The State of Montana’s Wetlands

MT Chapter of AWRA
October 12, 2006
Polson Montana

Lynda Saul, Montana DEQ
Wetland Program Manager
Montana Wetlands

- Marsh
- Slough
- Wet Meadow
- Prairie Pothole
- Riparian Fringe
- Lacustrine Fringe
- Forested Wetlands
- Scrub/Shrub
- Fen
Montana Wetland Statistics

- < 1% of land mass
- ~ 840,300 acres currently
- Lost >27% since white settlement
- ~ 306,700 acres lost
- What about quality degradation?
- Riparian areas ~ 3% of land mass
Wetlands in Montana

Wetlands in Montana: This map was derived from the "Wetland Resources of the United States", T.E. Dahl, produced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1991.
Wetland Size – Big Muddy Watershed
43,563 acres of wetlands
8,595 individual wetlands

- <1 Acre: 67%
- 1-10 Acres: 29%
- 10-100 Acres: 4%
- 100-1000 Acres: 0.4%
- >1000 Acres: 0.02%
Wetlands Benefit Society

- Flood Control
- Biological Diversity
- Improve Water Quality
- Filter Nutrients
- Groundwater Recharge
- Recreation Opportunities
- Wildlife Habitat
- Open Space
- Economic Value
Wetlands Provide Critical Wildlife Habitat

- 60% of Montana species identified as greatest conservation need rely on wetland and riparian areas (about 4% of MT land mass) for essential habitat
Wetland Status Report

1. Policy, Laws and Regulations
2. Inventory, Monitoring & Assessment
3. Restoration and Protection
4. Outreach and Education
5. Coordination and Integration
1. Policy, Laws & Regulation Status

- No specific State wetland protection
- 1950-70’s - Federal subsidies to fill & drain wetlands for more productive land uses
- 1972 - Clean Water Act
- 1988 - National no net loss policy
  Nation has lost > 50% of wetlands
- 2004 - Pres Bush Earth Day net gain goal
“Wetland Gain”
2006 USFWS Status and Trends Report
Supreme Court – muddies the CWA

SWANCC – 2001 isolated
Rapanos and Carabell – 2006 ?intermittent?

Courtesy of Rex Babin of the Sacramento Bee.
In Montana, when water is present, Wetlands are protected by Montana water quality act, but when dry....
1. Policy, Laws & Regulation Needs

State
- State-wide Stream Setback Legislation
- Wetland Protection Legislation

Local
- Encourage and Support Local Solutions

Federal
- Wetland Protection Legislation
- Monitor & Enforce Existing Regulations
- Track Quantity and Quality
2. Inventory, Monitoring & Assessment Status

- MT Wetland and Riparian Mapping Center
- 2005 CIR orthophotography
- Wetland Rapid Assessment – MT NHP 2000 sites 2 yrs
- Evaluating quality and quantity
- Geodatabase tracking - gain and loss
MT and UT - Least Mapped States
Physical Loss

Historic loss mainly from cropland conversion.
Functional Loss
People like to live near water

It’s how and where we are growing that are driving our significantly increasing rate of land consumption, not domestic population growth.
Three Year Grant

• Track All Losses & Gains

• Evaluate Quantity & Quality

• Start w/ Pilot areas
  Bitterroot
  Gallatin
  Flathead
2. Inventory, Monitoring & Assessment Needs

- Funding for Wetland Mapping
- Institutionalize 5 yr cycle CIR acquisition
- All gains and losses accounted
- Integrate wetland assessment into watershed assessments
3. Restoration and Protection Status

Voluntary incentive-based partnership dedicated to conserving Montana’s wetlands, riparian areas and associated uplands.

First 5 years Legacy partnership ~ 800,000 acres on the ground conservation, including 27,000 acres of wetlands.

www.wetlandslegacy.org
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<td>Five Valleys Land Trust</td>
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Example Programs

NAWCA grants
- Since 1998 about 100,000 acres protected
- Beaverhead, Hi-line, Front, Blackfoot, NW Valleys

NRCS
- Enrolled 23,512 acres Wetland Reserve Program.
- WHIP, EQIP, Floodplain Easements.

Blackfoot Challenge
- 2,600 acres wetlands, 38 miles streams
3. Restoration and Protection **Needs**

- Revise policy limitations of Farm Bill programs for landowners - ex. WRP, CREP
- Implement In Lieu Fee Mitigation Program for Stream impacts
- More staff and funding for on-the-ground work & id strategic priorities
- Include wetlands in all restoration work
4. Outreach and Education Status

- Public Service Announcements
- Student and Educator Programs
- Targeted to Landowners, Planners, Pond Builders, Realtors…
- Workshops
Montana’s Wetlands and Riparian Areas
October 20th, 2006
Continuing Education Course for Realtors

Free, Four-Credit Course
Registration Required
Contact: Debbie Zarnt at the Montana Watercourse
406-994-1684, dzarnt@montana.edu

As a landowner’s first contact you are in a unique position to shape how your community develops. Learning about your local water resources will not only give you a competitive edge in this market but also enable you to share accurate information with your client, empowering your client to make wise land use decisions.

You will learn about:
- Wetlands and riparian area fundamentals
- Local water resources
- Important regulations concerning landowners
- Conservation options for landowners
- Restoration of wetlands and riparian areas

Time:
8:30am-12:30pm
Location:
Double Arrow Resort
Hwy 83,
2 miles South of Seeley Lake
406-677-2777
20% off on lodging for participants, ask for Diana.

This course is a collaborative effort between:
- Montana Watercourse
- Clearwater River Realty
- Blackfoot Challenge
- BBC Trout Unlimited
- US Fish Wildlife Service
- Montana Audubon
- Missoula County
- US Army Corps Engineers

The Montana Watercourse is a state-wide water education program that supports water resource decision making by providing unbiased information, resources and tools and education to all water users.
4. Outreach and Education **Needs**

- Wetland Workshops for Professionals
- Professional standards for Wetland consultants
- Mapping information & technical assistance for local government and watershed groups
5. Coordination and Integration Status

- Montana Wetland Council
- Montana Watershed Coordination Council
- Floodplain managers
- Wildlife and bird conservation
- Regulatory - CWA, water law
- Land use?
Governor’s Task Force For Riparian Protection

"Development along rivers and streams that destroys protective riparian areas is possibly the single most urgent ecosystem threat facing Montana today."


Room to Roam Brochure
Outreach Plan
5. Coordination and Integration Needs

- Evaluate and revise 1997 Wetland Conservation Strategy – all participate
- Coordinate needs with Science Community
- Partner more within and between Federal, State, Tribal, Local efforts
- Better integrate wetlands into watershed protection
Final Words

- Water is the life blood of Montana.

- Wetland and riparian areas continue to be physically lost and functionally degraded every single day in Montana.

- Montana needs your ideas and action to integrate the protection and restoration of wetlands into the work you do.
“I am in love with Montana, for other states I have admiration, respect, recognition, even some affection, but with Montana it is love and it is difficult to analyze love when you are in it.”

John Steinbeck
Travels with Charlie