

**Tongue River Watershed Meeting Minutes
Ranchester Town Hall, Council Chambers
March 08, 2018**

Present:

Emerson Scott, SCCD
Carl Beavers
Greg Benzel

Travis Cundy
Drew King
Mike Nickel

Mark Wallace
Carrie Rogaczewski, SCCD
Jackie Carbert, SCCD

Meeting Opening and Introductions

Emerson Scott called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm and introductions were made.

Monitoring and Load Reduction Updates

2016 Monitoring Results/Report: Carrie reviewed the results for the 2016 monitoring season. Bacteria exceedances were observed as expected, with higher concentrations occurring at tributary sites and sites located lower in the watershed. Most of the other parameters reported values within the standards. As always, water quality parameters, bacteria in particular, are inherently variable and fluctuate as a result of changes in temperature, precipitation, run-off amounts, etc.

Priority Areas: SCCD has continued to use collected water quality information to evaluate the amount of bacteria reductions needed to meet water quality standards. 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. Most subwatersheds remain in the Low to Medium reduction categories. Priority areas continue to be sites located higher in the watershed; reductions upstream will lead to further reductions downstream.

Project Updates

Progress Register: The Progress Register 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. Projects that have been completed within the watershed include corral relocations, septic replacements, stockwater and fencing installations, diversion replacements, stream stabilization, and willow plantings. Willow planting is currently offered by SCCD as a free service to requesting landowners. Overall, on all watersheds, project requests continue to be 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.

Completed Projects: Four pet waste stations were installed in 2017; one at the Kleenburn Recreation Area, two at Connor Battlefield, and one in Tongue River Canyon. Four additional pet waste station installations in Ranchester/along Five Mile Creek are planned in 2018. In 2017, only one project was completed within the Tongue River watershed; a stockwater and fencing project on Wolf Creek. Two streambank requests and one diversion in and above the town of Dayton and in Tongue River Canyon are pending final designs and approval for construction. It is hoped that construction will start this spring to ensure deadlines are being met and funding opportunities are not lost.

Tongue River TMDL Update

The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ) will continue work on the Tongue River *E. Coli* TMDL once the 2018 Integrated Report has been approved by the EPA. Technical advisory committee (TAC) meetings will resume as usual to inform stakeholders of progress and to allow opportunities for feedback. Sol Brich, WDEQ TMDL Coordinator, hopes to have the TMDL completed by late 2018 or early 2019.

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality intends to complete a TMDL for electrical conductivity (salinity) on portions of the Tongue River watershed located within Montana in 2018. WDEQ meets with the Montana DEQ regularly to keep up to date with their project. Because SCCD has several years of conductivity data, they may be asked to participate on some level.

Plan Progress Review and Update

Completed Action Items: SCCD continues to maintain an active steering committee, complete interim water quality monitoring, update progress registers, and engage with other agencies and community organizations. Reducing bacteria contributions through septic system, livestock operation and bank/channel improvements remains as an ongoing action item. SCCD has been distributing annual watershed newsletters, as well as information regarding the watersheds on general newsletters when relevant. Water quality education continues to be implemented where possible, like Third Thursday and Ag Week activities.

Targeted and Actual Reductions: Actual reductions were variable throughout the watershed. In the Upper Tongue, the targeted reduction was surpassed in Smith Creek, but not met in Little Tongue. However, an average among the creeks in the Upper Tongue would result in an average quite close to the targeted reduction. A similar situation was seen for the other portions of the watershed.

Plan Update: Carrie explained the options for updating the Tongue River watershed plan; re-do the entire watershed plan (all sections) or prepare an update addendum. The addendum would include a summary introduction, description of the watershed and concerns, methodologies used in load estimates and prioritization, and updated load estimates, reduction requirements, priorities and action items. The committee agreed that an update would be sufficient. As a result, Carrie explained the portions of the addendum that would need updated and would require input from the committee.

The first section discussed was the priority rankings by site segments. In 2012, the committee had decided to list higher portions up the watershed as high priorities, assuming reducing concentrations upstream would reduce concentrations downstream. Other assigned priorities were based on the average required percent reduction for each sample site. Generally, sites with lower required reductions were given lower priority, and vice versa. The committee decided to keep the priorities as assigned in 2012.

The next section included a table for each subwatershed and the corresponding critical condition, priority ranking, and pollutant sources. The pollutant sources and ranking of those sources were discussed by the group. Overall, domestic animals and livestock and septic systems were of greatest concern to the group and were seen as high priority pollutant sources. The group felt that domestic animals and livestock should no longer be separated into small and large acre designations. Domestic animals/livestock and septic systems were all updated to high rankings and were added to all subwatersheds if not already listed. Smaller tributaries were prioritized over mainstems.

Targeted reductions were reviewed, and overall consensus was to carry over the targeted reductions from 2013-2017 to 2018-2022. Targeted reductions would remain as 20% for the Upper Tongue, 25% for Five Mile/Columbus, 15% for Wolf, and 10% for the Lower Tongue. Again, stemming from the idea that higher reductions upstream will benefit the downstream portions, therefore lessening the necessity of higher reductions downstream. The group agreed that if the Tongue River TMDL recommends drastically different reductions, the group may re-convene at a later date to alter the targeted reduction values.

The final topic for discussion on the Tongue River watershed plan update was the action items. Items under Objective 1 were kept as is, as the group felt the District was adequately meeting the objectives listed: maintaining an active steering committee, conducting interim water quality monitoring, maintaining progress registers, following up on completed projects, and coordinating with other agencies and groups.

Objective 2 focuses on reducing bacteria contributions via septic system improvements, corral relocations and off-channel stockwater and fencing. The group felt that these action items were appropriate given the conditions but suggested emphasizing more riparian protection/buffers. Objective 3 focuses more on other water quality parameters and improving these through replacing/installing irrigation structures and stabilizing stream banks and channels. The committee recognized that these action items are on-going and occur only at the request of landowners; they did not recommend any changes for objective 3 at this time.

The final objective relates to increasing participation in voluntary programs through education and outreach strategies. Overall, the committee felt that this area needed improvement. Some discussion was had on obtaining a list of landowners who have permitted septic systems and reaching out to those who do not, in hopes of finding landowners whose systems may be impacting water quality and could use improvement. Other suggestions were to continue the "Pay It Downstream" idea and to keep encouraging past participants to spread the word on their successes within the programs. Social media was a popular recommendation; not only posting on our own Facebook and website, but to post events, informational/educational activities, and testimonials from past project participants to other Facebook pages, like Sheridan Upcycle and TR Happenings. The group also felt that the SCCD should participate in more events local to the Tongue River watershed, like Dayton Days, where the District could have a booth with education and outreach activities.

Other Business

Carrie distributed a project summary on the Acme Power Plant site. Carrie and Emerson explained the next steps for the site. Initial clean-up of some items will begin this summer and will be completed by a contractor through the WDEQ Voluntary Remediation Program. The clean-up will largely focus on the removal and disposal of the drums, removal of some of the most accessible asbestos and PCB containing materials found outside of the building, and further identification of hazards at the site. Additional assessments are being pursued through EPA and will take place following the initial clean-up, pending grant approval.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for February/March 2019.

Submitted by Jackie A. Carbert, Program Assistant.