

Musselshell Watershed Coalition

A unique partnership of individuals and groups with a shared vision...

Supporting whole river management through whole river collaboration.

Central Montana RC&D was asked to assist the Musselshell Watershed Coalition to design a program for cooperative decision making about irrigation infrastructure needs which would include four separate irrigation organizations along a 280-mile river reach.

Grant funds are being used to set up an on-line Geographic Information System (GIS) infrastructure system to integrated GPS data and attribute data that describes and summarizes the existence of irrigation related structures, including descriptions of location, construction methods, condition, age, etc. The data is integrated and managed remotely by a GIS/GPS specialty company and is available to all users online. To date over 400 locations have been mapped with over 3900 descriptive attributes logged.

The primary purpose of the GIS infrastructure system is to provide the tools for informed, cooperative decisions to set irrigation infrastructure improvement priorities for the whole system, rather than the historical competition for funds between the different user groups on the river. This project is compatible with the language in the Montana State Water Plan.

The Central Montana RC&D Council also committed an additional \$10,000 for integration of the above described data into a Basin Wide effort being conducted by adjoining counties, with assistance from the RC&D, to develop a formal Regional Natural Resource Plan, that can be used to respond to state and federal resource planning processes. The Council felt that the irrigation data could be integrated into the overall planning effort and that the GIS format may be an appropriate format for the over-all plan. The RC&D has filled the roles for grant writer, grant administration, project management and coordination with user groups for the project.



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Our Mission

To benefit water users and the river through basin-wide cooperative management of the Musselshell River.

Who We Are

We are a voluntary partnership of the Upper Musselshell Water Users Association, Deadman's Basin Water Users Association, Delphia Melstone Canal Water Users Association, Mosby Musselshell Watershed Group, Upper Musselshell Conservation District, Lower Musselshell Conservation District, Petroleum Conservation District, Garfield Conservation District and state and federal agencies including DNRC, DEQ, FWP, USGS and NRCS.

A Watershed Vision

Water users are improving communication along the Musselshell River. Water rights conflicts are rare & quickly resolved. Relationships with support agencies are more trusting & more effective, leading to timely completion for prioritized projects. The public understands how the health of the river is monitored and appreciates the measurable gains in water quality & quantity.

The management of water is closely linked with an improving local economy & MWC is widely respected for its inclusive & pro-active leadership.

The Musselshell Watershed Coalition is a unique achievement in the region because it includes many different political jurisdictions, special purpose districts & water users groups. The basin spans five eastern Montana counties & includes 280 miles of river channel that irrigates nearly 80,000 acres & supplies municipal water.

Three Part Goal to Achieve Our Desired Quality of Life

Goal 1: Water Quantity—Meet decreed & contract water rights obligations by sustaining sufficient water in the Musselshell through cooperative flow management & a well-maintained irrigation infrastructure system.

This will be accomplished by continued support of the Musselshell River Distribution Project and by coordinating and implementing an inventory process for primary irrigation infrastructure (state storage reservoirs, inlet & outlet canals, etc.) along the entire Musselshell main stem with all four partner water user groups.

DNRC awarded \$18,000 to Central Montana RC&D for Geographic Information System (GIS) software. Another \$60,000 from DNRC's RRGL program is pending approval by the Montana Legislature & will be used to build a standardized irrigation infrastructure database, accessible to a web-based information center, serving partners of the Musselshell Watershed Coalition. This will help the Coalition prioritize infrastructure needs.



Goal 2: Water Quality—Pro-actively work with State agencies to meet State Water Standards using a volunteer local approach.

To be accomplished by helping to sustain & support the existing certified volunteer water monitoring program in place on the Musselshell sponsored by the Lower Musselshell Conservation District in Roundup.

Goal 3: Provide Governance, Planning & Outreach for the Coalition—

The Musselshell Watershed Coalition will develop a governance & decision-making model & agree to core annual monitoring indicators to measure the group's effectiveness & to meet the desired goals & vision for the Musselshell River & its users; sustain & improve communication & outreach for the Coalition's partners & interested parties; & prepare & update an annual plan of work.