

SB32: An Act Creating a Stream Gage Oversight Work Group

Water is an essential ingredient to Montana’s economy and way of life. While our demand for water continues to grow, our available water supply varies from year to year and often changes dramatically in any given year.

Access to accurate, publicly available, real-time stream flow information supports decision making by water managers, water users, recreationists and the general public as they adjust to seasonal supply and demand imbalances. Local governments, state, tribal and federal



Photo courtesy of USGS

agencies also rely on stream flow information for emergency planning and notification as well as longer-term water supply planning. The primary source of this information is a network of 220 stream gages operated by the U.S. Geological Survey and financially supported by 29 different sources of federal, state, tribal, local, and private funds. Information on stream flow is also available from 44 gages operated and maintained by the Department of Natural Resources & Conservation.

SB32 was drafted by the Legislative Water Policy Committee in response to stakeholders concerns over the recent shutdown of 10 USGS stream gages due to a lack of funding to support operation and maintenance. The loss of these gages came with little warning to the water user communities who depended on them for monitoring and cooperatively managing local water resource plans. The event revealed that as demand for water continues to grow, the continuity of Montana’s stream gaging network is threatened by declining funding support. It also highlighted the disconnect between those entities that operate and/or fund the system and those entities or individuals who rely on it daily for real-time stream information, local planning and response.

Who Uses Stream Flow Information?	
Water Commissioners	Distribution of water by decree.
Conservation Districts, Watershed groups, local government	Local water resource plans, drought response coordination, water supply planning.
Recreation	Fishing, floating, boating, and swimming
DNRC	Water rights administration, physical & legal availability, water supply studies, reservoir operations & distribution of water from state owned projects.
FWP	Fisheries management, recreation management, monitor instream flow rights
DEQ	Discharge permits
MDOT	Design & sizing of culverts and bridge openings.
MBMG	Groundwater and surface water interactions
Dept Emergency Services	Emergency planning and notification
Bureau of Reclamation & Army Corps of Engineers	Reservoir operations
Weather Service	Flood prediction and warning

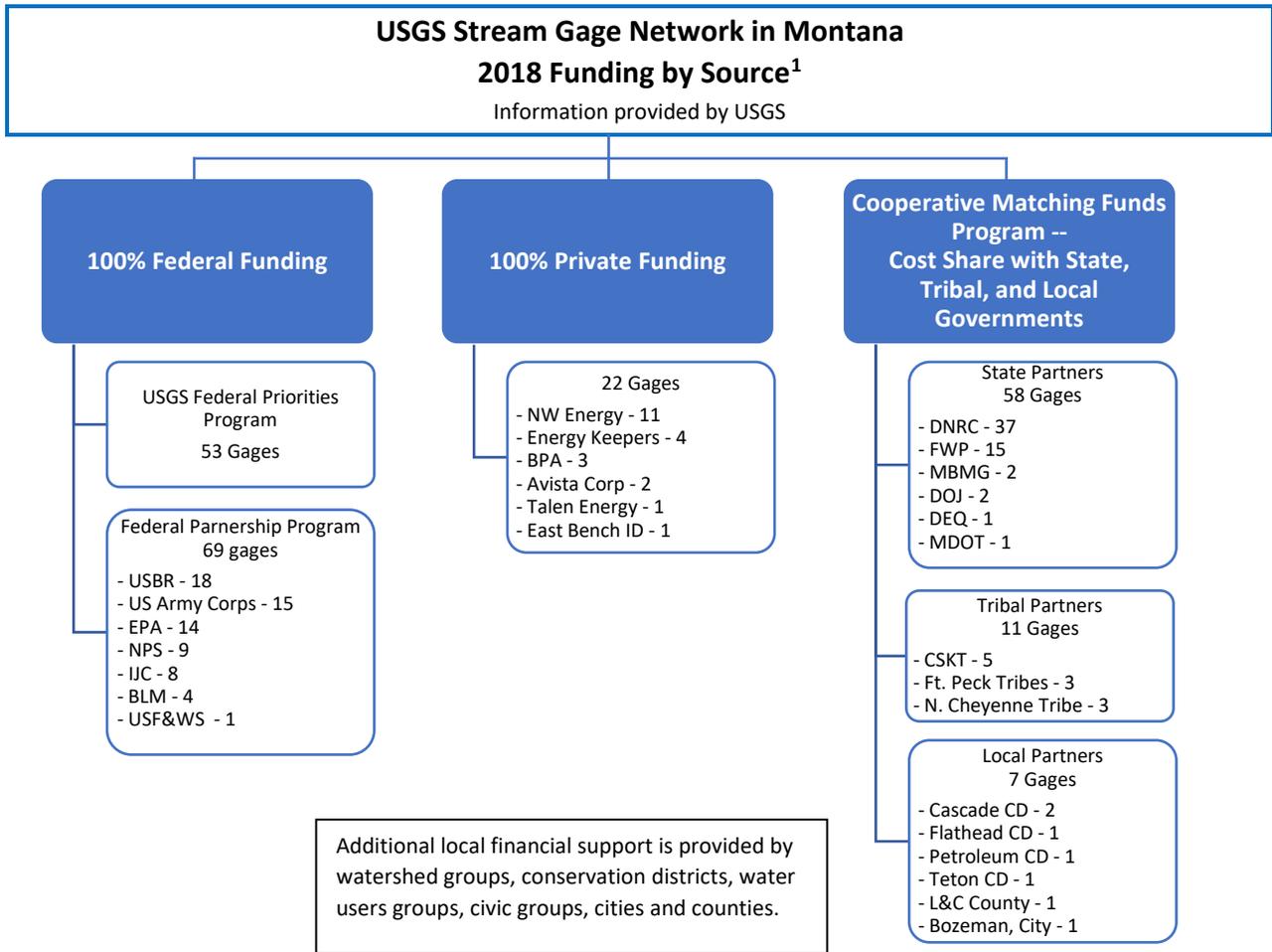
SB32 establishes a stream gage oversight work group composed of those with a stake in the collection and distribution of streamflow information, including but not limited to state and federal agencies, conservation districts, irrigators, municipalities, tribes, water commissioners, watershed groups and citizens. Oversight is provided by the Governor’s Drought and Water Supply Committee (§2-15-3308 MCA) with staff support provided by DNRC.

The stakeholders encouraging passage of SB32 share a common desire to promote the importance of publicly available stream flow information and a commitment to finding a long-term solution to financially support stream gaging in Montana.

Your support is needed for maintaining publicly accessible information on Montana’s stream flows. Please join with water users from across Montana in supporting passage of SB32.

Stream Gage Work Group Responsibilities

- Conduct a comprehensive review of Montana’s stream gage network
- Create annual stream gage infrastructure work plan
- Explore strategies to improve coordination between funders and users
- Report to Governor’s Drought and Water Supply Committee, & Water Policy Committee



¹ A single gage may be supported by more than one source of funding