



July 9, 2026

Sent via email to:

Guy Alsentzer, Executive Director
Upper Missouri Water Keeper
guy@uppermissouriwaterkeeper.org

Brian Wheeler, Program Director
Save Wild Trout
Bozeman, MT 59715
brian@savewildtrout.org

Intended Action: Big Hole River Impairment Designation Petition

Dear Petitioners:

DEQ received your petition to list the Big Hole River as nutrient and dissolved oxygen impaired under MCA § 75-5-702(3) via email on January 13, 2026 (the letter attached to that email was misdated as January 13, 2025). With the receipt of this email and additional data, DEQ determined that Save Wild Trout provided sufficient information to evaluate the petition. DEQ communicated that available data was sufficient to use in an assessment of the pertinent eutrophication-related narrative standards (ARM 17.30.637(1)(e)) on February 17, 2026.

Data reviewed in DEQ's assessment included benthic algae chlorophyll a, benthic algae ash free dry weight, benthic algae percent cover, macroinvertebrate counts and metrics, dissolved oxygen data, pH, and nutrient concentrations. DEQ assessed data following guidance outlined in DEQ's draft Wadeable Stream and Medium Rivers Eutrophication Assessment Method. Intended actions for each assessment unit of the Big Hole River are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Intended actions per assessment unit.

Assessment Unit	Intended Action
Big Hole River, headwaters to Pintler Creek (MT41D001_030)	List as impaired for Eutrophication and Dissolved Oxygen impacting aquatic life and recreation beneficial uses.
Big Hole River, Pintler Creek to Divide Creek (MT41D001_020)	List as impaired for Eutrophication impacting aquatic life and recreation beneficial uses.
Big Hole River, Divide Creek to mouth (Jefferson River) (MT41D001_010)	List as impaired for Eutrophication and Dissolved Oxygen impacting aquatic life and recreation beneficial uses.

DEQ hosted a meeting on June 23, 2026, to summarize the methods, data analysis, and rationale for draft 303(d) related decision-making. These draft decisions will be implemented within the upcoming 2026 Integrated Report, allowing further opportunities for public involvement.

The intended action pollutant listings require DEQ to provide a total maximum daily load (TMDL) development prioritization category. Future TMDL program actions will include determining a course of action to control algae growth. This may include determining thresholds for controllable pollutants as well as any local factors that affect algae growth. DEQ intends to propose these impairment listings as low priorities given the watershed's history of previous TMDL development and watershed restoration planning efforts. DEQ must coordinate TMDL prioritization with the Statewide TMDL Advisory Group; feedback from this group may alter TMDL priorities in the future.

Due to extensive TMDL development in the watershed in the past, local planning entities have been and continue to be eligible for federal 319 funds that utilize best management practices to address waterbody impairments through DEQ's competitive application process. DEQ will consider all 319 grant applications for projects in the watershed if they meet the requirements of open 319 calls for applications.

Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Andy Ulven
Water Quality Planning Bureau Chief
Andrew.ulven@mt.gov
(406) 444-2680

CC: Lindsey Krywaruchka, Water Quality Division Administrator, DEQ lkrywaruchka@mt.gov
Darrin Kron, Monitoring and Assessment Section Supervisor, DEQ dkron@mt.gov
Peter Brumm, TMDL & 303(d) Program, Region 8 EPA, Brumm.Peter@epa.gov
Dana Erickson, Nutrient Coordinator, Region 8 EPA, Erickson.dana@epa.gov
Stephanie DeJong, Clean Water Branch Manager, Region 8 EPA, DeJong.Stephannie@epa.gov