A website is an essential tool for a non-profit organization! Thank you so much!!!

Outcomes:

***We are more effective watershed managers*** - The process of developing the website and maps, as well as the information they provide, has allowed the board and staff to learn more about our watershed and its issues, prioritize tasks in our workplan, and get our hands on information more quickly.

***We are more efficient communicators*** - The LWG staff and board can now respond more efficiently to citizen's requests for information and resources. We can get information to each other and to members, partners and potential funders more efficiently, which allows us to maximize our limited resources.

***We strengthened partnerships*** - The ongoing communication with MWT about map details solidified our partnership and led to discussions about collaborating on projects and fundraising. Meetings and conversations with Advisory Board members (specifically the Lolo National Forest) also led to discussions about other map ideas, collaborative projects, priorities, and funding ideas; they produced and donated a useful map of TMDL areas in our watershed, and we are currently drafting a Master Agreement to formalize our partnership with the Lolo NF. Through our discussions with the Missoula Water Quality District and the Nature Conservancy, we also strengthened relationships and discussed partnership ideas.

***We attracted new board members*** - LWG's request for assistance with the website in our January 2008 newsletter generated a response from Tom Morarre, a local resident who agreed to develop and maintain our website. His participation in the process resulted in his attendance at meetings, followed by his appointment to the Board of Directors in March and ultimately his formal election to the Board by the membership in November 2008. In 2008 we also added three other board members; the website and maps were key projects that attracted their involvement.

***We increased the visibility and capacity of the LWG*** - Throughout the process of developing and promoting our website and maps, we attended other community meetings to share ideas and were able to increase awareness of our organization and goals. (See annual report for more details). In 2008, we:

- Recruited new members and volunteers (membership revenue for 2008 was up 117% over 2007; increase of 127% in total number of members; 5 new volunteers)
- Increased attendance at our meetings (attendance in Jan. and March was 15 and 14; in July and Nov. we had 32 and 35 attendees)
- Received more communication from and gave more input to other local and regional organizations (see annual report for details).

***We increased participation in on-the-ground conservation/restoration projects*** - A Lolo Creek property owner who has experienced severe erosion in recent years applied for and received the necessary permits to do a streambank stabilization project. Through presentations at local community meetings, site visits for anyone interested, and posting of the permitting process on the website, we generated support for our first demonstration project. Final permits were approved in mid-March and the landowner had to hit the ground running to accomplish the work before the ground thawed too much, and to get vegetation established before high flows. As of today, 18 volunteers have spent a total of 106.5 hours building soil lifts and cutting and planting willows at the site. We plan to continue using the site to educate the public as we monitor the changes and seek long-term solutions for erosion, sediment, and other problems related to channelization of Lolo Creek.

### **Opportunities for Project Continuation and Expansion:**

Website: We will continue to maintain and improve the website. Ideas include:

- Additions to content:
  - Upload the 2 maps; consider making them interactive?
  - Information and photos of streambank restoration project at Casbeer/Bartlette property, plus documentation of the permitting and design process
  - TMDL background information and updates
  - More on local watershed issues, causes of impairment, locations of restoration efforts
  - Information on Bitterroot Subbasin Assessment efforts
  - Photos and biographies of Board and Advisory Board members
  - Photo gallery of key landmarks in the Lolo watershed, including historic photos
  - Interviews/biographies of “old-timers” in the watershed (stories, memories, documentation of how the creek has changed over time)
  - Highlights of “Stewards of the Creek”, stories of local landowners who have improved, cleaned up, mitigated, protected, educated or otherwise forwarded conservation efforts
  - Add a page for other Lolo organizations (Community Council, non-profits, etc)
  - “Wish list” for items that LWG needs
  - Volunteer opportunities; how people can help or get involved
  - Consider a pay-pal (or other) option for payment of membership dues
- Conduct a campaign to publicize the website
  - Produce a brochure or flier with website address to post at key locations around Lolo
  - Distribute brochure/flier to other organizations so they can promote our organization
  - Contact partner organizations to have them add our link to their websites
  - Develop a list-serve to send out news and a link to the website to members and/or our mailing list whenever content is added

Maps:

- Add current maps to website
- Solicit additional in-kind printing to make additional copies to distribute
- Print smaller-sized copies of the map and reproduce for greater distribution to members
- Consider giving maps as a membership incentive gift to increase number of members or amount of membership dues
- Develop a display for one set of maps to be posted at LWG and other community meetings
- Ideas for other maps to produce (or things to put on maps):
  - A map of irrigation ditches on the lower (most developed) section of Lolo Creek, showing if ditches are active, inactive or abandoned
  - A more detailed TMDL map with accompanying information on impairment & status
  - Locations of specific issues: fish barriers, faulty culverts, excessive erosion, lost meanders, lost riparian vegetation, etc
  - Locations of past, current and/or future monitoring sites
  - Locations of past, current and/or future mitigation and restoration sites
  - Locations of past and current properties that applied for 310 permits

- Properties with high conservation value that could be protected through planning and/or zoning efforts
- Locations of sewer, septic, stormdrains, groundwater flow, aquifer
- Noxious weed hot spots and mitigation efforts
- Wildlife corridors, habitat, road crossings, info on mortality, conservation efforts, endangered species protection
- Sites of Historical/Cultural/Recreational interest (hiking, skiing, camping, Nez Perce trail, Lewis & Clark/Travelers' Rest, Holt Museum, Hwy 12 as scenic by-way, tourism)

### **Recommendations:**

Overall, these projects were a great success, especially in the area of strengthening partnerships– but there are some things we could have done to improve or maximize our efforts:

- We initially formed committees of board members to develop the website and maps, but didn't really utilize them fully because the partnerships were so successful. We could have done more to engage the board and advisory members.
- It was difficult to get input on the early drafts of the maps...early in the process we made cds for each board member, but some board members don't have a computer. It is difficult to navigate and visualize the maps on a computer, and cost-prohibitive to print drafts on paper. I'm not sure how to improve that, other than to start earlier and recognize that it will take more time to share drafts and get everyone's input.
- We could have included some volunteers early on to brainstorm ideas and develop content for website.
- **KEEP GIVING OUT MINI-GRANTS!!** This is one of the best, most productive and rewarding grant projects I have ever worked on! **THANK YOU SO MUCH!**

-- Wendy Sturgis