

BITTER ROOT Water FORUM

**Bringing the Community
together to protect,
enhance, and restore the
watershed we all rely on**

*Bitterroot River
near Hamilton*

FALL 2020

Stronger Together

As I think back on all of the ups and downs of this year, I'm struck with a deep sense of gratitude for the people who helped the Water Forum move smoothly through transitions, allowing us to continue making a conservation impact in this Valley.

Through so many changes—including moving our educational programs to virtual and keeping our volunteers safe and spaced during projects—our team handled everything in stride.

And thankfully for us, our team isn't just the incredible staff who lead programs. The Water Forum is the board members who continue to meet via Zoom, the community who still turned out for River Clean Up, the volunteers who masked up to water plantings, and the donors who continued to invest in the restoration and education.

I'm beyond grateful for the community that believes in this work, and keeps us moving forward no matter the obstacles. Thank you for helping us bring our community together to protect, enhance, and restore the watershed we all rely on—perhaps now, more than ever.

Thank you,



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Katie Vennie, *Communications + Outreach Manager*

Andrea Price, *Restoration Coordinator*

Grace Pierstorff, *AmeriCorps Member*

Jenny West, *Bookkeeper*



Comfort in Nature

During this challenging year we've all had to adapt, the Bitter Root Water Forum included.

Because building community around the river is as important as ever, we found new ways to connect. Though it may look different than it did when we could physically bring people together, our work sharing information about the importance of water resources and completing restoration projects continues.

Through change and uncertainty, some things remained constant — the solace to be found near waters, and our dedication to those waters that gives us so much.

We've certainly relished in any opportunity to escape to the river and the beauty of the Bitterroot watershed, and we hope you have too. We're so grateful to have these resources, and to have a community that helps us protect them.

Thanks to our supporters, the Water Forum has been able to weather this pandemic from a position of strength. By adapting and changing course, like the river we all love, we sustained our conservation impact.

We look forward to continuing to give back to the watershed that brought us so much comfort and joy this year.

Big Sky Watershed Corps

Thanks to the Bitterroot Conservation District and donor support, the Water Forum had our ninth year of hosting a Big Sky Watershed Corps member. The Big Sky Watershed Corps (BSWC) is an AmeriCorps service program that places young professionals throughout the state of Montana to make meaningful contributions for local communities and their conservation efforts.

This year's member, Grace Pierstorff:

- coordinated the youth education programs
- created virtual field trips
- led the Watershed Enhancement Team
- organized the Clean Up All Year program
- planted riparian vegetation in Hamilton's River Park
- and so much more.



While the pandemic altered a few of her tasks, Grace was able to create meaningful engagement opportunities to get work done for the Bitterroot Watershed.

We are excited to see what the future holds for Grace, and look forward to welcoming our new BSWC member in January. Thank you to our donors for making the impactful work of BSWC members possible.

Watershed Enhancement Team

The BSWC member has overseen the Watershed Enhancement Team (WET) since it's development in 2016, to provide necessary monitoring and maintenance to our restoration projects.

Even as WET socially distanced this year, the camaraderie and passion for the work were alive as ever. Each week Grace and the team enjoyed being outside while working diligently on restoration projects, all the while enjoying a few laughs and good conversation.



Visiting one of the East Fork restoration project sites, an especially exciting day—some of our WET volunteers had been there on the initial planting day!

Willows have now grown over six feet tall along the East Fork bank, helping to establish roots, shade, and habitat along the riparian zone.

Finding Solutions Together

Along the Burnt Fork, east of the town of Stevensville, is the Meyer Ranch. Jay Meyer has watched the stream change course and become a more powerful force due to increased sediment loads, changing flood patterns, and lack of riparian vegetation.

We partnered with Jay to develop a plan to improve the riparian area, because working with landowners to find solutions that are good for them and good for the resource—that is what the Water Forum is all about.

The project will enhance the “green zone” of plants, like willows and cottonwoods, along a quarter mile of the Burnt Fork and included:

- **Riparian fencing**—to protect vegetation and the streambanks from cattle
- **Protecting existing vegetation** from wildlife nibbling on them with browse protectors
- **Planting native trees and shrubs** to add diversity and habitat
- **Establishing an off-site watering system** that will reduce cattle impact on the stream AND help make Jay’s grazing operation even more effective

These actions will help prevent nonpoint source pollutants, including sediment and nutrients, from further impacting this impaired stream.

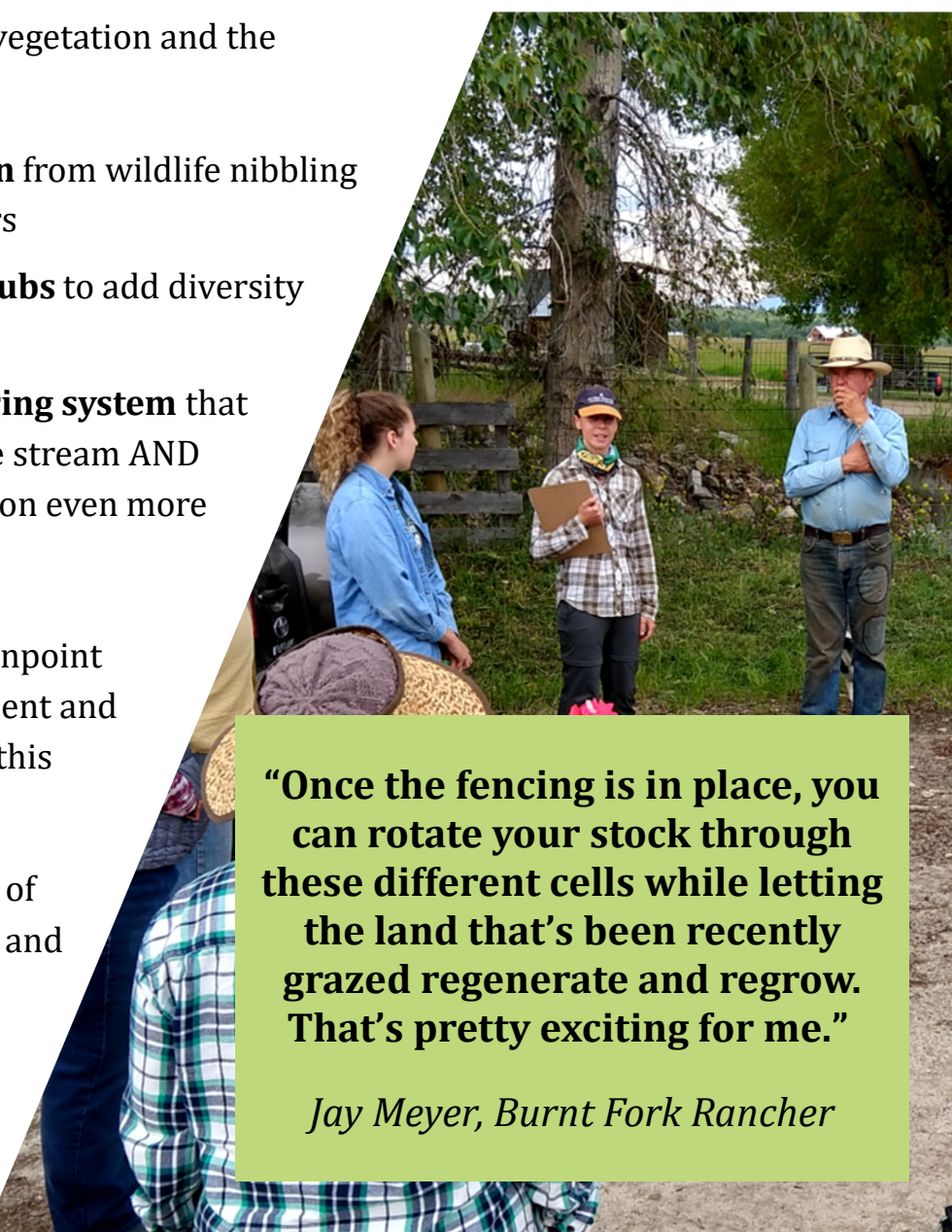
We’re so excited to see the growth of this project as the plants take root and do their part to improve water quality!

More to come in 2021



Above: Volunteers plant native shrubs and trees along the Burnt Fork

Below: Andrea Price and Jay Meyer explain the ranch operations and project to volunteers

A photograph of three people standing outdoors in a grassy area with trees in the background. A woman in a blue shirt is on the left, a man in a plaid shirt and a baseball cap is in the center holding a clipboard, and a man in a light blue shirt and a straw hat is on the right. They appear to be in a discussion.

“Once the fencing is in place, you can rotate your stock through these different cells while letting the land that’s been recently grazed regenerate and regrow. That’s pretty exciting for me.”

Jay Meyer, Burnt Fork Rancher



Roots Against

The Bitterroot River is one of the most dynamic rivers in Montana. This means the channel “migrates” or moves back and forth within its floodplain. This meandering can create new channels and braids.

Pictured: Eroding bank along Skalkaho Bend Park

You can see the results of channel migration at Skalkaho Bend Park. The River has been moving to the east—and because the Park lacks riparian habitat, like woody shrubs—it is eating away at the open grass area, eroding the stream bank.

Over the past 25 years, as the river has migrated eastward, it has taken with it roughly one acre of park land every five years.

The Water Forum worked with Geum Environmental Consulting to study the area and develop a design to help slow erosion and preserve the Park.

Vegetation along streams helps hold streambanks together and provides wildlife habitat. To protect the Park, the Water Forum has proposed planting thousands of plants, whose roots will grow into a strong web that will slow erosion. These plants need time to establish that root matrix, so the planting areas will be set back from the bank giving the plants the time they need to grow.

Within a few years, the plants will grow into a lush green swath; when the river eventually reaches the planted area, their roots will provide strength against the forces of flowing water. This planted area will also offer habitat diversity for wildlife within the grassy field.

“This is about as ecologically sound a project as you can build along the river.”

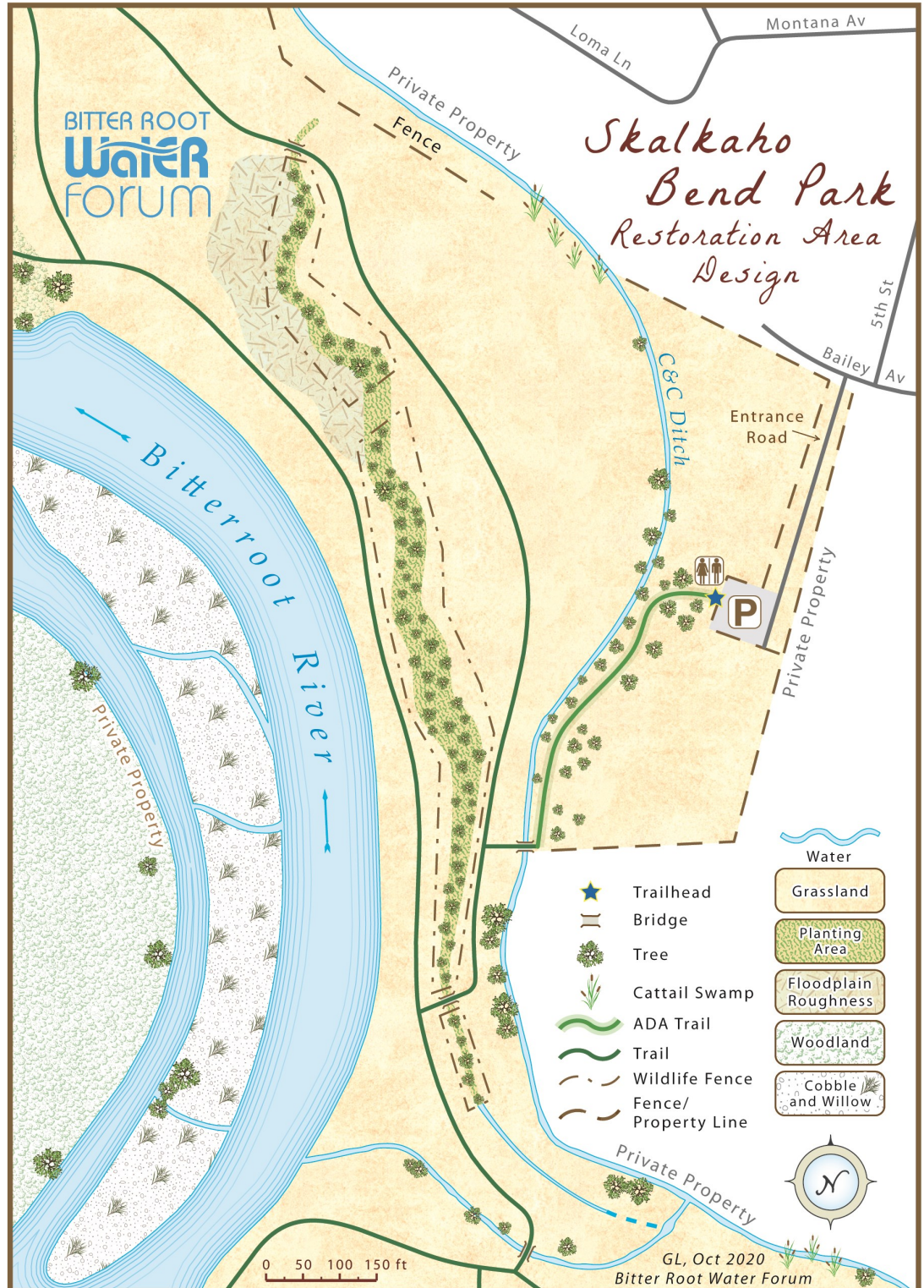
*Chris Clancy,
Fisheries Biologist
(retired Montana FWP)*

Erosion at Skalkaho Bend Park

Skalkaho Bend Park has quickly become a beloved spot for people to jog, bike, swim, fish, walk their dogs, or just sit and enjoy the river; we want to keep it that way, and do everything we can to preserve the park land for the next generation to enjoy.

Healthy streamside vegetation:

- Reduces excessive erosion
- Protects or improves water quality—buffers stream from pollutants
- Shades the stream—reducing water temperatures
- Slows water flows—replenishing groundwater
- Provides habitat for fish and wildlife





Celebrating 15 years of the Bitterroot River Clean Up

90 volunteers pulled **2,156 pounds** of trash from the river during the annual event on Saturday, August 8th.

We were honored to still be able to hold this event in a socially distanced manner that could be safe for our staff and volunteers along with our community. **Thank you to everyone who helped make this event a success!**



Eddie Olwell, with wife Trish and boys—Jacob and Weston, and their cousin Jesse, floated from Tucker Crossing to Bell Crossing and won “Best Trash” for this bath tub they removed (pictured to the right).



Thanks to Phil

Phil Romans, local guide and founding member of the Fly Fishers of the Bitterroot, started the Bitterroot River Clean Up in 2006.



Phil and his wife Dorreen organized the Clean Up for a few years before handing it off to Don McGourty and eventually the Water Forum.

Thank you, Phil, for getting the effort started!

Thank you to our 2020 sponsors

RAPP FAMILY FOUNDATION



Hamilton Dairy Queen
Bitterroot Trout Unlimited
The Loose Caboose
Runner's Edge
Bitterroot Disposal
Iron Horse Athletic Club





Top left: BSWC member, Grace, stands with Clean Up All Year bag stand



Bottom left: Austin Baker tries to lift the car frame that was removed in May

Right: Bill Jones in his raft with the cut up rowboat removed in October



Cleaning Up All Year

This year we had a few additional clean up efforts outside of the annual event. Our Clean Up All Year program, getting reusable litter bags out to river recreators, was in its fourth year.

Bag stands were stationed throughout the valley at nine Fishing Access Sites and four local businesses. From April through October over 2,000 bags were distributed.

An old car frame was removed in May as part of our Bitterroot Gives event and a row boat was removed in October.

CASH for CUTTHROATS

This year we launched Cash for Cutthroats, an annual event where fishing guides donate their day's tip to support the fishery by

supporting the Bitter Root Water Forum.

Next time you book a trip on the Bitterroot please consider these guides that give back to the river.

2020 Participating Guides:

Bill Hayward, Go West Outfitters
Eddie Olwell, Fishs Eddy O Outfitters
Jenny West, Go West Outfitters
Chad Williams, Total Outfitters

Alex Hibala, Bitterroot River Guides
Tim Parker, Go West Outfitters
Tony Reinhardt, Montana Trout Outfitters



Jenny West and Peg Miskin show off their catch

Image Courtesy of Jenny West

Thank you — your support of the Water Forum supports fish!

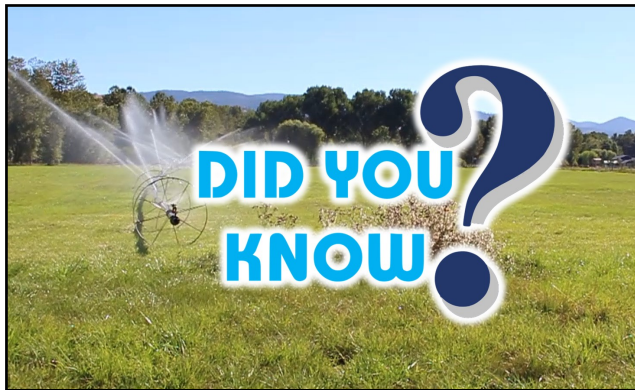
Protecting the Resource through Education

Empowering Future Stewards

The Water Forum's Earth Stewardship Program provides 7th grade students in Corvallis, Lone Rock, Victor, and Darby with monthly lessons featuring local natural resource professionals.

As students began to learn from home in early 2020, the classroom lessons were put on hold. The annual field trips turned virtual.

Virtual fall lessons will allow the students to learn more about their watershed and natural resources around them, while staying physically distanced.



Adapting Adult Education

Did You Know?

Education is key to watershed health. This year, we launched a 1-minute video series to answer your questions about water. The first episode answered where irrigation water comes from in the Bitterroot Valley. Learn more on our website brwaterforum.org/did-you-know/

Watershed Wellness

Connecting to the community is important at the Bitter Root Water Forum. New for Fall 2020 is a monthly installment in the Ravalli Republic. The column will feature topics on watershed health and wellness, tips for living near streams, and more.


A2 – Ravalli Republic, Friday, October 9, 2020

RAVALLI REPUBLIC

WATERSHED WELLNESS

The Bitter Root Water Forum begins new monthly column

Welcome to the first "Watershed Wellness" – a monthly installment from the Bitter Root Water Forum, bringing you the latest on watershed health and wellness, tips for living near streams, and more. But first, what is the Water Forum?



HEATHER BARBER

and wildlife habitat. Whether fish or bird, plant or person, we all rely on water. Many things define and different-

nel, draining all its water to one waterway. The Bitterroot watershed is the area where all the water in the forks, tributaries, and in the ground eventually flows into the Bitterroot River.

Here in the Bitterroot Valley, our watershed is easier to visualize than in flatter areas of the country.

rights, and more. We'd also like to hear from you about what else you'd like to know about our watershed. If you have questions about snowpack, ground-water, ditches, or the fishery, let us know! In addition to our "Watershed Wellness" column, we are creating a video series to



Ways to Give

GIVE A MONTHLY OR STAND ALONE GIFT and your financial support will allow our organization to thrive and leverage other private, state, and federal project funding

ONLINE	BY MAIL	DROP OFF
brwaterforum.org	Bitter Root Water Forum PO Box 1247 Hamilton, MT 59840	178 S 2nd St in Hamilton

GIVE THE GIFT OF YOUR TIME volunteering on our restoration projects, helping with events, or lending a hand in the office

BITTER ROOT WATER FORUM ACCEPTS PLANNED GIFTS

Make the greatest impact possible for cold, clean waters in your lifetime and for future generations

Types of planned gifts include, but are not limited to:

Stocks, bequests, and the Montana Endowment Tax Credit

Please contact Heather with questions about any of these types of gifts.

heather@brwaterforum.org | 406-375-2272

Provided for informational purposes only; not intended to be tax or legal advice.

Prior to making a planned gift to the Bitter Root Water Forum, please consult a qualified financial advisor.

You make it all possible. Clean water, healthy lands, and quality education for youth and adults can only happen when people like you invest in our work.

TOGETHER WE MAKE THE GREATEST IMPACT

BITTER ROOT Water Forum

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www.brwaterforum.org

406-375-2272

CONNECT



ENHANCE



RESTORE



EDUCATE



Water Forum Team with Bart Morris
of Oxbow Cattle Company, inside new
riparian fencing along Miller Creek