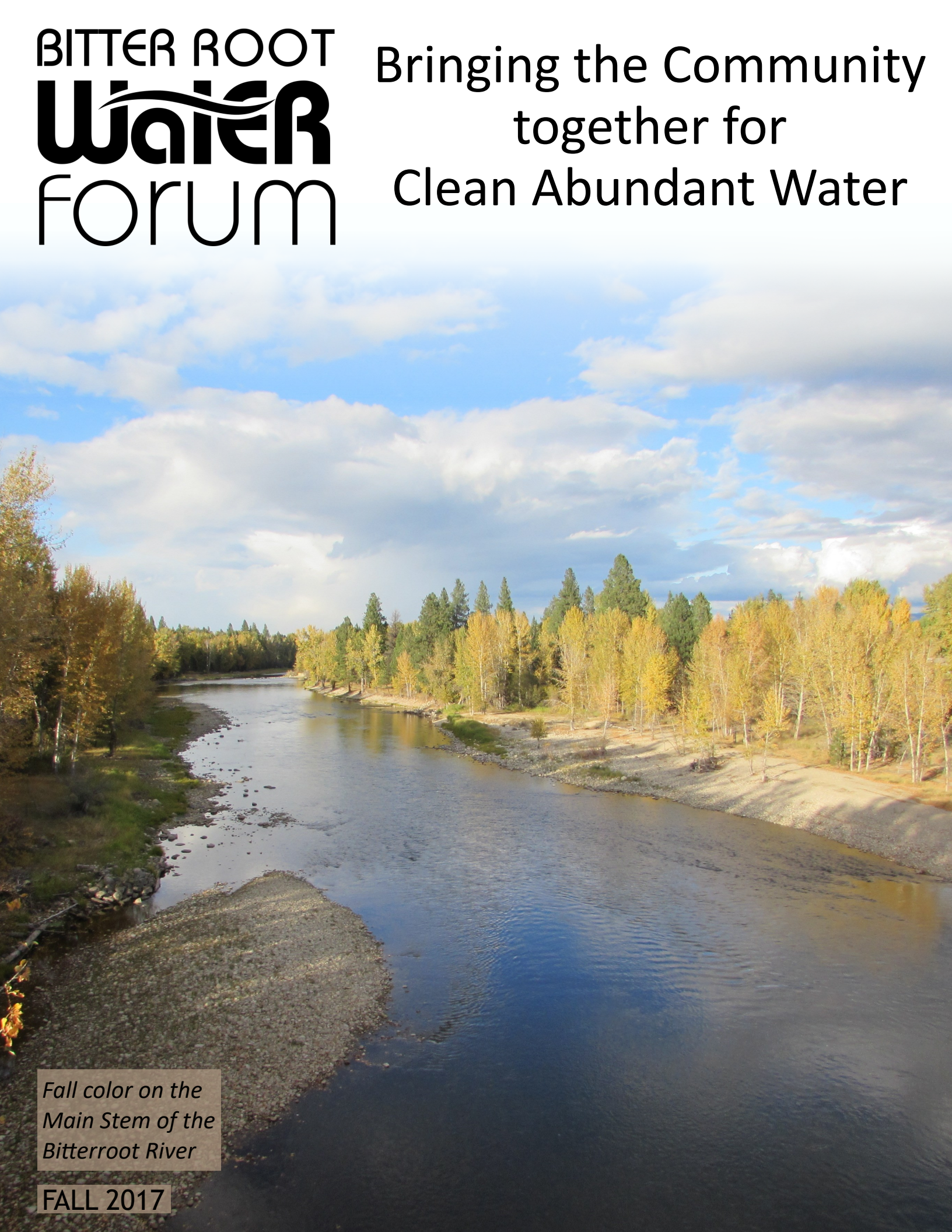


BITTER ROOT Water FORUM

Bringing the Community
together for
Clean Abundant Water



*Fall color on the
Main Stem of the
Bitterroot River*

FALL 2017

Parting Thoughts from a Founder

It's hard to believe it's been nearly 25 years since we started the Water Forum. Back then we knew water was important to the Valley and that we had to learn more to make sure we were good stewards. We still know water is important — maybe the most important thing we have here in the Bitterroot — but now the Water Forum is doing something to actively protect and enhance the watershed we all rely on.

We get more projects done each year, working with landowners for healthier streams. We're continuing to educate people about water, and are now reaching youth through classroom partnership and FFA. I sure hope these efforts will help kids become future stewards of our water.

Recently, we put together a team of Agriculture Advisors to make sure that we take farming and ranching into consideration as we make decisions. These folks are very important to our way of life here, and we want to make sure we're being the best partners we can be.

I'm very proud of the work we do, and we've grown a strong staff and board to continue what we started. With that, the time has come for me to step off the board and let the next generation lead us in the right direction for our water and our community. I'll keep showing up to events, donating time and money, and I hope you'll do the same.

Thank you for everything. It's been a real pleasure.

Rob Johnson, Bitter Root Water Forum Director



Rob volunteering on an East Fork project



Board of Directors in front of the new office

Ed Snook and Louise Massie not pictured

Board of Directors

Eddie Olwell, President

Chris Clancy, Vice President

Don McGourty, Treasurer/Secretary

Sharon Dedmon

Rob Johnson

Louise Massie

Al Pernichele

Sherry Ritter

Ed Snook

Agriculture Advisors

Dan Huls

Dan Severson

Staff

Heather Barber, Executive Director

Katie Vennie, Program Coordinator

Julia Wochos, AmeriCorps Member

Jenny West, Bookkeeper

Watershed Enhancement Team

The Watershed Enhancement Team (WET) was formed in 2016 to provide necessary monitoring and maintenance for the restoration projects the Water Forum has completed over the years.

In its second year, WET more than doubled its number of volunteers!

In 2017, **21** WET volunteers worked on **8** restoration projects over the course of **11** work days

Work Accomplished: browse protector maintenance, plant watering, photo point monitoring, plant counts, solarization fabric removal, seeding, and more.

Thank you WET Volunteers, see you next year!



Big Sky Watershed Corps

Thanks to donor support and the Bitterroot Conservation District, the Water Forum is in its sixth year of hosting a Big Sky Watershed Corps (BSWC) member. BSWC is an AmeriCorps service program that places young professionals across the state of Montana to make a meaningful difference in local conservation efforts.

This year, BSWC Member Julia Wochos led the Watershed Enhancement Team, coordinated the Water Forum's education programs, organized volunteers at work days and events, piloted a clean-up-all-year river cleanup effort, put together an irrigation and restoration tour, and more!

We wish Julia well in the future 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.



STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE

Local efforts starts with local input, and end with results that the community can understand and support. That's why we engaged community members in our Strategic Planning this spring. Through 16 individual interviews and two focus groups—one representing irrigators, farmers, and ranchers, and the other guides, outfitters, and recreationists—we listened to community voices.

We consistently heard that people appreciated our approach of bringing together different, and at times divergent, user groups to benefit the watershed resource and the community.

We also heard concern about the future, and protecting the watershed we all rely on. Through conversations we recognized the desire to prepare the community for the impacts of a changing climate.

Working together to increase local drought resiliency will be one of the most important ways we can help protect our local landscape. Farming, ranching, guiding and the future of our valley depend on us working together for our water resources.

Short-Term Strategic Goals

- Form Agriculture Advisor Group
(see next page)
- Identify and complete a project with agricultural water users
(see article on Oxbow Ranch, Pg 7)
- Continue hosting forums that bring the community together to find local solutions

Irrigation in the Field



On a rainy and windy afternoon, nearly forty people learned about irrigation and restoration

This fall, community members had the opportunity to learn about irrigation from local irrigators. The Water Forum offered a public tour on water management, irrigation, and streambank restoration as part of its ongoing community education efforts.

Highlights included hearing from the Bitter Root Irrigation District and the Bitterroot Water Commissioner at Lake Como; a stop at an irrigated property to visit with Daly Ditches and two local irrigators; and a streambank restoration project to learn about water quality improvement projects.

Many thanks to donors for making this tour possible, to the presenters who shared great information, and to the attendees for braving the weather to learn about irrigation and restoration!



Participants hear from FWP Biologist and Water Forum board member, Chris Clancy.

Irrigation in the Classroom



For 100 points: What is a head gate?

A simple enough question, but one that Jay Meyer has asked many times this fall as part of the Earth Stewardship Program.

New this year, Jay is partnering with the Water Forum to present on irrigation to local 7th graders as part of the Earth Stewardship Program. The Program invites natural resources professionals into 7th grade classrooms. Jay, a retired teacher with a passion for agriculture and FFA, was a perfect fit to educate on irrigation. The students played irrigation jeopardy, learned about irrigation efficiency, and the history of water in the Bitterroot Valley.

Thanks for your dedication Jay!



Students learned about irrigation methods, including pivot sprinklers.

AGRICULTURE ADVISORS

The Water Forum works for all water users — fish and wildlife, recreationists and irrigators, and everybody in between.

We all depend on a healthy watershed, and we know that bringing people together is the best way to identify opportunities and to address local challenges.

We heard during strategic planning that people in the farm and ranch community feel misunderstood—and we want to help change that.

The Water Forum values agriculture and we want to be a better partner to this group of water users. We also want the community to better understand agriculture's role in the watershed and its connection to all users in the community.

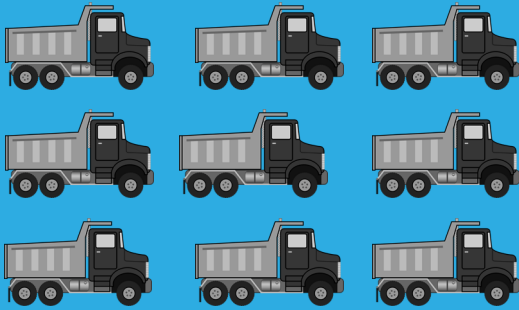
We've partnered with two members of the farm and ranch community to serve as our Agriculture Advisors. Dan Huls and Dan Severson—longtime agricultural producers—have offered to advise the Water Forum on how to partner with irrigators to manage water resources. They will also help identify opportunities for community education.

Working in partnership with the farm and ranch community is how we will find solutions to local and often difficult water problems. We're excited to have the wisdom of these advisors to help guide us forward.

NUMBERS ARE IN

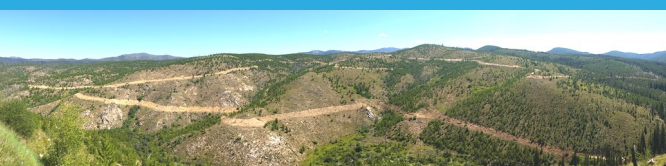
Last year your support allowed us to complete the **Watershed Improvement Project**, a large scale restoration effort in the headwaters of **Sleeping Child and Rye Creeks**.

This year we completed sediment reduction estimates and found that **this project will stop nine dump trucks worth of sediment** from entering these waterways each year!



ANNUAL IMPACT = 9 DUMP TRUCKS FULL OF SEDIMENT PREVENTED FROM ENTERING STREAMS

Excess sediment covers the bottom of streams filling in deep pools trout use to over-winter, smothering eggs, and choking aquatic insects they rely on for food.



Roads restored to the natural landscape

Restoring the



Corvallis High School Students Emmalee Patterson & Morgen Gerber plant a native shrub

There are stretches of the East Fork of the Bitterroot that lack vegetation in the important place where the river meets the land — the **riparian area**.

The riparian area provides **important habitat** for birds and animals as well as food and shelter for the fish and macroinvertebrates that live in the river. A healthy riparian area also acts as a **filter system** for nutrients, an **anchor system** for the streambanks, and a **cooling system** for the stream by providing shade.

The **East Fork is listed as impaired** by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality for **temperature and sediment**. This means that the water is too warm to support fish that depend on cold water, such as cutthroat trout and bull trout, and that there is too much sediment.

The Water Forum is working to resolve water quality impairments by rebuilding healthy riparian areas.

East Fork

By partnering with the Wetzsteon Family on their **5th generation family ranch**, a half mile of the East Fork of the Bitterroot was revegetated and protected.

Thanks to your support and many volunteer hours:

- ◇ **410 feet of stream bank revegetated with willow cuttings and mature willow transplants**
- ◇ **Wildlife friendly fence installed around half a mile of stream**
- ◇ **460 native shrubs and trees planted**
- ◇ **330 plants protected from wildlife browse – 100 existing plants and 230 new plants**

This project restored important riparian habitat along the East Fork and will improve water quality from the headwaters to the main stem and beyond.

Staff and volunteers stand ready to assist as a mature willow transplant is placed into the bank.



LOOKING TO NEXT YEAR



Bart Morris, ranch owner and operator, surveys the lack of vegetation along Miller Creek.

In **2018**, the Water Forum will work with **Bart and Wendy Morris**, owners of the **Oxbow Cattle Company**, to complete a **1.2 mile** restoration project at their ranch on Miller Creek.

Like the East Fork of the Bitterroot, **Miller Creek** has **temperature and sediment** impairments.

To combat impairments the Water Forum will work with the Morris' to install:

- **Riparian fencing** to keep animals out of the stream and off the banks
- **Woody debris** to collect sediment and provide floodplain connectivity
- **Native shrub plantings** to provide shade to the stream

Removing a car body from the West Fork

Your support lifted an extra 2,000 pounds of trash from the river this year in the form of an orange Mustang. The car had been in the West Fork of the Bitterroot for decades.

"... sure it's a fun story, but it doesn't belong in the river and if it can be removed we should remove it. It's a safety issue and a distraction from the natural beauty of the area," said Jenny West a Bitterroot native and local outfitter.

Thanks to loyal and new donors, the Mustang was removed—and recycled—in late October.

A special shout out to the **Rapp Family Foundation** and **AV8-Orr Helicopter Services**—the river is now safer and more beautiful thanks to you.



Working for a Cleaner River

4,000+ pounds of trash removed from the Bitterroot this year



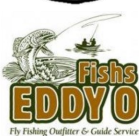
82 volunteers donated their time to this year's annual River Clean Up. Stationed along the entire length of the Bitterroot, this was the best coverage we've ever had of designated clean up sites. Thanks to their efforts **2,320 pounds of trash** were removed from the river.

Bob & Barb Schumaker won the prize for Best Trash, pulling out a push lawnmower.
Honorable mentions included a dredge bucket, shopping cart, and a love seat.

Thank you to our 2017 sponsors



Evans Ace Hardware
Runner's Edge
Clearwater Systems
Bitterroot Disposal



American Rivers
Hamilton Marketplace
Higherground Brewing
Iron Horse Athletic Club



RAPP FAMILY FOUNDATION



Geum Environmental Consulting
Chuck Stranahan's Flies & Guides

Clean Up All Year

This summer the Water Forum began a program to encourage river users to clean up all year round—picking up river litter and collecting their own trash every time they're out enjoying the river.

Next year we will get reusable bags at more sites along the valley. This effort will reduce the amount of trash accumulating in the river and removed at our annual clean up.



Donor and Volunteer Spotlight

Ron Evans has been visiting Montana for thirty years, learning the ins and outs of fishing local streams. Six years ago he made his commitment to Montana permanent, buying a home in the Bitterroot Valley. He soon after learned of the Water Forum and has become an invaluable donor and volunteer.

“I did some research on the Water Forum. I liked what I saw and decided to become involved.”

In addition to giving donations, Ron is also a member of the Watershed Enhancement Team and gives his time to volunteer at project work days. He shared that he’s enjoyed getting to know other volunteers while out watering plants and installing browse protectors.



Image provided by Ron Evans

“I like the Water Forum’s focus on tangible projects to improve the Bitterroot watershed and the quality of the Bitterroot’s water.”

In 2016, Ron became a Tributary Donor by donating monthly to the Water Forum. With a strong background in non-profits, he understands the meaningful impact donors can have—especially by giving monthly.

“Having been involved with non-profit organizations for all my adult life, I know the importance of having a predictable cash flow.”

Dedicated donors and volunteers make the Water Forum’s work possible.

Thank you, Ron, for your commitment to the clean water for all with the Water Forum!



Ron (left) works alongside Sherry Ritter and Mike McCall at a WET work day.

A Tribute to "Tributary" Donors

Like tributaries join together to create a powerful and dynamic river, our monthly "Tributary" donors join together to power our community to steward vital water resources.

The investment from Tributary donors allows us to work with landowners and develop projects, providing the funds needed to get ideas off the ground. Monthly donations are stable income that sustain operations and fuel new opportunities.

THANK YOU to the dozens of community members who have already stepped up to be tributaries.



*Jacqueline Locke,
Tributary since
August 2016*



*Donna and Jay Haglund,
Tributaries since
March 2016*

Tributary gifts join to make a **big impact**, like tributaries join to create the mighty Bitterroot River.

How to become a Tributary donor or make a one time gift

GIVE ONLINE

visit brwaterforum.org and click "**Give Clean Water**"

GIVE BY MAIL

send check or credit card information to
Bitter Root Water Forum
PO Box 1247
Hamilton, MT 59840

STOP BY OUR NEW OFFICE

at **178 S 2nd St** in Hamilton

**Thank you for
your support!**

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*Volunteers and staff at a restoration
work day on the East Fork*