

W2ASACT MEETING NOTES  
Meeting on October 8, 2024, 10 am to 12 pm  
Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, 1539 11<sup>th</sup> Ave, Helena, Montana  
First Floor Montana Conference Room and Zoom

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**Zoom Meeting participants:**

1	Abby Weimer, DNRC	14	Kristen Jordan, DNRC
2	Anna Connerton, DNRC	15	Lexi Laird, DNRC
3	Ann Kulczyk, DNRC	16	Lindsey Glastetter, DNRC
4	Autumn Coleman, DNRC	17	Lindsey Siebrasse, Commerce
5	Ben Rigby, MRWS	18	Melissa Downing, DNRC
6	Bobbie DuBose, DNRC	19	Mia Belting, DNRC
7	Coleen O'Rourke, DNRC	20	Nina Denny, DNRC
8	Denise Cook & Anna Miller	21	Rachel Gemar, DNRC
9	Galen Steffens	22	Rick Duncan, DNRC
10	Greg Montgomery, DEQ	23	Scott Miller, DNRC
11	Jason Mercer	24	Tanya Shadrick
12	Katherine Certalic, DNRC	25	Wade Salyards
13	Kayla Mehrens, AE2S	26	

**At DNRC:**

Anna Miller, DNRC

Denise Cook, DNRC

Jake Goettle, DEQ

Heather Reeves, DNRC

Mike Abrahamson, DEQ

Rebecca Shaw-Quinones, Interstate Eng

Shawna Swanz, DNRC

**Acronyms:**

AIS – American Iron & Steel

APE – Advanced Pump & Equipment

ARPA – American Rescue Plan Act of 2021

ARRA – American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009

AWWA – American Water Works Association

BABA – Build America, Buy American

BIL – Bipartisan Infrastructure Plan

BOI – Montana Department of Commerce, Board of Investments

CARDD – Conservation & Resource Development Division, DNRC

CDBG – Community Development Block Grant Program, MT Department of Commerce

CMRWA – Central Montana Regional Water Authority

COVID-19 – Corona Virus 2019

DEQ – Montana Department of Environmental Quality  
 DNRC – Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation  
 GWE – Great West Engineering  
 HDR – HDR Engineering  
 HUD – Housing and Urban Development  
 IAC – Infrastructure Advisory Commission (ARPA)  
 IUP – Intended Use Plan  
 KLJ – Kadmas Lee & Jackson Engineering  
 LFD – Montana State Legislative Fiscal Division  
 MAP – Midwest Assistance Program  
 MEPA – Montana Environmental Policy Act  
 MISC – Montana Invasive Species Council  
 MRWS – Montana Rural Water Systems  
 MCEP – See TSEP  
 RATES – Rural & Tribal Environmental Solutions  
 RDG – Reclamation Development Grant Program, DNRC  
 RRGL – Renewable Resource Grant and Loan Program, DNRC  
 SRF (DNRC) – Wastewater State Revolving Fund Loan Program  
 TSEP – Treasure State Endowment Program, MT Department of Commerce – Now MSEP  
 USDA - RD – United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development  
 WASACT – Water & Solid Waste Action Coordinating Team, Montana  
 WMCC – Western Montana Conservation Commission (from Flathead Basin Commission and Upper Columbia Conservation Commission)  
 WRF (DNRC) – Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program

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### **Call to Order, Sign-in Sheet, Agenda Changes**

Anna Miller called the scheduled meeting of the Water, Wastewater and Solid Waste Action Coordinating Team (W2ASACT) to order at 10:08 am, on Tuesday, October 8, 2024. Anna went over the agenda and asked if there were any changes. She asked those in attendance at DNRC to introduce themselves. The draft minutes from the July 9, 2024, meeting, which were distributed to those present at DNRC and posted to the WASACT website, were approved and adopted by those attending with no revisions. There were 7 attendees in the room. According to the Zoom report, there were a total of 23 participants on the meeting.

### **Guest Speaker – Ben Rigby with Montana Rural Water Systems**

Ben is the new Executive Director replacing John Camden who retired this summer. He stressed that the service water operators is the biggest issue facing water systems. From Chester to Conrad and including Saint Mary's, which we have heard about in the news

since the siphon failure this year. Ben said trying to get water operators certified has been a challenge. He posted his contact info in the chat.

Anna asked what is the main problem keeping operators? Ben replied pay, turnover and outreach – being an operator is not talked about at things like career fairs. He stated exposure as the main challenge. Job security, turnover at rural communities and no means for succession plan.

The pay to work in rural areas is lower. Losing operators is a nationwide epidemic. Texas has grant funding which earns students' college credits for Water School. We need to get into the high schools to look those who may be interesting in being system operators.

Anna asked about apprenticeship programs. Ben said there is a 2-year program with the goal being to find people interested in the program and communities to sign on to make it more appealing, which will make it work.

Ben announced the 2025 Montana Rural Water conference will be March 12, 13 & 14. Vendor applications are due November 1. The theme is "Water & Wastewater, Building Resiliency in an Every-Changing World".

Anna thanked Ben for speaking and invited him to stay on the meeting.

### **Renewable Resource Grants – Autumn Coleman**

Autumn announced some changes in staff. Michelle McNamee and Katherine Certalic moved from the ARPA program to the Resource Development Bureau replacing Lindsay Volpe and Sonja Hoeglund as new grant managers. Katherine is also doing planning grants.

Autumn said the grant ranking list is due in November. This is for the Legislative funding in House Bill 6. Visit the RRGL website to see who has applied. Planning Grants are now open on a rolling basis. The Technical Assistance program is modeled after that at Department of Commerce. Planning Grants are like a "baby step" to other grants.

### **Ann Kulczyk – DNRC Irrigation Development Grants**

Ann said the second cycle of ID grants is open and this is using the second tranche of funding with small farms being the caveat. November is the next grant cycle. There is a limit of \$50,000 and a \$50,000 match requirement. This is developing irrigation in the traditional sense.

## **Melissa Downing – DNRC RRGL Program**

Melissa announced that 8 Watershed Management grants were awarded. There is another cycle the beginning of November. Mia Belting and Bobbie DuBose who are both remote from Bozeman. Autumn added that if you have questions on who is managing which grant, reach out to us. We will publish grant assignments and put that on the RRGL website.

## **Tanya S – Montana Rural Water Systems**

Tanya tagged onto Ben's reasons for not enough system operators by adding the lack of training for boards and counsels.

She reminded all of the MRW conference and since it is earlier, the call for papers is open and due November 1. Anna asked if March 12 will be the W2ASACT workshop day? Tanya replied yes. Funders will be there from 8 to 12 with project information.

Tanya asked if anyone is doing 'mini" W2ASACT workshops for clerks. There is a lot of clerk turnover and some can't get along with new administrators. There was much agreement on that.

## **State Revolving Fund Program**

### **Jake Goettle – DEQ**

Jake's office is busy with many projects. There is plenty of funding under BIL. BIL provided for Lead Service Lines – there is a large balance of funds available. They turned down 2023 funding and may turn down 2024 funding. We don't know which projects are needed. There is also Emerging Containmentment funding available. Anna added that manganese and PFAs are being found.

### **Mike Abrahamson – DEQ**

Mike noted that his office is fully staffed. He said a number of projects tied with ARPA are coming to SRF program to complete funding requirements/matches. DEQ has plenty of EC funds. A little over \$1 Million forgiven of forgiven loans could go to communities who use on-site septic. A community that shows sampling with Emerging Contaminants (EC) funds could use EC funds to update sewer systems. Anna asked if there was funding for lab work? Mike said you can buy equipment to analyze PFAS, which is a "forever chemical" and to analyze metals that contaminate.

Jake added that the funding was out before the surveys. Communities can move forward on projects and there is available loan money. Anna noted the interest was at 1 ½ %. There is EC funding at DEQ in water and wastewater and in Greg Montgomery's program. Greg added that they have their own EC funding through public water supply group. You can get \$9.45 Million for 5 years. If your system has an EC project, apply for which funding works best. Greg said we have funding for schools for Lead Service Lines, pipes and fixtures. We need \$3.7 Million spent by June of 2025. Lead Service Lines inventories are due Oct 16. We still need 600 systems to respond to the inventory request by the EPA on water system.

10:48am – Zoom call was dropped and reinitiated.

### **Katherine Certalic – DNRC RRGL Program**

Katherine is learning about Sonja Hoeglund's projects. She added the Planning Grants are open now. Katherine is the program manager. Technical Assistant funding can help communities get started on their projects. Also she has engineering firms on contract as they can provide up to 20 hours of Technical Assistance.

### **Lindsey Siebrasse – Dept. of Commerce – MCEP**

She attended the meeting and was available for questions.

### **Shawna Swanz – DNRC ARPA**

Shawna reported that Michelle and Katherine moved to RDB and they have hired Heather Reeves to help with grant management. They have 13 months to finish getting the ARPA funds out. The reporting period deadline is Oct 13. They are fine-tuning reports as they do not want to revert funds.

Anna added that with BIL, there is still funding out there. We will work with you. You need to have ARPA funds spent and match in place. Mike from DEQ asked if the deadlines will differ depending on the funding? Shawna replied that they can't be reimbursed for work after December of 2025. You can refer to the treasury website for more info.

(At 11:03am, the Zoom meeting was dropped and resumed)

### **Regional Water Update – Rick Duncan**

**Dry Prairie Rural Water Authority (DPRWA)** – Denise put up the map of Assiniboine & Sioux & Dry Prairie Rural Water System, which also distributed to those in the room. The

Assiniboine-Sioux Rural Water Supply System continues work on installing pipeline in the northwestern areas of the Reservation. Currently, Phase 3 is in the process of being finished, with crews moving on to the last, Phase 4, as work winds down on 3. Engineers for the systems are preparing plans for construction of five rural water depots to be located throughout the Reservation. Anna asked if this project will end in 2026 and Rick replied that it should be complete in 2025, depending upon schedules and funding availability. For Dry Prairie Rural Water Authority, work on pipeline installation along the northern tier (Daniels and Sheridan Counties) continues. Last to complete will be a segment around Opheim in 2026. Before that, DPRWA will bid out its project for The Pines housing area near Fort Peck Reservoir in southern Valley County, with a probable completion date in 2025. They have secured Reclamation funding for that segment.

**Rocky Boys / North Central Montana** – Denise put up this project map, which was also handed out. Progress on construction of the regional water treatment plant (WTP) has gone well, with substantial completion having been reached in June of 2024, and only a few remaining punch-list items remaining before final completion of Phase 1 can be achieved. The 2-million-gallon ground storage reservoir was completed in July of this year. Extensive additional site work is part of a package for contract #4; work began at the end of May. Rick reported that earlier today he received an update from Greg Kruzich, Project Engineer for the Bureau of Reclamation. Pipe is still being installed by the Chippewa-Cree Construction Corporation (CCCC) on the Core Pipeline segments between the WTP and Box Elder due to the warmer temperatures this fall. Both Segment 3 and Segment 4 (of 8) have been completed, and Segment 5 has several miles to go. Segments 4 and 5 were installed by the two CCCC crews this season, with significant dewatering along portions of the segments being required for construction to take place. Pipe for Segment 6 has been designed and ordered and is being staged along the route as it arrives from the manufacturer.

**North Central Montana Regional Water Authority (NCRMWA)** -- North Central Montana Regional Water Authority (NCRMWA)--The third map was displayed. The cost of the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the regional Water Treatment Plant was reported to be \$100 million; approximately \$90 million more would be required to build the pipeline from Tiber to Shelby. With the revised cost of bringing WTP water to Shelby sitting at nearly \$200 million, the Authority, Reclamation and the State of Montana all are in favor of investigating alternatives which could save tens of millions in construction costs. This could include a smaller Phase 2 construction on the regional WTP, coupled with further development of the wellfield at Shelby, or other possible sources on the west side of the project. Anna asked how long until North Central is complete? Rick said it depends on costs and re-strategizing of construction priorities. It is estimated to be 50% complete.

**Central Montana RWA – Musselshell-Judith Regional Water System** – (Project area map was displayed). For Phase 2, Ubet wellfield to Roundup, water is anticipated to be to Roundup by Thanksgiving, but more likely by the end of the year, given the availability

of 2 vaults needed to finish the work. Anna asked if Phase 1, Ubet wellfield to Harlowton, was complete? The Authority had just approved Final Completion documents for that phase at a recent monthly Board meeting. Pipeline to Melstone (Phase 4, Roundup to Melstone) could be in place by the end of 2025 construction season; the contract for the segment has been awarded, and the contractor is mobilizing, awaiting arrival of pipe and other materials. Phase 3, Lavina-Broadview, is scheduled to start construction in 2025 if the full amount of the estimated cost for funding can be secured. Phase 3A, which includes Shawmut-Deadman's Basin and a privately owned main line to the Town of Ryegate may happen in 2026, depending upon funding. Shawna Swanz asked if Hobson will come in before Phase 3A and Rick replied no, that will be in Phase 5, and is scheduled to last in the sequence, as the Town's formal request came in after Shawmut-Deadman's Basin and Ryegate's were received.

**Dry Redwater Regional Water Authority (DRWA)** -- *(Project area map was displayed)*  
Denise put up the 5<sup>th</sup> map. Rick reported that early 2025 is the final phase of the feasibility study, and that the firm on contract with Reclamation to complete the revised study and associated documents may be done as early as January. After that process is complete, decisions will be made by Reclamation as to authorization of construction of the project, which would require annual appropriations by the U.S. Congress..

Anna asked how far Central Montana Judith Basin is from being complete? Rick replied about 60-65%. Anna added that Dy Redwater is still not authorized.

## **Workshops**

**Uniform Application/Standard Documents** - Jake Goettle reported one minor update and asked if there were any other updates or questions.

**Website** – Melissa Downing has no updates. She said to reach out if you have questions or updates.

Let Melissa know of changes or need something posted on the website.

Rebecca mentioned an issue with a school on an ARPA project and Shawna said that it has been corrected.

## **Congressional Update - None**

Anna noted that the Continuing Resolution was passed to go through December. Anna added the Federal government is busy dealing with cleanup from Hurricane Helene.

## **End of updates**

Anna thanked all those who attended. The next meeting is tentatively set for Tuesday January 14, 2025. We have the first floor Montana Conference room reserved.

Anna reminded all of the upcoming Legislative in session in January of 2025.

Meeting adjourned at 11:35am.

Minutes taken by Denise Cook, reviewed by Anna Miller, and adopted by those present at the WASACT meeting on January 14, 2025.