



# Biennial Report

2025-2026



WESTERN MONTANA  
**Conservation  
Commission**





This report covers **fiscal years (FY) 2025-2026** for the  
Western Montana Conservation Commission.  
*July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2026*

### List of Acronyms

|      |                                                        |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| AIS  | Aquatic Invasive Species                               |
| AWRA | American Water Resources Association                   |
| BPA  | Bonneville Power Administration                        |
| BSWC | Big Sky Watershed Corps (AmeriCorps)                   |
| CBSM | Community Based Social Marketing                       |
| CD   | Conservation District                                  |
| CSKT | Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes                  |
| DEQ  | Montana Department of Environmental Quality            |
| DNRC | Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation |
| EPA  | U.S. Environmental Protection Agency                   |
| FLBS | Flathead Lake Biological Station                       |
| FWP  | Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks                         |
| GSI  | Green Stormwater Infrastructure                        |
| USGS | United States Geological Survey                        |
| WMCC | Western Montana Conservation Commission                |



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*Bird tracks on Flathead River  
Photo by Glacier National Park*



## Executive Summary

We are pleased to detail the progress of the Western Montana Conservation Commission (WMCC) in this 2025-2026 biennial report.

During fiscal year 2025–2026, WMCC used public funding to deliver practical, measurable benefits for Western Montana’s waters and communities. Through grants for stormwater and septic leachate toxics reduction, WMCC directed more than **\$4 million** to 19 on-the-ground projects, including wastewater improvements, green stormwater infrastructure, and pollution reduction education. These awards are part of a larger initiative supported by nearly **\$7 million** in federal funding and more than **\$9.5 million** in match, expanding local capacity and water-quality benefits across the headwaters of the Columbia River Basin.

WMCC responsibly managed more than \$7.2 million in supplemental grant funding, expanding its capacity to deliver conservation work and tangible on-the-ground outcomes across the region. State funding supported staff capacity, public meetings, partner coordination, aquatic invasive species prevention, and community-based conservation work throughout the region.

The results were visible and region-wide: 2,841 people were engaged through community events, 125 visits to businesses through AIS industry outreach, and the Flathead Waters Cleanup mobilized over 320 volunteers, removed over 6,050 pounds of trash, and improved more than 195 miles of waterways. These outcomes demonstrate WMCC is using funds responsibly, expanding impact through partnerships, and providing an efficient regional structure for work that protects Western Montana’s aquatic resources now and into the future.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to thoughtful stewardship, effective partnerships, and lasting benefits for Montana’s shared waters and vibrant communities.

Mike Koopal, Chair  
Onno Wieringa, Vice-Chair  
Casey Lewis, Executive Director







Holland Lake  
Photo by Montana Dept. of Commerce

WMCC FY25-26 at a glance: *Public Investment, Regional Impact*

**16.6x** leveraged external investment for every \$1 of state appropriations.

**\$7.2 million+**

in external grants\*

WMCC aligned external funding with local priorities to expand staffing, education, monitoring, and on-the-ground conservation.

**\$1,016,821**

in state appropriations

Essential funding for WMCC’s statutory work to support locally led conservation efforts and community-based projects.

**\$9.5 million+**

match for external grants

Major outside investment was leveraged through awardees and WMCC to deliver long-term water-quality benefits.

**\$4 million+**

awarded to Montana communities

19 water-quality projects received support to address pollution and build local capacity.

**2,840+**

people reached at community events

Public outreach connected residents and visitors with practical actions to protect water quality and aquatic resources.

**320+**

volunteers mobilized

Cleanup and stewardship efforts translated public investment into visible, local action.

**6,050+**

pounds of trash removed

**195+**

miles improved

\*External grants have funding periods that extend beyond the biennium.

## Western Montana Conservation Commission

### Voting Members



**Mike Koopal, Chair**  
Flathead Representative  
Governor Appointed  
*Whitefish Lake Institute*



**Onno Wieringa, Vice-Chair**  
Upper Clark Fork & Blackfoot  
Representative  
Governor Appointed  
*Recreation Business Owner*



**Matthew Peterson**  
Private Landowner Representative  
Governor Appointed  
*NewFields*



**Duane Braaten**  
Electric Cooperative  
Representative  
Governor Appointed  
*Flathead Electric Co-op*



**Sandy Beder-Miller**  
Private Industry Representative  
Governor Appointed  
*Pulp & Paper Process Engineer*



**Ron Pifer**  
Lower Clark Fork & Bitterroot  
Representative  
Governor Appointed  
*Environmental Scientist*



**Phil Matson**  
Private Citizen Representative  
Governor Appointed  
*Flathead Lake Biological Station –  
University of Montana*



**Lech Naumovich**  
Kootenai Representative  
Governor Appointed  
*Greater Than Image, LLC*



**Randy Brodehl**  
County Representative  
*Flathead County Commissioner*



**Noel Duram**  
County Representative  
*Lincoln County Commissioner*





**Caroline McDonald**  
Conservation District  
Representative  
*Lake County Conservation District*



**Bill Yankee**  
Conservation District  
Representative  
*Flathead Conservation District*



**Julie Spencer**  
Wastewater Utility Representative  
*Montana Rural Water*



**Tracy Campbell**  
Stormwater Utility Representative  
*Stormwater Department of Public Works & Mobility, City of Missoula*

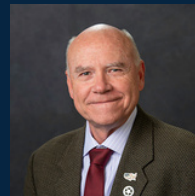


**Rich Janssen Jr.**  
Confederated Salish & Kootenai  
Tribes Representative  
*CSKT Natural Resources*

## Non-voting & Advisory Members



**Senator Janet Ellis**  
*Montana Senate*  
*SD41*



**Senator Mark Noland**  
*Montana Senate*  
*SD5*



**Representative Tom France**  
*Montana House of Representatives*  
*HD94*



**Representative Neil Duram**  
*Montana House of Representatives*  
*HD2*



**Lindsey Krywaruchka**

*Montana Department of  
Environmental Quality*



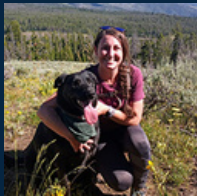
**Tom Woolf**

*Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks*



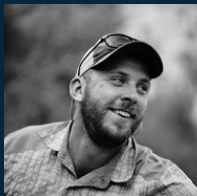
**Galen Steffens**

*Montana Department of Commerce*



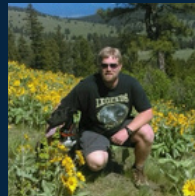
**Sara Edinberg**

*Montana Bureau of Mines &  
Geology*



**Peter Brumm**

*U.S. Environmental Protection  
Agency, Region 8*



**Jim Ferch**

*The Montana Department of  
Natural Resources & Conservation*



**Tom Martin**

*Montana Department of  
Transportation*



**Dr. Jim Elser**

*Flathead Lake Biological  
Station – University of Montana*



**Martin Charlo**

*Confederated Salish & Kootenai  
Tribes*



**Michelle Cox**

*U.S. Forest Service*





**Cory Sandow**  
*U.S. Bureau of Reclamation*



**Melissa Schaar**  
*U.S. Geological Survey*



**Greg Hoffman**  
*U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*



**Kate Wilson**  
*Bonneville Power Administration*

## Former Members: Active FY 2025-2026



**Arthur Potts**  
Hydropower Utility Representative  
*Governor Appointed*  
*Avista*



**Scott Rumsey**  
Conservation District  
Representative  
*Flathead Conservation District*



**Senator Mike Cuffe**  
*Montana Senate*  
*SD1*



**Chris Savage**  
*U.S. Forest Service*

## Staff



**Casey Lewis**  
*Executive Director*



**Stephanie Murphy**  
*Communications Coordinator*



**Emilie Henry**  
*Program Coordinator*



**Michelle Barton**  
*Program Coordinator*



**Heidi Fleury**  
*Grant Program Specialist*



**Krista Lammers**  
*Grant Administrative Specialist*



**Mark Bostrom**  
*Division Administrator*  
*Conservation & Resource*  
*Development Division*

## Big Sky Watershed Corps Members



**Mike Skamarakus**  
*FY 2025-2026*



**Olivia Galluzzo**  
*FY 2026-2027*

## Who We Are

### About the Western Montana Conservation Commission

The Western Montana Conservation Commission (WMCC) formed July 1, 2023, following the 2023 Montana Legislative Session. Montana Code Annotated 85-1-9 and 2-15-33 combined and replaced the roles and jurisdictions of the Flathead Basin Commission and the Upper Columbia Conservation Commission to increase management efficiency and broaden the scope of work.

The mission of the Western Montana Conservation Commission is to protect and improve the quality of Western Montana's aquatic resources, including water quality and quantity, recreational and scenic values, and fish and other wildlife, including the prevention and management of aquatic invasive species.

*Commission members at Libby Dam*



*WMCC staff*

#### **We strive to:**

- Reduce stormwater and wastewater pollution.
- Prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species.
- Maintain, enhance, restore, expand, or benefit the aquatic natural resources of Western Montana.
- Emphasize community participation, education, outreach, and engagement.



## Executive Committee

Chair: Mike Koopal (Whitefish Lake Institute)

Vice-Chair: Onno Wieringa

**11 members**

The committee exists to coordinate and track the Commission's work between full Commission meetings, plan upcoming meetings, make recommendations for project requests, and deal quickly with emerging or time-sensitive issues.

**41**

committee meetings  
held in FY25-26

**35+**

projects reviewed for  
support and/or funding

## Strategic Future Thinking

Crucial work to shape the future of WMCC includes standardizing committee structures and processes, and discussing feedback and the effectiveness of WMCC in consideration of the 2029 sunset date.

**Clean water is essential** to maintain our way of life. Our vision is for Western Montana to be a leader in innovative natural and aquatic resource conservation. By fostering participation and collaboration, we envision responsible stewardship of aquatic resources to provide for future generations.

## Pillars: The Work We Do

### Aquatic Resource Protection

Support existing and create new programs and projects to have positive, on-the-ground impacts.

### Education & Outreach

Inspire action for responsible water stewardship and provide resources for consistent messaging.

### Collaboration & Facilitation

Convene partners to collectively identify and address resource challenges and opportunities.

*North Fork of the Flathead River*  
*Photo by S. Murphy*



## Meetings

WMCC holds public meetings that bring together partners, agencies, and community members from across Western Montana to focus on shared water and conservation priorities. These gatherings are designed to be educational and collaborative, with panel speakers addressing timely topics related to aquatic resources, community stewardship, and emerging management issues. Meetings often include field trips to see projects and conditions on the ground, along with dedicated time for discussion so attendees can build relationships, share information, and coordinate next steps.

Meetings were held in the following locations across Western Montana during the 2025 and 2026 fiscal years (July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2026):

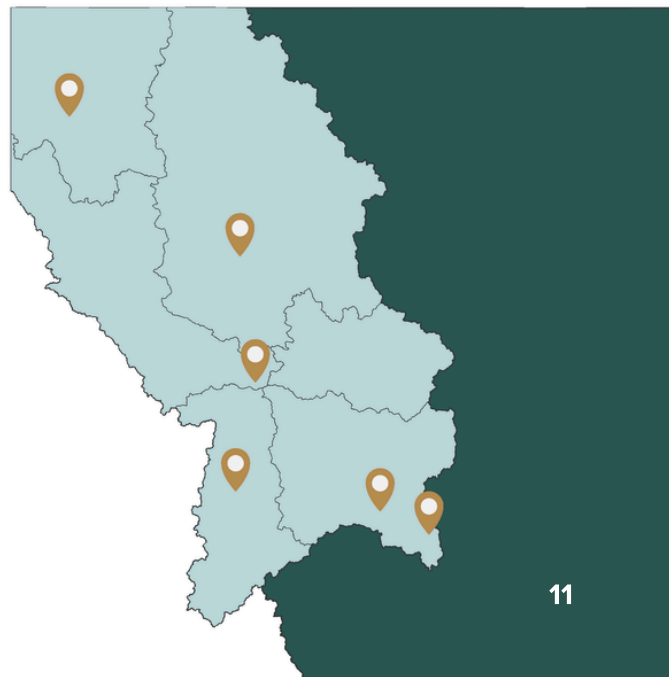
- Butte, MT | September 11-12, 2024
- Missoula, MT | January 22-23, 2025
- Libby, MT | May 28-29, 2025
- Pablo, MT | September 9-10, 2025
- Anaconda, MT | January 20-21, 2026
- Hamilton, MT | May 20-21, 2026



*Berkeley Pit Tour with Ripple*



*Project Tour with Bitterroot Water Partnership*



## Statutory Duties

WMCC's enabling legislation outlines the duties of the commission, guiding the work undertaken. See MCA 85-1-9 and MCA 2-15-3311 to learn more about our enabling legislation.

*The purpose of the Western Montana Conservation Commission is to protect the existing high quality of Western Montana's aquatic resources.*

MCA-85-1-902

## Summary of Duties

- Monitor & collaboratively develop a monitoring strategy for natural resources
- Support a comprehensive aquatic invasive species prevention program
- Promote cooperation among federal, state, provincial, tribal, and local managers
- Promote international coordination with British Columbia
- Provide targeted support for the Flathead Basin
- Support resource-conscious economic development
- Investigate and hold hearings about resource utilization
- Create public-private partnerships to:
  - a) Reduce point and nonpoint source pollution
  - b) Prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species
  - c) Benefit aquatic resources in Western Montana

During the biennium, WMCC carried out its statutory responsibilities through regional and interagency collaboration, public engagement, and support for on-the-ground conservation projects. This work, outlined in this report, reflects the commission's role as a convening body that links watershed science, education and outreach, grant implementation, and local project development across Western Montana.



# Financials - Fiscal Years 2025 & 2026

## Funding & Resources Supporting WMCC Work

WMCC’s FY25–26 work was funded through a combination of state appropriations and external grant resources. State appropriations supported personnel, operations, meetings, and coordination necessary to carry out WMCC’s statutory duties, while external funding expanded the Commission’s ability to add staff capacity, fund local projects, strengthen outreach, and deliver additional water-quality and aquatic-resource benefits across Western Montana.

\$1,016,821

State Appropriations

across FY25-26

\$7,262,659

External Grant Funding

active during FY25-26

### Leveraging public investment for regional watershed impact

## State Appropriations & Expenditures

FY25

\$487,023



FY26

\$529,798

\$386,290.32

Personnel

\$403,995.21

\$95,792.68

Operations

\$102,200.79

\$4,940

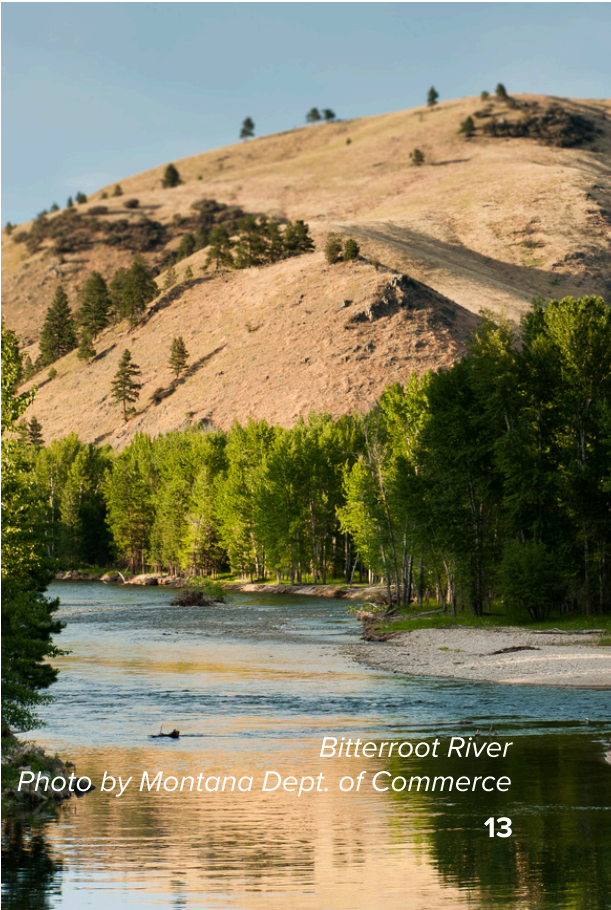
Restricted State IT

\$23,602

### Funds fully expended

Personnel represents the largest share of state appropriations because staff capacity allows WMCC to coordinate with partners, manage grants, support meetings, and deliver programs across the region.

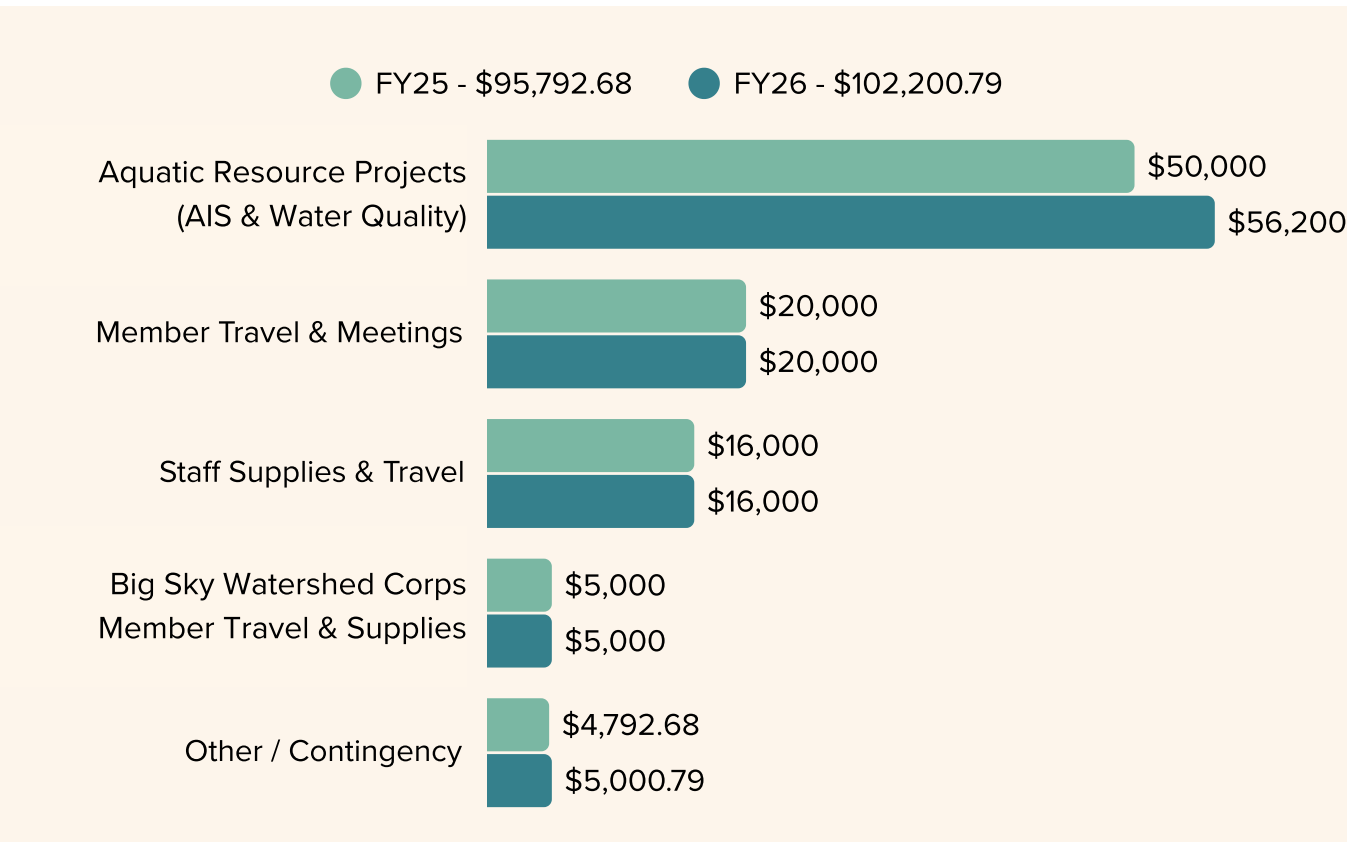
Western Montana Conservation Commission



Bitterroot River  
Photo by Montana Dept. of Commerce

## Operations Expenditures by Category

Operations funding supported travel, meetings, project support, and program delivery needed to carry out WMCC's statutory and regional responsibilities.



State appropriations provided the foundation for WMCC’s statutory responsibilities. WMCC actively secures external funding to strengthen local capacity, support project implementation, and expand conservation benefits across Western Montana.

## External Funding Expanding WMCC’s Impact

External funds are shown separately by source and purpose to preserve transparency while also illustrating how those resources strengthen and extend WMCC's overall work.

**\$58,255** Bureau of Reclamation  
Quagga Mussel Prevention

**Project Period Aug. 2021 - Nov. 2024**

Supported Upper Columbia Lakes Network AIS Monitoring and 3 years of Big Sky Watershed Corps members to run WMCC’s Industry Outreach project.

**\$67,542** Bureau of Reclamation  
Quagga Mussel Prevention

**Project Period May 2022 - Sept. 2025**

Supported clean, drain, dry campaign, WMCC’s Industry Outreach project and associated Big Sky Watershed Corps member.

**\$6,998,075** EPA Columbia River Basin  
Toxics Reduction Lead Grant

**Project Period Oct. 2023 - Sept. 2029**

Supports additional staff, septic leachate and stormwater toxic reduction projects, and associated education and outreach.

Match: \$2,334,972

Total: \$9,333,047

**250 Hours** WaterNow Project  
Accelerator

**Project Period Sept. 2025 - Sept. 2026**

Develop roadmap for WMCC’s Stormwater Advisory Council to utilize EPA grant funds to advance green stormwater infrastructure in Montana.

Approximate Value: \$62,500

**\$70,287** Avista Grant

**Project Period July 2025 - Dec. 2027**

Supports USGS work on the Monitoring Effectiveness of the Vermilion River Restoration.

**\$6,000** Montana Watershed  
Coordination Council

**Project Period Dec. 2025 - Dec. 2026**

Support for hosting costs of a Big Sky Watershed Corps Member to implement a DEQ-accepted Watershed Restoration Plan.



## Where We Serve

The rivers and streams of Western Montana are part of the headwaters of the Columbia River Basin, flowing west through multiple states and Canada, eventually draining into the Pacific. The Basin's communities, economies, and industries rely on the rivers and lakes within the watershed for many benefits, including hydroelectricity, irrigation, and recreation.

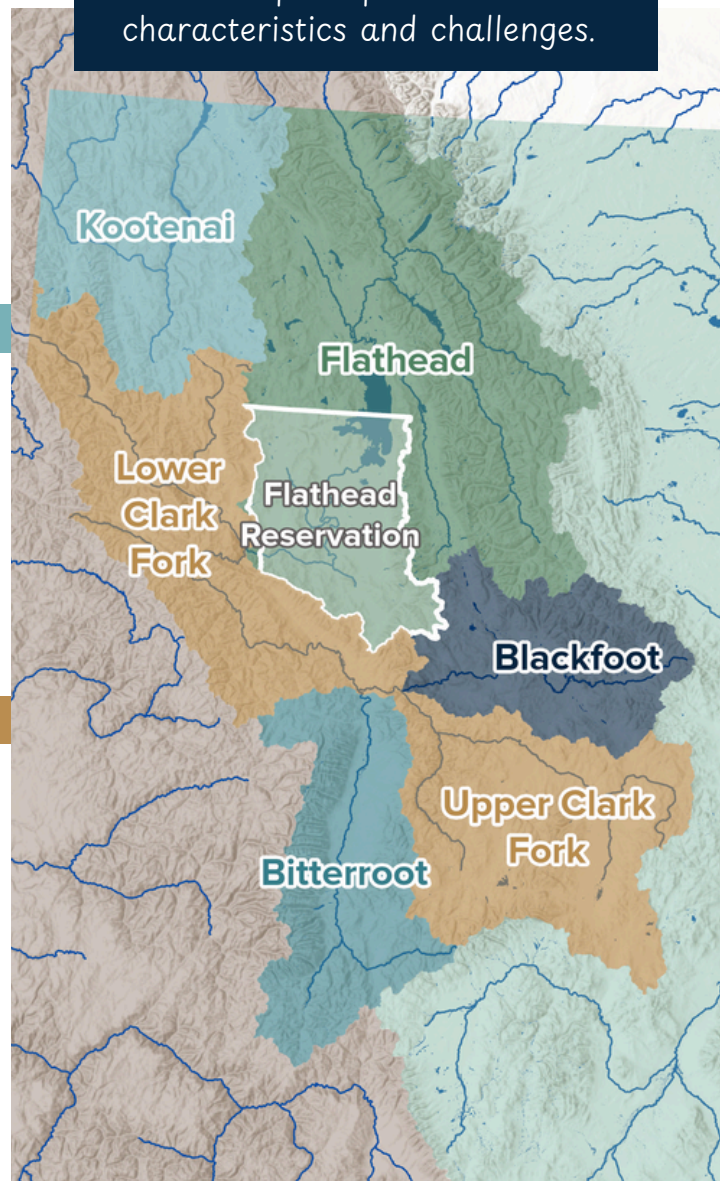
### Kootenai Basin

Originating in British Columbia, the Kootenai River flows south through Eureka and west toward Idaho. Lake Koocanusa, a reservoir created by the Libby Dam, provides hydroelectric and recreational opportunities. Historical and active mining along the Elk and St. Mary rivers pose challenges to water quality and fish health.

### Upper & Lower Clark Fork Basins

Beginning as Silver Bow Creek around downtown Butte, the Clark Fork River moves northwest to its confluence with the Blackfoot River east of Missoula before flowing through the city. The Clark Fork receives inputs from the Bitterroot and lower Flathead Rivers, eventually crossing the Idaho border. A history of mining has presented a host of water quality challenges for the watershed, leaving the Upper Clark Fork as the largest superfund complex in the U.S.

WMCC divides Western Montana into six smaller river basins, each with unique aquatic resource characteristics and challenges.



## Flathead Basin

Originating north of the border in British Columbia, the Flathead Basin is comprised of forests, agricultural land, and towns. The Stillwater, Swan, and Whitefish rivers join with the three forks of the Flathead River to feed Flathead Lake. The Flathead Reservation lies in the southern portion of the basin, home to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Glacier National Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness offer vast recreation opportunities, and the Hungry Horse and Seli's Ksanka Qlispé dams provide hydroelectric power to the region. Rapid development, increasing recreation trends, and aging infrastructure put pressure on the beautiful natural resources of the Flathead.

## Blackfoot Basin

The Blackfoot River converges with the North Fork near Ovando and flows westward, where it is joined by the Clearwater River carrying water from Seeley Lake and other neighboring lakes. The Blackfoot Basin remains largely undeveloped and rural compared to other watersheds in the region. Historical impacts from livestock grazing, logging, and mining have impacted the basin's water quality, as well as a loss of intact landscapes to support fish and wildlife populations.

## Bitterroot Basin

The two forks of the Bitterroot River unite south of Darby and flow north through Hamilton and Lolo. As it flows, the Bitterroot River receives inputs from many tributaries before it converges with the Clark Fork River. In the northern portion of the watershed, Lolo National Forest offers wilderness and recreational opportunities as well as habitat for keystone species. High rates of development and population growth put pressure on the basin's natural resources.



# What We Do

## Coordination & Collaboration

The Western Montana Conservation Commission plays a crucial role in coordinating and collaborating with organizations across Western Montana. We provide project support funding, letters of support, outreach material donations, and staff time to bolster regional efforts and events ranging from AIS prevention and mitigation to watershed restoration planning, monitoring, and risk assessment.

|                                                                                                  |                                                        |           |                                                 |                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <b>\$26,415</b> | funds provided to support<br><b>7</b> partner projects | <b>7</b>  | letters of support<br>provided                  |  |
|  <b>\$11,000</b> | funds provided to support<br>partner organizations     | <b>11</b> | outreach material<br>donation requests provided |                                                                                     |

*Water Quality Awareness Day at the Capitol*



### Monitoring & Coordination Committee

Chair: Lech Naumovich (Greater Than Image)  
**12 members**

The committee promotes coordination among federal, state, provincial, tribal, and local resource managers to establish consistent conservation practices, comprehensive monitoring, and effective data collection and interpretation. These efforts are vital for protecting and sustainably managing Montana’s natural resources.





*Kootenai River from Libby Dam*

## Interactive Map Platform

Supporting WMCC's duty to develop a 5-year aquatic resources monitoring strategy, the committee aims to frame this strategy in an approachable, interactive map format.

**2** working groups established to accomplish this task

## Sponsored Events

WMCC hosted and sponsored regional events to bolster community engagement, share our mission, and support our partners through collaborative efforts on shared goals.

Fiscal year 2025 - 2026 events include:

- Flathead Waters Clean Up | August 2024 & 2025
- Montana AWRA Conference | October 2024 & 2025
- Invasive Species Rotunda Event | February 2025
- Water Quality Rotunda Event | March 2025
- AIS Volunteer Monitoring Training | June 2025 & 2026
- Montana Aquatic Research Colloquium | April 2026
- Western AIS Short Course | April 2026



# Education & Outreach

WMCC’s multifaceted outreach efforts include social media, newsletters, press releases, events, and outreach campaigns that support awareness, education, and community action.

## By the numbers:



**2,840+**

people engaged at  
**24** community and  
education events  
across Western  
Montana.



**154,200+**

people reached  
from TV, online,  
and print news  
audiences.



**44%**

click-to-open rate

of newsletter  
subscribers that opened  
our emails clicked on  
links to WMCC content.



**3,000+**

interactions on our  
Facebook and  
Instagram posts.



Water Quality Awareness Day at the Capitol



Viking Creek Wetland Education Days



WMCC Team for Clark Fork River Cleanup



**320+** volunteers

**6,050** pounds of trash

**195+** miles improved



## Flathead Waters Cleanup

Each year, WMCC co-hosts the Flathead Waters Cleanup event with Flathead Conservation District, Flathead Rivers Alliance, Flathead Lakers, Lake County Conservation District, and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Volunteers clean up trash and debris in and around the waterbodies of the Flathead Basin.

*Volunteers and WMCC Staff at the Flathead Waters Clean Up*

## Education, Outreach, and Communications Committee

Chair: Kate Wilson (BPA)

**9 members**

Providing support and guidance for WMCC's communications, education, and outreach projects. The committee supports the *Montana Waters: Clearly Connected* campaign and assesses needs for outreach materials.

### Notable Efforts

- Planned and implemented the 2025 Water Quality Awareness Day at the Montana State Capitol Rotunda.
- Developed the Request for Proposals (RFP) for a Marketing Communications Firm to bolster the *Montana Waters* campaign through Community-Based Social Marketing (CBSM) strategies.
- Launched a Montana Waters pre-engagement survey.



## Montana Waters: Clearly Connected

*Montana Waters: Clearly Connected* is an umbrella education and outreach campaign that seeks to increase public awareness of water quality issues in Montana, ultimately enhancing personal behaviors and inspiring residents and visitors to take pride and responsibility in conservation efforts.

WMCC promotes the campaign and continues to develop outreach materials based on the needs of our communities and partner organizations.



*Septic outreach magnet*

## BE SEPTIC SMART

Follow these tips to protect your septic system & our Montana waters!



Have your system inspected and maintained regularly (3-5 years)



Throw away food scraps, wet wipes, and other damaging items



Keep structures, cars, and plants a safe distance from your drainfield

Next Pumping due:



**MONTANA  
WATERS**  
Clearly Connected.

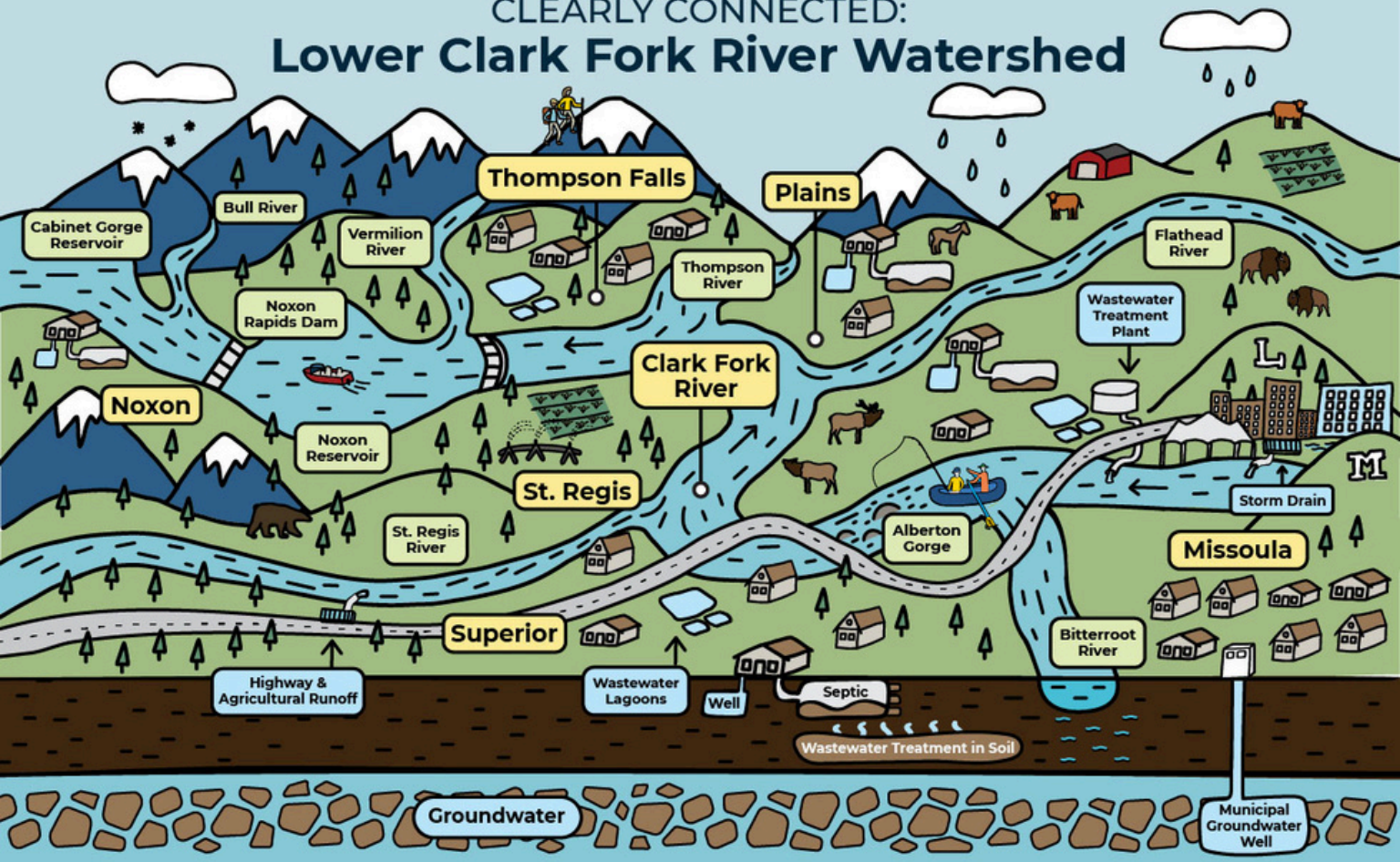
Learn more at [MontanaWaters.com](http://MontanaWaters.com)



**MONTANA  
WATERS**  
Clearly Connected.

All resources are available at  
[MontanaWaters.com](http://MontanaWaters.com)

# CLEARLY CONNECTED: Lower Clark Fork River Watershed



Lower Clark Fork River Watershed

## Watershed Infographics

Seeing a need for region-specific outreach materials about water quality, WMCC developed Western Montana Watershed Infographics. In 2025, WMCC hired High Mountain Creative, a Montana graphic designer, to bring this vision to life. Each infographic showcases the story of each unique watershed in Western Montana.



Watershed  
Infographics



## Big Sky Watershed Corps

From January to November each year, WMCC hosts a Big Sky Watershed Corps (BSWC) member through the Montana Conservation Corps (AmeriCorps). BSWC members gain experience with community engagement and education, conservation efforts, and are provided professional development opportunities. BSWC members provide capacity and programmatic support for WMCC, engage with our commission members, and are an asset to the team!



“

My term of service as a Big Sky Watershed Corps Member with WMCC and the Missoula County Department of Ecology and Extension has been an incredibly rewarding experience. Through my work engaging local businesses and the public, I've developed a strong understanding of AIS issues and improved my ability to communicate this information to diverse audiences. Coming from a background primarily focused on fieldwork, this role has allowed me to expand my skill set into new areas such as environmental education, public outreach, grant writing, and project coordination. The supportive and knowledgeable team at WMCC has played a key role in helping me build confidence and prepare for a long-term career in conservation.

”

Mike Skamarakus  
FY 2025-2026



“ My Big Sky Watershed Corps term with WMCC has been my first real glimpse into the professional world of conservation after graduating college in 2024, and it has allowed me to grow so much as a young professional. The projects I've worked on for WMCC's Montana Waters: Clearly Connected campaign have familiarized me with the water quality issues facing Montana, including nonpoint source pollution and aquatic invasive species. Through these projects and other trainings, I've been able to develop my skillset in new areas, such as ArcGIS, volunteer management, environmental education, and community outreach. I am so grateful for WMCC and their amazing staff for guiding me through this term and getting me one step closer to pursuing my long-term conservation career goals!

Olivia Galluzzo  
FY 2026-2027

”



*Tabling at the WildFest and Free the Seeds events*



## Aquatic Invasive Species

Protecting Montana's waters from aquatic invasive species (AIS) depends on the collaboration of management agencies, partner organizations, and Montana citizens and visitors. Montana's AIS monitoring and prevention program is led by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP). Supporting and promoting Montana's AIS prevention program is one of WMCC's core legislative duties.



## Industry Outreach Project

Led each year by WMCC's Big Sky Watershed Corps member, we connect with businesses including marinas, boat shops, angling shops, guiding outfitters, and commercial outdoor retailers to strengthen partnerships and support AIS education and prevention.

**125** visits to fishing and water-based recreation businesses



*Fly shop in Missoula & Outfitter in St. Regis*

## Aquatic Invasive Species Committee

Co-Chairs: Phil Matson (FLBS) & Tom Woolf (FWP)

### 14 members

The committee defines WMCC's role and responsibilities within Montana's statewide AIS prevention and mitigation efforts and strengthens those efforts by hosting regular partner meetings for updates, coordination, and information sharing. The committee aims to identify gaps, expand outreach and education, and advance thoughtful legislative engagement.



## Watercraft Inspector Appreciation Week

WMCC celebrates the Watercraft Inspector Appreciation Week annually to thank inspectors for their hard work and raise public awareness of the difficult and important job they do.

*Watercraft Inspectors at Whitefish Lake, Ravalli, and Glacier National Park stations*



### Realtor Engagement

The committee developed a realtor training program to help real estate professionals share relevant AIS information with homebuyers.

### AIS Signage

The committee supported the development of an inventory of AIS signage at high-use waterbody access sites to increase consistent messaging.

### Resource Development

The committee has ongoing efforts to provide resources for educators, legislators, AIS partners, and the public to raise awareness about AIS prevention and management efforts.



# Clean Drain Dry

WMCC was awarded a \$67,542 grant from the Bureau of Reclamation to implement a basin-wide Clean Drain Dry outreach campaign. Working closely with Montana FWP, the campaign support included video promotion; billboard advertising; social media, online, and print advertising; and the creation of promotional and educational materials to distribute through the industry outreach program and at community events.

Google ads generated

47,236

impressions

5,440

clicks to FWP's website



Social Media ads achieved

201,981

impressions

7,052

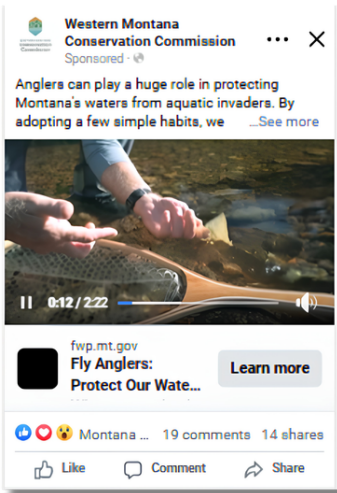
clicks to FWP's website

Radio ads aired

33

times per month on 2 radio stations from May-September





Social media advertisement

Bringing your boat to Montana?

HELP STOP THE SPREAD OF INVASIVE SPECIES

MONTANA REGULATIONS

- ▶ Watercraft transported into Montana from out-of-state must be inspected before launching.
- ▶ Stop at all open inspection stations as directed by signs.
- ▶ Out-of-state boats with bladders or ballast tanks, such as wakeboard or wake-surfing boats, must obtain a decontamination before launching.
- ▶ It is illegal to transport aquatic invasive species, live fish, bait fish or surface water into Montana.
- ▶ Non-resident watercraft launching in Montana are required to purchase a **Vessel AIS Prevention Pass**, the pass is \$30 for motorized and \$10 for non-motorized watercraft and can be purchased online.

LEARN MORE AT [fwp.mt.gov/ais](http://fwp.mt.gov/ais)

CLEAN.DRAIN.DRY. MONTANA FWP

Brought to you by: [www.westernMTwaters.com](http://www.westernMTwaters.com) WESTERN MONTANA Conservation Commission

Newspaper advertisement

CLEAN BOATS STOP INVASIVE SPECIES

MANDATORY BOAT INSPECTION IN 5 MILES

CLEAN. DRAIN. DRY. MONTANA FWP

[fwp.mt.gov/ais](http://fwp.mt.gov/ais)

Billboard outside of Ravalli, MT

## Nonpoint Source Pollution

Nonpoint source pollution comes from many dispersed sources across the landscape, making it difficult to regulate. One effective way to reduce nonpoint source pollution is to provide ways for individuals to mitigate their impact and resources to better understand how they can make a difference. Two sources of nonpoint source pollution that WMCC currently works to address are stormwater and septic leachate.



### Wastewater

WMCC seeks to reduce pollution from wastewater to our ground and surface water resources by leveraging science, creating local partnerships, and inspiring community action.

WMCC provides publicly available resources that support septic education, emphasize proper maintenance, and map areas where water quality could be negatively affected by development density.

### Septic Education & Maintenance Program Toolkit

This toolkit provides a variety of customizable resources that can be used to develop a program, engage with participants, and educate the public about protecting water quality through septic system maintenance.



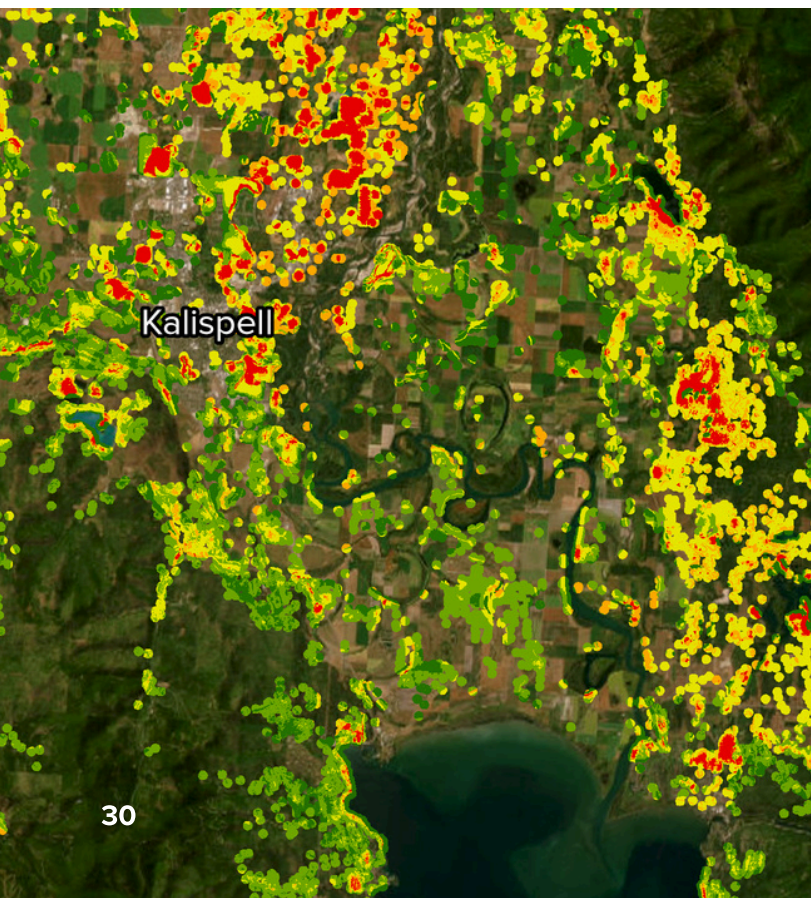
Toolkit

## Septic Risk Model

This model was created to visually display the risk of underperforming on-site wastewater treatment systems in the Flathead Basin. The model incorporates both physical landscape characteristics and the age and density of existing septic systems, where data allowed.



Septic Risk  
Model



## On-site Wastewater Treatment Committee

Co-Chairs: Caroline McDonald (Lake County CD) & Nanette Nelson (FLBS)

**19 members**

This committee is made up of dedicated partners who collaborate on shared goals for supporting measurable tasks that help bring awareness and protect water quality from septic nonpoint source pollution.



**300+**

volunteer hours from  
committee members over  
**14** meetings and additional  
task group meetings to  
discuss septic issues.



## Realtor Education

The committee collaborated with Northwest Montana Association of Realtors to host Septic System Operation and Maintenance education workshops to address concerns about aging, failing, and unpermitted systems and how realtors can help.



**67**

realtors attended **2** events in Flathead and Lincoln Counties

## Septic Permit Data

The committee sought to understand specific technical support and funding needs to help county and tribal officials update septic permit records into digital, geolocated databases.

## Legislative Task Group

A committee working group investigated policy guidance and materials that could help the state or counties deal with old, unpermitted, and under-permitted septic systems.



*2025 in-person committee meeting*



*Realtor Education Event*



*2026 in-person committee meeting*

## Stormwater

WMCC emphasizes innovation and continuous improvement in the science and management of stormwater to best protect our aquatic resources while providing opportunities for community education, engagement, and empowerment.

### Stormwater Advisory Council

Co-Chairs: Tracy Campbell (City of Missoula) & Matt Peterson (ERM)

#### 19 members

Serving as an advisory team of stormwater experts in the region, the council's mission is to advise and collaborate to develop resources that promote and support a sustainable green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) program in Montana. The council is driven by requirements in WMCC's EPA Toxics Reduction Lead grant.

**\$433,700**

granted to council for  
comprehensive Montana GSI  
programmatic development

**250**

hours of technical support awarded  
to council through the WaterNow  
Project Accelerator program



WMCC works collaboratively to provide resources focused on promoting and increasing green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) projects. These GSI structures rely on site design and native plants to help capture and filter stormwater runoff.

### Community Rain Garden Program Toolkit

This toolkit provides a variety of customizable resources that can be used to develop a program, engage with participants, and educate the public about protecting water quality through rain gardens.



Toolkit





*Flathead Rain Garden*

## Western Montana Native Plant Collaborative

Staff from WMCC, DEQ, and the Missoula Conservation District started the Western Montana Native Plant Collaborative, a group of native plant program specialists, commercial and retail suppliers, and landscape design and installation professionals that meet throughout the year to work on tasks to promote conservation and the co-benefits of native plant usage in landscape design.



**20+**  
engaged  
partners in the  
collaborative



### Supply & Industry Task Group:

Supports grower, retailer, and landscaper outreach, inventory and training. Investigates ecotypic species supply.



### Programs Task Group:

Supports collaborative resources development for native plant programs and outreach materials.

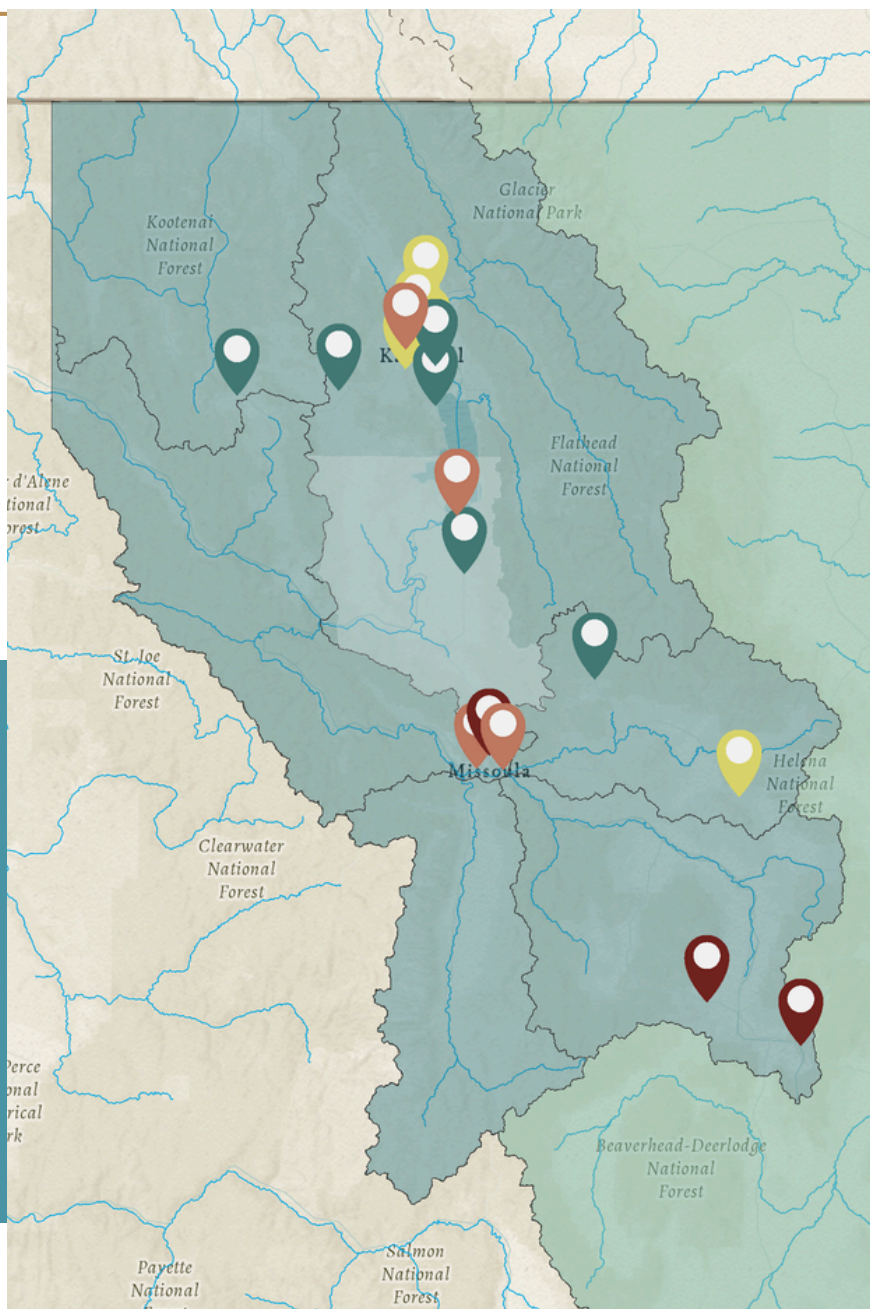


## Stormwater and Septic Leachate Toxics Reduction Grant Program

Over \$3 million in competitive funding was awarded to 18 projects in communities across Western Montana, including a focus on the Flathead. This program is supported by a \$7 million grant awarded to WMCC by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to mitigate toxic pollution in the headwaters of the Columbia River Basin through this subaward program and education and outreach initiatives.

### Grant Awardees

-  Septic Education & Maintenance
-  Septic Connectivity
-  Residential & Community Green Stormwater Infrastructure
-  Showcase Green Stormwater Infrastructure





## **\$162,447** Community Green Stormwater Infrastructure Programs

These programs and projects educate and empower homeowners and community partners to implement native-plant based gardens to capture stormwater runoff and improve water quality.

## **\$2,289,415** Showcase Green Stormwater Infrastructure Projects

Showcase projects demonstrate innovative ways of managing stormwater runoff in communities, such as incorporating more GSI into community areas like libraries, schools, and parks.



## **\$234,858** Septic System Education & Maintenance Programs

WMCC partners are engaging directly with property owners through different education and cost-share programs about septic system operation and maintenance in Flathead, Lake, Lincoln, and Missoula Counties.

## **\$400,000** Septic System Replacement & Connectivity Projects

Funding is driving Powell County, Resident Owned Communities in the Flathead, and Evergreen Water and Sewer District to address pollution concerns from aging and failing septic systems and tanks.



## Understanding Behaviors: Nonpoint Source Pollution Reduction

To understand and reduce human contributions to stormwater and septic leachate pollution, WMCC is conducting Community-Based Social Marketing (CBSM) research funded by a grant from the EPA. The CBSM framework pulls concepts from psychology and social marketing to understand a community's perceived barriers and benefits to adopting behaviors and then develops outreach strategies to address them.



### Behavior Research

WMCC selected behaviors through literature review, expert interviews, and an expert survey.

### Barriers & Benefits

WMCC hired a team of social scientists from the University of Montana to conduct community-specific barriers and benefits behavior research. This includes focus groups and a public survey.

### Outreach Strategy Development

WMCC contracted with Cascadia Consulting Group to develop strategies to change behaviors, pilot-test those strategies, and evaluate effectiveness before broad-scale implementation.



## Looking Ahead for Western Montana

WMCC was created to increase management efficiency and broaden the scope of aquatic resource conservation across Western Montana. In FY25–26, state funding and external grant support allowed the Commission to carry out that role through regional coordination, public meetings, partner engagement, and project support across all land and water west of the Continental Divide.



### Call to Action:

- Maintain the framework and collaborative state partnership that enables WMCC to serve as a regional, non-regulatory convener for coordinated monitoring, public engagement, funding alignment, and practical water-resource solutions.
- Support policies, agency priorities, and collaborative funding strategies that sustain and expand locally led septic and stormwater infrastructure efforts that reduce pollution at the source.
- Maintain strong support for aquatic invasive species prevention, including coordinated outreach and partner-driven resources.

**The FY25–26 biennium demonstrates that WMCC’s consolidated regional model is producing measurable outcomes, leveraging outside investment, and providing a practical structure for continued conservation effectiveness in Western Montana.**



WESTERN MONTANA  
**Conservation  
Commission**

[westernMTwaters.com](http://westernMTwaters.com)

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Kalispell, MT

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[DNRCARDDWMCC@mt.gov](mailto:DNRCARDDWMCC@mt.gov)



The Western Montana  
Conservation Commission is  
administratively attached to The  
Montana Department of Natural  
Resources and Conservation.