

Upper Clark Fork Streamflow Working Group Meeting Meeting Summary

July 9th, 2025

Powell County Community Center, Deer Lodge, MT

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

Goals of this group

- **Build a clear understanding** of the water use and streamflow challenges in the Upper Clark Fork River;
- **Share information** about ongoing activities pursued by participants to address water use and streamflow challenges; and
- **Determining a suite of actions** that could be initiated by the participants to augment streamflow during critical times.

Meeting Objectives

- Deepen understanding of sustainable farming practices from a landowner in the UCF basin
- Gain shared knowledge of completed and current water management projects within the UCF Watershed
- Inform on Milltown Water Right call status and next steps
- Share relevant updates and upcoming events

Participants

In Person				
Alli Pardis	Brian Chaffin	Heather Stokes (Facilitator)	Matt Vincent	Stephen Begley
Amanda Spencer	Bruce Thomas	Jason Smith	Maureen Connor	Valerie Kurth
Andy Fischer	Casey Hackathorn	Jim Berg	Monica Anderson	Walker Conyngham
Bill Schenk	Dan McQueary	John Hollenbach	Paul Grieco	Will Pauley
Brian Bartkowiak	Erin Clinkenbeard	Madison Boone	Richard Forbes	Zach Zipfel
Virtual				
Adam Logar	Benjamin LaPorte	Doug Martin	Pat Ortmeyer	Ted Dodge
Attila Felnagy	Casey Ryan	Mark Mariano	Robert McDonald	Thomas Stark

Next Steps

- Confirmed Upcoming Meeting Dates
 - o **September 10th – 3 PM to 8 PM** - 4th Annual BBQ – Thomas' Ranch
 - We'll be reaching out in late August to put together a potluck list!
 - o **November 12th – 10 AM to 12:30 PM** – Powell County Community Center

- Brian Chaffin will continue updating the project map and will develop a related project list, including date, project name, partners, and types of projects. He will be reaching out to others to help populate the data prior to November's meeting.

Sustainable Farming Practices: Monica Anderson's Story

Local rancher Monica Anderson presented her experience with farming and ranching in the Upper Clark Fork drainage.

Monica's background

- Has spent most of her life farming in Minnesota – mostly corn and soybeans
- Bought 1300 acres of farmland in the Deer Lodge Valley about 10 years ago
- Her farm is family-run – herself, husband, son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren
- She and her family farm wheat, alfalfa, canola, triticale and run 300 head of cattle
- It is unique (at least in this valley) to farm and raise cattle

Monica's purpose

- Farming is her way of nourishing her family and community, as well as the world
- Food is vital for survival
- She believes in taking care of the land
- She is committed to the next generations of farmers
- She wants to protect the land from development, and cares about conservation and open spaces
- She believes water is OUR (all of us) livelihood

Monica shared the challenges she faces with agricultural production

- Farming in Montana is significantly different and more challenging than in Minnesota
 - Water is plentiful in Minnesota
 - Soil is different – understanding the nutrients of the soil; what the crops need; and much more conscious need to utilize water effectively and efficiently
- Water rights in Montana are complicated; correct and complete data on water rights are not documented in one place and require extensive legal navigation to get water rights in order (last bill – legal fees \$36K)
- Margins are extremely tight with navigating water rights, purchasing and maintaining equipment (one used harvesting tractor is almost \$500K), and building and maintaining infrastructure (pipes and pivots)
- Utilizing pivots for watering is extremely efficient; concern is that if focus is just on crops and not on soil and aquifer recharge, we are not addressing the health of the /soil/land or ground water

- Feels targeted by conservationists – always asking to give up more water
- Landowners do not have the money that agencies and NGO's have to purchase land, water rights, equipment; we are land rich and cash poor
- We are isolated from these kinds of discussions; We work hard day and night; We don't go to many meetings; the ones we do attend are usually ag related

Moving Forward: Why Monica participates in the UCF Streamflow Group

- She wants to collaborate and feels concerned; there is a lack of trust; we don't know what we don't know; uncertainty equals fear
- To collaborate, we need transparency and honesty; we need all the information – the pros and cons around what is being asked of us; we need time and patience to understand the information and have honest conversations around how to make this a win-win situation
- She thinks we in this room all want the same thing: more water; water stored in our basin; water for the health of the land, the rivers, the people, the fish
- She wants to collaborate; this is why I am here and a part of this streamflow group; the opportunity to hear and share information amongst landowners, agencies and NGO's is crucial for us to collectively address and balance the water needs of the UCF basin
- We collectively can find solutions – we need to work together and to do so we must understand the needs of one another

Dan McQueary shared his calculations below to underscore that ag does not use as much water as others think:

Water Use Consumed: Basis 1 cubic ft/sec = 7.5 gal/second = 40 miners inches

Crops:

Hay: 14% Moisture per ton

- $2000 \text{ lbs} \times .14 = 280 \text{ lbs}$ divided by $8 \text{ lbs/gal} = 35 \text{ gal/ton}$. $1000 \text{ ton} \times 35 \text{ gal/ton} = 35,000 \text{ gal}$. $35,000 \text{ gal}$ divided by $7.5 \text{ gal/sec} = 4667 \text{ seconds}$ divided by $60 \text{ sec/minute} = 78 \text{ minutes}$

Wheat: 60 lbs/bu

- $100 \text{ bu/acre} \times 60 \text{ lbs/bu} = 6000 \text{ lbs/acre}$ divided by $8 \text{ lbs/gal} = 105 \text{ gal/acre}$ divided by $7.5 \text{ gal/sec} = 14 \text{ seconds /acre}$

Barley: 48 lbs/bu

- $80 \text{ bu/acre} \times 48 \text{ lbs/bu} = 3840 \text{ lbs/acre}$ $\times .14 = 537 \text{ lbs/acre}$ divided by $8 \text{ lbs/gal} = 67 \text{ gal/acre}$ divided by $7.5 \text{ gal/sec} = 9 \text{ sec/acre}$

Oats: 32 lbs/bu

- $60 \text{ bu/acre} \times 32 \text{ lbs/bu} = 1920 \text{ lbs/acre}$ $\times .14 = 269 \text{ lbs/acre}$ divided by $8 \text{ lbs/gal} = 33.6 \text{ gal/acre}$ divided by $7.5 \text{ gal/sec} = 4.5 \text{ sec/acre}$

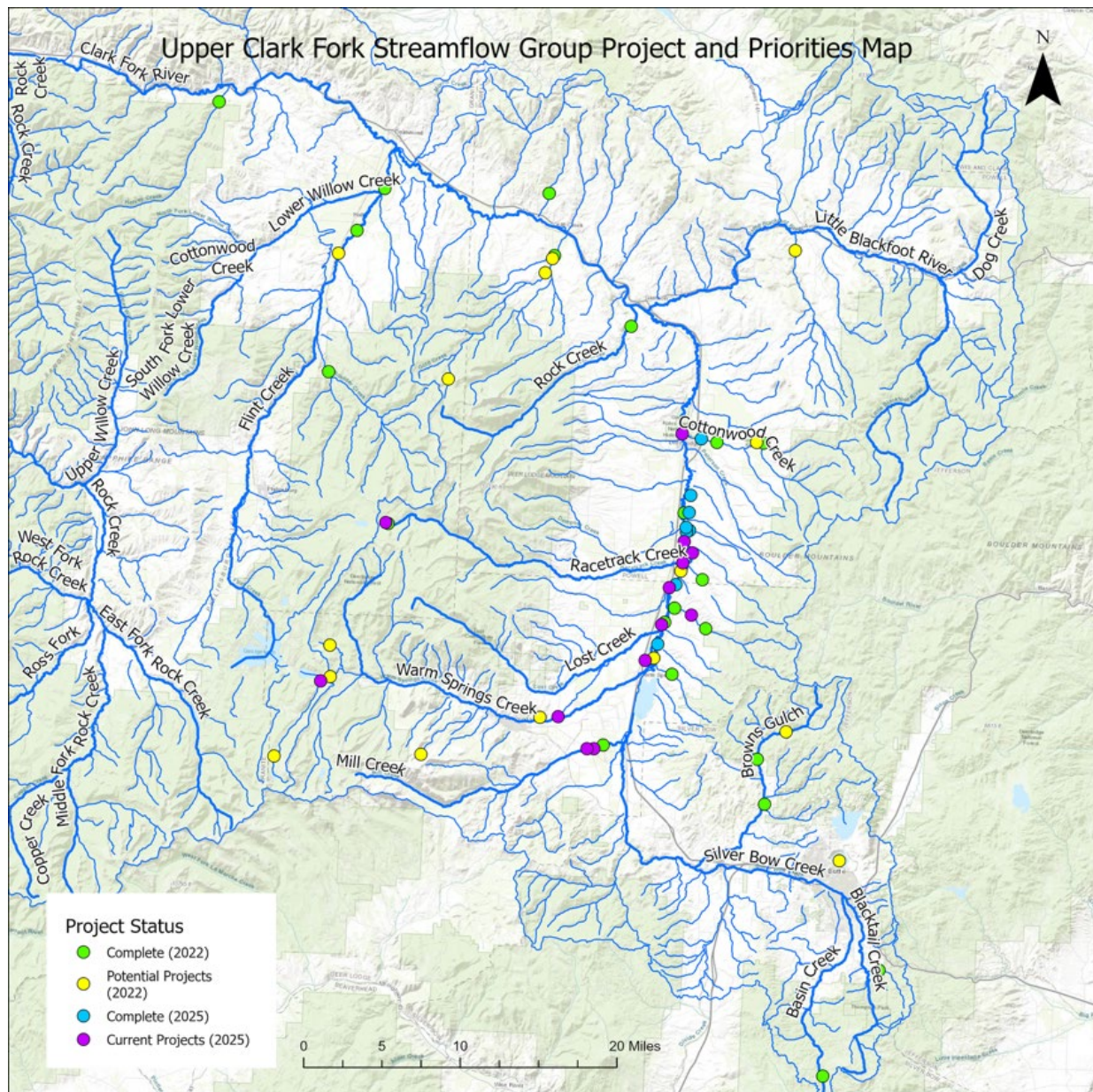
Corn: 56 lbs/bu

- $220 \text{ bu/acre} \times 56 \text{ lbs/bu} = 12,320 \text{ lbs/acre} \times .14 = 1,725 \text{ lbs/acre}$ divided by $8 \text{ lbs/gal} = 216 \text{ gal/acre}$ divided by $7.5 \text{ gal/sec} = 28.7 \text{ sec/acre}$

Cows:

- $100 \text{ cows} \times 30 \text{ gal/hd/day} = 3000 \text{ gal/day}$ divided by $7.5 \text{ gal/sec} = 400 \text{ sec}$ divided by $60 \text{ sec/min} = 6.67 \text{ min}$

Projects in the Upper Clark Fork Watershed: Completed, Current, and Potential



In 2022, the UCF Streamflow Working Group engaged in a priority mapping exercise to better understand where and what type of completed streamflow-related projects had occurred as well as what potential project this group would like to discuss moving forward. Other discussion items took priority and projects continued on the ground.

This group requested revisiting this map to gain shared understanding of completed, current and potential projects in the UCF basin.

This updated map, pictured above, is an estimated list of projects that had been complete in 2022, projects completed between 2022 and 2025, potential projects (identified in 2022), and current projects happening in the basin. We recognize this list is incomplete and will work with streamflow group members prior to the November 2025 meeting to further populate the map.

Discussion:

- The group would like to see on the map, differentiating the different types of projects with different shapes
- creating a list of projects, including:
 - o date, project name, partners, and types of projects (including fish screens, managed storage, natural headwaters water storage and rehabilitation, irrigation infrastructure improvements, new types of leases/transactions like split-season leasing, habitat restoration projects, Superfund-related water management).
- The group also expressed interest in the list describing:
 - o What made projects successful?
 - o What lessons were learned through projects?
 - o What institutional barriers did you face (beyond funding)?

The group also agreed that this type of list is valuable.

Updates

- Erin Clinkenbeard, CSKT, shared that CSKT is continuing to collaborate with FWP and landowners to explore water management plans and options and can't provide answers to what might happen the rest of the summer as it depends on water levels. CSKT will be hiring a UCF watershed coordinator focused on providing technical support to local water users off-reservation. Clinkenbeard also shared three resources CSKT has developed regarding the Milltown Water Right:
 - o **A new Milltown Water Rights StoryMap** – [Milltown Water Right: Naayc̓stm](#)
 - o **CSKT Water Rights Program Page** – [Water Rights Program | Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes](#) (includes a contact form to reach our team)
 - o **Contact us** – [Water Rights Program | Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes](#) (contact form)
- Stephen Begley, FWP, shared that the Clark Fork and Blackfoot River are both more than 100 CFS lower than they were at this date last year, and that they're monitoring flows and exploring their options. FWP asked for signups to subscribe to a listserv/alert system to provide water level conditions, forecasts, and the potential for call, with the hopes that this helps people plan ahead.

- Brian Bartkowiak, Montana Natural Resource Damage Program, shared that Silver Bow Lake will be releasing 32 CFS into Upper Warm Springs Creek daily for 47 days (beginning on 7.10.25).
 - o Alli Pardis, Trout Unlimited, will be helping monitor the Silver Lake release and comparing it with 2021.
- Maureen Connor, town of Phillipsburg, shared that Drummond just accepted a bid on replacing their sewer lagoon (which discharges into the Clark Fork). The project came in at \$10 million, twice what was expected.
- Pat Ortmeyer, WRC, shared that WRC got a grant to automate the Racetrack Lake Dam, and they're currently working through environmental and cultural compliance requirements.
- Adam Logar, Pioneer Technical, shared that the Yankee Doodle Offsite Discharge (3 CFS) was suspended on June 19th to avoid compounding temperature and salinity issues in Silver Bow Creek.
- Valerie Kurth, Montana DNRC, was asked about DNCR's work in the Big Hole watershed regarding cloud seeding. She talked to her colleague Michael Downey and provided the following information via email shortly after the meeting.
 - o The State of Montana completed a [feasibility study](#) for cloud seeding in the Big Hole ([press release](#)) this past spring.
 - o One of the main challenges identified is the geography (mountains) and prevailing wind patterns.
 - o A feasibility study for the Upper Clark Fork would assess these challenges and perform a cost-benefit analysis (the Big Hole study was about \$200K). Following the feasibility study, a multi-year (3-5) pilot study would be required to better quantify the costs and benefits.
 - o It's an expensive commitment, so one of the big questions is whether or not the State wants to dedicate funds to developing a program. Montana and Washington are the only two states in the West who don't have cloud seeding programs, and many of them are decades old (e.g., Utah has had a program since the 1970s).