

STATEWIDE TMDL ADVISORY GROUP (STAG) MEETING SUMMARY

JANUARY 29, 2020

Skype Meeting
1:30 to 3:30 p.m.

Attendance:

STAG Members (name, affiliation, interest group represented)

John Youngberg, Montana Farm Bureau – Farming-Oriented Agriculture (STAG Chair)
Brian Sugden, Weyerhaeuser Company - Forestry Industry
Ryan Leland, City of Helena - Municipalities
Doug Parker, Hydrometrics - Mining
Alden Shallcross, Bureau of Land Management – Federal Land Management Agencies
Jeff Schmalenberg, MT Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation – State Trust Land Management Agencies
Jordan Tollefson, Northwestern Energy – Hydroelectric Industry
Mike Geary, Healing Waters Lodge – Fishing-Related Business

Other Participants & Affiliation

Derf Johnson, Montana Environmental Information Center (MEIC)
Terri Nichols, Montana Watershed Coordination Council
Jon Kenning, DEQ/Bureau Chief – Water Protection Bureau
Galen Steffens, DEQ/Bureau Chief – Water Quality Planning Bureau
Darrin Kron, DEQ/Supervisor – Monitoring and Assessment
Kristy Fortman, DEQ/Supervisor - Watershed Protection Section
Christy Meredith, DEQ/Watershed Protection Section
Christina Staten, DEQ/Watershed Protection Section
Robert Ray, DEQ/Watershed Protection Section
Mark Ockey, DEQ/Watershed Protection Section
Eric Trum, DEQ/Watershed Protection Section
Hannah Riedl, DEQ/Watershed Protection Section
Lou Volpe, DEQ/Watershed Protection Section
Chace Bell, DEQ/Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Section
Katie Makarowski, DEQ/Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Section

John Youngberg, STAG Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:40 p.m. and there was a round of introductions of those in attendance via Skype and in room 111 of the DEQ Metcalf Building in Helena.

WATER QUALITY ASSESSMENT METHODS

Darrin Kron, Supervisor of the Monitoring and Assessment Section of DEQ, and Katie Makarowski of the Monitoring and Assessment Section provided an overview of DEQ's water quality planning process, the goals of the water quality monitoring and assessment program, the impairment listing and beneficial use assessment process, and how this information relates to the STAG's role as defined in state law (Montana Code) (see Attachment A for a copy of their presentation). Katie then provided an overview of Montana's *E. coli* water quality standards and draft assessment method (Attachment A). Chace Bell of the Monitoring Assessment Section provided an overview of Montana's electrical conductivity (EC) and sodium adsorption ratio (SAR) water quality standards for Rosebud Creek, the Tongue, Powder, and Little Powder rivers, and the Tongue River Reservoir, and the draft assessment method for EC and SAR (Attachment A). Darrin closed this presentation with an overview of the state's water quality integrated report and the public comment process for the report and draft assessment methods.

The draft 2020 Water Quality Integrated Report, the draft *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) Assessment Method for State Surface Waters, and the draft Electrical Conductivity (EC) and Sodium Adsorption Ratio (SAR) Assessment Method for Rosebud Creek, Tongue, Powder Rivers, and Tongue River Reservoir will be available for a 60-day public comment period, anticipated to begin in early February. DEQ will begin working on updated assessment methods for sediment, metals, and possibly toxins and PCBs, and intends to have these documents ready for public comment by the time of the 2022 integrated report.

Discussion:

Brian Sugden, Timber Industry representative, asked why impairment by only EC or SAR is required to list a waterbody, but attainment of both EC and SAR water quality standards are required to delist a waterbody. Darrin Kron responded that DEQ will follow-up on this question, as the assessment method is still draft, and a determination on these impairment listing/delisting decision factors is not final.

February 2020 DEQ Response: After an evaluation of the assessment process and of each parameter's impacts to the agriculture beneficial use, both parameters are needed to fully assess agriculture uses, but both parameters are not required to delist an assessment unit for EC or SAR.

Doug Parker, Mining representative, asked how DEQ deals with public comment on waterbody listings and delistings reported for the current assessment cycle in the 2020 Water Quality Integrated Report. Darrin Kron responded that DEQ considers each substantive comment and whether the comment may affect the outcome of the impairment listing decision (i.e., list, keep listed, do not list, or delist). DEQ prioritizes comments that affect the decision and may postpone administrative work related to comments that do not affect the listing decision; postponed work may be addressed in the next assessment cycle/integrated report (in this instance, would be the 2022 assessment cycle and report). However, DEQ will try to address all comments during the current cycle, if resources are available to do so.

John Youngberg, Farming-Oriented Agriculture representative, asked how DEQ reports back to the public on the comments received and DEQ's actions in response to those comments. Darrin Kron responded that the final 2020 Water Quality Integrated Report will contain an appendix that summarizes all comments and DEQ's responses to those comments.

Brian Sugden asked what is DEQ’s mechanism for getting public or stakeholder feedback on the next assessment method updates prior to their public comment period, as waiting until public comment seems to be too late in the process. Darrin Kron responded that ideally DEQ should think about having a public comment period prior to public comment on the draft integrated report, and have done this in the past. However, DEQ did not have the resources to do so for the current assessment methods that will be available for public comment with the draft 2020 integrated report (i.e., *E. coli* and EC/SAR). Brain suggested for the sediment assessment method, if DEQ already knows what types of changes will be made to the method and if there’s an opportunity to involve stakeholders early on, to collect their input prior to conducting assessments with the new method. Darrin Kron responded that if DEQ can do this time-wise, that the agency should consider it for all future assessment method updates and for development of new assessment methods.

MONITORING, TMDL, AND NONPOINT SOURCE PROGRAM UPDATES

See Attachment B for a copy of the presentation containing maps associated with these program updates.

Monitoring & Assessment Projects for 2020

Darrin Kron showed a map of, and discussed, the Monitoring and Assessment Section’s proposed priority areas for monitoring and assessment in 2020 (see summary table below), noting that DEQ is still determining whether it has enough resources to conduct all the projects shown. Projects are chosen based on internal outreach within DEQ to solicit different projects across programs and then decisions are made as a management team, as well as soliciting feedback from the STAG, and other agency partners.

Project Type	Project	Nutrients	Metals	Sediment	Selenium	Turbidity
New TMDL Support Area (previously chosen with STAG consultation)	Yellowstone River mainstem Collected data in 2019; have enough data to conduct assessments on all segments of the river. Contemplating monitoring less sites this year - only at sentinel sites to track trends over time; also looking to make this a collaborative project if local partnerships can be made to collect data, with DEQ funding laboratory analysis.	X	X			
	Missouri River mainstem (Three Forks/headwaters to Marias River) Need to continue monitoring to collect sufficient data to conduct assessments. May expand sites this year for source assessment purposes.	X	X			

Project Type	Project	Nutrients	Metals	Sediment	Selenium	Turbidity
	<p>Smith River Collected data last year and will again this year. Trying to determine detailed causes of elevated nutrient levels and water temperature; there is a potential for nutrient TMDL development for the mainstem</p>	X				
	<p>Middle Fork Judith River Proposed monitoring in response to a request from the USFS and Trout Unlimited for a sediment assessment. USFS and TU have conducted a NEPA analysis and have plans to reduce road crossings. An impairment determination is needed before 319 funding could be used.</p>			X		
Monitoring Threats to Water Quality	<p>Upper Gallatin Coordinating with the Gallatin River Task Force to look at nutrients for two years in response to a large algae bloom. TMDLs have already been completed for this area and DEQ is providing both technical and funding support.</p>	X				
	<p>Lake Koocanusa A partnership with various agencies to track selenium trends; DEQ's Water Quality Standards section is developing updated standards for selenium.</p>	X			X	
Monitoring for Success Stories (Delistings) & Trends	<p>Clark Fork River Ongoing project for over 20 years that is being continued through partnerships</p>	X				
	<p>Various Tributaries in Western Montana Contemplating monitoring for sediment success stories (removals from impaired waters list)</p>			X		
	<p>Nevada Creek Considering monitoring for nutrient trends, in response to three 319 restoration projects</p>	X				
Monitoring in Nonpoint Source Focus Areas	<p>Bitterroot River Watershed May conduct sediment monitoring to find success stories and also monitor the mainstem for nutrient trends</p>	X		X		
	<p>Lower Gallatin River Watershed Proposing nutrient monitoring</p>	X				
Supporting Other Projects	<p>Various Volunteer Monitoring Programs DEQ funds projects across the state that are in support of the Monitoring & Assessment Section's overall monitoring objectives</p>	X	X			

Project Type	Project	Nutrients	Metals	Sediment	Selenium	Turbidity
	Lake Mary Ronan Two years of funding for volunteer monitoring	X				
	Big Horn River DEQ is serving on a technical advisory committee for study of nutrients, selenium, & turbidity	Providing technical support				
	Red Rock Lake FWP's "Save the Graying in Red Rock Lake" aeration project	Loaning monitoring equipment				

TMDL Development Status

Kristy Fortman, Supervisor of the Watershed Protection Section, discussed the status of TMDL development in TMDL priority areas where: TMDL work is in progress, pre-TMDL assessment has been initiated, and TMDL development is planned post 2022 (see table below). All in-progress TMDL work, plus the Yellowstone River, are included as commitments to EPA for completion by the end of 2022.

TMDL Phase	Project	Status	2022 Commitment to EPA
TMDLs in Progress	Sheep Creek Aluminum	Currently out for stakeholder review	X
	Madison Temperature & Sediment	Stakeholder review projected for Spring 2020	X
	Beaverhead Nutrients & Metals	Stakeholder review projected for Spring/Summer 2020	X
	Musselshell Nutrients & <i>E. coli</i>	In data analysis and source assessment phase	X
	Red Rock Nutrients, Metals, <i>E. coli</i> , & Sediment	Source assessment data has been collected, reviewed for quality assurance, and input into database	X
	Tongue River Salinity	Waiting for completed modeling report	X
Pre-TMDL Assessment Initiated	Yellowstone River Nutrients	In monitoring and assessment phase	X
	Smith River Watershed Nutrients	In monitoring and assessment phase	
	Missouri River Nutrients (Headwaters to Marias River)	In monitoring and assessment phase	
TMDL Development Starting Post 2022	Flathead Lake Phase II	Waiting for development of nutrient water quality standards for the lake	
	Otter Creek	Initiated due to a new, proposed coal mine; on hold due to inactivity of mine development	

Nonpoint Source Program Updates

Kristy Fortman showed a map of areas with completed watershed restoration plans (WRPs), noting that updates to the Bitterroot and Lower Clark Fork WRPs were accepted by DEQ in 2019. Additionally, a map of current nonpoint source focus areas was shown, highlighting the Bitterroot River watershed as the current focus area and the Lower Gallatin designated as the next focus area. Eric Trum, of the Watershed Protection Section, discussed the selection criteria for focus watersheds.

Discussion

Doug Parker asked how much of the proposed 2020 monitoring is unrelated to TMDL development and why it is not focused on TMDLs. Darrin Kron responded that approximately 40% of the monitoring is not directly related to TMDL development; however, the priorities are linked to the Section's new 20-year strategic plan and program objectives (see summary of the January 2019 STAG meeting). Some of the monitoring priorities are to find success stories of waterbodies that can be delisted due to restoration activities in the watershed, and others are to support monitoring requests made by other agencies and organizations. DEQ is working to show that partnerships with local organizations, to get nonpoint source 319 funding in place in these areas to fund restoration projects, is leading to successes of removing waterbodies from the impaired waters list.

Doug Parker commented that it seems like a major shift in policy to choose focus watersheds and prioritize a portion of 319 funding for the focus watershed, and asked if stakeholders were involved in this policy decision. Kristy Fortman responded that the draft 20-year strategic plans for monitoring and assessment, TMDL development, and nonpoint source priorities were released for public comment in 2019 and DEQ also held meetings with agency and partner organizations to solicit feedback on the plans. Eric Trum noted that 319 funding requests doubled in 2019, largely in part to having initiated a focus watershed in the Bitterroot, as nearly half of the requests originated from the Bitterroot River watershed alone.

DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE JOINT STAG AND WPCAC MEETINGS

The possibility of joint meetings with the Water Pollution Control Advisory Council (WPCAC) was discussed. Kristy Fortman provided an overview of the differing roles of both STAG and WPCAC and requested thoughts from the group. It was decided that the STAG would like to receive the agendas for the WPCAC meetings to determine if they are interested in attending; however, the STAG would not like to move forward with joint meetings at this time.

Discussion

Doug Parker asked if there is a benefit to DEQ to have joint meetings of the two groups. Jon Kenning, Bureau Chief of DEQ's Water Protection Bureau, and Kristy Fortman responded that the benefit would be for each group to be informed of what the other does and is discussing. Jon Kenning noted that one topic WPCAC regularly addresses is discharge permits, and discharges permits are a component of some TMDLs via wasteload allocations.

John Youngberg stated that he wasn't sure he would be interested in attending WPCAC meetings, but at a minimum the two groups should share meeting agendas. Jordan Tollefson, Hydroelectric Industry representative, stated that he sees no disadvantage of having shared agendas, but thinks it would be too much to have concurrent meetings. Jordan said he isn't sure how much overlap there would be between the two groups and isn't sure he would participate in the WPCAC meetings.

PLANNING FOR NEXT STAG MEETING

John Youngberg stated he would like the next meeting to be in person and suggested a Doodle Poll be sent out to find a date and time in April.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

The meeting was closed at 3:30 p.m.

ATTACHMENT A: ASSESSMENT METHODS PRESENTATION

**ATTACHMENT B: MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT, TMDL, AND
NONPOINT SOURCE PROGRAM UPDATES PRESENTATION**