

Mystic TAC meeting notes, 2/2/12

Meeting was held in the FWP Office in Billings

Attending:

Andy Welch
Brent Mabbott
Ken Frazer
Jeremiah Wood
Joe Vacirca

2011 notes were discussed; they were reviewed last year but will be forwarded to all for a final review.

Several items were purchased during the 2011 field season and all are working well. Items included lifejackets, SPOT, Garmin for documentation of land ownership and transect locations. The Electrofishing transducer was cleaned by Smith Root and returned.

2011 work was discussed and it was noted that we should explore a way to save money for a much bigger project in the W. Rosebud drainage than is currently being done. This would include the monitoring of spawning fish (rainbow and brown trout), including: movement, migration, use of drainage, timing of movements and residency. This work would require several years of planning and several more years for implementation. Brent will explore ways that the TAC could, under current funding levels, could save money for this study. Post meeting note: I talked with Karen Z and I think that there is a way to do this. I'll talk to Ken and Jeremiah about this and get their thoughts.

Discussed the current minimum flow that PPL has implemented. This is minimums of 70 cfs in October and 40 cfs from November until mid-April. We looked at the data that Andy and Brent collected in 2011 over Brown Trout Redds in West Rosebud downstream of Pine Grove Campground. This data included location of redd and depth of water over redd. Additional data was collected that documented stage changes of water during different flows. Graphs visualized the following: All redds remained under water with the 40 cfs minimum flows, but; many were dewatered when flows decreased below the 40 cfs.

Jeremiah questioned if a MOU would be distributed about this flow. Brent said that PPL will honor this flow, to the best of the water available, and that PPL has a good history in honoring flow agreements. Brent will ask PPL if a MOU would be needed. Jeremiah also asked if this timing could be adjusted or changed if needed. Brent noted that due to the extended high flows this past summer and the associated impact on historic spawning areas in West Rosebud, he will be annually walking the spawning areas near Pine Grove campground during September to determine impacts, needs and potential changes for the targeted October through April minimum flows.

Brent and Andy informed the TAC about the changes that have occurred at the rereg and how that is being used to “flatten” flows below the rereg. Jeremiah had a graph from USGS graphing flows over the past couple weeks and there was a large drop in flows (from about 120 cfs to 45 cfs) over several days. Brent will ask operators what happened. Brent will -again thank operators for protecting that minimum of 40 cfs.

Jeremiah had the data for the fish population sampling in the bypass in September. There was some confusion of monitoring locations but that was figured out and generally fish numbers were less. This could be an artifact of the September sampling. Historically monitoring has exhibited less fish numbers with less flows. Flows are reduced the first of September from a minimum of 10 cfs to 5 cfs. (We were not able to electro-fish in August due to high flows). The sizes seem to be similar to past sampling efforts.

The electro-fishing equipment quit working during the sampling of the lower section (just above the powerhouse) so a complete 2011 sample was not collected at this site.

Whitewater floating was offered for two week- ends in 2011. Four boaters showed up and only three floated the whitewater section. This information was supplied by the power plant operators. It was noted that they were disappointed with the lack of floaters. They are required to spend extra time accommodating the floaters and there are very few boaters taking advantage of this opportunity. Andy noted that there was a lot of water this year and consequently little demand for whitewater releases to float.

2012 Work

- FWP will do standard Gill net sampling in both W. Rosebud and Emerald lakes during late spring of 2012.
- sampling will also include gill netting and angling of Mystic Lake as required in the Sampling plan. This work will be mid-August to Mid-September in 2012.
- After some discussion, it was determined that biologist would repeat the 2011 electro-fishing monitoring in the Bypass. This will occur near the first of September.
- Water Quality, according to the sampling Plan, will also be collected. This will include 4 temperature monitoring sites in W. Rosebud; 3 visits to 3 water quality sites in W. Rosebud (above power house, below power house, and below W Rosebud Lake; Mystic Lake water chemistry, phytoplankton and zooplankton; macroinvertebrates, periphyton, and habitat in W Rosebud Creek.

All the 2011 data will be sent to Ginger for compilation and included in a final 2011 fisheries report to FERC.

Also noted; FWP wanted a copy of the new flow protocol. The numbers included above may suffice. Brent will ask.

Of the \$25,000 allocated for fisheries work in 2012, each agency will receive the \$10,000 agreed upon. As noted above, Brent will also explore ways that unspent funds can be saved for future study use.

In addition, Brent worked with the biologists to determine field equipment needs and purchase needed items. Of note, several waders were purchased immediately after the meeting for Jeremiah and Ben.