



William Bunch
Aquatic Resource Protection and Accountability Unit
EPA Region 8
1595 Wynkoop Ave.
Denver, CO 80202-1129

December 24, 2015

Dear Billy,

Attached, please find Montana Department of Environmental Quality's Wetland Program Plan addendum for calendar year 2017 and 2018. The addendum includes two charts. The first shows several new program development actions that we are excited to pursue and the second shows WPP actions that we intend to continue or start in the next two years.

To help put our Wetland Program Plan (WPP) into context, you'll recall that Montana DEQ leads the development of state-wide wetland and riparian conservation planning via the Montana Wetland Council. Our current plan is titled "Priceless Resources: A Strategic Framework for Wetland and Riparian Conservation and Restoration in Montana 2013-2017". DEQ's WPP references the Strategic Framework and identifies, in part, the unique actions that DEQ takes responsibility for to collectively achieve the overall state goal of "no overall loss of the state's remaining wetland resource base (as of 1989) and an overall increase in the quality and quantity of wetlands in Montana". The Strategic Framework also specifies Montana's riparian goal as "maintain, protect, and restore the ecological integrity of riparian areas."

In addition to identifying 2017 and 2018 priority actions, another reason we're requesting the two-year WPP addendum is to synch the timing of Montana's state-wide Strategic Framework with DEQ's Wetland Program Plan. We intend to lead the Wetland Council to assess the 2013-2017 Strategic Framework and update for 2018-2022, and assess DEQ's Wetland Program Plan and update for 2018-2022 to coincide with the Strategic Framework timing. You will find that as a new action listed in the first chart.

Finally, the addendum request more clearly describes the integration work that the Wetland Program is advancing with other water programs at DEQ. The Wetland Program along with other water programs are developing a watershed risk assessment strategy that integrates all DEQ water programs. This long term strategy will develop several products that will provide direction for comprehensive aquatic resource restoration and protection in Montana.

Please feel free to contact either Lynda Saul or Steve Carpenedo, contacts listed below, should you have questions or comments.

Sincerely,

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"The DEQ Wetland Program provides state leadership to conserve wetlands for their water quality, water quantity, habitat, and flood risk reduction benefits."

Amendments to Montana DEQ Wetland Program Plan 2011-2016 for Calendar Years 2017 and 2018.

Submitted to EPA Region VIII on 12/28/15.

Each WPP action has a current or prospective funding source identified for each year as follows:

S = State funds will be pursued for this action

F = Federal Wetland Program Development Grant funds will be pursued for this action

NEW ACTION ITEMS		
WPD GRANT PERIOD	CY 2017	CY 2018
PUBLIC EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING		
10. Revise the Montana Wetland Clearinghouse to incorporate new regulatory and project information in a user friendly interface	<i>S</i>	
MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT		
13. Develop a watershed risk assessment strategy at DEQ that integrates all DEQ water programs, including wetlands, to provide comprehensive aquatic resource restoration and protection.	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>
WETLAND WATER QUALITY STANDARDS AND REGULATORY		
15. Develop an ecosystem service assessment module for use in wetland mitigation to accomplish the 'no-net-loss of ecosystem function and value' dictum from Executive Memorandum M-16-01.	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>
VOLUNTARY RESTORATION AND PROTECTION		
11. Build collaborative partnerships to protect and restore wetlands that meet the varied goals and objectives of interested partners.	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>
12. Identify BMPs for agriculture, development, forestry, and other activities to protect and passively restore wetlands and disseminate this information.	<i>S</i>	<i>S</i>
SUSTAINABLE FINANCING AND EFFECTIVENESS ACTIONS		
3. Lead the Wetland Council to assess the 2013-2017 Strategic Framework and update for 2018-2022. Assess DEQ's Wetland Program Plan and update for 2018-2022 to coincide with the Strategic Framework.	<i>F</i>	
4. Provide competitive small contracts (project assistance) to advance the goals and objectives of the Strategic Framework and leverage partners to assist DEQ in meeting water quality goals.	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>

2011-2016 ACTION ITEMS – TIMELINE EXTENDED		
WPD GRANT PERIOD	CY 2017	CY 2018
PUBLIC EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING		
7. Develop a science-based information and outreach campaign regarding Montana’s wetlands and riparian areas.	<i>S</i>	<i>F</i>
MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT		
8. Review MTNHP reference condition and reference standards sites and data and determine if appropriate for DEQ monitoring and assessment objectives.	<i>S</i>	
9. Design data management system that supports DEQ monitoring objectives.	<i>S</i>	
10. Analyze monitoring data to inform DEQ decision making and address DEQ monitoring objectives.	<i>S</i>	
11. Develop a long-term ecological monitoring program at the Story Mill wetland restoration site to understand the effects of restoration activities on water quality and other resources.	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>
WETLAND WATER QUALITY STANDARDS AND REGULATORY		
2. Enhance DEQ’s existing 401 certification program based on WQS and through the use of conditions, provisions, or prohibitions	<i>S</i>	<i>S</i>
7. Evaluate the feasibility to establish narrative criteria to regulate physical, hydrological, and biological modifications that impact wetland functions, aquatic life, and wildlife.	<i>S</i>	<i>S</i>
8. Evaluate the feasibility to better define DEQ nondegradation policies for wetlands, requiring full protection of existing uses (functions).	<i>S</i>	<i>S</i>
10. Provide guidance to the public on how to identify jurisdictional waters and wetlands, regulatory program requirements, regulated activities, and wetland protection.	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>
VOLUNTARY RESTORATION AND PROTECTION		
5. Develop, promote, and demonstrate techniques and technical assistance resources for living with beaver and effectively using beaver, or beaver mimic structures, as a tool for restoring wetland and riparian areas.	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>
8. Verify restoration techniques using ecological and/or functional monitoring and assessment tools.	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>
LOCAL GOVERNMENT, VULNERABLE WETLANDS, AND PUBLIC POLICY		
5. Research, develop, and distribute technical assistance resources to assist local government decision making to conserve and protect wetland and riparian resource.	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>
6. Engage state and local governments in protecting vulnerable aquatic resources, including floodplains and groundwater dependent ecosystems.	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>