

Big Sky Sustainable Water Solutions Forum
DRAFT Agenda
August Theme: Ecological Health of the River Systems

August 31, 2016
1:00-4:00pm
Big Sky Water & Sewer District

1:00-1:10pm: Welcome and Introductions

1:10-1:15pm: Public Comment

1:15-2:25: Presentation of Information on Ecological Health of the River Systems

Panel Presentations

2:25-2:35pm: Break

2:35-3:00pm: Panel Presenter Q & A and Discussion

3:00-3:45pm: Discussion

Overview of Community Models for Ecological Health

Group will discuss the following questions:

- If Big Sky strives to be a model community in this focus area, what elements does this include?
- Given what you heard, what are the most important things to address in this area?
- What else would we like to know before we start thinking about alternatives to address concerns in this area?

3:45-3:50pm: Public Comment

3:50-4:00pm: Closing Question

Big Sky Sustainable Water Solutions Collaboration

Stakeholder Meeting Notes

June 28, 2-4pm

Big Sky Water and Sewer District Conference Room
561 Little Coyote Rd. in the Meadow Village of Big Sky

Invited Stakeholders Attending: Guy Alsentzer, Upper Missouri Waterkeeper; Brad Bauer, Greater Gallatin Watershed Council; Scott Bosse, American Rivers; Pat Byorth, Trout Unlimited; Rich Chandler, Yellowstone Club; Susan Duncan; Association of Gallatin Agricultural Irrigators; Mike DuCuennois, Yellowstone Club; Ron Edwards, Big Sky Water and Sewer District; Kristin Gardner, Gallatin River Task Force; Kevin Germain, Lone Mountain Land Company, Chamber of Commerce & Resort Tax Board; Torie Haroldson, Gallatin Local Water Quality District; Travis Horton, Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Ethan Kunard, Madison Conservation District & Madison County Planning Board; Peter Manka, Alpine Water; Tim Roark, Gallatin City-County Health Department; Ann Schwend, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; Bill Simpkins, Big Sky Town Center; Tim Skop, Gallatin County Planning; Kerri Strasheim, Department of Natural Resources; Eric Urban, Department of Environmental Quality; Wendi Urie, Custer-Gallatin National Forest; Darcie Warden, Greater Yellowstone Coalition; Brian Wheeler, Big Sky Resort & Big Sky Water and Sewer District; Bob Zimmer, Greater Yellowstone Coalition; Steve White, Gallatin County Commissioner; Jessie Wiese, Montana Land Reliance; and Ciara Wolfe, Big Sky Community Organization;

Other Attendees: Madison Boone, Big Sky Watershed Corps & One Montana; Emily Casey, Gallatin River Task Force & Big Sky Watershed Corps; Steve Johnson, Gallatin County Planning Department; Stephanie Lynn, Gallatin River Task Force.

Consultants: Jeff Dunn, RESPEC; Karen Filipovich (facilitation and notes)

Summary of Actions:

All Stakeholders

- Stakeholders return a signed letter of commitment by July 8 to indicate their participation in the Big Sky Sustainable Water Solutions Forum (BSSWS).
- Stakeholders share any areas of expertise, further resources, if they have not already done so. (Information to Karen Filipovich (karen.filipovich@gmail.com))

Consultants, GRTF and Advisory Committee

- The Gallatin River Task Force (GRTF) will post a blog post on July 8 and meet with the media as the voice of the collaboration. Stakeholders will receive advance notice and any PR or article material produced ahead of time. Stakeholders may continue to express their own opinions.
- Consultants will revise the process and roles to clarify that existing laws and policies are recognized, though the group will also have the opportunity to recommend changes to laws and regulations as part of their plan.
- Three meeting dates in August-November will be set to examine the three focus areas in more detail. A public meeting in early December will be set. That BSSWS advisory committee will work with the consultants to finalize those agendas and times.

Detailed Notes

This was the first stakeholder meeting of the *Big Sky Sustainable Water Solutions Forum* (BSSWS). Kristin Gardner, Executive Director of the Gallatin River Task Force, welcomed the group. She thanked all for coming, for their support in putting together the funding and for their work on this process. This meeting is the first stakeholder meeting, the culmination of six months of work to launch this forum.

Karen Filipovich, facilitator, briefly outlined the meeting objectives. They were:

- Start work on a community-based collaborative effort
- Agree on our basic approach and focus areas for this collaboration
- Offer suggestions and ideas to further the work of this process

Introductions

Attendees were asked to introduce themselves, identify their primary affiliation(s), a reason for interest in the collaborative effort, and how each person is feeling about being at the meeting.

Reasons for interest in the collaborative approach included:

- **Community and collaboration**
 - A chance to share experience working with the issues we face in a bottom up way, rather than top down.
 - Great to see this opportunity to unite everyone in one direction, under one umbrella.
 - See this as a way to understand the water resource needs and challenges and how the community is going to deal with them in the future.
 - Good to be among great friends and colleagues.
 - How can Big Sky be an example across the nation and Montana for “responsible” and sustainable growth?
 - Like a proactive approach of this collaborative effort, especially since agency processes aren’t quick
 - Collaboration: everyone is represented in this process and everyone is here to work as a team.
 - Like that there are lots of perspectives and expertise and excited to be part of a think tank.
 - Everyone is represented in this process and everyone is here to work as a team.
 - Looking to share the water we have between all of the interests. Want to build a flexible and inclusive plan to ensure everyone gets what they need.
 - This is a great opportunity to look at Big Sky holistically now and into the future.
 - Great collaborative to get everyone under one roof to find “community-wide solutions”.
 - Looking at this as an opportunity for a holistic approach to managing a precious resource.
 - This effort connects people to natural resources in the community and water resources affect our community assets. The Task Force is a strong local partner.
 - Collaborative are a good way to look at issues as a group.
 - Current partner with the Task Force.
- **Model**
 - Would like Big Sky be a model community for smart water use and wastewater disposal. This is a chance to raise the bar.

- How can Big Sky be an example across the nation and Montana for “responsible” and sustainable growth?
- Way to resolve policy issues and create a model for development in the future because we have a common interest with different approaches and perspectives.
- Hope to be a model for sustainable development.
- Have wanted this effort for ten years. Believes that there is a solution there for everyone.
- **Addressing specific topics or challenges**
 - This effort needed to happen and interested to see how this will play out based on the challenges (county lines, unincorporated). Hope to use this as a model for other resort towns.
 - Interest in the “headwaters” and the influence and impacts of Big Sky growth and development.
 - Water rights are challenging in this closed basin, especially since Big Sky doesn’t have agriculture water for mitigation.
 - Would like to increase accountability and improve understanding of legal requirements.
 - Interested in water and respect agency authority.
 - Would like to stay ahead of growth.
 - Want to address water quality.
 - See this as a way to better understand the effects of septic systems and wells (individual and larger systems) on the established framework.
 - Hope group can work within framework of development and regulations to make Big Sky a truly sustainable community.
 - Interest in how water allocation affects fisheries and communities because water is everything.
 - Here because fish need water and cumulative impacts (death by a 1,000 paper cuts) make fisheries more difficult. Fisheries are an economic driver for the area, in Big Sky and downstream.
 - See this group as a way to enhance drought planning. Drought is water scarcity and occurs whenever there are more people or use than you can supply.
 - How does our work in the headwaters fit into the larger landscape? Connect the dots and connect the group to resources.
 - Here because downstream interests, from irrigation water to commuter population impacts on water quality and development patterns, are affected by what happens in Big Sky?
 - Big Sky build-out is at 50% and we have a lot of work to do to get the rest right.
 - Interested in options like the snow pilot study.
 - Interested in wastewater capacity and source water availability, especially on the Madison County side.
 - See this as a complement to the forest plan revision, since land and water can’t be separated.
 - As a regulator, spend a lot of time looking at how to stay compliant with state and local regulations.
 - As a public manager with management downstream, it is an interesting dynamic.
- **Listening and learning**
 - Interested in listening and learning.
 - Interested in hearing from other people and learning about new options

Participants were also asked how they felt about being at the first collaborative meeting. Responses included:

- Excited (9)
- Excited and humbled
- Extremely excited. If this room can't solve it, there isn't a way. BS has the opportunity to lead the way.
- This is important because it is progressive, innovative, and collaborative.
- "Relieved." Knock out big problems with creative solutions.
- Optimistic
- Hopeful
- Encouraged and hopeful
- Happy to be here (2)
- Real interest in what's going on
- Curious to see what comes out of it
- Cool to see of the size of the group but tired. Glad to be a part.
- Glad for big group.
- Can hardly wait because it's going to be fun.
- This is where the water starts. Excited to work with everyone and learn what is important to the group.
- "Go team"
- Opportunity to work with people who he doesn't usually get to work with.
- Opportunity to be part of a conversation in Big Sky.
- Curious observer
- Observer (2)

Overview of Collaborative Process and Work

Proposed Timeline and Activities:

The collaborative effort is expected to take until roughly December 2017 to develop a watershed stewardship plan. Between now and the end of the 2016, it is anticipated that the group will build, gather and share data and establish common goals. In 2017, the group will develop a joint definition of water resources priorities and then generate and analyze alternatives to address the identified problems. Finally, the group will develop a management strategy in a watershed stewardship plan. That plan will include implementation and monitoring details. It is envisioned that there will be two public town hall meetings and public information available throughout the process.

The group affirmed this schedule.

Stakeholder Roles and Collaborative Process:

The participants reviewed the roles and process sheet that had been sent out before the meeting.

Stakeholder Commitments

Stakeholders were asked to identify their commitment by signing a letter of commitment that was handed out. The letter will identify who would like to be a stakeholder in the collaborative effort and identify the voters, if a vote needs to be taken.

Questions and Comments:

- There was a worry that an elected official has first responsibility to the public, so the bullet point, “Support community implementation of the solutions.” might be construed as a pre-commitment to allocating funds or resources.
- Another participant noted that downstream stakeholders may not easily support the effort from 50 miles away.

In response, the facilitator suggested that participants could view that bullet as optional and cross it out if needed.

Purposes of the Collaboration

The group reviewed the purposes of the collaboration.

Several participants noted that existing rules and regulations need to be recognized and followed. Points made were:

- It is important that everyone recognizes existing laws and policies and uses them as a guideline. Don't have to focus on the letter of the law at all times. Doesn't exclude creativity. We do need to agree to recognize local and state laws and policies. This needs to be clearly recognized.
- Might be some changes to laws and policies needed. We don't want to preclude that option.
- Think composition of the group will help keep laws and policies in mind.
- Examples like the Carson River Valley Conservancy are challenging to some extent, “first in time, first in right” for water – creative solutions need to be examined.
- Tweaking bullet two under “purposes” could clarify this understanding.

The group was asked if tweaking bullet two was acceptable. No one disagreed with this. Karen Filipovich was tasked with adding this clarification to the bullet in question. The current wording of that bullet is:

- “Provide a framework and process to identify common ground, resolve differences and identify effective solutions.”

Roles

Roles were reviewed briefly. The stakeholders, identified by signing the letter of commitment, are the designated collaboration members and decision-makers. A sub-set of the stakeholders act as an advisory committee that ensures that the process proceeds and that the consultants produce was is needed. The consultants support the collaborative process and do not make decisions. Finally, the public has an important role of interest, adding additional suggestions and comments and in implementing the watershed stewardship plan.

Ground Rules:

The group was also asked to affirm the proposed ground rules. The rules are:

- Keep an open mind
- Use objective standards for evaluation
- Respect for each other and the process
- GRTF is the voice of the group to the media

The first three were reviewed without comment. The last proposed ground rule required some clarification. Participants discussed:

- **Media Voice:** GRTF would represent the process until the stakeholders come to a set of decisions. During the development, GTRF would be the voice of the collaborative. Individual stakeholders are free to share opinions and perspectives throughout the process on behalf of their own decisions. In the end, all members will have arrived at a collaborative set of decisions that represent a unified approach.
- **Newsletter and Information Sharing:** What about putting information in our newsletters? Online? Should we get that from the Task Force? The Task Force would like to help by providing information to all stakeholders for consistency. Opinions are the organization or author's own. Stakeholders are encouraged to talk about this process and share information as often as possible.
- Group members discussed the tension between wanting to ensure that an individual organization had the ability to state opinions publically, but that is was also important to ensure that the collaborative effort to find common ground was not undermined, especially while the group is in the "messy middle" of trying to find common ground. It was noted that it is important to ensure that a positive message about progress occurs while the participants work to find joint solutions.

Participants did express trust that Kristin would represent the collaboration in the media as the voice of BSSWS, as long as they were free to express opinions of their own.

Participants also wanted to have clarity on what is sent to the media. It was agreed that the full set of stakeholders would receive press releases and other media related information as an FYI before it is released so that no stakeholder is surprised.

Everyone present agreed to these ground rules, with the understanding of what they mean as outlined above.

Stakeholder Summary – Overview of Focus Areas

Jeff Dunn briefly summarized the major areas identified in the stakeholder assessment. Thirty-three stakeholders were interviewed and three major focus areas for work were identified as a result of that process:

- Ecological health of the river systems
- Water supply and availability
- Wastewater treatment and disposal

Within those areas, the following sub-topics were identified:

Ecological health of the river systems

- Integrity of rivers, streams and wetlands
- Water quality and impaired stream segments
- Fisheries health
- Wildlife and landscape ecological connectivity
- Scenic values and aesthetics
- Recreations values and impacts
- Fire management and vegetative changes
- Weed control
- Drought and climate change

Water Supply and Availability

- Complex geology and aquifer systems
- Geographically limited supplies
- Water rights and mitigation
- Closed basin
- Controlled ground water zone
- Changing land and water users
- Instream flows
- Ground water and surface water interactions
- Water management/reuse opportunities and implications
- Hydromodification

Wastewater Treatment and Disposal

- Limited storage, treatment capacity and service area
- Cumulative effects of individual septic systems
- Alternatives for wastewater treatment and disposal
- Implications of wastewater alternatives to basin water supplies

Stakeholder Discussion of Focus Areas

Stakeholders were asked if any sub-topics were missing. Then they were asked to identify specific questions that they would like answered in the next three meetings on the focus topics.

Missing

- Identify existing and potential downstream impacts. The next phase for collaboration is how we deal with those issues in the Gallatin Valley. This collaboration is a great introduction and road map.
- Need more information specific to the upper river, especially ecological issues. Downstream ecological and economic needs should not be affected by activities in the Big Sky area.

- Need to include information enhancing and maintaining the economic needs of the community. We need both to be healthy.
- Keeping all water users in mind (urban, agriculture, tourism) as information is presented.
- Need to define our baseline for ecological health. Is it today, 10 years ago or something else?
- Want to make sure that we understand GRTRF's information and background in defining the ecological health of our rivers.
- Need to define the desired condition. For the watershed, the DEQ has created the TMDL and WRP with recommendations to get watershed back to desired conditions.
- We need to keep land management in mind and how it affects water.
- Need to make sure new issues might surface as we move forward. We should be open to them.

Specific Questions Related to Focus Area Information

The consultants are gathering existing information, in partnership with stakeholders. Specific questions help shape the next three meetings.

- Would like information on any studies about groundwater and surface water connectivity in the South Fork and West Fork.
- How will land use changes affect water availability?
- What data is out there to inform our decision making to inform baseline and goals?
- Specific information on water right claims, locations, and priority dates.
- What is the Montana code regarding beneficial reuse? (DNRC)
- Information on historic water supply and how that has changed in the basin over time. What is the demand of the supply and how has that changed?
- What is full build-out and occupancy for the Big Sky area? Where does that build-out number come from? [Participants pointed out two studies immediately: Big Sky Water & Sewer District (available at their site). LMLC did one independently (Spanish Peaks, Yellowstone Club, Moonlight, Big Sky Resort).
- Information on consumptive use.
- Climate change information, especially as it related to future supply and timing.
- Develop a better picture for those areas outside of Water & Sewer District and Resort boundaries.
- Provide a comprehensive map of resort area, sewer district, what's on septic, etc.

Closing Question

Participants were asked to state how they felt about moving forward with the collaborative effort.

Responses included:

- Excited (9)
- Feel that the right people are here (right stakeholders, knowledgeable) (6)
- Opportunities to learn (3)
- Encouraging (3)
- Appreciate that everyone feels safe enough to be candid.
- Water and land is mud. Mud is messy. We're not in crisis mode. It's not an instant solution. We have 18 months to put together a plan.
- Big Sky is a community managed by committees, boards, and districts. Great start.

- Collaboration is messy.
- Ready to get messy.
- Potential
- Still curious
- Good to look at it as a group.
- Great to move forward.
- Unsure where we're going. (2) (and happy) (1).
- Optimistic.
- Curious.
- Knocking heads and figuring it out.
- Ready to jump in.
- Interested in zeroing in on wastewater treatment and disposal.
- Encourage stakeholders to take a detailed look at documents. It will make you a better stakeholder.
- Looking forward to the process. As the manager, my whole board will be a part of this.
- How can we make this place as good as possible for the future?
- Really excited to have so many smart minds to help. The results will something really special to bring to the community and future generations.

The next stakeholder group is expected to be held in the second half of August, with additional meetings in September and November. All three will be designed to build common knowledge in our three focus areas and to decide on priorities within those areas.

The meetings adjourned at 3:55.