

**Tongue River Watershed Alliance**

**Meeting Minutes**

September 6, 2005

Ashland Public School

Attendees:

|                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| Mark Bloxham      | Ronald Hauso    |
| Denise Wood       | Phil Wood       |
| Art Hayes, Jr.    | Mike Blum       |
| Ray Muggli        | Bill Isaacs     |
| Betty Aye         | Lester Aye      |
| Donna Wilson      | Rick Rice       |
| Jacy Isaacs       | Dick Wilson     |
| Tom Emmons        | Bill Stern      |
| Lois Hasuer?      | Nan Stevens     |
| Bonnie Lyda?      | ?               |
| Frank Rollefson   | Jan Stevens     |
| Tim Pannebaker    | Keith Bales     |
| Jae Notti         | Roger Gaskill   |
| Brett Emmons      | W.C. Torske?    |
| Maurice Felton    | Ann Emmons      |
| Mark Stevens      | Bonnie ?        |
| Wanda Gaskill     | Gaye? Samuelson |
| Sid Samuelson     | ? Dunning       |
| ?                 | ?               |
| Andy Gaskill Jr.? | Warren Kellogg  |
| Laurie Kelley     | Megan Sweedland |

Warren Kellogg facilitated the meeting.

Art Hayes called the meeting to order at 7:14 pm. He gave a brief overview of the beginnings of the group, then reported that he was chosen as Board Chairman and Megan Sweedland was hired as coordinator.

Rick Rice came forward with a petition on behalf of Pumpkin and Otter Creek members. The petition asked for amendment of the operational guidelines to allow for two board members to be elected from Pumpkin and Otter Creeks, for a total of four new board members.

Warren stated that clarification was needed before a vote was taken. Do other areas need representation, as well? Warren reminded the group that the operational guidelines are a moving, growing entity that the group can change at any time. He suggested amending the bylaws to say that Pumpkin and Otter Creek should each have a set of representatives; is this acceptable?

Discussion was as follows:

Denise Wood gave her total support, stating that the more active participation the group has, the more successful it will be. Ray Muggli also gave his support.

A member expressed concern that a fourteen member board might be too large. He proposed starting from scratch and voting for a whole new board; another member agreed with him. Warren stated that if the group decides to increase the board size and it becomes too unwieldy, then the group can update the operational guidelines to reflect the wishes of the group. His suggestion: try fourteen and if it works, great; if not, it can be changed.

Warren stated that a classic watershed planning effort includes all water that flows into a river. He gave an example of the Shields watershed group, which after forming, found that the different ends of the river had different goals, so the group broke into two separate watershed groups.

A member asked why there was no consideration for people off of the river in the guidelines. Art responded that the divisions in the guidelines are only geographical divisions. For example, Otter Creek falls within the Birney to Brandenburg division. The divisions were marked along the river for simplicity and included areas off the river.

Another member wondered how the T&Y Irrigation District can be included as part of the Tongue River. Art explained that it has the largest water right in the Tongue, drains into the Tongue and the drainage lays within the Tongue drainage. T&Y users are directly affected by what happens on the Tongue.

Warren asked for any more questions or comments. There were none, so the group voted by a show of hands to amend the operational guidelines to include Pumpkin and Otter Creek in the divisions and to have 2 directors from each creek. The vote carried unanimously. Megan will update the operating guidelines to include these changes.

Warren then addressed the issue of the election: does the group want to revote completely? Are there any questions about how the original election took place? There was confusion about the election. One woman suggested using actual ballots next time. Concerns included how the election took place and it was suggested to reelect the board. Denise asked how many people had been participating all along. She said that the group needs a broad participant base and needs to go into this wholeheartedly to make this work. Several people said that they were not aware of the group until recently. Warren pointed out that until the group was organized, it couldn't do public outreach. Rosebud Conservation District has been picking up the tab for all the mailings and has sent out invitations to every household they know of. Warren said that the showing for the meeting was good and tells him a lot about the potential of the group.

A member suggested bringing Hanging Woman Creek in as a separate district, since Pumpkin and Otter Creeks are now their own districts. Art reminded the group that Hanging Woman Creek already has their own watershed group, so they are already represented. The Hanging Woman members in attendance do not wish to have their own district at this time.

Warren asked the group again if they want to reelect the board. Ray Muggli suggested leaving it as it is and just adding the Pumpkin and Otter Creek directors. After some discussion, the group decided to move forward with the existing board and add the Otter and Pumpkin Creek directors. However, the guidelines will be amended to say that members can only vote for directors from their own district. Mark Bloxham stated that in

the future, we need to make it clear how the process works. The board will lay out the districts to make them clearer.

The group took a 15 minute break while the Otter & Pumpkin Creek members nominated and elected their directors. The results are as follows:

**Otter Creek**

|             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| Jae Notti   | 1 year term |
| Jan Stevens | 2 year term |

**Pumpkin Creek**

|                  |             |
|------------------|-------------|
| Norman Samuelson | 1 year term |
| Tom Emmons       | 2 year term |

**Grant**

The group took a few minutes to read through the Watershed Planning Assistance Grant, written by Laurie Kelley.

A member asked if there is data already gathered or if the group is starting from scratch. Art said that there is a lot of data available and we are in the process of gathering it. The USGS has done a lot of CBM studies, available on their website, which we can reference. There are also some studies that were done in the '70s that we can use. We need to get baseline data done so we know where we stand.

Warren stated that after the data is gathered, the group needs to determine if there are any holes in that data. Laurie said that the grant is written with that in mind.

The question was asked what the definition of "flooded soil" is. Art said that "flooded soils" are those in creek bottoms, where an ephemeral drainage floods when it rains or snows but is otherwise dry.

The question was asked about how extensive all the different areas will be. For example, will soil samples be taken only on the Tongue River bottom itself or will they be taken from other places, as well? Will groundwater and weed projects cover the entire basin or only along the river? Art said that the entire watershed will be covered for the various projects. He stated that we currently have a decent weed map, but it's not good on saltcedar, which is coming into the spotlight. We know the Birney-area leafy spurge and some knapweed problems in different areas, but we need to know how much more is in the drainage.

Art said that CBM will affect the groundwater, so we need to know how old the aquifers are and how fast they recharge. He mentioned the testing that Colstrip High School has been doing in the Tongue River. They are studying aquatic life in the river and they have raised red flags, but we don't know if the reason for the decline of aquatic life is due to a higher EC from CBM discharge water, drought, or some other cause.

Brett pointed out that the USGS monitoring system is not included as a data gathering system; Laurie will add it to the grant for water monitoring data already in existence, although the data is 6 months behind.

Rick asked if the whole purpose of the watershed group is to determine what damage occurs from CBM discharge. He pointed out that there are other factors that cause

problems in the water. Clint McRae told the group about the problems at Colstrip due to the surge pond leaking; if they knew what the data said beforehand, they could have fixed the problem more quickly. Rick said that since development is moving so slowly, the group should be able to gather the baseline data.

A member stated that the group should have an independent third-party do the work. Art agreed, saying that he would like to see the group hire a Montana company so the money would remain in the state. Another member suggested ALL Consulting; they take grants and do work for non-profit organizations. Rick asked if Fidelity's data will be utilized and Art said that it will be included.

Mickey Stewart's watershed characterization was discussed. She has developed a comprehensive list of items that are integral to a watershed characterization. Would the group like to bring her in to speak at a meeting? No official decision was made.

Weeds were discussed again. Will the grant cover spraying weeds? Grants can be written to cover an operator or contractor to spray. Tongue River Water Users hired an operator for three summers on a cost-share basis to spray weeds in the drainage. He did a lot of work and got the problem under control so that landowners can now control their own weeds.

Causes of weed problems were discussed. Art said that CBM brings weeds and another member stated that the weeds were planted by road construction. Another cause is the availability of weedy hay. No matter the cause, we need to get ahead of the problem to help prevent further spread.

Art stated that there is no need for a board meeting until we know the grant status. He adjourned the meeting at 8:30 pm.