

BOULDER RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

Post Office Box 749
Big Timber, Montana 59011
Phone: 406-932-5160,
Extension 106

June 1, 2019

Mary Erickson, Forest Supervisor
Virginia Kelly, Forest Plan Revision Team Leader
Mariah Leuschen-Lonergan, Public Affairs
Custer Gallatin National Forest
Post Office Box 130
Bozeman, MT 59715

Regarding: Custer Gallatin Forest Revision Plan

To all concerned:

On behalf of the Boulder River Watershed Association Board of Directors, we wish to submit the following comments regarding the proposed revision plans for the Custer Gallatin National Forest.

We support the continued harvest of timber resources in and around the Boulder River Watershed and encourage efforts to increase timber production, especially in those areas where this would prove beneficial to wildlife habitat and improved water quantity. Implementation of existing FS tree harvest planning goals are essential to improved forest health, especially as we deal with changing climate variability conditions.

We support the grazing allotment program in the Custer Gallatin Forest. Responsible livestock grazing on these lands provides a valuable resource to local livestock producers and local communities. This program also provides much needed rangeland improvement and wildfire suppression benefits.

We support the resource extraction industry in and around the Boulder River Watershed. Sibanye-Stillwater is the largest industrial employer in Montana and have proven themselves to be good stewards of both public and private lands in the area. These industries provide strong economic sustainability and tremendous public benefit to local communities.

We support the continued effort on behalf of the USFS to control noxious weeds and invasive species in and around the Boulder River Watershed. Greater efforts should be made to improve these efforts, especially given the increased use by the public in the Custer Gallatin Forest.

We do not support any increase in Wilderness Study areas in the Custer Gallatin Forest. Existing inventory in these areas have proven to be both controversial and a hindrance to productive land use decisions. Removal of existing lands now open to the public for trail and off-road activity in the watershed, could increase negative impacts on the watershed by concentrating recreational opportunities to fewer locations. This would also increase traffic on roadways and encourage trespassing on private lands. Emergency services access to Forest Service lands during an emergency or rescue situation is already problematic and becomes even more difficult in lands with wilderness status.

We do not support any efforts to designate streams and rivers in the area as "Wild & Scenic". We are concerned that these designations if determined in the Boulder River Watershed, could interfere with public access and recreational usage and hinder agricultural operations in and around the river corridor.

The Boulder River Watershed Association is committed to addressing the resource issues and concerns that are important to its members and the watershed by working to maintain and improve the health of their land and water resources.

We support a continued effort to consider multiple use of Custer Gallatin Forestlands. Maintaining a vibrant discussion led by the Advisory Committee, that includes all stakeholders, will assist in the development of sound revision management planning.

Sincerely,



Bill Brownlee, Chairman



Stuart Stenberg, Vice-Chairman

we are one Sibanye Stillwater

Boulder River Watershed Association is grateful for the **generous** contributions Sibanye-Stillwater mining provided to our association since its inception, which provides administrative and project funding support.

Because of their commitment to the mission and work of the watershed association, Stillwater Mining Company received the 2013 BLM Hardrock Mineral – Community Outreach & Economic Stewardship Award.

Now, Sibanye Stillwater continues to partner with the Boulder River Watershed Association and Sweet Grass County Conservation District to support natural resource stewardship programs and projects.

All told, efforts undertaken or sponsored by the Boulder River Watershed and the Sweet Grass County Conservation District has produced dozens of projects that have totaled more the 2.5+ million dollars in on-the-ground projects or baseline studies.

Sibanye Stillwater is a great example of how an industrial mining and resource extraction industry has benefitted the Montana landscape by providing crucial funding for resource conservation groups.

BOULDER RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

BRWA BOARD OF DIRECTORS:
Bill Brownlee, Chairman

Stuart Stenberg

Leo Cremer

Keith Engle

Mark George

Jay Federer

COORDINATOR:
Dan Rostad



PO Box 749
Big Timber, MT 59011
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Who we are...

The Boulder River Watershed Association was formed in 2001 by a group of Boulder River Valley residents and landowners, who were interested in protecting, perpetuating and maintaining the values that make this area such a special place.

We work to maintain and improve the health of our land and water resources by:

- ◆ Identifying/researching resource issues and concerns within the watershed;
- ◆ Helping willing landowners/land managers to plan and implement innovative solutions; and
- ◆ Educating the general public about the efforts of landowners in the valley to care for the resources that provide for their way of life.

What we do...

Since its inception the BRWA has implemented more than a million dollars in on-the-ground projects, baseline professional analysis studies and resource assessments, and administrative tasks that have dramatically improved many parts of the watershed in all five committee areas.

The BRWA is committed to addressing the resource issues and concerns that are important to its members and the watershed. The group has formed five committees within its organizational structure to further study these issues with the goal of developing and implementing effective management strategies.

Weed Committee

The purpose of the weed management committee is to control noxious weeds and educate landowners about their identification and management.

- Educate landowners and the public about the abundance and threat of noxious weeds.
- Develop a comprehensive weed management program for the entire watershed.

BRWA has worked with the Sweet Grass County Weed Department to sponsor Noxious Weed Trust Fund grants through the Montana Department of Agriculture in several regions of the watershed over the past 15 years. These projects include many landowners in three areas of the watershed which have provided much needed assistance to landowners to control noxious weeds including Leafy Spurge and Spotted

Wildlife and Range Committee

The purpose of the wildlife committee is to understand the habits and needs of wildlife species, how they interact with landowners, and to assist landowners and appropriate agencies in dealing with their management.

- Inform landowners of predator species present in the area and work

with wildlife management agencies to form partnerships to mitigate problems.

- Understand the impacts of wildlife species in the watershed and set up collaborative efforts to manage their populations in conjunction with management of domestic animals.

BRWA works closely with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks providing educational tools and outreach to landowners whose properties are affected by big game animals and predators in the watershed. BRWA serves in an advisory capacity to Montana FWP and other stakeholders assisting with public outreach and education on issues like Grizzly bears, wolves, elk and brucellosis issues and the impacts of over population of big game animals in areas of the watershed.



Boulder River Valley is home to hundreds of elk.

Forest Committee

The purpose of the Forest Committee is to educate, coordinate, and assist in promoting forest management practices on both private and public land within the entire watershed.

- Improve forest health, sustain forest growth, improve wildlife habitat, and improve overall water quality and quantity.
- Assist, cooperate, communicate, and coordinate efforts of fire suppression/management agencies, while educating and involving private landowners in personal and property protection.

BRWA and the Sweet Grass County Conservation District can provide information to landowners within the watershed offering insight about fire behavior and how to build a defensible space to protect property and structures.

Riparian Committee

The purpose of the riparian committee is split into three categories: off-stream watering, bank stabilization, and grazing management.

In general, the riparian committee seeks to improve the health and function of riparian vegetative communities immediately adjacent to the stream.

The specific committee goals are:

- Develop off-stream water sources to encourage cattle away from riparian areas.
- Minimize in-stream sediment loading by prioritizing areas for bank stabilization projects.
- Encourage landowners to implement grazing management practices that improve cattle grazing habits and distribution.

BRWA has assisted with dozens of off-stream watering and fencing projects by providing technical assistance and cost-share funds for approved projects. We have also assisted with stream bank stabilization

projects and work with our partners at Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation and USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Services to provide range improvement and grazing management consultation.



We removed old rusted bridge pillars from the riparian area left there nearly 60 years ago.

Water Committee

The purpose of the Water Committee is to enhance water quantity and quality for all beneficial uses.

- Encourage the most effective and judicious use of irrigation water for agricultural purposes.
- Establish baseline water quality information and monitor over time.
- Develop and implement management practices and strategies to minimize in-stream sediment, nutrient loading, and contamination.

BRWA has provided cost-share funding to irrigators to install gated pipe irrigation systems and assisted with irrigation infrastructure and rehab & repair projects, which provides more efficient methods of water use. We worked with Montana DEQ to provide a comprehensive water quality document of the Boulder River and tributaries available for public review.



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