

**DRAFT W2ASACT MEETING NOTES**

Meeting on September 12, 2017, 9:30 am to 12 pm

Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, 1539 11<sup>th</sup> Ave, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor conf. room 225**Members and participants present:**

|                 |                  |                |                 |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Mark Smith      | DEQ/ENG/DRF      | Jenna Stamper  | DEQ             |
| Mike Abrahamson | DEQ/ENG/WRF      | Sarah Robbin   | Rates           |
| Anna Miller     | DNRC/FDB         | Julie Flynn    | MBOI            |
| Lindsay Volpe   | DNRC/RDB         | Elisa Prescott | Great West Eng. |
| Denise Cook     | DNRC/RDB         | Erinn Zindt    | MAP             |
| Tom Erskine     | Interstate Eng.  | Tim Uribe      | KLJ Eng.        |
| Bryant Higgs    | Avd Pump & Equip | Brad Catron    | DNRC/RDB        |
| Rick Duncan     | DNRC/RDB         |                |                 |

**Via Conf. Phone:**

None

**Call to Order, Sign-in Sheet, Agenda Changes**

Anna Miller, Acting Chair, called the scheduled meeting of the Water, Wastewater and Solid Waste Action Coordinating Team (W2ASACT) to order at 9:32am, on Tuesday, September 12, 2017. The sign-in sheet was routed and the meeting agenda and draft minutes from the June 13 meeting were distributed. Those present briefly introduced themselves. Anna asked if there were any revisions to the minutes from the June 13, 2017. Tom Erskine made a motion to accept the minutes and Denise Cook a second and the minutes were approved and adopted.

**Guest Speaker:****Carolyn Sime, Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program Manager**

Carolyn began by saying that Sage Grouse are affected by infrastructure planning. Montana and Wyoming are the sage grouse strongholds as far as habitat and breeding and they are tied to the sage brush plant. Carolyn gave an overview from a Power Point presentation of the Sage Grouse Habitat Program, which includes a staff of 3, housed by the Conservation and Resource Development Division at DNRC. Therese Hartman and Graham Neale, both Environmental Science Specialists, work with Carolyn on the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT). In 2005 Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) started with the first management plan for sage grouse. In 2010 the US Fish and Wildlife Service reported that listing the sage grouse on the Endangered Species List (ESA) was not warranted.

All the western states were seeking protection action to protect sage grouse habitat. In 2015 and Executive Order issued by Governor Bullock provided the basis for protecting the sage grouse and establishing the MSGOT. At that time, FWP said the listing the sage grouse on the ESA was not warranted. In the time since being formed, the MSGOT has made much progress, but there are still concerns about habitat loss, invasive species and fragmentation as a result of development and oil & gas drilling and other factors affecting habitat. Another concern is the lack of regulatory mechanisms to address threats to the bird.

Carolyn explained that the sage grouse breeding grounds, known as leks, are used over and over, which is why habitat protection is key. Carolyn said that most leks are on private land. Sage Grouse do not have a gizzard and are often seen along roadsides and in ditches feeding on ants and grasshopper. Grazing is not an issue with habitat. Development, including infrastructure projects can affect sage grouse breeding and habitat.

Carolyn gave a tour of <https://sagegrouse.mt.gov> starting with the Program Information section where you can find Resources like the Executive Orders, the Montana Greater Sage Grouse Stewardship Act and links to other agencies involved in sage grouse habitat protection. Carolyn suggested joining the mailing list, which will enable you to receive alerts on meetings, etc. She said the team is also available to conduct webinars.

Montana's Sage Grouse Habitat Program mirrors that in Wyoming. So the oversight team was established. The program designated key habitat areas. Carolyn referenced the Quick Start Guide on the website, which goes through a program overview and the possible steps to approve a project including consultation and mitigation.

Carolyn covered the goals of the Executive Order and what activities are exempted from permits. Inside incorporated areas (cities and towns) there is no permit required. Carolyn said the permitting process usually takes seven to ten days upon receipt of application. She showed us where to find project information on the website. From there you can view a map, zoom in and print (screen shot or snippy) and include that map with your application. The program uses epass to apply, so you will need to use that account or create one in order to apply for a permit. Once you have your application done, you can either submit or save and close it.

MSGOT coordinates with other agencies including BLM, USFS, NRCS, BOG and other state agencies. For example, on a fiber optic cable project, it was necessary to time the project around the breeding time frame of the sage grouse in that area. This involved consultation, meetings and much gathering of information as well as allowing sufficient time ahead of the project. Protecting the sage grouse ecosystem helps other species as well. Some of the guiding principles include work collaboration, keeping impacts to a minimum, not interrupting working landscapes, respecting property and being proactive. She also said that Montana FWP does monitoring of sage grouse. MSGOT updates their map from FWP's website.

Carolyn encouraged all to check out <https://sagegrouse.mt.gov>. (Since this meeting, a link has been placed on the WASACT website to the Sage Grouse and Infrastructure Planning Presentation. It is under Technical Assistance Providers. Here is a link to the pdf: [http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/cardd/wasact/SG\\_Sime\\_WASACT\\_91217.pdf](http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/cardd/wasact/SG_Sime_WASACT_91217.pdf).) If you have questions, please contact Carolyn, Graham or Therese.

## **Program Updates**

Anna Miller - Anna began by informing us that DNRC's fire fund has been depleted. The Governor's office is looking to state agencies to make cuts. This will mean that vacancies may not be filled right away, travel may be limited and some equipment/vehicle purchases may be put on hold. Anna noted that SB 261 had some triggers and there may be a special legislative session. Funding agreements were held until September 25<sup>th</sup> because of budget consideration. Now agreements are being sent out, but we need to watch revenues to see that they can fund the programs.

Mark Smith and Mike Abrahamson with DEQ – Their office is busy and hectic as they are cruising through construction season. They are looking into the EPA budget reductions which may affect the SRF program. We are experiencing the same issues as DNRC and deciding

where to make cuts. Overall, DEQ should be okay as far as the water side of things. Mike Abrahamson added that most of the cuts will be General Funded programs.

Julie Flynn said that BOI has no General Funding. The tourism and Economic Development may be cut and there may be a reduction in services. Julie said her office is busy. She reported the interest rate is at 2.5%.

Lindsay Volpe – Lindsay began by introducing Brad Catron, CARDD's new Renewable Resource Program Specialist. Brad is currently helping by taking some of the work left by now retired Bob Fischer. There were 52 applications received for the RRG program. The contracts are on hold. We need to get the info from TSEP, but they are affected by the cutbacks. Lindsay reminded all to let her know about your upcoming projects.

Anna added that we are waiting to see the quarterly revenue received and more triggers may come into play from SB 261.

Elisa Prescott with Great West Engineering had no updates.

Sarah Robbin with RATES said her office has been busy helping towns realize funding issues. She said they may have to re-do their rate restructure.

Erin Zindt – They are getting questions on projects from communities. They don't want to raise rates. Users do not want to connect to a community system. Instead they want to do individual well and septic systems. Erin said we need more ways to help communities. Water and Sewer districts have no teeth, legally, to raise rates. Erin said that residences surrounded by a subdivision need help to connect to a system. Anna suggested the Community Block Grant Fund may help with that issue. Anna offered to have a meeting on that issue.

Bryant Higgs with Advanced Pump & Equipment said he was there to listen.

Tim Uribe with KLJ Engineering reported that planning grants are in cue.

Tom Erskine is waiting on the go-ahead on projects.

#### Rick Duncan - Regional Water

Fort Peck Tribes/Dry Prairie - They are doing improvements to remove fine sediment from the raw water before it enters the regional plant. The plan is to also rehabilitate all 8 filters - 4 this year and 4 the next year. There are nets (chemical) which have formed inside the filters due to polymers used in the treatment processes. Recent use of a different type of polymer has resulted in improved operation. Wolf Point and Poplar are now on the regional system. By year end 2018 they hope to serve up to 18,000 users between on and off reservation customers.

Dry Prairie -- Pipeline installation on the Valley County Area "B" project outside of Glasgow is done, the Authority is scheduled to achieve final completion on the segment this autumn. Contracts for new booster pump stations at Nashua and St. Marie and a water storage facility at St. Marie were in place earlier in the summer, and work is continuing on those structures.

Rocky Boys Reservation/North Central – The tribe has asked for \$54 million in federal funds to finish the first phase of the water treatment plant construction project.

North Central - Shelby to Cut Bank project components are substantially complete and the Authority intends to reach final completion this fall. Rick said they are also looking to get water

north to Oilmont CWD and Nine Mile CWD from the Shelby wellfield interim source. Work on that segment will commence in 2018.

Dry Redwater – The Authority’s East Yellowstone main extension recently achieved substantial completion. The next project there will be to provide water to West Sidney Circle subdivision area. Anna added that they need to be organized to avoid construction of buildings over water lines. Dry Redwater and Central Montana RWA are under the same legislative constraints, and DNRC continues to ask for assurances that project-related expenses will be considered as eligible for match for Federal funding when the two systems receive Congressional authorization.

Central Montana RWA would like to have phase 1 of the project, to bring water from the Ubet wellfield to the town of Harlowton, shovel-ready upon Congressional approval. Construction grant funds from DNRC are currently paying for preliminary environmental studies and engineering, surveying, and related work.

### **Committee Updates**

Workshops – Erin Zindt asked for feedback on the newly designed WASACT brochure, which is on the web site so it can be printed out as needed. One suggestion was to drop the background image so the text is easier to read. Another comment was to have the brochure instead of doing the fall workshop. Anna added that having that personal contact with communities and firms is important to facilitate relationships and share information. She said we can check on the cost to print the brochures.

Erin said we need to check with Rural Water as they need to decide whether or not to hold workshops. Sarah offered to set up a venue to facilitate.

### Uniform Application and Standard Documents

Lindsay Volpe reported that on October 1<sup>st</sup>, the application will be available on the WASACT web site. Rick asked that as far as Bob Fischer’s role, can we wait until January when the chairmanship shifts? Mark Smith said he will visit with Marc Golz.

### Internet Website

Lindsay Volpe had no updates to report. She said there is a link on the web site to EPA’s water infrastructure and you can find technical resources. Erin added that the WASACT is a better resource than the EPA’s site.

### **Congressional Update –**

Anna said that Jennifer Madgic is leaving Senator Tester’s office. Steve did get a replacement for Conner in the Bozeman office. Erin added that she thinks RD currently has 9 openings.

### End of Updates

Next meeting was set for Tuesday, December 12, from 9:30 to noon at DEQ, to which all agreed. Video conferencing will be available. Topics for next meeting include Rates & Charges and District Creation, so we may want to include Dan Semmens or Bob Murdo.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00.