

Tongue River Watershed Alliance
Board Meeting Minutes
January 12th, 2006
Ashland School

Attendance: Mark Bloxham, Jae Notti, Brett Emmons (for Tom Emmons), Denise Wood, Art Hayes, Ron Hauso, Ray Muggli, Tim Hamilton, Megan Sweedland, Laurie Kelley, and Bill Issacs were present.

National Wild Turkey Federation Grant

The first order of business was the National Wild Turkey Federation's EPA grant proposal. The board looked over the application and discussed it. Several members were concerned that there might not be a permit to discharge into Squirrel Creek. There were also concerns about irrigating with a sprinkler gun; it was unknown if the CX Ranch had a beneficial use permit that would make it possible to do so. The study involves planting cottonwoods, and there was doubt that two years (the length of the study) is enough time for a roost tree to grow. Denise Wood pointed out that if we do sign on to the grant, we'll have a certain accountability and she believes that the money could be spent more wisely. Jae Notti said that he had planted cottonwoods that died without receiving any CBM water; if the trees survive, it could be good press for CBM, so we shouldn't rule it out. The board came to a consensus that the proposal would not be money well spent. Ray motioned to suggest to the membership that the Alliance pass on supporting the proposal; Denise seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Watershed Action Plan

Next on the agenda was discussion of possible items to include in the watershed action plan. The board came up with the following:

- 1. Weeds:** Leafy spurge was mapped about 8 years ago, so we have a fairly decent idea where it is located. Weed information is really lacking from Ashland on down the river. We need to go to each county weed board and ask for maps. It was suggested that we seek out grant money to get maps gathered and put into a usable, accessible form so that we know where we're going and can get an effective plan in place. Megan will write a letter to the weed boards. Jae asked if as a watershed group, we can push through an ordinance to create consequences when people just come through and spread weeds. Art said that it's possible but pretty difficult due to the weed law, but most companies are good about controlling weeds. It was mentioned that when the fiberoptic cable was put in, Rosebud County made the company wash their vehicles. Art said that the individual counties are in charge of enforcement. Laurie Kelley told the board that there are educational grants available to educate landowners about weed control. Art suggested that we will probably need a minimum of \$20,000. He also said that the Noxious Weed Trust Fund is probably the best way to go to get the weed mapping done. The board also discussed having someone design a vehicle wash station.

2. **Water Aging:** The board discussed water aging to see how quickly the aquifers recharge and where they recharge from. USGS and the Bureau of Mines have started work on this. A study in Wyoming suggested that some coal veins haven't recharged since 1952. A board member said that the objective is to get companies to conserve CBM water since our own personal water is coming from the same aquifers; where will we get water from if the aquifer is drained? Jae pointed out that we cannot aim all of this toward anti-CBM. Denise said that we need to monitor all changes regardless of what they may be.
3. **Aquatic Life Records:** Birney Smith at Colstrip High School and his students have gathered a lot of aquatic life information. We should talk to him and see what he can give us.
4. **Pine Tree Control:** The board discussed doing controlled burns to control pine trees. We should look into grants. Laurie will get Megan grant information. Megan will contact Judd Hammer at USFS.
5. **Soil Sampling:** Jae suggested that we do some education on soil sampling; we could call the extension office. Art said that a lot of the work for this issue would be just assembling data. Laurie reminded the board the RCD conducts soil sampling and that they are available to us.

New Business

Denise brought up the Tongue River Railroad and asked if we should comment on it. Art said we probably won't need to comment unless there's a sediment issue in the river. Denise asked if the Alliance would want to sign on to oppose a permit to finish the final leg of the railroad. Jae said that it might be biting off too much for a watershed group. Brett said that he would have to see the information first. The consensus on the issue was no.

Denise motioned to adjourn and Mark Bloxham seconded. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 5:45 pm.