

## **Tongue River Watershed Discussion May 10—Birney School—Birney, MT**

Warren Kellogg—facilitator

Warren opened the meeting with introductions (see attached list).

A discussion of previous activity was held. Warren told the group that the purpose of the first meeting, held April 23, was to determine if there was enough interest and common ground for the group to formally organize. Concerns and issues were discussed as well as potential organizational guidelines. Warren then assigned the attendees homework. He told everyone to be thinking of ways to “keep house” (govern the group).

One of the issues identified at the first meeting was the need to examine the conditions of the soil and water in the Tongue River drainage. Larry Fox, Rosebud Conservation District (RCD), and Jim Bauder, MSU-Extension, were brought in to discuss monitoring initiatives with the group.

Larry Fox, RCD technician, discussed his role in examining the soil and water of the Rosebud Creek drainage. 4 USGS sites were tested and 9 additional samples were taken from various ranches along the watershed. The samples were tested for electrical conductivity (EC), pH, calcium, magnesium, and sodium absorption ratio (SAR). All of the samples were tested using RCD's Hach testing kit and some of the samples were sent to Energy Labs to ensure that the Hach tests were accurate. The original samples were taken in the fall of 2004. Four seasonal samples will be taken starting in June 2005; further sampling will be done twice per year. The initial samples will be used to determine a baseline and later samples will determine if a change has occurred. In the future, water samples will be taken and tested for EC, total dissolved solids, SAR and various nutrients. All of this information will be put into a user friendly format so that stakeholders can have easy access to the information.

Jim Bauder told the group about some of the monitoring they have done in the past and some they are currently undertaking. One of the projects involved irrigation discharge water along Muddy Creek. By defining the necessary data and gathering it, they were able to change some irrigation practices and significantly reduce sedimentation in the stream. A venture on the Sun River yielded information on nutrients, sodium, flow rates and sources of flow. They are also working with Buffalo Rapids on a soil sampling program. Jim told the group that MSU-Extension is a technical service provider. They do not generate a profit; their work is done in the interest of science. They protect the integrity of the data they collect and protect the privacy of the data as well.

Jim Rogers, RCD board member, asked Jim how they were paid. Jim said that his services were free but that the monitoring is contracted. Some of the funding for monitoring is paid by other funds and there is always some kind of a match. His group will help find and write grants. There are many different types of grants available and some of them are line item billed and makes the financial part of it

much easier. EPA and NRCS grants are rather cumbersome and lengthy and the budget accounting is much more difficult. He also stressed how important it is to know what kind of “baggage” a grant carries. What do they expect as a result of granting a funding request? Jim told the group that there is a strong directive by USDA and EPA to help watershed groups in any way they can.

Warren checked in with the group, asking why a watershed group is important to the Tongue River Watershed. Art Hayes said that a strong watershed group will provide for local control. Doug McRae mentioned that a watershed group has more clout than individual stakeholders have. John Hamilton said that a group of locals could do a lot of good. He cited Rosebud Conservation District’s success in passing the land use ordinance as an example of group influence, saying that if you don’t try to influence what is going on in your neighborhood, someone else will. Forming a watershed group gives everyone a “say in what the future is”.

Warren asked the group what they felt the most important issues were:

Water Quality—Monitor the water and educate people about the effects of CBM discharge. Science and experience should work together to give the watershed some political clout.

Water Quantity—Effective use of the available water is a big concern (management). Local control is important and productive partnerships need to be developed with the tribe and landowners from both the upper and lower watershed.

Other issues—weeds (especially Saltcedar and Leafy Spurge), land preservation, roads and development.

Warren suggested that the group become more involved with their legislators and get in touch with the TMDL Advisory group so that the group’s input could be voiced.

Warren stressed the need to think beyond the scope of the first issue. The common tie is the water resource. A successful watershed group evolves and changes. A Tongue River Watershed Group composed of landowners and the tribe would have a lot of clout.

Check in: Is water quality an issue to you? Does the watershed group make sense?

Mark Roundstone—from a tribal perspective another partnership adds clout to the water quality movement. It is important to monitor water quality. CBM developers take what they want and leave bad water behind. The watershed group is a base or foundation to correct what has been done wrong. A watershed group will give everyone involved more clout in the political arena. “Water is life; too much salinity means no life”. Warren asked if the tribe would collaborate with a Tongue River watershed group and Mark said YES!

Allen Clubfoot—a watershed group is a good tool to determine water quality and to educate. We need to learn from our mistakes so we do not repeat them. Water rights are an important issue. A partnership will be very beneficial to the watershed group and the tribe.

John Hamilton—it is so important to take charge of what happens in your neighborhood or someone else will. We need to make sure that the river system isn’t degraded further; it is a tremendous resource that deserves our protection. Any

partnerships we can form will only make the group more powerful. Individuals don't have any clout, but a group does.

Maurice Felton—CBM water is a big problem, but the weed problem is a major concern as well. There is an island 20 miles north of Ashland that is full of Saltcedar.

Tim Lohof—water quality is a big issue. A watershed group is a good idea.

Charles Bumgardner—a watershed group will be a positive influence and can help to unify people on the upper and lower river. It should involve many more issues. Education is very critical—we need to get the facts out.

Larry Fox—education is very important. On a larger/political scale we need to let them know what is actually going on. We need to raise awareness of new technology and foster cooperation.

Jerry Lunde—a watershed group is all about local control. We need to take care of our own backyard. Baseline data is essential because water quality affects everything up and down the river. Big Horn Conservation District will definitely be on board. Jerry suggested inviting our legislators to meetings.

Jim Rogers—southeastern Montana is just getting going as far as watershed group formation is concerned and there is political clout in watershed groups and even more in coalitions of watershed groups. Think about how you want your watershed to look in 50 years. Don't rely on state agencies to fix something after it's broken.

Doug McRae—water quality is a very important issue. Watershed groups need to have input in the TMDL process. Bringing the tribes, DEQ and EPA into the procedure should have beneficial results. A partnership between the watershed group and the tribes should help this effort a great deal.

Art Hayes—Water quality is very important! A Tongue River TMDL advisory group was formed and it appeared they were not trying to improve the water quality; they were trying to see how badly they can degrade it. It was a big fiasco and finally put on hold. A watershed group is a good idea and it should focus on water quality!

Roger Muggli—Tetrattech is the company doing the TMDL modeling. In 1978 Tetrattech wrote a book on moving the Tongue River Reservoir. When they were contacted for the information they had gathered during the writing of the book, they didn't even know they had written it. None of the information gathered in 1978 was used in the model. Water quality is extremely important. We need to figure out how to take the best science and "cowboy" science (science and experience) and blend it together to help the public understand how intertwined everything is. People need to understand the relationship between fish and crops. People are very disconnected and need to be reconnected.

Ray Muggli—the difference between an individual voicing their concerns and a watershed group voicing their concern is like the difference between a ball pein hammer and a sledge hammer. We need a loud voice coming out of this valley; therefore we need a watershed group. I have seen the progression/development down the valley and you can really see the magnitude of it.

Ron Hauso—everything he thinks has been said before and he agrees a watershed group is a good idea.

John Wilkinson—water quality is very significant. Water quantity is also very important. He doesn't feel that the water is being used in the best way. Water usage needs to be networked so that everyone knows when they can and can't irrigate.

Art Hayes—the water users are in their third year of measuring water. It is a learning process. It's hard to keep everyone in the loop as far as contract versus flow right water is concerned. This year commissioners will run the river. It is possible that a watershed group could help facilitate the water usage process.

Tyler Escott—agrees with John and Art.

Gabe Morgan—CBM water is the most important issue for the BIA. A watershed group is a good idea and education of the public is also something that needs to be done.

Phil Wood—Water quality is the most important issue. A watershed group would be able to influence decisions.

Jim Bauder—the group is right on target. The down side of forming a watershed group is that you become part of the radar screen; you become the group people look to for answers. The group has to decide if they are prepared to take charge/action.

What's next? It is possible that the group's needs would best be served by splitting the group and having a joint board. Allen Rollo with the Sun Watershed Group and David Schwartz of Buffalo Rapids would be the ones to talk to about this.

Suzanna Roffe, MSU-Extension, asked the group if they would be interested in getting a research and education grant. There is one they have been pursuing for another project, but it hasn't worked out very well. She feels that they could easily shift gears and do one for the Tongue. The grant could cover some monitoring, research and education. She asked the group what type of education they felt was important:

Urban people needed to know how CBM water impacts everything. They just see the short term benefits, not the long term impacts. Unbiased facts are necessary to show them how things really are.

Decision makers need to know the hard, cold facts. They need to get away from "the politics" and into the policy.

Businesses used to support agriculture, but now they don't see the connection between their success and the success of agriculture. We need to educate them too.

Suzanna told the group that the pre-proposal was due in June, the actual proposal in November. She needs to start moving on it now. It has to be landowner driven. The grant would be 2-3 years with approximately \$20,000 available per year. Monitoring costs can be included.

Warren asked if the group would be interested in trying to get grant funding to drive education. The group agreed to go ahead with the funding search and write letters

of support for the proposal. Laurie will help Suzanna in any way she can through RCD and RWG.

Where do we go from here?

We need to determine a name for the group, define the geographic scope, develop operating procedures, pursue the grant, gather baseline data and form partnerships. Sampling has been ongoing for 2-3 years on water quality. A baseline needs to be developed for soils. We need to find the information that has been gathered by BLM, DEQ, EPA, TRWU, the tribe and other sources and get it all in one place in the same format.

The group determined that it was very important to formulate a set of operating guidelines as soon as possible. Art Hayes, Doug McRae (advisor), Jerry Lunde, Roger Muggli and Laurie Kelley volunteered to meet to draft them so that they can be reviewed, revised and voted upon by the general membership at the next regular meeting which will be held June 16<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm in Ashland. The agenda for the next regular meeting will be:

- Name of group
- Geographic scope of watershed
- Operating guidelines—review, revise and vote
- Education grant
- Baseline data-list and summary
- Partnerships