

Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group
Basin Creek Water Treatment Plant and Watershed Field Trip Notes
June 23rd, 2021

ATTENDANCE

Members: Darcie Warden, conservation representative; Tony Colter and Willy Peck, timber representatives.

Stakeholders: David Laufenberg, Raeya Gordon, Madison Conservation District; Sean Steinebach, Sun Mountain Lumber; Jim Keenan, Jim Dennehy, Austin Gerry, Eric Casagrande, Butte-Silver Bow County; Bryan Lorengo, Montana Logging Association.

Technical advisors: Tim Lahey, Jesse Myers, Jeanne Dawson, Anton Brennick, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest; Laura González Mantecón, Claire Grisham, National Forest Foundation; Ashley Juran, DNRC; Darryl Barton, Montana DEQ.

FIELD TRIP NOTES

Stop 1 - Basin Creek Water Treatment Plant

The group met outside the treatment plant.

- Jim Keenan gave an introduction and overview of the field trip followed by a plant tour.
- The plant was built in 2017 after the Basin Creek water failed the filter waiver, possibly because of the large quantity of debris falling into the stream from dead and down trees. The plant supplies 60% of Butte's drinking water.
- The water undergoes daily testing, with monthly reports to DEQ.



Stop 2 - Basin Creek Reservoir

The group drove up Basin Creek, past a recreation area, to the reservoir that supplies water for the plant.

- Water conditions at the plant are slow changing because of the predictable reservoir source. However, the reservoir is newly open to the public (as was a condition for plant construction funding), which brings concerns about public damage to infrastructure, introduced invasive species, liabilities, etc.
- From this point, the group could see the large quantity of dead and down trees around the reservoir and the whole watershed. Jim Keenan voiced his concerns about high fuel loading and elevated fire risk that could compromise Butte's drinking water supply, since ash-filled water cannot be treated at the plant. This is a growing concern for many water treatment plants across the West.



- The group discussed funding options, opportunities, and challenges to treat the Basin Creek Watershed:
 - The Forest Service has an existing NEPA to treat aspen stands forest-wide. Any other treatment would have to go through NEPA first. An EIS was done for the area 15 years ago, but it purposely excluded the watershed.
 - The project would likely have to be accomplished in phases, with different grants at each stage and coordination between FS and Butte-Silver Bow County. The first phase could comprise FS aspen and County CE, with a bigger second phase that aims to treat 40% of the watershed (the number generally used by FS as a benchmark for effective fire risk reduction).

- The Hazardous Fuels Reduction Program could provide an initial \$50k to start implementation for the county while applying to larger pots of money such as CFLRP or Joint Chiefs. RACC could also serve as starting funding, as could potentially weed treatment funds.



- The group discussed outreach opportunities to garner support for the project:
 - The project could make a good case for the County and Congress because of the threat to drinking water supply and the increased ignition sources from the newly granted public access. Looking at the lessons learned from similar projects in Bozeman and Helena, in addition to using examples from burnt watersheds, could mitigate the risk of litigation.
 - BDWG could do a presentation or send a letter to the Budget Department in support of the project. The project makes for good storytelling, which could be very powerful.
 - The County could send a letter to the Regional Forester about prioritizing Basin Creek and speeding up the NEPA process through contracting or the strike team.
 - Butte-Silver Bow could enter a multi-year stewardship agreement with the Forest Service.

Stop 3 – Overview of Basin Creek Watershed

The group drove up towards an overlook point for the Watershed to better observe the state of the forest and continued to discuss how the project could be best accomplished.

- While it will take longer to determine the treatment units, FS can provide a general map of the area to be treated.

