

DRAFT W2ASACT MEETING NOTES

Meeting on April 18 2025, 10 am to 12 pm

Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, 1539 11th Ave, Helena, Montana
First Floor Montana Conference Room and Zoom**Zoom Meeting participants:**

1	Abby Weimer, DNRC	15	Kristen Jordan, DNRC
2	Autumn Coleman, DNRC	16	Laura Gundlach, Morrison Maierle
3	Becky Anseth	17	Lexi Laird, DNRC
4	Bobbie DeBose, DNRC	18	Lexi Leffler, WET
5	Cody Marez	19	Lindsey Glastetter, DNRC
6	Coleen O'Rourke, DNRC	20	Maureen Connor
7	Daniell Redden, DNRC	21	Melissa Downing, DNRC
8	Denise Cook & Anna Miller, DNRC	22	Nina Denny, DNRC
9	Heather Reeves, DNRC	23	Rachel Gemar, DNRC
10	Heidi Anderson Fohnagy, DNRC	24	Rick Duncan, DNRC
11	Heidi Fleury, DNRC	25	Sandie Koenig, DEQ
12	Janelle Painter, DNRC	26	Susan Brurud, WET
13	Kelly Bertellotti, DNRC	27	Tanya Shadrack, MRWS
14	Krista Lammers, DNRC	28	Tucker Colvin, SWEFC

At DNRC:

Anna Miller, DNRC	Mike Abrahamson, DEQ
Denise Cook, DNRC	Rika Lashley, Morrison-Maierle
Bryant Higgs, APE	Lindsay Volpe, USDA - RD
Chrissy Thompson, DNRC	Ben Rigby, MRWS
Katherine Certalic, DNRC	Michelle McNamee, DNRC

Acronyms:

AIS – American Iron & Steel
 APE – Advanced Pump & Equipment
 ARPA – American Rescue Plan Act of 2021
 ARRA – American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009
 AWWA – American Water Works Association
 BABA – Build America, Buy American
 BIL – Bipartisan Infrastructure Plan
 BOI – Montana Department of Commerce, Board of Investments
 CARDD – Conservation & Resource Development Division, DNRC
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CDBG – Community Development Block Grant Program, MT Department of Commerce
 CMRWA – Central Montana Regional Water Authority
 COVID-19 – Corona Virus 2019
 DEQ – Montana Department of Environmental Quality
 DNRC – Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation
 GWE – Great West Engineering
 HDR – HDR Engineering
 HUD – Housing and Urban Development
 IAC – Infrastructure Advisory Commission (ARPA)
 IUP – Intended Use Plan
 KLJ – Kadmas Lee & Jackson Engineering
 LFD – Montana State Legislative Fiscal Division
 MAP – Midwest Assistance Program
 MEPA – Montana Environmental Policy Act
 MISC – Montana Invasive Species Council
 MRWS – Montana Rural Water Systems
 MCEP – See TSEP
 RATES – Rural & Tribal Environmental Solutions
 RDG – Reclamation Development Grant Program, DNRC
 RRGL – Renewable Resource Grant and Loan Program, DNRC
 SRF (DNRC) – Wastewater State Revolving Fund Loan Program
 SWEFC – Southwest Environmental Finance Center at the University of New Mexico
 TSEP – Treasure State Endowment Program, MT Department of Commerce – Now MCEP
 USDA - RD – United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development
 WASACT – Water & Solid Waste Action Coordinating Team, Montana
 WMCC – Western Montana Conservation Commission (from Flathead Basin Commission and Upper
 Columbia Conservation Commission)
 WRF (DNRC) – Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program

Call to Order, Sign-in Sheet, Agenda Changes

Anna Miller called the scheduled meeting of the Water, Wastewater and Solid Waste Action Coordinating Team (W2ASACT) to order at 10:03 am, on Tuesday, April 8, 2025. She reminded all that this is round table where we get together the funding agencies and people from different engineering firms to join in general discussions on how best to help communities with projects. We'll also get some program updates and things going on from the various programs including SRF, Rural Development, ARPA and Renewable Resource loan programs. She asked those in attendance at DNRC to introduce themselves.

Anna went over the agenda and asked if there were any changes. The draft minutes from the January 14, 2025, meeting, which were distributed to those present at DNRC and posted to the WASACT website, were approved and adopted by those attending with no revisions. There

were 9 attendees in the room. According to the Zoom report, there were a total of 32 participants on the meeting.

Guest Speaker – Lexi Leffler, Water & Environmental Technologies (WET)

Lexi is a Project Engineer with WET out of Butte. She is excited to present some updates on the new 2025 National Infrastructure Report Card and then tie this into our Montana report card released at the end of 2024. Lexi said the ASCE (American Society of Civil Engineers) is the oldest national civil engineering professional development organization in the US. She began a slideshow presentation on the ASCE Infrastructure Report Card. The ASCE has over 160,000 members worldwide and every four years they produce a national report card that boils 18 different categories down to a report card style, letter grade. In Montana, we try to stay on pace with the same four-year release. We were a little behind this last time, so our last release was in 2018.

Lexi said some helpful background info is the ASCE Bridging the Gap report released in 2024. It explains many of what the recommendations are and have been at the national and state levels and about the assessment that was released in both new report cards. Lexi added that there are extensive documents available online. Reach out to her and she can connect you with those resources. Lexi went over the possible scenarios, which are dependent on whether we 1) Continue to Act, 2) Snapback to 2019 levels in 2027 or 3) Fail to Act. The choices we make today will either build on our momentum or set us back.

One of Lexi's go-to stats has been that if we continue our funding federally, we'll save American households \$700 a year, which is significant. If we snap back, we face a \$3.7 trillion dollar infrastructure funding gap federally and that will have to be bridged by state, local and private funding entities. There is real risk, especially here in Montana and other rural states if states delayed infrastructure investments.

Lexi moved on to the 2025 report card and cited an overall improvement from the C minus we had in 2021 to now a C overall. Almost half the categories did see a grading improvement since 2021, so we are seeing that this funding is making tangible progress. Another high point was that no category received a D minus grade for the first time since this report was released in 1998.

Some key trends we saw among the categories are aging infrastructure, it's increasing vulnerability to natural disasters and extreme weather events, especially in our state. Another key trend was that these federal investments are definitely helping, but the infrastructure takes time to plan, design and build. Continued investment is critical in furthering our momentum. Another key trend is that we still lack reliable data in many of these key categories. Schools, stormwater and broadband are some of the biggest ones where we cannot effectively plan because we don't have the data. And again, that is something that you are all well aware of.

Moving forward to recommendations in this 2025 release to raise the grades. High points were to sustain investment, prioritize resilience and then advance policy and innovation. To **sustain investment**, ASCE asks that IIJA level funding be continued in 2027 rather than lost so we don't snap back to those funding scenarios that we saw that will cost Americans real dollars. We also talked about leveraging municipal bonds at the Legislative fly-in this year. It is huge for our rural communities to make sure we maintain other funding opportunities so we can continue to bridge the gap between federal and state dollars. Those dollars are very important to sustain investment. Lexi's personal favorite is the public education portion of things. She says it's important that we continue to educate people with real facts and real data so they know what these decisions will cost them ultimately.

The second recommendation was to **prioritize resilience**. We are seeing more severe weather events. Our infrastructure must be built to withstand them so every dollar that we invest in resilience saves \$13 in disaster recovery efforts. Finally, the recommendation to **advance policy and innovation** to streamline our permitting but not sacrificing our safeguards. We could all agree that faster timelines sound great, but we want to make sure that we are still protecting our resources. Workforce development is another one that we keep hearing. We are seeing it at all levels from consulting to permitting. STEM education is one way that we can help bolster our Montana workforce to improve these grades.

Moving on to our Montana report card, we saw many of the similar trends at the national report touched on. We were excited to include new categories this year. Broadband was new and as you can see, it received an incomplete grade which goes back to the lack of data. We have seen a massive influx of money, but still kind of up in the air whether those impacts are making a difference. Another new chapter we were excited to include was aviation, as well as hazard waste, and public parks. Our grades for roads, stormwater and wastewater were unchanged from 2018. We did see improvement in drinking water and schools slightly.

Lexi said she'd like to leave room for questions. She said again that the choices that we make in these next few years, with regards to funding, resilience and innovation, will determine whether we reverse decades of decline or fall back into crisis mode. It is important that we stay on top of this. I really appreciate all of your efforts and dedication to improving our infrastructure. Lexi included her contact information in her presentation. Lexi Leffler with Water 7 Environmental Technologies can be reached at (406) 782-5220 or LLeffler@WaterEnvTech.com.

Anna asked about the "I" for incomplete for the Broadband category. Anna asked if that is where there was not enough information? Lexi said we did not have enough data there to fully say where exactly those funds have made improvements. We are definitely planning on assigning a grade next time. Anna added that because we are continuing to work on this and hopefully spending all of our ARPA money, will there be an update where that ARPA money is spent in the next year or so? Will you go back and look at this, or will it be again a 5-year

period? Lexi said that is a good question and something that it is up to the volunteers that we get. It would be very valuable to provide an interim update, especially for categories like broadband that are showing incomplete. And to your point where ARPA funds are being spent. I'm hoping that we can have maybe a 2026 release that would show a slight update. Lexi added that she would love any volunteers that may be willing and passionate about this to reach out and help make sure we can do that. Otherwise, we maintain the 4-year track.

Anna asked Lexi how Montana does nationally compared with other states in our region? Are we holding our own? Are we behind? Lexi said regionally, we have done really well and we are fortunate to have had so many volunteers. Many neighboring rural states struggle to have people assess these categories. As far as actual grades, some of them are a bit more outdated than ours. The national report card is a full melting pot of every state. So based on that, we are right about middle of the road. We are doing a lot better in some places and have a lot more room to grow in others, which you can see in the presentation.

Bryant Higgs with Advanced Pump & Equipment asked if the volunteer work is done by ASCE members in Montana and then nationally, right? The report card is put together by them. Lexi said yes. She added that nationally there is a group of paid individuals who work with federal experts as well as our state representatives, to come up with a grade at the state level. Yes, it is volunteer based. We have many consultants that are able to help because companies can offset those volunteer costs for us. We are fortunate this year to have some non-civil engineer which was really important as I don't feel like energy, for example, is something that is best up to a civil engineer to determine. We had an electrical engineer lead that effort and then we also were fortunate to have a landscape architect help us on our public parks portion. Everything is coordinated through ASCE at the state level. Bryant thanked Lexi for the clarification.

Rika Lashley with Morrison Maierle asked what the measuring stick is for these grades – what is an “A” and what is a “D”? She said she's looking at public parks. We have some parks and the are nice. That's a “C-“ right? Lexi said good question. Much of it is up to the industry experts. We are given a template of things to look at that is consistent with the national report card. For public works, every state is supposed to analyze certain benchmarks. That is all directed nationally. I encourage you to look at the website: <https://infrastructurereportcard.org/>. There are 8 criteria that everything is graded on. Capacity, condition, funding, future need, public safety, resilience and innovation are the main criteria.

Anna noted that Susan Brurud with WET added links to the chat. Lexi said those links go right to the ASCE website and there are QR codes in her presentation so that will show you the national report card and the executive summary and then our state report too. You can also find historical data and information about other states. Lexi showed where Montana has a “C” in infrastructure meaning it is mediocre and requires attention. Susan added that we added several categories and that is unusual for a state to take on adding that many categories. The overall determination of the overall state grade is up to that national team who evaluates each

individual category. Some are weighted a little different than others. The new ones definitely can impact that. We are excited to add those new chapters like aviation, broadband, hazardous waste and public parks.

Anna thanked Lexi for presenting at today's meeting and also Susan for her time and her the hard work that went into the report. We appreciate the report card on how Montana is doing so we hope to contribute to Montana's success and hopefully get our grades up a little in the future. Lexi and Susan with WET thanked all for their time.

Program Updates:

Renewable Resource Grants – Michelle McNamee

Michelle began with an update on House Bill 6, which includes the Renewable Resource Grants that folks applied for in May of 2024. It is currently moving through the Senate and last week it was amended from its previous version to add more funding for project grants. As it stands now, HB 6 has basically the full infrastructure list funded less the 3 bottom ranked projects. The rest are funded likewise on the irrigation project side of HB 6. Stay tuned for updates on HB 6 project funding. We are hopeful that that is going to go through and we will have the majority of our projects funded in HB 6 for the next Biennium.

As Anna alluded, the next Biennium does start July first. Once we get HB 6 passed, probably in May, we will distribute award letters and then those will have instructions. The biggest news is that we will contract agreements probably starting in August. We will start with those that are ranked higher on the list and then work down the list. So stay tuned in terms of seeing award letter and understanding that we will not be able to get contract agreement out until the beginning of August of this year.

In the upcoming Biennium, we are anticipating August for the next planning grant cycle to open. We will get more information out around in the next month or two. We do still have this Biennium some emergency grants and technical assistance grants. If you have ideas or thoughts about technical assistance grants, those are the precursor to planning grants. Reach out to Katherine Certalic and she can help.

Anna asked Michelle to speak on Nina Denny's new grant program. Michelle said they are RRGL programs – non-point source grants. There two grant cycles we have open currently. That is the non-point source project implementation grants and the non-point source municipal sewer connection grants. Both are open now and the application cycle closes on April 14. Nina Denny is our grant manager. Nina also runs the emergency grant program and she is our division engineer. Reach out to Nina if you have questions. Autumn Coleman put a link in the chat to that program and how you can apply and read the guidelines – <https://grants.dnrc.mt/submit>. Those projects need to be ready to go. We need to get those

contracted by the end of June. We do anticipate opening that grant program up again in the next biennium. If you can't make the deadline this year, there will be another one in the next year.

Tanya Shadrick, Montana Rural Water Systems

Tanya said according to the feedback survey conducted after the March conference, they have outgrown the venue – the Heritage Inn in Great Falls. They are looking for another location for the next conference. The results on the classes were wonderful and they were well attended. We received requests for more classes, but we don't know which one are going to be well attended so that is not really an option for us. The funding workshop was a huge hit. They did get a request for more funding classes so she may be calling on DNRC for more class time next year. There were requests for more funding classes.

Ben Rigby spent much time at the Legislature during the session looking for funding sources for us as well as working on different house and senate bills that are affecting our membership. Tanya mentioned Cody Marez, who attended today's meeting and is MWRS's newest staff member. You may have met Cody at the March conference. He will be handling our membership and our marketing. He is also doing the MWRS website and social media accounts so if you have anything that needs to get out, please reach out to Cody.

Lindsay Volpe – USDA – Rural Development

Lindsay said she is back to work after 6 weeks due to the federal freeze. Our staffing has really been fluctuating lately. Today was the last day of our second buyout program so we expect to see staffing changes again. We are hoping we won't be absorbed into Wyoming and will be in place to serve our rural communities. We are not sure which staff member will be working on which projects. Stay tuned for some updates from Steve Troendle. We are trying to accomplish meetings and process disbursements on schedule. Our loan technician has left so we are borrowing from Wyoming right now so there may be some delays. Our interest rates have gone up a little bit. I believe the market rate is 4.25%. If you need something, please reach out to us.

Lindsay mentioned the last meeting she had with Anna Miller and Mike Abrahamson where they discuss a shared environmental assessment process. Is there any update on that? Or is that something you want to continue? Mike added that it has not gone far since that brief discussion. DEQ was interested in a uniform environmental assessment to make sure all of our programmatic things are covered requirements as well as RD's and of course anyone else. Mike said there is a need for it and they have done it on the SRF side as we are adopting a MEPA-like environmental review. Even those cross checks show there are some things that just are not addressed. Mike said it would be easy enough to incorporate that. It could be good to discuss how you approach the environmental process. SRF has always completed

our own environmental reviews but it is duplication and could cost more money. I believe RD has typically taken the lead on that because RD has an environmental consultant prepare the environmental document correctly. Mike said it would be good to get the funding agencies together and this is obviously the forum. We just need to figure out what everybody needs. Anna added that maybe we can get this scheduled through the uniform documents committee. She ask if Mike could help coordinate that. Mike said the committee is a bit in disarray as Jake Goettle has left the SRF program. We will follow-up on this later.

Mike Abrahamson – DEQ

DEQ personnel have been out of the Metcalf building due to remodeling, which could last 18 months. Staff has been relocated to Colonial Drive – the Board of Investments building at Commerce. Things are a bit unsettled and we are packed in quite densely over what we are used to. There have been some changes in staffing, mostly on the drinking water side. Michelle Marsh is set to retire October first. In the last year we hired two new employees so we are pretty young in the realm of experience, but they are doing great at stepping in. We are seeing a lot of projects, many were in the que last year. With ARPA dollars they were not engaging in SRF loans at that point so we going to see a big uptick in dollars out of our program.

The other thing we are doing to updating our Intended Use Plan on for the CAP 2025 grants. We are applying for our CAP grants this May. Mike asked if consultants have project working with communities that may be considering SRF, to get us a survey on our IUP for that time. This is critical for both programs because you cannot get funding without being on there, but for the clean water program, this is the time when we allocate principle forgiveness. It is a one-time during the year. And if you going to do construction in the next 12 to 15 months essentially because of that time frame, we are looking at our next steps to get more funding

Sandie Koenig - DEQ

Sandie echoed that they are short staffed and looking to hire additional SRF engineers. She said it is just her and Denver Fraser so have patience with them as they are trying to keep up. We are also working on the IUP. Plan your projects that you are aware of and if you want to get us a survey for the drinking water work that would be great. We will add it. That does not commit you to use SRF. Anna added that DEQ personnel have the same emails, mailing address and contact numbers despite being temporarily displaced.

Autumn Coleman - ARPA

Autumn reminded the group that progress reports are due April 15, 2025. Our strategy is to spend lots of time with our high risk projects, projects that do not have any money spent. Projects that have not gone to construction bid yet, projects that are submitting inadequate or not submitting progress reports. If you have one of those projects, you will be getting lots of

contacts from your favorite ARPA grant manger. Again, our deadline to spend all of our ARAP funds is the end of 2025. We are trying to reach out and work with communities as best we can to help you be successful. We do have monthly webinars the last Tuesday of the month at 3pm. Autumn put a link to register for the webinar in the chat: https://mt.gov.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_N6nnP6GcRTSGPJw4jTH2Bw. She added that you go to the ARPA website and the webinar link announcement is the first thing you see.

Anna added: Again the deadline is December 2025. Even if your project is going to carry over into 2026 and has several funding sources, you want to get that ARPA money spent first. Talk with your grant manager if you need to do a budget amendment to modify the scope of modify the budget, etc. You want to be sure that we do not lose any of that money.

Anna Miller - BIL

Anna said that the federal government in some ways, is looking at clawing back money so if you haven't got that ARPA on BIL money spent, the federal government is looking at that as they have some deficits. This new administration is very deficit-conscious.

Regional Water Update – Rick Duncan

The HB 11 gives DNRC spending authority for the MCEP Regional Water Fund and that is interest earnings on the \$94 million corpus over the course of the biennium. There are several projections and we hope the Legislature is going to give us authority to spend those interest earnings. There are some additional pieces of legislation currently under consideration by the Legislature to add more funding on a one-time basis for regional water construction and Rick did not have an update on the status of those bills at this time. Things are mercurial at the end of last week, so he is hoping to have some updates on that later in the day. If you are interested, please reach out to Rick by email: rduncan@mt.gov, message him on Teams or call him at (406) 444-1879.

The HB 2 funds the regional water administrative grants. We have some additional one-time only funds approved in the House. Rick believes the senate is working on HB 2 now and we'll see whether or not those additional funds are on a one-time only basis for administrative costs. Ultimately it must pass because that is the one that funds the ongoing agency budget. Rick will have more updates at the July W2ASACT meeting.

Fort Peck/Dry Prairie Rural Water Authority (DPRWA) – Work continues on their completion of Phase 4 for the tribes in the northwest corner of the reservation. That will finish during the 2025 construction season. We had previously mentioned the location of the approved 4 rural water depots on the reservation. Those 4 were recently confirmed. One is at the water treatment plant and 3 others distributed throughout the rural areas of the reservation. Part of this is to provide water to residents who still haul water. It will also provide for filling of water

tanker trucks for fire control and other related purposes. There is a fifth one that could be installed depending on the demand and preferenced by the residents of the Fort Peck reservation or Dry Prairie. Completion work on construction phases across the northern tier which is Daniels and Sheridan Counties proceeds ahead. With all the work scheduled to be completed by 2027. Our understanding is that BIL has provided for all of the remaining federal funding that would be required, or that would be allowed under the authorization. Legislation passed in 2000 for purposes of funding those project segments. The Pines project is in southern Valley County. That project planning is moving ahead with recent meetings with interested federal agencies taking place and more scheduled in the future. As of the first of April, Dry Prairie had 44 out of approximately 76 sign-ups in hand. 76 appears to be the number for the folks that might wish to receive water either for seasonal habitations, or a number of them have converted those seasonal conversions into year-round residences. Those folks appear to be very happy about these developments.

Rocky Boys / North Central Montana – The Chippewa-Cree Construction Corporation core pipeline Phases 4 and 5 are nearly complete. They should complete early in this construction season. Phase 6 will be constructed this year. Pipe has already been staged along the pipeline route. Pipe for Phases 7 and 8 will be bid and ordered this year. When Phase 8 is complete that will be the end of the core pipeline off the reservation. Plans are being finalized now for new on-reservation distribution lines, water storage facilities and so forth. Construction will start on a number of those as we move into 2026 and 2027.

North Central Montana Regional Water Authority (NCMRWA) -- Construction is proceeding on Phase 3 A, which will serve Hill County Water District. It is the authority's intention to also then complete the last of its easements and rights of way work for the Havre segment. They plan to bid and award that project this year. On the west side there will be a report on the City of Shelby's wellfield hydrologic study analysis in June. That is a summary of all the hydrologic studies that have been done thus far. The determination of whether or not that well field can be improved, to provide more water regionally or sub-regionally is yet to be made. Some of the member entities on the west side are resistant to the idea of using either City of Shelby water or Pondera Canal and Reservoir Company water because of the hardness of those water sources. Adding softening to any kind of local treatment plant would be something to the tune of around \$30 million in addition to whatever upgrades to any kind of plant would be done there. We will have to see what goes on for their cost analysis of various requests and demands is an ongoing process.

Central Montana RWA – Musselshell-Judith Regional Water System – According to information received last week, they could be providing water service to the Town of Roundup by the end of the week. Phase 4 construction, which is Roundup to Melstone, continued through much of the winter. That is supposed to be complete by the end of 2025. Phase 3 Lavina to Broadview, plans are on tap to be submitted to DEQ for review this spring. The authority plans to bid and award that project by summer 2025, with construction taking place

during the 2025 and 2026 construction season. Finally on that project Phase 3 A, which is Shawmut and Deadman's Basin, they are working on the funding package for that project right now. They hope to bid that next year, 2026 with construction taking place in 2026 and completing in 2027. Also a part of that will be a line from the City of Ryegate to connect with part of the network for Deadman's Basin Shawmut District.

Dry Redwater Regional Water Authority (DRWA) – Dry Redwater is waiting on completion of the revised System Feasibility Report by the Bureau of Reclamation designated contract firm Stantec. We are hoping to see something very soon. Rick is uncertain on what criteria is needed to satisfy Reclamation requirements. The final note on phase 1 of the highway 200 west project, which is Richland County, southwestern Richland County, DNRC is working with the authority to pull together the funding package and get the things set up so they can begin construction using the ARPA grants that they have for this project.

Anna thanked Rick for the report and said it sounds like it will be a busy construction season for regional water projects, which is a good thing.

Anna added that Montana Department of Commerce has Montana Coal Endowment Grants. They are in House Bill 11, which is moving through the Legislative process. Contact Commerce to see when those award letters will be out and when they will be getting out agreements or contracts. Anna said she believes Commerce has some agreement in place from projects where ARPA money is used. Make sure you get that ARPA money spent.

Heidi Fleury – Western Montana Conservation Commission

Heidi began by saying she was able to attend the Montana Rural Waters conference. It was her first time there and she really enjoyed it and thanked everybody for putting it on. It was great to learn so much.

At WMCC we are working on getting our EPA Competitive Grant funds out. We have 4 different pots of money. Two of them relate to storm water and 2 relate to wastewater. We finished our rankings last week and now are moving through the process of figuring out awards and working with our Executive Commission to get different grant funds on the ground. It looks like we will have some additional grant funds left over so our applications will continue to be rolling out until those grant funds are fully spent.

Heidi announced some exciting news. WMCC is about to do some awards for stormwater and wastewater projects in western Montana. And they also have a little bit of funding left over and are working to figure out what that application process looks like. We will have more on that soon. We are at a transition point, and we are excited about it.

On one other non-grant related item, the WMCC on-site wastewater treatment committee is going to have an in-person meeting on April 24 at the Flathead Lake Bio Station and we are going to tour their new wastewater facility. We will also go to Big Fork and look at the Big Fork Water and Sewer District treatment plant as well as the Biosolids injection land

application site. If anybody would like to come on that tour and visit us over here in Western Montana, please email Heidi at Heidi.fleury@mt.gov.

Anna noted the large project at Lakeside where they are able to accept septage will be a huge thing. The composting facility there, Glacier Gold is going out of business probably within the next year. That will be something the local governments will need to deal with as far as composting where they can take waste material. Anna said many communities in the northwestern area of Montana are doing a lot of work to take care, and remediate that situation.

Anna thanked Heidi for the update and said she is welcome anytime to come back and update us on what is going on in western Montana. We are excited to hear about the projects and glad to see a lot of good progress.

Heidi added that one more thing that our septic programs are pots of competitive funding for septic education and maintenance as well as connecting to municipal systems or replacing septic systems. We have 2 different pots of funding. If you have questions, check out our website or give me a call (406-594-1913).

Rika Lashley with Morrison Maierle asked about the relationship between DNRC and WMCC. Anna explained that the WMCC is attached to the Conservation and Resource Development Division at DNRC. The WMCC works on wastewater projects and septic education. Those are sensitive areas. Flathead Lake is one of our very coveted lakes. We want to keep it pristine and clean, along with the other bodies of water around there.

Funding Workshop

Autumn Coleman reported that all the presentation materials from the March Montana Rural Water Systems conference are posted on the W2ASACT website along with the link to the recording. She added that they have not talked about doing more funding workshops. She said Tanya with MRWS mentioned earlier that people were interested in funding classes. She asked Tanya to let her know and we can get the team together and put together some ideas with you.

Uniform Application/Standard Documents – Anna announced that Jake Goettle has left DEQ. We will be working on that Uniform Application and Standard Documents Committee and finding out who our new members will be. That is on the to-do list, and we will see what we can do to achieve some efficiencies as far as being able to adopt each other's environmental documents.

Website – Melissa mentioned that Katherine Certalic is working on some updates to the planning grant section of the RRGL page, and that might change some of the other RRGL pages. She said to reach out if you see anything that needs to be corrected on the website.

Rika pointed out that in the past on the Uniform Application, there was a list of agency contacts and she did not see that on the newer version. Perhaps that could be posted on the website somewhere, either put it back in the application, or have a separate spot with agencies and contacts as that would be helpful. Melissa said yes, we can look at that.

Autumn Coleman added that Nina has been working with other agencies to update the Uniform Application. She asked Nina to update the group.

Nina Denny reported that things have been stalled since Jake, who had been compiling it all, left. Nina said they have been talking about some other changes to the Uniform Application. She was not sure of the timeline, but we can include the contact information that Rika asked about, in the next version.

Anna added that Shawna Swanz, the head of the ARPA team, put together a nice booklet with funding information. Anna asked if that was posted somewhere. Autumn said yes, it is. It was to replace the old Funding Table, which was the large, ledger-size table with all the funders on it. Anna said the booklet is a nice hard copy that has some additions. Anna asked Autumn if Nina's program and WMCC information is in the booklet? Autumn said there is a web friendly version. Autumn referred all to the W2ASACT funding page you will see the "Financial Assistance Programs" for water and wastewater and solid waste projects in Montana. Autumn shared the link: <https://dnrc.mt.gov/docs/conservation/WASACT/WASACT-Funding-Table-2025-Website.pdf>. Autumn said it will be updated shortly. Anna said it is worth having a copy because it has contact names, phone numbers and emails for funders.

Congressional Update – Anna reported that the federal government passed a budget for the 2024 Federal fiscal year. We will be able to apply for our grants, at least for the Revolving Fund Program. Hopefully that means that RD will have a little bit more assurance on what their funding. The next thing we are working on in the Federal fiscal year 2025. We will see a lot about that. The Administration has a different view on things. They seem more debt-conscious, and the country is facing a lot of debt because of the stimulus packages we have had in the past. Anna believes there are many yet-to-be-determined items so we will see how things work themselves out. There are many cabinet positions and federal positions that have not been filled. They seem to be looking at some things in some agencies, like some reorganization.

Anna referred to Bryant Higgs with Advanced Pump & Equipment with a question are you hearing anything about the tariffs or what can you tell us on that? Bryant relied yes, we are hearing a lot about tariffs. He has heard from multiple manufacturers that every quote they are giving us has language in there that this is subject to change based off of tariffs. He added that at the drop of a hat, there is no real way to identify when and how that is going to happen. Bryant has heard from a few vendors who are saying that they do not think it is going to be the 25% that is getting thrown around out a lot. They are thinking on a lot of things it is going to be

more of the 3 to 7%, but there will be some things that will be at 25% and may be more. From a pricing structure that is very challenging in our world. And probably the same with funding agencies. He said it is all in flux right now. Anna added that we will see what happens on bids as we go out yet this year and see what the prices end up being. Rika believes their engineering reports are going to have to have that same disclaimer on them. Rika said there is no way we can predict anything anymore.

Anna asked if anyone had anything to add. Lindsay Volpe had a question based on the conversations we had today that she wanted to follow up on. The funding that is getting moved forward through the Legislative process right now. She has requested to see what the funding packages are on projects. We used to have a table that W2ASACT shared and she has not been able to get any information on what the projects that are moving forward. What their funding packages look like. Lindsay said it is helpful for us to know what expectations are and state agencies would also like to know. Anna said we will take that under consideration, but she does not know how soon we would have anybody available to work on that and put it together. Anna added that you should be able to go the state agency's websites and see their reports, which would have all of their projects listed with the funding, etc. listed.

End of updates

Anna thanked all those who attended in person and online. The next meeting is tentatively set for Tuesday July 8, 2025. We have the first floor Montana Conference room reserved. Anna added that that date could get pushed out with our fiscal year end occurring at the same time.

Meeting adjourned at 11:23am.

Minutes taken by Denise Cook, reviewed by Anna Miller, and will be adopted by those present at the WASACT meeting on July 8, 2025.