

Prairie Dog Creek Watershed Meeting Minutes
February 13, 2020
Prairie Dog Community Center

Edith Heyward, SCCD
Brad Bauer, SCLT & Landowner
John Kane, Landowner

Sharon Miller, Landowner
Larry Barbula, Landowner

Jackie Carbert, SCCD
Carrie Rogaczewski, SCCD

Meeting Opening and Introductions

Edith Heyward called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm and introductions were made.

Progress Updates/Priority Areas

Plan Review

Carrie began with a brief overview of the history of SCCD's activities in the Prairie Dog Creek watershed. Following the two-year baseline assessments completed in 2007 and 2008, the 2011 Prairie Dog Creek Watershed Based Plan was completed. The plan was updated in 2016 to reflect new data, load information, and project needs. Carrie went over completed milestones which included annual watershed meetings, updated progress registers and load reduction estimates, annual watershed newsletters, and water quality monitoring. Overall, the SCCD is on track with the implementation goals of the updated plan, with the exception of project installation. Project requests continue to be down.

Progress Registers – Completed Projects

The progress register documents water quality projects within the watershed to demonstrate progress that may not be reflected in water quality sampling in the short-term. Carrie listed the different types of projects on the register and the number of each that have been completed thus far. Since 2001, 31 projects have been completed, including fencing and stockwater installation, septic system replacements, irrigation improvements, a diversion improvement, riparian buffers and an erosion project. SCCD did complete one septic system replacement within the watershed this year. At the suggestion of various landowners during last year's watershed meetings, SCCD has been working on adding NRCS projects to the progress registers. All NRCS projects through 2015 have been added to the most recent progress register (see handout); Jackie will continue to work on adding the rest. The number of irrigation and fencing and stockwater projects in the Prairie Dog Creek watershed may increase once the remaining NRCS projects have been added.

Reduction Requirements/Priority Areas

Load reduction requirements are calculated for each subwatershed for each monitoring year. Maps depicting the load reduction category (low, medium, high and very high) provide a visual representation of general changes in reduction requirements over time. The load reductions are not necessarily intended to be used to determine specific water quality trends within the watershed. SCCD uses the information when ranking projects; the load reduction category of the appropriate subwatershed is one of several ranking criteria used to determine whether a project is funded. As of the 2017 data, most subwatersheds are in the low or medium reduction category, with the exception of the Meade Creek subwatershed, which is in the high reduction category. The largest subwatershed, Dutch Creek, was not sampled in 2017 but was in 2014 and that year's results are reflected on the map (low). Carrie pointed out that while there are not many projects in the lower portion of the watershed, the assumption is that projects upstream will result in enhanced water quality in the downstream portions of the watershed.

2020 Proposed Monitoring

Sampling was last completed in the Prairie Dog Creek watershed in 2017 at eight sites; five on the mainstem of Prairie Dog Creek and on Wildcat Creek, Meade Creek and Jenks Creek. The next sampling season is this year and SCCD would like to sample the same sites as in 2017, with the addition of a

couple sites last sampled in 2014: a regular water quality site on Dutch Creek and an additional macro-habitat site at PD08. If able to obtain landowner consent for all sites, the 2020 season will include nine regular water quality sites (five mainstem and four tributaries) and four macro-habitat sites. Sites are chosen as to represent the entire watershed, ideally with each subwatershed having at least one sample site. Having a site within each subwatershed is particularly useful for the load reduction calculations and for prioritizing projects.

Sampling will follow the same schedule as in past years, with 5 sampling days occurring from mid-May to mid-July and five from mid-July to mid-September. Five samples within a 60-day period are required by WDEQ to obtain a geometric mean for bacteria, thus SCCD follows this schedule for bacteria as well as for the other parameters. Instantaneous temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, conductivity, turbidity, and flow are measured at all sites. Continuous temperature, macroinvertebrate sampling and habitat assessments will take place at select mainstem sites.

Carrie reminded the group that bacteria concentrations fluctuate greatly in response to things like water temperature, water quantity, and suspended sediment. In the short term, it may be hard to see any trends or positive changes within the watershed, long-term collection is needed to see improvement.

2021 Plan Update-TMDL Implementation

Carrie briefly explained the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality's (WDEQ) requirements; when waterbodies do not meet water quality standards, the state has 8-13 years to develop a pollution remediation plan through a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). The Prairie Dog Creek watershed has no permitted point sources for bacteria; programs to address non-point sources are voluntary. WDEQ utilized much of the Prairie Dog Creek Watershed Plan in writing the TMDL, as much of the work had already been completed for the plan. The Prairie Dog Creek TMDL was approved in 2018. The Prairie Dog Creek Watershed Plan will be due for an update at next years' meeting, but shouldn't require too many changes with the recent completion of the TMDL.

Carrie also mentioned the TMDL to be completed by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) on portions of the Tongue River watershed located within Montana. The MDEQ requested conductivity data collected by the SCCD. SCCD has not heard anything else since last year.

Additional Comments from Group

SCCD, in partnership with NRCS and multiple other organizations, submitted a new proposal for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) in December. If awarded, the program will allocate USDA funds for a myriad of projects targeted at improving water quality and habitat in the Upper Tongue River watershed (see handout). The amount requested was approximately \$5.5 million. The group discussed the beaver dam analog complexes and mule deer migration study projects.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:50 p.m. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for February 2021.

Submitted by Jackie A. Carbert, Program Specialist