

**Tongue River Watershed Meeting
March 02, 2017
Ranchester Town Hall, Council Chambers
Meeting Minutes**

Present:

Emerson Scott, SCCD
Bill Bensel
Greg Benzel

Peter Clark
Mark Wallace
Rick Pallister

Travis Cundy
Carrie Rogaczewski, SCCD

Meeting Opening and Introductions

Emerson Scott called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm and introductions were made. Emerson reminded everyone about the advisory nature of the group. Formal positions can only be made after discussion and approval by the SCCD Board of Supervisors.

Tongue River 2016 Monitoring

Carrie discussed preliminary results for the 2016 monitoring. All pH and dissolved oxygen samples were within water quality standards; though some dissolved oxygen samples were below recommended levels for water column samples. Conductivity generally increased from upstream to downstream and was typically higher in adjacent tributaries. Turbidity varied widely within the watershed and even within individual sample sites.

Bacteria geometric means (handouts) were calculated for three 60 day periods: one for samples collected in May-July, one for sample collected from June-August, and one for samples collected from July-September. Samples used to calculate the June-August mean were also used in either the May-July mean calculation or the July-September mean calculation. For 2016, all tributary stations exceeded water quality standards in the May-July period and all but Wolf Creek exceeded the standards in the July-September period. Tributary stations generally had higher bacteria concentrations than adjacent mainstem sites, except for Wolf Creek in the July-September period.

On mainstem stations, bacteria decreased from 2013 to 2016 at all stations except TR09 during the May-July sample period. However, increases were observed during the July-September sample period at all mainstem stations except TR09, which had minimal change. Tributary stations were more variable.

Bacteria Load Reduction Needs/Requirements

The Progress Register (handout) was developed in the early 2000's as a way to document projects within the watershed that might not result in short-term changes in water quality. The projects that are on the Progress Registers are primarily those done through the SCCD office and do not reflect other activities/projects completed by other organizations or individuals. Since 2001, 45 projects have been completed within the watershed that include corral relocations, septic replacements, stockwater and fencing installations, diversion replacements, stream stabilization, and willow planting sites. Willow planting is currently offered by SCCD as a free service to requesting landowners. Overall, on all watersheds, project requests are down. It is unclear whether that is because all of the "easy" projects are done, current economic conditions, or lack of awareness on issues/programs. SCCD conducted a Social Indicators Survey process on the Goose Creek watershed with the intention of conducting a similar effort on the Tongue River and Prairie Dog Creek watersheds. However, due to the low response and high expense, SCCD is not inclined to pursue it, unless the stakeholders from those watersheds have a strong desire to do so. Despite the low response, especially among larger landowners, there was some

useful information. Generally, respondents were aware of watershed concerns and potential sources. However, there was less knowledge about practices to improve water quality and assistance programs.

The group discussed targeted mailings or direct conversations with landowners that could include an informational DVD. A good DVD was distributed around Missoula that discussed irrigation run-off. The group agreed that there are likely still potential septic system projects and discussed providing information on issues and programs through realtors.

SCCD has continued to use collected water quality information to evaluate the amount of bacteria reductions needed to meet water quality standards (handout). The load reduction category for each subwatershed is determined using the most recent water quality information. In addition to providing a visual of general changes in bacteria reduction requirements, the reduction category of the appropriate subwatershed is one of several ranking criteria SCCD uses when making project funding determinations. As of 2016, most subwatersheds are in the Low to Medium reduction categories.

There was discussion as to how development patterns may affect reduction requirements. It would be interesting to see whether there was any connection between the intensity of recent developments and the reduction required. It might be possible to do with a map overlay.

Plan Progress Review and Update

The group reviewed the completed and upcoming activities (handout). It's important to note that the completion of projects depends on whether there are requests for assistance. There are no new/specific upcoming activities for 2017. SCCD will continue to provide information through newsletters, demonstrations, presentations, and other activities. Previously, there had been discussion about installing Pet Waste stations at Kleenburn and in Tongue River Canyon. Carrie hopes to follow-up on those this spring. The Town of Ranchester has some, but could use some more in the Connor Battlefield. Peter will send Carrie the information about what they have. Carrie is also working with the Towns and County about signs, similar to what was done in the Goose Creek Watershed. SCCD is working with other partners to pursue clean-up options for the former Acme Power Plant. There are still several details to be considered before beginning a formal community outreach effort.

Tongue River TMDL Update

Sol Brich, WDEQ TMDL Coordinator, had planned to make the meeting, but was unable because of the weather. He expects to have a draft of the TMDL document out to the Technical Advisory Committee for their comments soon.

Other Business

Carrie distributed information from Weed and Pest on invasive grasses. Two new invasive grasses have recently been identified in Sheridan County: Ventenata and Medusahead. The Weed and Pest and UW Extension have efforts underway to understand the distribution and control of these species.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for February/March 2018.

Submitted by Carrie Rogaczewski, District Manager