

FLATHEAD REGIONAL WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT GROUP
MINUTES OF MAY 11, 2010
11:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.
CONFERENCE ROOM C
EARL BENNETT BUILDING
KALISPELL, MONTANA

<u>Members Present</u>	<u>Members Absent</u>	<u>Others</u>
Greg Acton	Joe Brenneman	Judel Buls
Dan Bangeman		Thomas Cox
Kate Cassidy		
Ned Cooney		
Joni Emrick		
Jim Foster		
Pam Holmquist		
Dale Lauman		
Joe Russell		
Bill Shaw		
Mike Shepard		
Jim Simpson		
Julie Spencer		
Susie Turner		

Call to Order

Ned Cooney, Flathead Regional Wastewater Management Group (FRWMG) Facilitator, called the meeting to order at 11:04 a.m.

Introductions

Each individual introduced themselves and stated what department or agency they represented.

There was a review of May 11, 2010 agenda items.

Public Comments

It was asked if there is a website or anyplace where someone can find out information about what is going on during these meetings.

Joe Russell, Health Officer, Flathead City-County Health Department, reported that there is no website at the moment. The original grant was posted on the Health Department website. Russell reported that the Health Department could do whatever the Wastewater Management Committee wants and can support the committee with the department's IT staff.

Common Issues and Challenges Related to Wastewater Management

Cooney distributed a document titled Common Issues and Challenges Related to Wastewater Management. This is to be used as a reference tool that can be used to keep the committee focused on the important issues.

Cooney asked if there were any of these topics that the committee should focus on during future meetings to enhance common understanding and knowledge of a particular issue so potential solutions can be identified.

Kate Cassidy, Flathead City-County Health Department, commented that the TMDL is a hot topic since the date by which the TMDL is to be completed is coming up in the near future and could have a big impact on wastewater management.

Cooney asked if, as a general approach, the committee should move forward with some of these items and bring in outside expertise when needed.

The first item that was brought up by the group was the TMDL. Several names were suggested from MDEQ and EPA that could comment on the TMDL including George Matthews and Ron Stagg. Current TMDL studies on non-point sources have been completed and are being distributed internally among MDEQ staff for peer review and MDEQ is not yet ready to publish anything. Joni Emrick, Kalispell Wastewater Facility, reported that MDEQ does not have the final numbers related to the TMDL, but have commented publically on their philosophy related to establishing the TMDL. The group discussed having someone from MDEQ or EPA present to the committee either at the Flathead Basin Commission (FBC) on June 16th or to the Flathead Regional Wastewater Management Group at the June 8th meeting.

Pam Holmquist, Evergreen Water and Water Board, suggested that the committee approach the Evergreen Water and Sewer District about reporting on the status of the Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Cooney asked about whether or not septage should be a topic of future discussion. Holmquist stated that this has been a topic of discussion at the Evergreen Water and Sewer District and they may have something to present on this topic as well.

Jim Simpson, of FBC, asked if anybody is aware of any other region in the country that has gone through a similar exercise where there has been an extensive study of wastewater management in a defined area and recommendations made on how to improve management of that wastewater. The Lake Tahoe Basin was identified as an example of a basin-wide wastewater management study. Most studies of this sort are tied to near-lake TMDL issues and management. Simpson commented that he asked the question wondering if there was a “blueprint” from a previous study that the committee could review to understand how to proceed. It was suggested that Karen from the Flathead Basin Commission would know where to find some of these past studies.

Dale Lauman, Flathead County Commissioner, commented that septic disposal sites for septic pumpers is going to become critical in the next several years and is already becoming a problem especially in the Bigfork area. Lauman suggested that the committee invite some of the septic pumpers to come and speak at a future meeting so that they can express their concerns and summarize some of the problems they face. Russell commented that he felt that he could get a septic pumper to the meeting who would speak openly about his challenges. This would be a good presentation and the Health Department could facilitate this discussion/presentation. Simpson commented that he would like to know more about the environmental impacts of land applying septage. In summary, the two basic issues or topics include (1) talking with septic pumpers about their practices and (2) understanding the science of septic systems and septage

disposal and understanding the difference between septage from septic tanks and biosolids from a wastewater treatment plant. Biosolids disposal could even be a whole separate presentation since the various treatment plants in the area manage their biosolids differently. The group suggested that Russell coordinate with Susan Brueggeman, Lake County Environmental Health Department Director, to have a presentation prepared for next month's meeting. Russell suggested that each interested party (e.g. treatment plants, regulators, etc.) take 10 minutes and talk about their biosolids programs (or lack thereof).

Jim Foster, Chief of Facility Management from Glacier National Park, commented that Glacier National Park is concerned with aquatic related issues such as invasive species, but this concern could carry over to management of wastewater disposal sites for boats along the lake shore, etc. Dan Bangeman, FBC, commented that we are seeing a higher number of larger boats that have their own toilet facilities on board using Flathead Lake and very few boat landings have dumping facilities and as a result the waste gets dumped in the lake. Lauman commented that John with Fish, Wildlife and Parks has a public education campaign related to zebra mussels and the committee could possibly work on a coordinated public information/education campaign. Greg Acton, Utilities Supervisor for City of Whitefish, commented that the Whitefish Lake Institute requested that the City of Whitefish provide a place for boats to drain their bilges which is contaminated with hydrocarbons, etc. Whitefish designed a facility, but the project became a regulatory and liability nightmare and as a result was never constructed. Russell commented that there are many laws in place to protect the lake, but money is not available to enforce the laws. Lauman asked about how to encourage businesses to build dumping facilities for boats on the lake. Cooney asked if it would be worth spending more time discussing this topic and Cassidy offered to research current dumping sites. Bangeman suggested that public education is key for a successful boat dumping program.

Mike Shepard, Columbia Falls City Council Member, asked if the "novel discharge agents" topic should be folded into the "sewage nonpoint source" topic. Russell commented that since wastewater treatment plants don't effectively treat these agents, they need to be managed a different way. Russell also commented that a Pharmaceutical Take Back Program is scheduled for June 5th at the Health Department.

Shepard asked about someone coming from Washington, DC to comment on regulatory changes. Russell commented that the TMDL process is driving the regulatory changes and someone from MDEQ and EPA should come and talk about this process. Russell commented about how this already having a severe impact on current point source dischargers. Impacts include more stringent discharge requirements, more extensive sampling, etc. Russell commented that many communities are contesting their new MPDES permits claiming that the new standards are too stringent and cannot affordably be met. Russell also commented that the TMDL will force more septic systems since drainfields don't discharge directly to surface water, which is exactly what we don't want since it results in bad development. In some cases, a limited amount of nutrients keep lakes healthy, but too many nutrients can harm a water body, Foy's Lake being a great example. Unfortunately, the TMDL only regulates 2-3% of the nutrients that enter a water body. The rest are non-point sources that are difficult or impossible to regulate.

Shepard asked that since he lives in a city and therefore is impacted by the need to address the TMDL, what does this group need to do to bring the rest of the people in the county into the problem. Russell

stated that it comes down to density and proximity to public sewer and if a homeowner within approximately a mile from a public facility chooses to not connect to that facility, then that person should be required to treat their wastewater to the same standard as the nearby facility. Currently Flathead and Lake County have the most stringent septic regulations in the state. Even with these strict regulations, however, nutrients are still a concern. Also, the cost of land impacts the financial decisions that developers have to make with respect to wastewater treatment and disposal. More expensive land tends to result in connecting to a public sewer and less expensive land tends to result in large dense areas of septic tanks and drainfields like the Evergreen area.

Lauman commented that there are two areas that are a major concern with respect to future development as a result of the lack of a public sewer. These areas include north of Kalispell toward Whitefish and south of Kalispell toward Somers and Bigfork. How do we change that as the valley grows? This is a big future issue that needs to be addressed today. The authority to require a development to connect to a public sewer system is regulated by the Health Department and is defined by state law. Everyone will need to buy into this concept before more stringent regulations can be passed.

Bill Shaw, Columbia Falls City Manager, suggested that John Wilson, Whitefish City Public Works Director, would be a good resource since he sits on the League of Cities and Towns Board.

Judal Buls, a member of the public, commented that there is also a nutrient work group in Helena that meets every other month that is working to balance affordability with the limits of technology. In other words, limits are set based on science, but then modified through a variance based on the community's ability to afford the wastewater treatment plant upgrades to meet a future standard. Hopefully this group will help prepare smart legislation in this regard.

Break for Lunch

Russell addressed dealing with high population areas on septic tanks that are failing. Replacing the failing on-site systems with new on-site systems can be costly and makes homeowner's very reluctant to ever connect to public sewer due to their past financial investment. When the community recognizes the overall problem it can be dealt with more affordably upfront. What about new development? How do you provide an incentive to connect to public sewer when we all know it is the right thing to do since the cost of running sewer at a later date will be so much more expensive that it may never happen unless it is forced by a city? Do the cities have the political will to force this? Stillwater Estates is a good example. In addition, bringing the subdivision up to city standards (i.e. adding curb and gutter) is another cost that the homeowner would have to pay for that could make the project too expensive, thus another reason not to connect to public sewer.

Cooney suggested that septage be the next topic. The meeting could include power point presentations and site visits to the Bigfork sludge farm, and the City of Kalispell and City of Columbia Falls Wastewater Treatment Plants. Glacier National Park could provide the bus.

Cooney suggested that a steering committee be created to deal with some of the administration kinds of issues and meeting planning. Emrick, Russell, and Shepard commented that they would like to keep the whole group together.

Cooney informed the committee that Bill Meyer, a Bigfork citizen, suggested that public comment be opened at both the beginning and the end of the meeting. Russell suggested that public comment be accepted at any time. Shaw added that the chairman needs to be able to control or put an end to public comment if it gets off topic during the middle of the meeting.

The next meeting is scheduled for June 8, 2010 at 11:00.

The meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Tonya M. Buxton, Secretary