

**Tongue River Watershed Meeting Minutes
Ranchester Town Hall, Council Chambers
February 12, 2019**

Emerson Scott, SCCD
Loren Ruttinger, WWC
Chris Vrba, SCLT

Jeff Baron, Town of Ranchester
Mark Wallace, Landowner
Karl Kukuchka, Landowner
Pat Blair, Sheridan Media

Andrew Cassiday, NRCS
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.

2018 Tongue River Watershed Plan Update

Carrie presented the following changes for the Tongue River Watershed Plan. Changes were made based on input and recommendations from last year's watershed meeting. The steering committee decided to update the plan where needed rather than updating the entire document.

Subwatershed Changes: Previously, some tributaries were included within larger subwatersheds. These were separated into their own subwatersheds for the purpose of load calculations. The Upper Tongue River subwatershed was split into Upper Tongue River, Smith Creek and Little Tongue River subwatersheds. The Five Mile/Columbus Creek subwatershed was split into Columbus Creek, Middle Tongue River, and Five Mile Creek subwatersheds. Wolf Creek and Lower Tongue River were already their own subwatersheds, and the Expanded Tongue River, Lower Goose Creek and Lower Prairie Dog Creek subwatersheds were added.

Load Reduction and Priority Updates: The lower segments of the Tongue River watershed retained a lower priority for load reductions based on the assumption that improvements in the upper portion of the watershed should reduce reductions needed in the lower portions. Most of the tributaries within the watershed were given a high priority as well. Prairie Dog Creek and Goose Creek subwatersheds were given a lower priority because of existing on-going efforts.

Pollutant Source and Priority Rankings: Domestic animals, including livestock, and septic systems were agreed upon by the committee to have a high ranking, particularly in the upper subwatersheds (Upper Tongue, Smith, Little Tongue, Middle Tongue, Columbus and Five Mile). Several pollutant sources were grouped together in order to make the table more concise; and size designations were removed (i.e. small acreage operations, large acreage operations, etc.)

Actual and Targeted Reductions: Actual and targeted reductions were updated for each subwatershed based on updated load reduction estimates.

Recommended Action Items: Providing assistance to improve vegetative cover in upland areas and riparian corridors and providing septic system program information with mailings through the County and/or realtors and title companies were added as recommended action items.

The committee agreed that the above changes be made to the watershed plan. Carrie asked that the committee email her with any other comments and/or concerns on the plan within the next two weeks. Some discussion was had on the status of projects within the watershed; Carrie explained that, like last year, project requests are down in all watersheds. Carrie thought that it might be worthwhile to begin

including NRCS projects as an action item and/or on progress registers. Jeff Baron offered to include information on SCCD cost-share programs in the Tongue River newsletter. Karl Kukuchka inquired on whether program requirements had eased up at all, particularly, the requirement that a system have been installed prior to 1973. Committee members felt that there may be failing or inadequate systems that were installed after 1973, especially considering Sheridan County did not start permitting septic systems until 1978. Carrie explained that while occasionally some funding comes in that can be used for systems that were installed post-1973, most of the funding for septic system improvements or replacements comes from 319 funds, which require the system be installed prior to 1973.

Plan Progress and Project Updates

Load Reduction Priorities: 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. The load reduction maps and data remain the same as in 2016, when they were last updated. The maps and priorities will be updated following monitoring of the Tongue River watershed in 2019. Carrie reminded the committee that all subwatersheds are within the low-medium load reduction category, apart from Fivemile Creek, which has a high reduction category, and the Upper Tongue River, which does not require a reduction.

Progress Registers: The Progress Register was developed in the early 2000's 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. The progress register also remains mostly unchanged, apart from the addition of a diversion replacement and bank stabilization project on the Tongue River above the Town of Dayton. Another stabilization project is planned for 2019 in and adjacent to Dayton and will include 16 landowners. Overall, there have been 48 improvement projects completed in the watershed since 2001; including 8 livestock facility projects, 4 riparian fencing/stockwater projects, 10 septic system replacements, 7 diversion replacements, 9 stream stabilization projects, 8 pet waste stations and 10 willow planting sites. Carrie reminded the committee that willow plantings are currently offered as a free service to landowners and that interested landowners should contact the District soon, as plantings need to be done in the spring before willows break dormancy.

Completed Activities/Milestones: Since the last meeting, additional completed activities include distribution of the annual watershed newsletter in the spring and fall, updates to the Ranchester and Dayton Town Councils, a presentation for the Ranchester-Dayton rotary club, a couple of third Thursday displays/activities on water quality and information in the library during the month of May.

2019 Proposed Monitoring

Jackie presented the following information to the steering committee on the upcoming monitoring season on the Tongue River Watershed.

Sample Sites: Sample sites will be the same as in 2016, pending consent from landowners for access and review by the Board. This will include 13 sites in total; six mainstem sites and seven tributary sites. There will be at least one site in each subwatershed.

Parameters: Parameters will also be the same as in past monitoring years, again pending review by the Board, and will include pH, instantaneous and continuous water temperature, conductivity, dissolved oxygen, discharge, bacteria, turbidity, and macroinvertebrate sampling and habitat assessments.

Schedule/Sample Periods: Jackie explained the past sampling schedule, in which the District collects ten samples between May and September, and calculates an early, mid, and late season geometric mean for bacteria based on the collected data. WDEQ requires that a geometric mean be calculated from at least 5 samples collected within a 60-day period. This means that the District could just complete 5 sampling events within a 60-day period and essentially only have a mid-season geometric mean. In the interest of saving money and personnel time, Jackie and Carrie asked for the committee's thoughts on only monitoring during the mid-season. Jackie also pointed out that often sample collection can be difficult in the early season when flows are high, and that most often discharge data has been discarded during this time. The committee asked whether the data would still be comparable to past year's if the District was to change to mid-season mean only. Carrie explained that mid-season data would still be comparable to past data, which has been collected during the mid-season as well. After no other comments or concerns were heard from the committee, Carrie asked that they email her with any other concerns or comments within the next two weeks. Final decisions related to monitoring schedule will be determined by the SCCD Board.

WDEQ Tongue River TMDL Update

The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ) hopes to have the Tongue River TMDL completed by the end of this calendar year. Technical advisory committee (TAC) meetings should resume as usual to inform stakeholders of progress and to allow opportunities for feedback.

Other Business

Chris Vrba with the Sheridan Community Land Trust offered to help the District advertise their programs in any way that he could. Carrie informed the committee that the District will be holding a streamside stewardship workshop in May, will be helping with a cover crops workshop/tour that will be on June 24th, and that the Northeast Wyoming Invasive Grasses Working Group (NEWIGWG) will also be holding a field tour on June 19th.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:50 p.m. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for February 2020.

Submitted by Jackie A. Carbert, Program Assistant.