

Upper Clark Fork Streamflow Working Group Meeting
3.12.25 - 10AM to 12:30PM
Deer Lodge, MT

Meeting Summary

In-person: Heather S.(Facilitator), Brian B., Stephen B., Andy F., Seth M., Erin Clinkenbeard, Amanda S., Pat O., Caleb U., Troy MCQ, John H., Monica A., Amy G., Ted D., Valerie K., Evan B., John L., Jenn D., Ben LP, Dan McQ
Online: Walker, Sam, Whitney, Brian C, Attila/Morgan

UCF Streamflow Working Group Mission: To pursue solutions that support and balance the water needs of the Upper Clark Fork River watershed communities.

Meeting Objectives

- Gain shared understanding of UCF Streamflow Working Group activities for 2025 as related to the BoR Grant deliverables
- Share information and next steps on the Milltown Water Right Draft Implementation Framework
- Share information on the water supply report for the UCF
- Share updates, announcement, and upcoming events

BoR Grant – UCF Streamflow Working Group Activities for 2025 – Heather Stokes

Overview Scope of Work 2025 – 2027

- Further develop a cooperative, self-sustaining watershed group
- Address water use challenges in the Upper Clark Fork River Watershed
- Collaboratively identify priorities for flow restoration and solutions to chronic dewatering

Activity 1 – Watershed Group Development – begin 2025

Objectives

- 1) *Expand the scope and diversity of the Streamflow Group, targeting key UCF stakeholders who are critical to flow restoration efforts (e.g., irrigators, industry, local government, and recreational user stakeholders in high-priority drainages with large water use rights)*
- 2) *Increase public awareness of the UCF Streamflow group as a trusted venue for win-win solutions between conservation, agriculture, and Tribal interests in the watershed*
- 3) *Increase group capacity by pursuing additional funding opportunities and preparing for a formal strategic planning process.*

Activity 2 – Watershed Restoration Planning – begin 2025

Objectives

- 1) *Create a matrix of proposed flow restoration priorities endorsed by the Streamflow Group to provide structure and direction to the group’s future planning and project implementation*
- 2) *With these project priorities serving as a common goal (or set of goals) draft a five-year strategic plan for the Streamflow Group*

Activity 3 – Watershed Management Project Design – likely begin 2026

Objective

Make tangible progress toward implementing 1-2 projects prioritized by the group under Restoration Planning (and identified in the group’s five-year plan) that directly address water management, use, availability, and reliability challenges in the watershed.

Draft List of 2025 Activities

March

- Review grant objectives and deliverables
- Some members have actively begun inviting others to join our meetings
- Website development

May

- CFC’s synthesis report on UCF current activities
- Invite new UCF stakeholders to May meeting
- Potential Field Trip - Mainstem diversion projects – Brian B – Sager Lane; new pump station and diversion; Lamperts/Helena Johnson pipeline (formerly ditch); fish passage on Warm Springs Creek

July

- Field trip – Racetrack Lake – Monica host
- Continued discussion on current activities
- Review previously identified UCF priority areas and adjust as the group sees fit
- Broad strategy discussions including self-sustaining structure of working group

September

- Annual BBQ – developing new and strengthening relationship
- Gold Creek tour and project update

November

- TBD based on progress thus far

Milltown Water Right Draft Implementation Framework – Stephen Begley, FWP Presentation Attached to email

- Hydrograph and enforceable flow levels - main concern is late July through mid-Sept
- Framework (vs. Plan) - basic structure; based on principles of adaptive management; more flexible than a plan.
- Who is subject to call?
 - Ex: 2024 - call could have been initiated on August 11th (4 out of 5 consecutive days below 500 cfs) and lasted until Sept 15 (?)
 - Avg flow was <500 cfs during that period and dropping
- Protocol for making call - big question from the 2019 listening sessions, so FWP and CSKT developed a joint protocol.

- Basin analysis of junior users, but not everyone will be called. Considerations:
 - Is there a basin management plan/drought plan and who participates?
 - Are there Water commissioners in the drainage - probably already have juniors shut off anyway
 - Identify water rights that are most likely to benefit flow (if called)
 - Use River Conditions Tool to help users monitor flow
 - Consultations - weekly coordination calls between FWP and CSKT
 - FWP process: ISF program works with fisheries biologists to assess; then make recommendation to DO
 - CSKT water program assesses and makes recommendation to the Council
- Options for long-term management
 - Commissioners
 - Sub-basin water management plans - working with users to improve flows and habitat. Could include:
 - 1:1 trades (person exchanges using a senior right for a junior one with less impact)
 - Soil moisture management - saturating soils when water is available
 - Natural storage
 - Leasing - esp split-season; often involves landowner working with an NGO on the lease and changing the water right
 - Water storage opportunities - high elevation storage
 - Water projects like Silver Lake have the potential to reduce calls .

Group discussion

- JH - a topic we talked about early on is how do we manage the water when no one is looking. Many people in the Gold Creek basin work together and make sacrifices to maintain flow; they've done really well and the flows look good compared to other creeks of similar size. Remembers times in the past when the creek would run dry, but in the recent past, the irrigator sacrifices have maintained flows all season.
- JH - Potentially need to be prepared for a water commissioner? Seems like the people working the hardest to maintain flows end up also paying for a commissioner to make sure others get water (frustration)
- SM - CSKT perspective - Gold Creek irrigators need to document their basin water management; could be built into a plan. Doesn't necessarily have to be super technical, but should have objectives and information on what they do. It will be difficult, but it's necessary.
- BB - Posed question that if GC irrigators would memorialize their water management, would it also be considered a "plan?"
- SB/SM - not quite a plan - need to look at flow and temperature targets to see if management is meeting them or if more needs to be done. Meeting OR moving towards meeting them - acknowledging that it will take time
- CU - is there a good example of a sub-basin plan?
- SB - we could develop something. Wants to ensure credit is given for work that's already being done.
- JH - fish data shows that there's a lot of spawning high in Gold Creek - sign of good habitat

- TD - thinks the longer-term management options presented are comprehensive; would only add one about groundwater (e.g., easements). Asked if the CD could work with others on the GC plan with state grant funds (RDG)
- SB - Racetrack might be another sub-basin to focus on
- BB - it has a CFC ISF right AND a water commissioner
- SB - probably wouldn't prioritize it then, but still could be put into a plan
- BC - coordinating some of the subbasin plans will take time and effort; who can pursue these and who reviews them? CSKT and FWP? Can CFC start bringing people together?
- SB - doesn't make sense for FWP/CSKT to do it all, so sure; Caleb can help identify criteria and targets.
- SM - wants to be part of planning process/development, not just handed a plan when it's done
- MA - comment about Racetrack - CFC isn't very popular in that basin, so would be better for FWP/CSKT to lead.
- SM - we can come join if you get people together; MA - better for you to organize a meeting
- SB - also the workshop idea
- AF - probably wise to check and make sure there would actually be people to call before developing a plan
- DMQ - Where are you looking to get water from? Rock, Flint, Little Blackfoot basins all identified - who will contribute the most? Where will water come from? Will everyone be expected to get a commissioner? Wants to know expectations for all the tribes, ideally by percentage. Thinks FWP/CSKT needs to be ready for these kinds of questions if they have meetings or workshops.
- SB - They've had a lot of discussion about the equity of making call and have settled on the need to ask the entire basin for contributions, not fair to just pick on Rock Cr because it's close to Turah. Questions are a good starting point.
- MA - also need to factor in the adjudication process occurring now - deadline extended to August

Next Steps

- Stephen welcomes feedback from this group; reach out with questions; invite him to your community to talk with landowners
- FWP will host workshops to discuss framework and seek feedback

Water Supply Outlook – John Lunzer, DNRC Presentation Handout Attached to email

- Explanation/walk through handout
- DMQ - period of use question (when is DNRC going to let people move back their period of uses to better match the earlier season runoff?) (DNRC staff can't really answer that!)
- SM - CSKT has been trying to capture the Feb flows because the warm-ups and chinooks - we've always had them, but getting increasingly common and significant. Building pumping infrastructure to capture and hold water from Crow Creek in Nine

Pipe Reservoir. Project will pump 2500-4000 AF/yr, 40 cfs pumps; gives reservoir irrigation water for about 40K acres (?)

Updates/Announcements

Valerie K

Exempt well bills

- HB 704 failed
- SB 436 (Glimm) – passed Senate
- SB 358 – (SWG) – amended to have revenue component, so hasn't passed the Senate, but still in play

Abandonment bill – SB 580 – passed the House. If irrigator ceases to use all or some of water right, not considered nonuse if area is in D1 drought and in compliance with a local, regional, or state drought plan. Plan must have metric or criterion that compels voluntary reduction for certain geographic areas or water rights.

Hb 256 – Water trust and special revenue account – appears popular; however, Monica A. had different feedback from legislators she spoke with.

Gold Creek – prepping for the field season, meeting with reps from other agencies (FWP, DEQ, Agriculture). Adding vegetation and soil analyses this year thanks to some help from Brian B and NRDP.

Brian C

In person meetings in DC with state reps

2025 Meeting Dates Confirmed

Email invites have been sent out by Heather

- **May 7th** - 10AM to 12:30PM meeting followed by afternoon field trip
- **July 9th** - 10AM to 12:30PM meeting followed by afternoon field trip
- **September 10th** - **annual BBQ**
- **November 12th**