

STATEWIDE TMDL ADVISORY GROUP (STAG) MEETING SUMMARY

JUNE 3, 2026

**Hybrid Meeting: DEQ Colonial Building Wilderness Room and via Zoom
1:30 p.m.**

To supplement this meeting summary, see **Attachment A** for a copy of the presentation given by DEQ. Both this summary and the meeting agenda can be found on the Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) Water Advisory Councils & Work Groups webpage at: <https://deq.mt.gov/water/Councils>

ATTENDANCE: STAG MEMBERS PRESENT

STAG Member & Affiliation	Representing
Karli Johnson Montana Farm Bureau	Farm-Oriented Agriculture
Dan Rostad Yellowstone River Conservation District Council	Conservation or Environmental Interest
David Brooks Montana Trout Unlimited	Water-Based Recreation
Jason Todhunter Montana Logging Association	Forest Industry
Brian Heaston City of Bozeman	Point Source Dischargers
Greg Bryce Hydrometrics	Mining
Jeff Schmalenberg Department of Natural Resources & Conservation	State Trust Land Management Agencies
Mary Ellen McCarty Flathead Conservation District	Conservation District Supervisor - West
Jordan Tollefson Northwestern Energy	Hydroelectric Industry
Michael Bias Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana	Fishing-Related Business

ATTENDANCE: STAG MEMBERS ABSENT

STAG Member & Affiliation	Representing
Louis Engels City of Billings	Municipalities
Andy Efta U.S. Forest Service	Federal Land Management Agencies

VACANT STAG POSITIONS

STAG Member & Affiliation	Representing
Vacant	Livestock-Oriented Agriculture
Vacant	Conservation District Supervisor - East

ATTENDANCE: OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Aaron Losing, City of Kalispell
Amy Deitchler, Great West Engineering
Andy Ulven, DEQ, Water Quality Planning Bureau Chief
Ben Catton, Montana Environmental Information Center
Brian Sugden, Sugden Forest Environmental
Casey Lewis, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Christina Staten, DEQ, TMDL Section Supervisor
Darrin Kron, DEQ, Monitoring and Assessment Section Supervisor
Ella Bushnell, DEQ, Monitoring and Assessment Section
Eric Trum, EPA Region 8, Montana Nonpoint Source Contact
Erin Eberhard, DEQ, Monitoring and Assessment Section
Gabby Metzner, DEQ, Monitoring and Assessment Section
Gabe Johnson, Navajo Transitional Energy Company
Hannah Adkins, DEQ, TMDL Section
Hannah Riedl, DEQ, Nonpoint Source and Wetlands Section Supervisor
Jeff Dunn, WGM Group
Joe Schrader, City of Kalispell
Joe Vanderwall, DEQ, TMDL Section
John Iverson, Treasure State Resources Association
Katie Makarowski, DEQ, Standards and Modeling Section Supervisor
Keith Haskins, City of Kalispell
Kyle Milke, DEQ, TMDL Section
Laura Collins, Montana Environmental Information Center
Leea Anderson, City of Helena
Logan McInnis, City of Missoula
Margarite Thomas, City of Kalispell
Mary Harlow, League of Women Voters of the Helena Area
Matt Elsaesser, Upper Missouri Waterkeeper
Paul Yakawich, DOWL
Peter Brumm, EPA Region 8, Montana TMDL Contact
Rickey Schultz, HDR
Rosalyn DiLillo Knock, Schwabe Williamson & Wyatt
Susie Turner, City of Kalispell
Tiffany Lyden, DEQ, Nonpoint Source and Wetlands Section
Troy Clift, DEQ, TMDL Section
Vicki Watson, University of Montana Watershed Clinic

MEETING INITIATION

Christina Staten, Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ's) Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Section Supervisor, called the meeting to order at 1:31 pm and began by going over the DEQ organizational chart for the Water Quality Planning Bureau. There was a round of Statewide TMDL Advisory Group (STAG) member introductions and other attendees in the room also introduced themselves. Christina Staten conducted a roll call of STAG members in attendance. The meeting agenda was then reviewed.

STAG OVERVIEW

Christina Staten gave an overview of STAG member roles and responsibilities. STAG is authorized in 75-5-702(10), Montana Code Annotated. The STAG is comprised of 14 members that represent a broad base of water related interests. There are no officers or quorums necessary and there is no decision-making authority, however, the department takes interest in what the group thinks of the department proposals. STAG members serve in an advisory capacity helping develop TMDL priorities, water quality monitoring priorities, and water quality assessment methods. STAG member responsibilities include representing interest groups in Montana and attending meetings twice a year. Positions are a renewable two-year term, and members must notify the department if they need to step down at the end of their term.

Christina Staten then began a discussion on the STAG Chair position. Historically STAG had a Chair, previously it was Brian Sugden with Sugden Forest Environmental. The role is informal, and the Chair helps with meeting facilitation and agenda coordination. Christina Staten asked the members if they would like to do a round of nominations or think about it and defer until the next meeting. The group consensus was to not have a Chair.

WATER QUALITY MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT UPDATES

Darrin Kron, DEQ's Monitoring and Assessment Section Supervisor, went over water quality monitoring and assessment updates. Darrin Kron discussed the status of the combined 2022/2024 Water Quality Integrated Report (IR). A public comment period was completed, and the themes of the public comments received on the draft 2022/2024 IR are in **Attachment A, slide 10**. There are a few additional smaller topics that were not touched on in the slide. No substantial changes are needed to the document even though DEQ made several edits. Submittal of the 2022/2024 IR to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will be on June 9, 2026. DEQ will finalize the report and update the website after EPA review/action.

Darrin Kron gave an update on the petition to list the Big Hole River for nutrients. The department is evaluating all three assessment units and is working to address the petition within 180 days as of January 13, 2026. Currently, there is a local meeting planned that DEQ will have more info on soon.

Darrin Kron went over assessment method development updates. The pH assessment method will be finalized with the final 2022/2024 IR. DEQ is currently working on a strategy to update the dissolved oxygen assessment method and/or standards. The daily and weekly dissolved oxygen minima standards in salmonid streams appear to be more stringent than natural conditions according to in-depth analysis. DEQ is currently addressing public comments and compiling data for the Lake Koocanusa and Kootenai River selenium assessment method.

DEQ is also working on eutrophication assessment methods for wadeable streams, large rivers, and lakes/reservoirs. The eutrophication assessment method for wadeable streams and medium rivers is anticipated to be out for public comment around the same time as the Big Hole River assessment outcomes. In the future DEQ is planning on developing and updating several assessment methods to include temperature, metals/toxics updates, sediment/habitat updates, and sulfate updates.

Darrin Kron went over the projects in the assessment phase for 2026, **Attachment A, Slide 15**. DEQ will be:

- Catching up on eutrophication assessments
- Looking at the new project data package for the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone
- Reviewing the upper Missouri River data from its headwaters to the Marias River
- Conducting a Deep Creek sediment assessment
- Looking at eutrophication updates for the Smith River and Big Hole River

DEQ will also be looking at other waters, many of which include volunteer monitoring data from across the state. Lastly, DEQ will be responding to its call for data and assessment requests.

Darrin Kron went over project in the monitoring phase for 2026, **Attachment A, Slide 15**. These projects include:

- Big Hole River and Gallatin River algae bloom response monitoring
- Canyon Ferry, Hauser, Holter, and Lake Helena
- Upper Yellowstone River response variables
- French Creek sediment assessment, which is a potential success story and may be a delisting

Dan Rostad, Yellowstone River Conservation District Council, asked what areas in the upper Yellowstone River will DEQ be looking at. Darrin Kron said around the Billings area to the headwaters, and we will be looking at dissolved oxygen, algae parameters (chlorophyll-*a*, ash-free dry-weight, and percent algae cover), and maybe pH. DEQ is focused on filling the remaining data gaps.

Jason Todhunter, MT Logging Association, stated that DEQ said it looks at all readily available data. He asked if that is something DEQ has gotten into a conundrum on. Darrin Kron responded that it is a topic that comes up. “All readily available data” is in the Clean Water Act, and it is a high level of workload. Peter Brumm, EPA Region 8, stated that you don’t have to use all the data if you have a sound and rationale reason for not using it.

David Brooks, MT Trout Unlimited, asked what projects are in the assessment phase and what all does the timeline include. Darrin Kron said that there was not enough room on the slide to include all of them. DEQ will also be looking at the Clark Canyon Reservoir and Canyon Ferry Reservoir.

David Brooks followed up by asking for the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone and Smith River what will the assessment phase include? For the upper Missouri River, which portion? Darrin Kron responded that for the Missouri River, it will be the main river below Three Forks, MT and above the Marias River confluence; it does not include the reservoirs. The Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone project is exhaustive and takes a watershed approach. DEQ will be looking at all previously listed waters and will add a few others based on local input which includes many of the tributaries as well as Rock Creek and some its tributaries. DEQ will be looking in the teens to low twenties of assessment units in the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone and that also includes Cooney Reservoir. As far as the assessment phase goes, it will include gathering all the data, evaluating the data, and if data isn’t used because of quality concerns, it must be documented. These are slated for the next (2026) IR, but DEQ is currently not on schedule for the 2026 IR.

Darrin Kron added that DEQ has an open call for data for the 2026 IR statewide, and anybody can submit information. DEQ also has an interested parties list on their website where people can sign up.

Jordan Tollefson, Northwestern Energy, asked regarding the per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) report put out a while ago, if there are any monitoring plans for expanding the waterbodies for PFAS substances? Darrin Kron stated that was a one-time infusion of grant funding that was used for those efforts; DEQ is not planning any more PFAS monitoring soon.

TMDL PROJECTS AND FUTURE PRIORITY PROJECTS

Christina Staten reviewed the EPA commitments process and upcoming timeline, **Attachment A, slides 17-18**. Montana submits its TMDL commitments to EPA every two years. TMDL commitments can be “in development” or “complete.” A commitment of “in development” for one two-year cycle should generally be completed the following two-year cycle. TMDL commitments are also reflected in the TMDL priority ranking in the IR. A high priority will be completed within two years, a medium priority within two to six years, and a low priority sometime beyond 6 years.

Christina Staten then discussed the status of current TMDL projects and EPA commitments. Current commitments are due to EPA on September 30, 2026. Current commitments include the Beaverhead watershed nutrient TMDLs (~28 TMDLs) as complete, Red Rock watershed nutrient TMDLs (~30 TMDLs) as complete, and Ashley Creek nutrient and sediment revisions (10 revised within the Flathead-Stillwater TMDL document) as in development. The reason the Ashley Creek revisions were chosen was because there was a collection of additional data, and the watershed model was revised after the document was originally completed in 2014. The model showed different loading outputs and DEQ wanted to incorporate these into the document, in addition to the reversion to narrative standards related to nutrients. DEQ is hoping to have it completed by the end of 2026.

Christina Staten presented the prioritization of future TMDL projects, **Attachment A, slide 19**. Emerging priorities include the Missouri-Cascade and Belt revision, Gallatin River excess algae, Clarks fork of the Yellowstone watershed, and the Clark Fork River Voluntary Nutrient Reduction Program (VNRP) revision.

David Brooks asked what the new discharge on Belt Creek is. Christina Staten replied that DEQ has a new water treatment facility to treat discharge water from abandoned mine adits, which is then returned to Belt Creek. David Brooks followed up by asking if that was from the coal mining? Joe Vanderwall, DEQ TMDL Section, stated that yes, it is near the town of Belt.

On the Gallatin River, DEQ has completed three years of monitoring and is currently working on a water quality model. After the model is completed, the Monitoring and Assessment Section will be conducting a reassessment and that will determine whether a TMDL is needed or not. If the reassessment shows that the middle segment of the Gallatin River is still impaired for excess algal growth, then DEQ will prioritize writing TMDLs. If it is not impaired, DEQ will not write TMDLs and may instead develop a protection plan. This may be a commitment for 2029 completion.

On the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone, DEQ has also completed three years of monitoring, however DEQ is unsure if this will be listed a “complete” or “in development” commitment. The Clark Fork River VNRP is being prioritized because DEQ has been hearing a lot of comments and concerns about this being an outdated TMDL from 1998.

Christina Staten presented a summary of what the department is proposing for the next round of commitments, shown in **Attachment A, slide 20**. The commitments are split between new TMDL development and TMDL revisions, aiming for a balanced approach between the two. The Clarks Fork of

the Yellowstone would be a watershed project. This is a new area where there are no existing TMDLs and multiple groups want to implement TMDLs and a Watershed Restoration Plan (WRP).

The middle segment of the Gallatin River is another that touches on all the major priority factors. However, this is not considered a potential commitment currently because DEQ wants to complete modeling and reassessment work first to determine current impairment status and the need for a TMDL. This segment extends from the Yellowstone National Park boundary to Spanish Creek.

The Smith River is a potential commitment that DEQ has heard a lot of stakeholder interest on due to recurring algae blooms. DEQ has already accepted a Smith River WRP which enables nonpoint source funding to be granted to the area; therefore, completion of TMDLs is unlikely to spur additional implementation. An intensive three-year algae study was completed in 2020 and report was published in 2024 which is on the DEQ website. This project would be for nutrients and metals even though metals would mostly be from natural resources.

For the Big Hole River, DEQ received a petition to list. If the impairments are caused by nutrients, the outcomes would be a eutrophication listing(s). DEQ does not want to preemptively commit to this project since the assessment findings have not been determined. There will be a public meeting at the end of June and a press release related to these assessment outcomes.

For Lake Koocanusa, DEQ has received comments from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. DEQ has not conducted reassessment because the assessment method for selenium is still be developed, therefore DEQ does not want to commit to a TMDL.

DEQ has received comments on Flathead Lake. There is currently a phase 1 TMDL from 2001 that establishes targets for nitrogen and phosphorus for the lake but did not set allocations for the sources. This project would require some complex water quality monitoring work and DEQ's resources are limited to complete that work. DEQ has heard the concerns regarding this project and is reevaluating whether this can be a near future priority for a future round of commitments.

For TMDL revisions, DEQ is proposing the lower Gallatin River watershed. This would focus on the nutrient listings for the entire Lower Gallatin TMDL Planning Area boundary. DEQ is currently entering into a memorandum of understanding with the City of Bozeman to begin work on revising the nutrient TMDLs for the East Gallatin River. The City of Bozeman will be focusing on the assessment unit to which their wastewater reclamation facility discharges.

The Clark Fork VNRP has multiple wasteload allocations (WLAs) that are outdated. Some facilities that are no longer in existence have WLAs. DEQ is proposing this as a commitment to be completed by 2028.

The Lake Helena watershed is not being proposed as a potential commitment, however it has multiple WLAs that need to be revised. While there are permits up for renewal in this watershed, they are not up for immediate renewal. DEQ is coordinating with the City of Helena to collect additional data that would be helpful to have completed before embarking on TMDLs.

STAG INPUT ON PROPOSED TMDL COMMITMENTS

Christina Staten opened the floor for STAG member's thoughts on the proposed commitments.

Dan Rostad stated that the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone is important. Any future commitment now or in the future is a win-win.

Christina Staten added that for the Clark Fork VNR, the town of Deer Lodge received a zero allowance for discharge because they originally said they would land apply. However, this has changed and now they need an allocation for their discharge. Also, when the document was originally published, the state did not have numeric nutrient standards in place for these portions of the Clark Fork River, but we do now.

David Brooks asked regarding Deer Lodge in the Clark Fork VNR if they are still going to land apply? Hannah Adkins, DEQ TMDL Section, replied that the initial assumption is that they will not land apply.

Greg Bryce, Hydrometrics, asked in respect to the revisions, what is the department's policy of renewal of permits for TMDLs based off the numeric standards prior to permit renewals being implemented? Christina Staten stated that there is no official policy, but DEQ is coordinating internally regarding upcoming permit renewals and prioritizing TMDL revisions before the permit is renewed so the new WLAs can be incorporated in the revised permit. Andy Ulven stated that this might not always be the case, but DEQ will try as much as possible.

Greg Bryce strongly suggests revising the TMDL before the renewals happen. Christina Staten replied that DEQ agrees, and that DEQ is striving to get these done so that a permit is not based on old numeric numbers for nutrients. Brian Heaston, City of Bozeman, was in full agreement of Greg Bryce's comments.

Greg Bryce asked regarding the Lake Helena TMDL, was DEQ just considering for nutrients and has the department considered evaluating other parameters like metals? Christina Staten replied, no, DEQ has mainly been focused on nutrients, however, this is a project that DEQ hasn't scoped yet so additional pollutant groups could be considered.

Christina Staten asked the STAG members if there were any concerns with the potential commitments and if they would like to see something additional or different?

Brian Heaston stated that having some reserve space for permit renewals is important because there are permits in holding patterns that have WLAs based on the numeric standards. Brian Heaston asked regarding the reassessment work on the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone, what discharge permits are out there, are they municipal only? Also, is there another vehicle a watershed group can use to get access to 319 funds? The Smith River work indicates that 319 funds are available when no TMDLs have been completed. David Brooks replied that the Smith River has an approved WRP that gives the watershed access to 319 funds.

Brian Heaston followed up by asking if a WRP must happen in conjunction with a TMDL? Christina Staten replied no, it can be an independent process. Hannah Riedl, DEQ Nonpoint Source and Wetlands Section Supervisor, stated that local watershed organizations can take on a WRP ahead of a TMDL. DEQ can provide capacity support for that type of activity. Having the TMDL helps fulfill the nine required elements of a WRP, or at least a TMDL makes three of the elements a lot easier to achieve. Darrin Kron asked is having a TMDL in place better for other federal funds? Hannah Riedl replied that she doesn't want to speak for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, but they indicated having a WRP is helpful for them to designate a watershed as a national water quality initiative watershed.

Christina followed up on the second part of Brian Heaston's question by stating that she doesn't specifically know what dischargers exist in the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone. Darrin Kron said that he thinks there are four small communities with lagoons, however, he is not aware of other industrial discharges.

Jeff Schmalenberg stated that he is in support of the commitments and DEQ should move forward. Christina Staten stated that she will provide the STAG with the list of commitments prior to submitting them to EPA so members will have another opportunity for input.

BRIEFINGS

Hannah Riedl discussed the 2025 and 2026 nonpoint source and wetlands funding awards (**Attachment A, slides 25-26**). The call for applications was in early January and was split into two phases. In the draft phase, an applicant can continue to discuss ideas with DEQ before submitting draft applications in late February. In the final phase, applicants cannot discuss their projects with DEQ and before the final applications are due in mid-March.

Half of the available funding is typically reserved for projects in Focus Watersheds. The other half of the available funding is used for projects, capacity, and education and outreach throughout the state. Typically, a 40% non-federal match is required, however, in years where funding is available, this match could be reduced to 10%.

In 2026, \$2,905,584 was requested for a total of 32 projects. \$1,839,664 was awarded to a total of 20 projects. \$681,070 was awarded to the Shields Focus Watershed.

Hannah Riedl highlighted the Boulder River project where there is not an approved WRP, but DEQ has reviewed a draft. DEQ has every reason to believe that the WRP will be approved by the time the contract is initiated in October.

Dan Rostad asked if Hannah Riedl could tell the STAG more about the projects in the Shields? Hannah Riedl said the projects involve beaver mimicry, livestock fencing, culvert removal, and planning efforts.

Jordan Tollefson asked for the Boulder River, is there any worry about contaminated sediment. Hannah Riedl replied that they did sediment monitoring as part of the application package and are leaving the sediment in place. They are rerouting the channel through a relic stream channel. So, the sediment has been accounted for and there is no concern about mobilizing those sediments.

Christina Staten then briefly covered what a TMDL Implementation Evaluation (TIE) is and what TIEs DEQ is currently working on/their outcomes (**Attachment A, slides 28-30**). Current TIEs that are in development that are expected to go out for stakeholder comment this year are the Big Hole watershed, Blackfoot Headwaters, Middle Blackfoot, and the Big Sandy and Sage Creeks. TIEs that are expected to go out for stakeholder comment next year are the Bitterroot River (lead only), Elk Creek, and Bobtail Creek.

TIE outcomes for the Big Hole watershed are there is a recommended reassessment of the French Creek sediment impairment and a recommended reassessment of the Elkhorn Creek arsenic and lead impairments. Recommendations for the Blackfoot Headwaters TIE are to reassess the upper Blackfoot

River, Beartrap Creek, and Mike Horse Creek for metals. All other recommendations for these TIEs are that additional time or additional monitoring is needed.

PUBLIC COMMENT & CLOSE OF MEETING

Christina Staten initiated a discussion of next meeting topics and date. One topic will be an update on where DEQ is with the 2026 commitments to EPA. Another update will be what DEQ is committing to for 2028.

Brian Heaston suggested that there be an update on where DEQ is at with the methodology or criteria it will be applying when it is translating the narrative standard into load allocations or WLAs.

Jeff Schmalenberg recommended that legislative updates on bills that DEQ may be taking forward as a topic.

Christina Staten stated that the STAG typically meets about every 6 months, so the meeting will be sometime this Fall. The group agreed with meeting in the Fall. Christina Staten will send out a doodle poll to schedule the meeting.

Logan McInnis, City of Missoula, noted that the City of Missoula is interested in a third-party TMDL revision for the segment of the Clark Fork River they discharge to and that he will be reaching out to DEQ. He asked what the timeframe was considering all the other entities in the Clark Fork River and if there was any sort of flexibility for a September 2028 deadline? Christina Staten asked if Logan McInnis was proposing that DEQ denote this project as in development? Logan McInnis said that would make sense to him and that there is a lot of data that exists. Christina Staten said that DEQ will take that into consideration before DEQ commits to anything. She noted that that project has not been fully scoped yet and that DEQ would have to do more work before September 1st when commitments are due. Andy Ulven replied that Christina and he will reach out about a third-party TMDL.

Peter Brumm stated regarding expanding the Lake Helena project to include metals, that it may not need to be a revision just because progress has been made. He asked if the suggestion should be revisiting the Lake Helena TMDL with a TIE? Christina Staten stated that DEQ has done a TIE for nutrients but not metals.

Vicki Watson, University of Montana Watershed Clinic, stated in the Q&A that Christina listed some changes since the VNRP. She provided some additional information including a huge amount of population growth and development, changing hydrology and loads, removal of a dam, the upper river superfund work, Deer Lodge stopped land applying while the City of Missoula has started it, and three proposed data centers in the basin. She stated that there needs to be a central Clark Fork WRP and that they have more decades of data. Christina Staten thanked Vicki Watson for the additional considerations and stated that they will be helpful. She noted that DEQ will convene the watershed advisory group for all these projects to reach out to stakeholders.

No further comments. End of meeting.

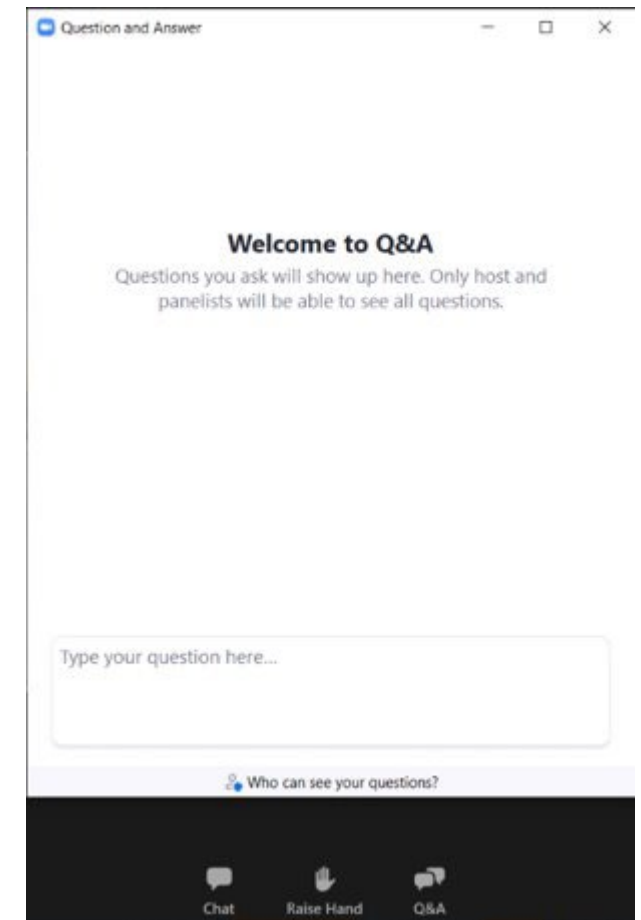
ATTACHMENT A: JUNE 3, 2026 STAG MEETING PRESENTATION SLIDES

Statewide TMDL Advisory Group Meeting

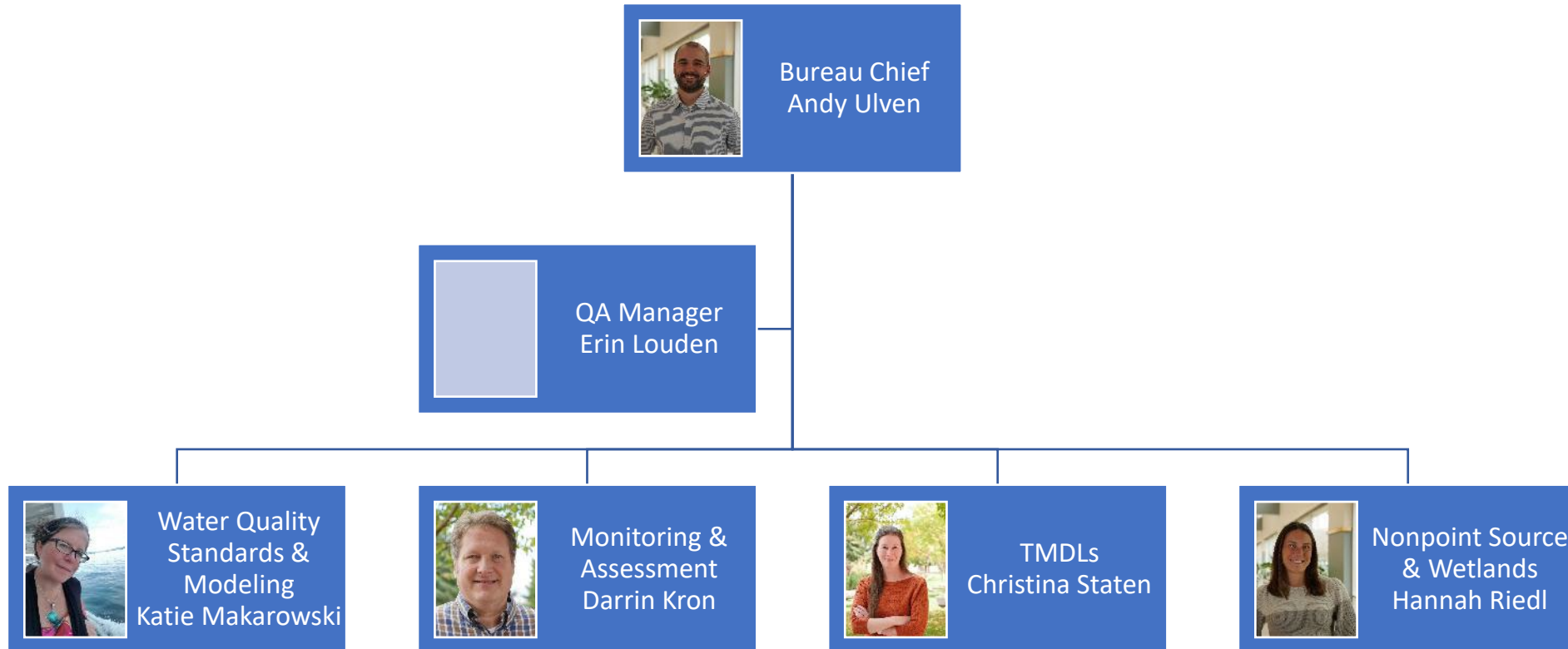
June 3, 2026

Welcome!

- This meeting is a webinar
- STAG members will be panelists
- Members of the public can raise their hand or use the Q&A feature to ask questions during the public comment portion of the meeting
- *9 raises your hand if you're on the phone
- State your name and affiliation before providing your comment



Water Quality Planning Bureau



STAG Roll Call

STAG Member	Affiliation	Representing	Term End Date
Karli Johnson	Montana Farm Bureau	Farming-Oriented Agriculture	January 31, 2028
Vacant		Livestock-Oriented Agriculture	
Dan Rostad	Yellowstone River CD Council	Conservation or Environmental Interest	January 31, 2028
David Brooks	Montana Trout Unlimited	Water-Based Recreation	January 31, 2028
Jason Todhunter	Montana Logging Association	Forestry Industry	January 31, 2028
Louis Engels	City of Billings	Municipalities	January 31, 2028
Brian Heaston	City of Bozeman	Point Source Dischargers	January 31, 2028
Greg Bryce (Scott Mason sub)	Hydrometrics	Mining	January 31, 2028
Andy Efta	U.S. Forest Service	Federal Land Management Agencies	January 31, 2027
Jeff Schmalenberg	Dept. Nat. Resources & Conserv.	State Trust Land Mgt. Agencies	January 31, 2028
Vacant		Conservation District Supervisor – East	
Mary Ellen McCarty	Flathead Conservation District	Conservation District Supervisor – West	January 31, 2028
Jordan Tollefson	Northwestern Energy	Hydroelectric Industry	January 31, 2028
Mike Bias	Fishing Outfitters Assoc. of MT	Fishing-Related Business	January 31, 2028

Agenda

- STAG Overview
- Water Quality Monitoring & Assessment Updates (Darrin Kron)
- TMDL Projects & Future Priority Projects (Christina Staten)
- STAG Input on Proposed TMDL Commitments
- Briefings: NPSW Funding Awards, TIE updates
- Public Comment & Close of Meeting

STAG's Advisory Role

- Authorized under 75-5-702(10), Montana Code Annotated
- 14 members representing broad base of water-related interests
- No officers, required quorums, or decision-making authority
- Members serve in advisory capacity to the department on:
 - TMDL development priorities
 - Water quality monitoring priorities
 - Water quality assessment methods

Member Responsibilities

- You are representing an interest group in Montana
- Attend meetings twice a year
- Renewable two-year term limits (solicitations occur at end of terms)
- Notify the department if you're stepping down from your position

STAG Chair Discussion

- Historical Role:
 - Informal
 - Meeting facilitation assistance
 - Agenda coordination



Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Updates and Priorities

Darrin Kron, Monitoring & Assessment Section Supervisor

Draft 2022/2024 Integrated Report Comment Themes

Lake Koocanusa/Kootenai River Selenium Assessment and Request for TMDL

Big Hole River Petition To List

Nutrient Criteria

Clean Water Act Requirements - Use of Readily Available Data

Flathead Lake, Flathead River, and Ashley Creek Assessment and TMDL

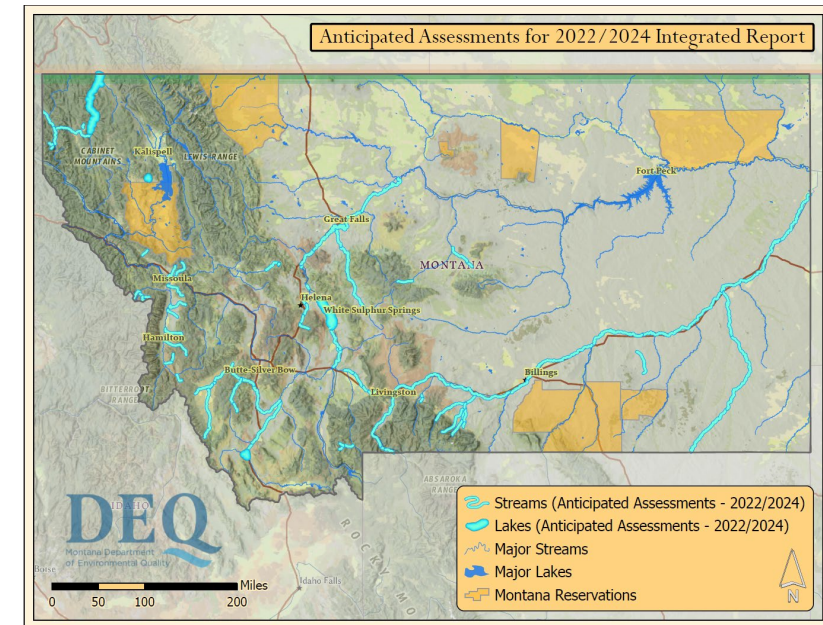
Review of Call for Data and Systematic Data Evaluation within the IR

Reporting Errors

Various IR Document Edits and Minor Additions

Waters in Exclusive Federal Jurisdiction

Request for more information on Yellowstone River Natural Arsenic Evaluation



Draft IR Update - 2022/2024

- No substantial changes to document
- Submittal to EPA planned for June 9th, 2026
- Plan to finalize document and update website after EPA review/action



Big Hole Petition to List

- Evaluating all three assessment units
- Working to address petition within 180 days of January 13th, 2026.
- Local meeting planned
- More information will be provided soon



Assessment Methods Update

- pH
 - Will be finalized with final 22/24 IR
- Dissolved Oxygen
 - Daily and weekly minima standards in salmonid streams appear to be more stringent than natural conditions according to in-depth analysis.
 - Working on a strategy to update assessment method and/or standards
- Lake Koocanusa and Kootenai River Selenium
 - Addressing public comments on draft assessment method and currently compiling data

Existing Methods

Overarching Beneficial Use Assessment Guide

Metals

E. coli

Sediment in Mountainous Streams

EC/SAR in Tongue, Powder, Rosebud

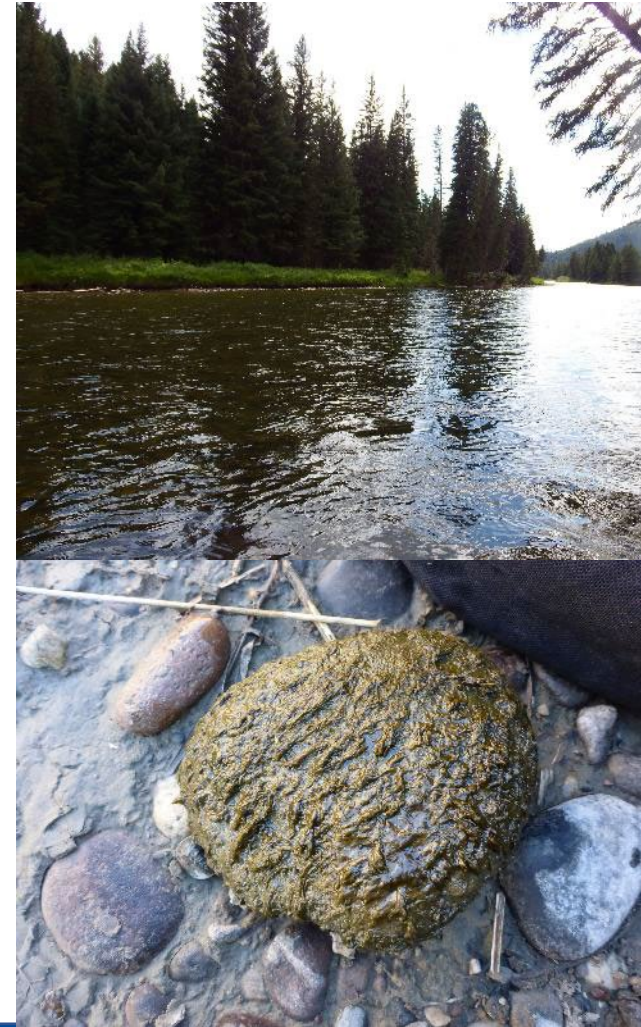
Ammonia

Sulfate

Assessment Methods Update

- Eutrophication:
 - Wadable Streams
 - Large Rivers
 - Lakes/Reservoirs
- Temperature
- Metals/Toxics update
- Sediment/Habitat update
- Sulfate update

On horizon:



Current DEQ Monitoring and Assessment Projects

Assessment Phase

Eutrophication

Clarks Fork of
Yellowstone

Upper Missouri River

Deep Creek Sediment

Smith
River

Gallatin
River

Big Hole River

Volunteer Monitoring

Respond to Call for Data
and Assessment Requests

Ashley Creek
East Gallatin River
Lake Koocanusa
Kootenai River
Jefferson River
Ruby River
Flathead River
Yellowstone River
others

Monitoring

Big Hole River Bloom
Response

Gallatin River
Bloom Response

Canyon Ferry, Hauser,
Holter, Lake Helena

Upper Yellowstone
Response Variables

French Creek Sediment

TMDL Projects & Future Priority Projects

Christina Staten, TMDL Section Supervisor

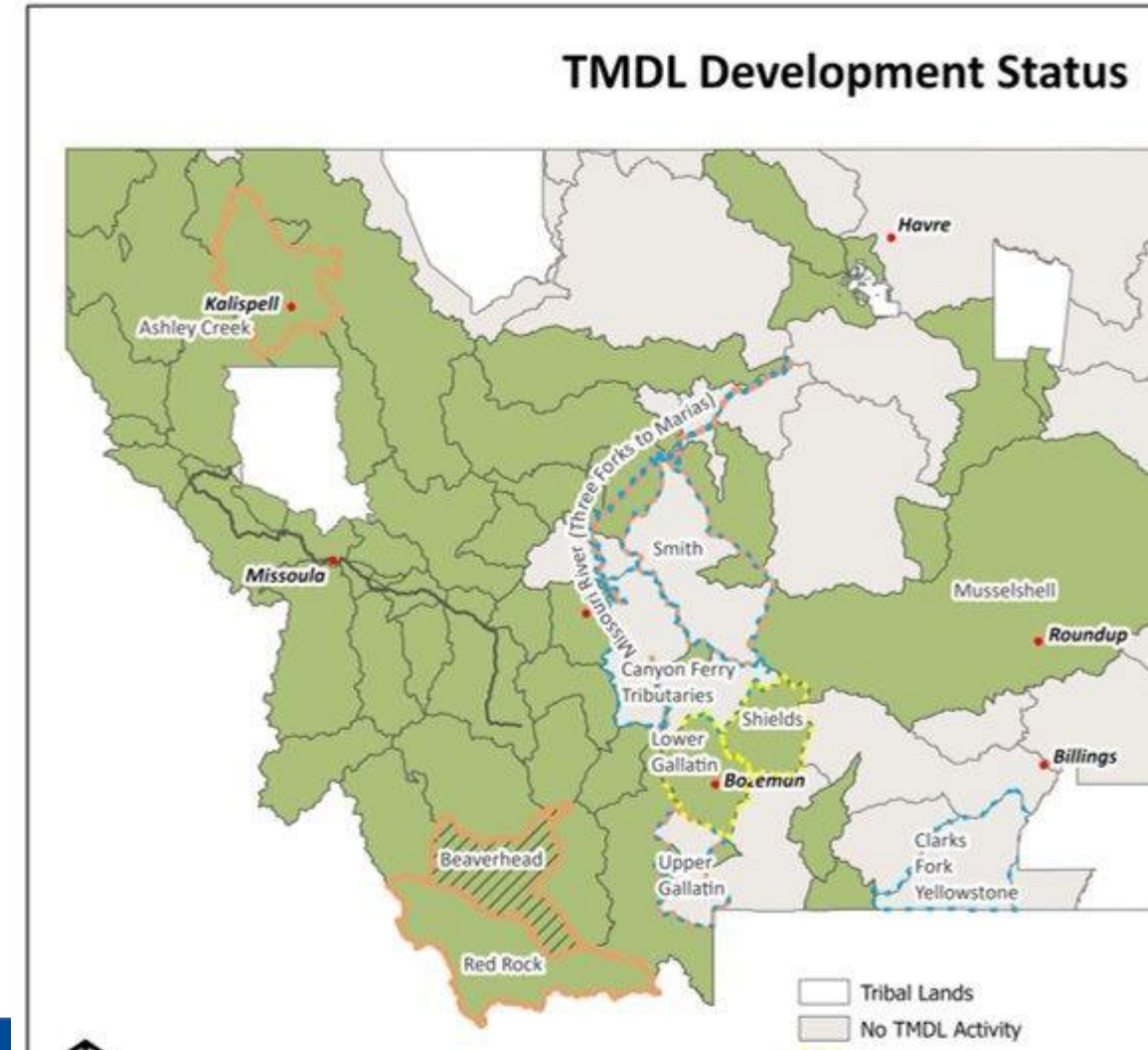
TMDL Commitments to EPA

- Montana must submit TMDL commitments to EPA every two years
- TMDL commitments can be “in development” or “complete”
- “In development” for one 2-year cycle should generally be “complete” the next 2-year cycle
- TMDL commitments are also reflected in the TMDL priority rankings in the Integrated Report (H, M, L)
 - High: Completion anticipated within 2 years
 - Medium: Completion anticipated within 2 – 6 years
 - Low: TMDL development not started or completion beyond 6 years

Current TMDL Commitments

Due to EPA September 30, 2026

- Beaverhead River watershed nutrients (28 TMDLs) - Complete
- Red Rock River watershed nutrients (30 TMDLs) – Complete
- Ashley Creek nutrient and sediment revisions (10 TMDLs revised within the Flathead-Stillwater document) – In Development



Potential TMDL Priorities Shown Dec 2025

Current Commitments (due 9/30/26)

Beaverhead Nutrients

Red Rock Nutrients

Flathead-Stillwater Revision

Emerging Priorities

Missouri-Cascade & Belt
Revision

Gallatin River Excess Algae

Clarks Fork Yellowstone

Clark Fork River VNR
Revision

Unknowns

Needed TMDL Revisions

New Discharge Permits
Triggering TMDL
Development

Future Monitoring Projects

Prioritization Factor		New Discharge Permit	Implementation Considerations	Program Coordination	Resource Value	Impairment Characteristics
New TMDL Development	Clarks Fork Yellowstone		X	X		
	Middle segment Gallatin River		X	X	X	X
	Smith River				X	X
	Big Hole River				X	X
	Lake Koocanusa		X	X	X	
	Flathead Lake Phase II		X		X	
TMDL Revision	Lower Gallatin		X	X		
	Clark Fork VNRP	Potential	X	X	X	
	Lake Helena			X		

Proposed 2028 TMDL Commitments (due to EPA Sept 30, 2028)

- New TMDL Development
 - Clarks Fork Yellowstone watershed (nutrients, metals, sediment, E.coli, oil/gas) – In Development
- TMDL Revisions
 - Lower Gallatin nutrients – In Development
 - Clark Fork River Voluntary Nutrient Reduction Program (VNRP) - Complete

STAG Input on Proposed TMDL Commitments

Briefings

Nonpoint Source and Wetlands Funding Awards

Hannah Riedl, Nonpoint Source & Wetlands Section Supervisor

Annual Call for Nonpoint Source Pollution Reduction Applications

Potential applicants encouraged to discuss proposals with program staff outside final application phase

Early January:
Call opens

Late February: Draft applications
due, feedback posted

Mid March: Final
applications due

October:
Contracts
issued

- Up to half the available funding (typically \$500,000 of 319 funding) is available for quality projects in Focus Watersheds
- Half the funding, or any unallocated to Focus Watershed, available for projects, capacity, and education outreach elsewhere in state
- Typically: require 40% non-federal match.
Years with State funding available: require 10% non-federal match.
- Additional funding (Climate Pollution Reduction and Gulf of America Grants) is secured for projects that help reduce the prevalence of downstream harmful algal blooms.

Nonpoint Source and Wetlands Funding Awards

- 2025:
 - \$1,814,125 (22 projects) requested, \$1,444,525 (15 projects) awarded
 - \$587,439 awarded to the Lower Gallatin and Shields Focus Watersheds
- 2026:
 - \$2,905,584 (32 projects) requested, \$1,839,664 (20 projects) awarded
 - \$681,070 awarded to the Shields Focus Watershed
- Visit deq.mt.gov/water/programs/nonpoint for more information

TMDL Implementation Evaluations Update

Christina Staten, TMDL Section Supervisor

What is a TIE?

- TMDL Implementation Evaluation (TIE)
- Evaluation of progress in restoring WQ since the TMDL was developed
- TIE conclusions
 - a. Implementation of new practices is necessary,
 - b. All practices in place; more time is needed,
 - c. TMDL revisions are necessary



Kennedy Creek Watershed TMDL Implementation Evaluation



March 2023

Greg Gianforte, Governor
Christopher Dorrington, Director DEQ



Goals of a TIE

- Constructive feedback for stakeholders,
- Suggest additional monitoring, if needed,
- Identify TMDL document updates, if applicable,
- Document conditions where an updated beneficial use assessment may be needed
- Note: TIEs $\neq$ impairment assessment



TIEs In Development

Goal for Stakeholder Comment This Year:

- Big Hole watershed (nutrients, metals, sediment, temperature)
- Blackfoot Headwaters (metals, sediment)
- Middle Blackfoot – Nevada Creek (nutrients, metals, sediment, temp)
- Big Sandy and Sage creeks (salinity)

Out for Comment Next Year

- Bitterroot River (lead only)
- Elk Creek (sediment)
- Bobtail Creek (sediment)

TIE Outcomes

Big Hole Watershed

- Recommended reassessment of French Creek sediment
- Recommended reassessment of Elkhorn Creek arsenic and lead

Blackfoot Headwaters

- Recommended reassessment of upper Blackfoot River, Beartrap Creek, Mike Horse Creek for metals

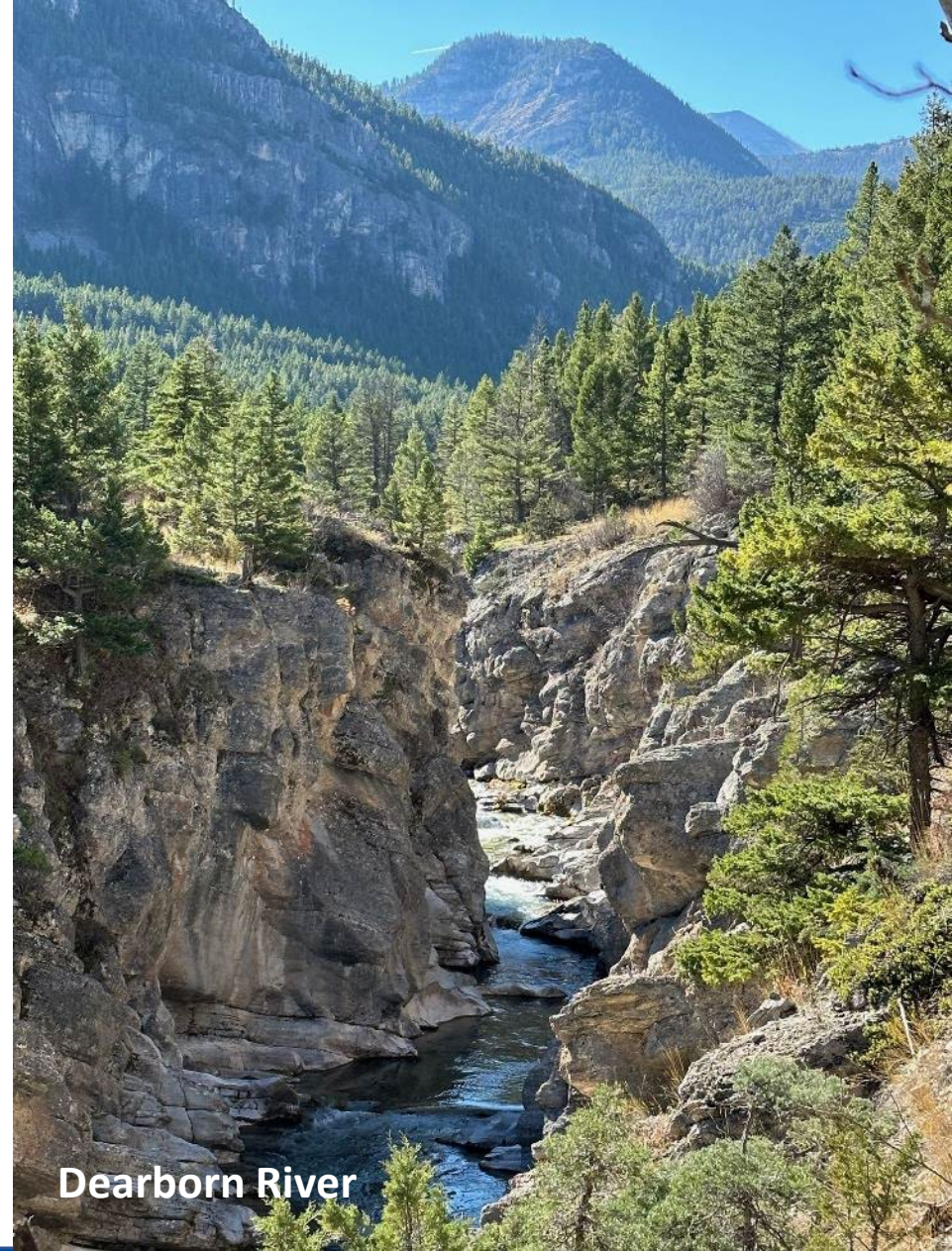
All Others:

- Additional time or additional monitoring needed

Public Comment & Close of Meeting

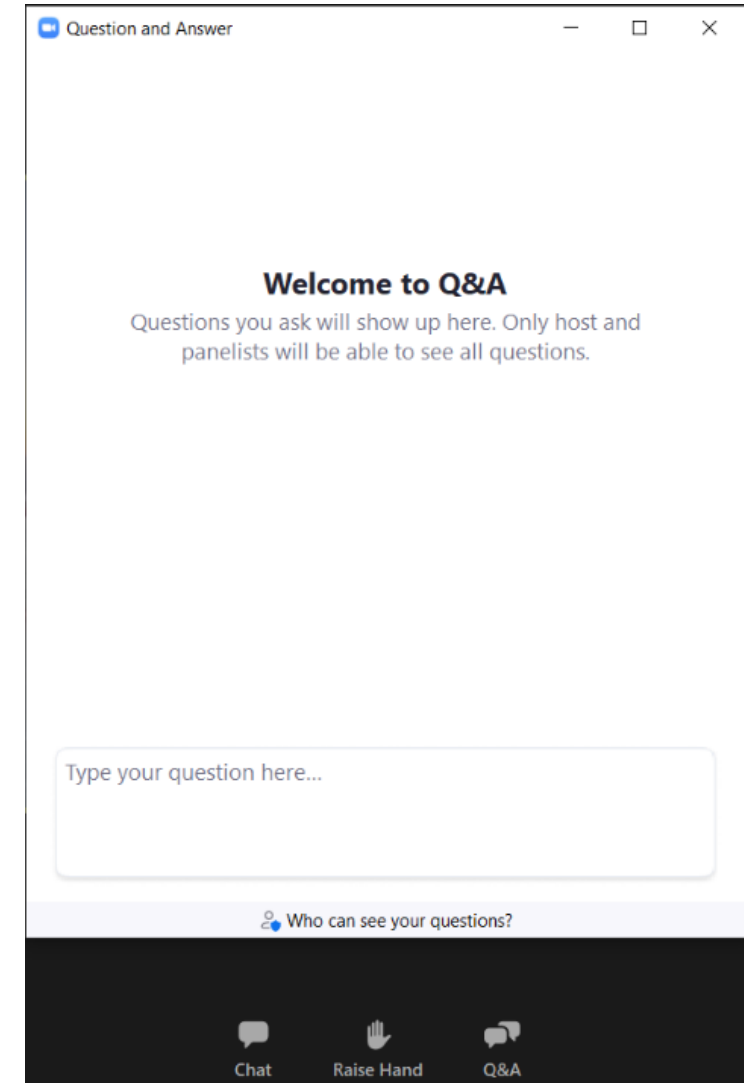
Close of Meeting

- Discussion of Next Meeting Topics & Meeting Date
- Public Comment



Questions / Comments

- Raise hand (*9 if on the phone) or type questions into the Q&A
- DEQ will unmute you if you wish to provide your comment orally
- If calling by phone, press*6 to unmute
- State your name and affiliation before providing your comment



Thanks for Joining Us!

- **Christina Staten**
- *TMDL Section Supervisor*
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- 406.444.2836

DEQ STAG Webpage:

<https://deq.mt.gov/water/Councils>