



# Montana DEQ Nonpoint Source Program 20-Year Vision and Strategic Plan



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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Montana has a strong commitment to protecting and restoring water quality. To help fulfill this commitment, this document provides a long-term vision and strategic plan for how the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) will prioritize nonpoint source (NPS) program resources to generate measurable improvements in water quality. Specifically, the Plan focuses on the activities of the DEQ Nonpoint Source Program staff within the Watershed Protection Section of the Water Protection Bureau. The plan also incorporates NPS support activities provided by DEQ's Monitoring and Assessment (MAS) and Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) staff. Over the next several years, these NPS program activities will include:

- Coordinating NPS funding, outreach, and restoration efforts with partners
- Building the capacity of watershed groups and local leaders
- Working with partners to establish and implement approaches to evaluate water quality related conditions and trends
- Working with partners to foster interest in water quality improvements
- Establishing an approach for prioritizing DEQ NPS resources, including identification of NPS focus watersheds
- Identifying and implementing the NPS actions and products best pursued in the NPS focus watersheds as well as state-wide

## **2.0 VISION AND GOALS**

The DEQ NPS program 20-year vision is that Montanans are taking action and achieving measurable improvements in water quality for the benefit of our environment, landowners and local communities.

The Montana DEQ NPS program will provide statewide leadership toward achieving this vision by pursuing the following actions:

- Informing Montana citizens about sources of nonpoint source pollution, effects on water quality, and the decisions and activities that can reduce nonpoint source pollution.
- Identifying how water quality pollution is being successfully addressed by individual landowners and other local, state, and federal partners.
- Developing strong partnerships and pooling resources with landowners, watershed groups, conservation districts, local governments, state and federal agencies, and other entities to generate long-term, significant improvements in water quality.
- Supporting water quality restoration activities that provide sustainable, long-term benefits to Montana's communities and citizens.
- Tracking trends in water quality and the social and economic factors linked to water quality improvements.

## **3.0 DEQ NPS PROGRAM CORE FUNCTIONS AND PRODUCTS**

Montana DEQ is authorized by the State Legislature, the Governor, and EPA as the lead state agency for implementing a statewide NPS Management Program. An inherent component of Montana's NPS program is integration within a water quality planning process, as described in Montana's NPS Management Plan, that includes monitoring and assessment of water quality, development of total

maximum daily loads (TMDLs), and support for efforts to implement the NPS restoration actions identified within the TMDLs. This planning process is linked closely to requirements within Montana Law for assessing water quality (MCA 75-5-702) and supporting implementation of TMDLs (MCA 75-5-703), as well as Federal Clean Water Act (CWA) Sections 303 and 319. The DEQ programs involved with implementing this planning process and primary products and activities are identified as follows:

- Monitoring and Assessment (MAS) Program: Water quality data and beneficial use assessments.
- Water Quality Planning Bureau: List of impaired waterbodies including the list of waters requiring TMDL development (303(d) List).
- TMDL Program: TMDL documents that characterize and quantify nonpoint and point sources water quality problems and identify solutions to these water quality problems.
- NPS Program: Leadership role toward supporting and implementing many of the nonpoint source aspects of TMDLs and overall nonpoint source management coordination in Montana, including evaluating water quality improvements over time.

The NPS program's core functions and associated products are organized into the following four main areas:

**Managing the CWA Section 319 project grant provided by EPA as authorized under the 1987 amendments to the Clean Water Act (CWA).** The Montana NPS program distributes approximately \$1M Section 319 funds per year to nonprofits and government entities for projects that reduce or prevent NPS pollution. This funding is leveraged with other funding sources and used as a catalyst to advance water quality protection. Projects are selected through a competitive process involving a multi-agency review panel.

Products:

- The Section 319 projects grant typically funds 7 to 10 projects per year. NPS staff provide technical and project management input on 20 to 30 open 319 projects at any one time.
- Individual contracts, contract reports, and yearly project grant reports to EPA.

**Developing the Montana NPS Management Plan.** This document provides a framework for NPS programs throughout Montana. The NPS Management Plan is required under CWA Section 319 and must be updated every five years for Section 319 grant funding eligibility.

Products:

- Updated versions of the NPS Management Plan (most recent is 2017).
- Annual NPS program report. This document is used for outreach purposes and provides a summary of DEQ and key partner activities toward achieving the goals of NPS Management Plan. The report also satisfies a requirement of the Section 319 grant from EPA to DEQ.

**Providing feedback and input on individual and watershed-scale NPS related planning efforts, projects and land management activities.**

Products:

- TMDL Implementation Evaluations (TIEs). TIEs represent an important component of the monitoring feedback program, required under State Law (MCA 75-5-703), for evaluating the pollution reduction activities associated with implementing TMDLs. TIEs can be accomplished at

the waterbody scale or at a larger watershed scale addressing multiple waterbodies with multiple TMDLs. The final product is a report providing feedback and management recommendations to watershed partners, including monitoring and assessment recommendations to help document progress.

- Success stories that document where one or more impairment causes are removed from a waterbody because of reductions in NPS pollution. These are accomplished in coordination with Monitoring and Assessment (MAS) program staff and the stakeholders involved in achieving NPS reductions. They also satisfy a core EPA program tracking objective.
- 319 project effectiveness reviews (PERs). These evaluate long-term effectiveness of past 319 projects to better inform future NPS project development and provide an improved understanding of NPS actions within a watershed. They also provide feedback for individuals involved with water quality project review, design and implementation.
- Formal and informal input on federal and state planning actions. Staff routinely provide input on United States Forest Service (USFS) and other agency actions. USFS actions over the past few decades represent some of the most significant gains toward successful management of nonpoint sources, in part due to their willingness to partner with DEQ in their efforts to protect water quality and implement TMDLs.
- Participation with stakeholder groups. NPS staff routinely participate as members of or contributors to stakeholder-led committees and organizations involved with efforts to advance NPS pollution prevention.

**Technical, educational and financial assistance to partners involved with NPS pollution prevention throughout Montana.**

Products

- DEQ accepted Watershed Restoration Plans that address NPS pollution. Although these documents are developed via local watershed groups and other partners, DEQ typically provides input and guidance on how to ensure these documents address EPA's nine minimum elements for subsequent 319 project funding consideration.
- General outreach and educational information and material. This includes presentations and informal day-to-day input to stakeholders on topics such as management practice recommendations. It also includes information located in the NPS portion of DEQ's website.
- DEQ works with applicants to achieve improvements in Section 319 project proposals, contracts, and implementation efforts.
- (MAS program): MAS, with WPS staff assistance, supports a diverse and expanding volunteer monitoring program that engages local citizens in watersheds throughout the state.

Many of the above core functions represent Montana's approaches to implementing an NPS program that is based primarily on voluntary actions of landowners and Montana citizens. This approach is consistent with the NPS Management Plan and Montana state law (MCA 75-5-703(8)). The NPS program provides leadership towards this voluntary approach that empowers Montanans to address water quality issues in a flexible manner, consistent with local needs and interests.

## **4.0 NPS PROGRAM FOCUSED APPROACH FOR PRIORITY WATERSHEDS**

For several years, NPS program resources have been directed toward those watersheds where watershed groups or other locally led entities are actively involved with the implementation or development of a Watershed Restoration Plan (WRP). Attachment 1 shows a map of these areas.

Moving forward, a key element of the NPS program strategy involves identifying three priority levels for watersheds throughout Montana and defining the type and extent of DEQ-supported NPS activities for each priority level. The highest priority applies to the NPS focus watersheds where resources will be focused the most toward producing measurable improvements in water quality from NPS management activities. The next level of priority are the watersheds where a WRP exists or is under development, referred to as WRP watersheds. In these areas DEQ will continue to help local interests with WRP implementation. Many WRP Watersheds will eventually become a focus watershed as the NPS program moves forward with implementing this strategic plan. The remainder of the watersheds in the state are those areas without an existing WRP or WRP under development, referred to as non-WRP watersheds. DEQ NPS resources in non-WRP watersheds will typically involve support toward NPS watershed planning activities where there is local interest.

NPS program actions within each of the three priority levels form the basis of the NPS 20-year strategic plan. These actions and further details of each priority level are discussed in greater detail in the following sections of this plan. Figure 1 provides a map showing the NPS strategic planning priority levels for watersheds in Montana.

### **4.1 NPS FOCUS WATERSHEDS**

NPS focus watersheds (focus watersheds) are areas or watersheds where it is DEQ's goal to apply a majority of NPS staff and funding resources over a given period. The goal is to influence significant and measurable progress toward reducing NPS pollution.

#### **4.1.1 Focus Watershed Size**

Focus watersheds will generally coincide with the size of a watershed covered by an existing WRP (Attachment 1) or watershed group area of interest. For this reason, they will typically be the size of a 4<sup>th</sup> level Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC). This watershed size helps ensure that water quality improvements can benefit a significant number of Montanans. Exceptions to this focus watershed size are anticipated, particularly where a significant number of landowners in a smaller watershed are actively engaged in NPS restoration activities such as the National Water Quality Initiative Watersheds (NWQIs) discussed in Section 4.1.6. These NWQI areas are typically a 6<sup>th</sup> level HUC.

#### **4.1.2 Focus Watershed Selection**

DEQ will select a focus watershed based on the following list of attributes.

- One or more DEQ-accepted Watershed Restoration Plans are in place.
- Resources and momentum exist through active watershed groups, agencies, or other entities promoting water quality and/or habitat protection.
- Local citizens, stakeholders, and visitors are interested in, support, and value natural resources provided by water quality.



- The extent to which DEQ resources can provide increased momentum for water quality improvement actions on the ground.
- DEQ's ability to track changes in water quality and/or key water quality indicators through time.
- Supports other agency or other internal DEQ program priorities.
- The extent of nonpoint source pollution issues and related impairment conditions that can be addressed via traditional BMPs.
- Opportunities to reduce municipal wastewater or other point source water treatment costs by reducing upstream nonpoint sources of pollution.

#### **4.1.3 Pilot Watershed Selection**

The Bitterroot watershed has been selected as a pilot focus watershed. It satisfies most, if not all, of the selection criteria and there are numerous ongoing DEQ NPS activities already occurring within this watershed. Focusing on the Bitterroot watershed will help develop and refine our approach in focus watersheds as we move forward. DEQ is currently developing a transparent process for future focus watershed selection that will include input from many of our partners involved with NPS program implementation throughout Montana.

#### **4.1.4 NPS Actions and Products in Focus Watersheds**

Within focus watersheds, DEQ will pursue many NPS core functions and develop products suitable for the watershed, such as TIEs and PERs. NPS staff will help coordinate internal DEQ monitoring support and work with local stakeholders to ensure that appropriate information is collected for tracking water quality and other associated indicators of progress. DEQ will also provide staff expertise to help local groups identify and develop projects for subsequent 319 project funding. Using this approach, it is anticipated that at least 25% to 50% of the yearly Section 319 funding will be reserved for each focus watershed for at least two 319 annual funding cycles.

Additionally, DEQ staff will work with partners in focus watersheds to develop new NPS approaches and products that can be used to achieve water quality improvements. These may include:

- Enhanced outreach efforts to highlight NPS achievements such as story maps, dashboards, presentations, informational kiosks, and products that highlight local landowner and community benefits from water quality, riparian, floodplain and wetland improvements; this work will also involve describing landowner experiences implementing water quality improvement activities.
- Increased technical and funding support for voluntary restoration and monitoring activities.
- Identification of sources other than 319 project funding for implementing projects or for building the capacity of watershed groups.
- Identification of protection approaches for existing high-quality waters and other key water-related resources such as wetlands, ground water, or source water protection areas.
- Additional documentation or other forms of assistance to help interpret and implement existing TMDLs. Development of new TMDLs could be pursued in some focus watersheds, but it is anticipated that in most situations all TMDLs necessary for adequate NPS implementation will have already been completed.

Ultimately, the extent of funding and DEQ staff activities will be a function of the focus watershed size and needs. Relatively small focus watersheds, such as the NWQI priority areas discussed in Section 4.1.6, may receive less 319 money and staff involvement.

#### **4.1.5 Duration of DEQ Support in a Focus Watershed**

NPS staff resources will initially be allocated to a focus watershed for approximately 2 to 3 years. After that time, there will still be a need for ongoing NPS program assistance linked to ongoing 319 project management and tracking improvements in water quality over time.

#### **4.1.6 National Water Quality Initiative Watersheds**

The National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) is a partnership between the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and state water quality agencies to identify and address agriculture-related water quality impairments through voluntary conservation. NRCS provides targeted funding (typically more than \$500K per year in Montana) for financial and technical assistance in small watersheds (6<sup>th</sup> level HUCs) where farmers and ranchers will implement conservation practices to achieve measurable improvements in water quality. DEQ will work with NRCS and local organizations in NWQI watersheds to document water quality changes attributable to the installed conservation practices. Every 1 to 3 years, depending upon the potential for completing additional projects, new NWQI watersheds are identified and chosen through a collaborative process between NRCS, DEQ, the Montana Watershed Coordination Council, and other interested stakeholders.

Because of the ongoing, sizeable commitment of DEQ staffing and financial resources to the NWQI program, and the significant benefit the collaborative effort provides for water quality, the NPS Program will include NWQI watersheds as focus watersheds where many NPS core functions, including Section 319 funding, can be applied. However, the scale of NWQI project areas justifies a more limited expenditure of DEQ's NPS resources, including both staff time and 319 project resources, in comparison to the larger focus watershed such as the Bitterroot.

The Camp/Godfrey watersheds are two adjacent tributaries to the Gallatin River near Manhattan are the current NWQI project in Montana. Deep Creek, a tributary watershed to the Missouri River near Townsend, is a recently completed NWQI area with ongoing DEQ NPS support commitments such as documenting water quality improvement.

### **4.2 WRP WATERSHEDS**

WRP watersheds are all the watersheds, not yet identified as a focus watershed, where a Watershed Restoration Plan (WRP) exists or is under development. DEQ NPS staff will support many NPS core activities in these watersheds including Section 319 project funding (where WRPs have been accepted), outreach, TIE development, PERs, and success story reporting. This support will continue in WRP watersheds, although at a somewhat reduced extent to provide additional resources within the selected focus watersheds.

DEQ recognizes that WRP watersheds represent future focus watershed. Based on that recognition, DEQ will work with partners in watersheds that exhibit many of the attributes of a focus watershed to help prepare for potential increased NPS program focus. This could involve providing support for watershed group capacity building, and additional public and partner outreach.

Many WRP watersheds represent areas where landowner actions have or will likely lead to improved water quality. Given the importance of tracking water quality improvements through time as it relates to the NPS 20-year vision, DEQ actions within some WRP watersheds may include initiating baseline data collection prior to a watershed becoming a priority focus watershed.

## 4.3 NON-WRP WATERSHEDS

Non-WRP watersheds represent those watersheds where WRPs are not developed and are not currently under development. DEQ NPS support for these areas will still occur, though at a reduced level. Support will involve outreach and occasional input and feedback on proposed NPS related activities. Support will also include NPS program outreach to watershed stakeholders during the TMDL development process within TMDL priority areas. For those watersheds where DEQ has completed TMDLs, support can be provided toward development of a WRP or other documentation that involves NPS water quality improvements. A goal is that interest in water quality improvements will result in more non-WRP watershed transitioning to WRP watersheds.

As part of DEQ's NPS strategy, new outreach approaches and products will be developed to help promote NPS protection in this large area of Montana. One approach might involve working with Conservation Districts, local landowners, and NRCS to support and highlight individual landowner actions that protect water quality and improve the landowner's enjoyment and use of their property. These landowners often are innovators that can positively influence neighbors over time. Attachment 2 - [DEQ NPS Support in Non-WRP Areas](#) provides a list of existing or potential NPS program support actions in non-WRP watersheds.

## 5.0 TRACKING IMPROVEMENTS

The desired outcomes of the Nonpoint Source Program are based on our vision of achieving measurable improvements in water quality for the benefit of our environment, landowners and local communities. Directly measuring improvements in water quality is challenging because of the inherent variability of natural systems and the complex and variable land management activities that influence water quality. Therefore, tracking NPS program improvements will involve a combination of indicator parameters and direct water quality measurements.

Measuring benefits to landowners and local communities from improved water quality represents a unique challenge toward evaluating whether we are fully meeting our vision. This can be addressed using indicators such as economic gains linked to water quality, as well as through landowner or local community surveys.

The following sections provide approaches for tracking NPS related improvements for each priority level. Some approaches can be readily implemented, while others are still being developed.

### 5.1 TRACKING IMPROVEMENTS IN FOCUS WATERSHEDS

In focus watersheds, DEQ will track change using several indicators that will likely include:

- Riparian health – This measure can be a critical indicator of overall stream health and implementation of protective measures. WPS staff will be responsible for developing and applying these indicators. They will be mostly developed using aerial photography with some ground-truthing where convenient. An example outcome might be using aerial imagery to show the percentage of improved riparian vegetative cover over time.
- Water chemistry – In some areas it will be beneficial to obtain baseline and subsequent trend information on nutrient or other parameters to evaluate overall watershed implementation activities. Locations could be on larger rivers within a focus watershed, above a WWTP with

nutrient treatment concerns, or within a smaller focus watershed sub-watershed with significant implementation. MAS would take a lead on this work based on input and suggestions from WPS staff and local stakeholders. Volunteer monitoring could play a role. Metals sampling could also follow a similar approach where appropriate.

- Percent fine sediment or other physical in-stream measures: These measures may be appropriate for setting baseline conditions and tracking improvements relating to sediment or habitat impairment conditions.
- Social Indicators – These may include approaches to track stakeholder engagement, awareness and involvement. They should also include measures that track how improving water quality and stream health are benefiting local communities and interests.
- Landowner Actions – These are important indicators to develop regarding the willingness of landowners to take actions to protect water quality, particularly those landowners along impaired waterbodies or tributaries to impaired waterbodies. Measures may include or be linked to the number of 319 project proposals for BMPs on private lands and general extent of BMPs implemented over time. The riparian health measure closely links to landowner actions.
- Economic Benefits/Gains –At a minimum this will include tracking Section 319 NPS or other funding made available to a local economy.
- Wetland Indicators – Wetland indicators, such as species diversity or increases in functional attributes, can be linked with riparian health, but can also be used as a separate environmental health indicator within the watershed either within or outside of the riparian (near stream) zones.
- Achievements or success stories – As previously described, the extent to which individual or multiple landowners contribute to healthier waters is an important overall way to help measure success and provide positive feedback within a focus watershed. The number of pollutant – waterbody impairment causes removed from the list of impaired waters is a key measure to be used here.
- Project Effectiveness – Results from Project Effectiveness Reviews (PERs) can be used as an indicator of progress.

## 5.2 TRACKING IMPROVEMENTS IN WRP WATERSHEDS

Given NPS program constraints, the extent of effort put into tracking improvements in a WRP watershed will be limited. However, given the overall extent of WRP watersheds in Montana, efforts to track improving water quality or associated indicators of progress will occur in some locations as follows:

- NPS program staff will continue working on TMDL Implementation Evaluations (TIEs) in WRP watersheds. This TIE work may be prioritized to address areas where success stories linked to significant water quality improvements are likely. They will also ensure progress is made toward satisfying the related TMDL evaluation requirements within state law.
- Stakeholders and landowners in some WRP watersheds are making significant progress toward water quality improvements. Water quality measures, such as nutrient, metals, or percent fine sediment should be pursued in some of these select watersheds to obtain timely baseline data in anticipation of becoming either a future focus watershed or being a watershed where DEQ NPS program support has or likely will be a contributing factor toward improving water quality. Tributary streams, such as French Creek in the Big Hole watershed and Nevada Creek in the Blackfoot watershed may fit into this category.
- Section 319 Funding and Project Effectiveness Reviews – DEQ will continue to support 319 project funding for the highest priority projects (based on existing or updated Agency Panel

Review criteria) in WRP watersheds and complete PERs within these areas over the next several years.

Where a WRP watershed becomes focus watershed, any of the above indicators of progress may additionally be applied in the area.

### **5.3 TRACKING IMPROVEMENTS IN NON-WRP WATERSHEDS**

Tracking change in the portion of the state covered by non-WRP watersheds will reflect additional goals of an evolving level of local stakeholder interest. A visionary goal is that in 20 years, the Figure 1 map showing areas with locally developed watershed restoration plans or equivalent will indicate that most of the state has this level of local water quality restoration interest. Where a non-WRP watershed becomes a WRP watershed any of the above Section 5.2 indicators of progress may additionally be applied in the area.

## **6.0 FOCUS WATERSHED WORKPLAN**

In focus watersheds, DEQ NPS staff will work as a team in pursuing many of the core functions and developing associated products where applicable. Each focus watershed will have a DEQ representative providing internal DEQ and external stakeholder coordination. NPS products will be assigned based on expertise, interest, availability, and working history in a location.

An example implementation schedule of support activities and products is provided in Attachment 3. For each focus watershed, this schedule will be influenced by partner goals, ongoing NPS activities, DEQ resource availability, and an evolving understanding on how DEQ can best promote efforts toward achieving our vision. This information is used to help develop individual DEQ staff workplans.

## **7.0 PROGRAM AND PROJECT INTEGRATION AND COMMUNICATION**

Implementing the 20-year vision and strategic plan requires dedicated coordination with internal and external partners. This section of the vision lays out NPS program key partners and stakeholders, our current relationship, and potential opportunities over the next 20 years. The 2017 NPS Management Plan goes into greater detail on working partnerships (Section 5) and an overview of the various cooperating entities and their role and activities in NPS management (Appendix E).

DEQ's water quality standards program, monitoring and assessment program, and TMDL development program have generated a wealth of knowledge regarding water quality conditions in watersheds across the state. NPS staff work with these internal partners to develop products and provide consistent messaging that makes this information clear and accessible to public and private entities and individuals, so they may use the information to plan and carry out on-the-ground water quality improvements.

In most watersheds, nonpoint source (NPS) pollution is a major contributor to identified water quality impairments. The success of the voluntary approach to addressing NPS pollution relies on the willingness and ability of individual landowners and land managers to implement best management practices (BMPs). Due to our centralized location and broader role as a government agency, the NPS program generally lacks the opportunity to form and maintain one-on-one relationships with individual

landowners. Instead, we focus on providing tools and information to local entities (e.g., CDs, watershed groups, state and federal land managers) so that they can use their local presence, legitimacy, and relationships to encourage on-the-ground project implementation. Levels of engagement between the NPS program and local entities will vary across watersheds, depending upon priority level, local stakeholder interest, and the potential for making measurable improvements in water quality.

## **7.1 DEQ INTERNAL INTEGRATION**

Internal coordination between DEQ programs provides an opportunity to understand work that has been completed, to share knowledge that has been gained, to ensure the outputs DEQ provides are both useful and used, and to establish a path forward to improve water quality across the state. Internal coordination is also critical to ensuring DEQ provides the public with a unified, consistent message. NPS staff will work to further engage and integrate work within DEQ, and seek new opportunities to engage other DEQ programs over the next 20 years to reduce NPS pollution and improve water quality.

### **7.1.1 TMDL/Watershed Management**

NPS will work with the Watershed Management (TMDL) staff to coordinate:

- TMDL implementation recommendations and consistent messaging for stakeholder implementation.
- Assistance with WRP development and review.
- Assistance with TIE development and review.
- Developing methods for project effectiveness evaluations consistent with TMDL methods
- Input on 319 project proposals.
- Developing “Alternative TMDLs”, where appropriate, to assist with implementation of NPS management activities.
- Identifying potential priorities for TMDL development or TMDL updates, either to help fill programmatic needs in a focus or WRP Watershed, or to help with capacity building and subsequent WRP development in a non-WRP Watershed.
- Interactive tools, such as story maps or dashboards, for data or project communication and interpretation.

### **7.1.2 Monitoring and Assessment**

NPS will work with the Monitoring and Assessment (MAS) staff to coordinate:

- Monitoring efforts within focus watersheds.
- Public outreach to improve local understanding and use of MAS products.
- Local support for citizen-based volunteer water quality monitoring.
- Establishing a TMDL Implementation Evaluation (TIE) program that satisfies TMDL review requirements identified in Montana State Law.
- Data collection for TIE recommendations including updated assessments.
- Areas and projects in which MAS data may further the work of tracking, reporting, and championing water quality improvements over time.
- Development of outreach tools to help in the interpretation of water quality data and DEQ water quality program information.
- Fulfillment of EPA 319/GRTS reporting requirements.

### **7.1.3 Wetlands**

NPS will work with the Wetlands program to coordinate:

- Inclusion of wetland restoration and preservation into watershed restoration planning.
- Implementation of wetland restoration and preservation projects.
- Greater local and statewide understanding of the role of wetlands in addressing NPS pollution.

### **7.1.4 Standards and Modeling**

NPS will work with the Standards and Modeling program to:

- Develop pollutant load reduction estimates necessary to meet EPA reporting requirements.
- Inform NPS inputs to modeling efforts.
- Inform stakeholders of new or evolving standards development work that may impact or influence TMDL implementation.

### **7.1.5 Information Management Bureau**

NPS will work with the Information Management Bureau to coordinate storage and retrieval of water quality data.

### **7.1.6 Abandoned Mine Lands**

NPS will work with the DEQ Abandoned Mine Lands program to support stream restoration opportunities in coordination with remediation actions and removal of mining-related NPS pollution. This support includes 319 project funding assistance, technical assistance with stream restoration design, and facilitating collaboration among stream restoration professionals and affected parties at specific locations.

### **7.1.7 DEQ Programs Involved with Point Source Dischargers**

There are several DEQ discharge permitting programs where there is existing as well as opportunities for expanded collaboration. These include:

- TIE development may require information on permitted point sources as part of evaluating progress on reducing pollutants in a watershed. MPDES permitting, (Engineering Bureau and Compliance, Training and Technical Assistance) staff can provide important information on the status of permitted facilities in a watershed.
- Engineering and Compliance, Training and Technical Assistance programs have the potential to prioritize their point source support activities, such as wastewater treatment optimization, in a NPS focus watershed to help ensure a coordinated effort toward achieving measurable positive changes in water quality.
- TIE development – coordination on data availability to evaluate point source improvements.

### **7.1.8 Other DEQ Regulatory Programs**

In instances where groundwater, surface water, 318/401, subdivision review, public water supply, source water protection, or other regulatory programs may have jurisdiction, the NPS program will coordinate with the applicable program(s) to ensure DEQ provides a unified approach and consistent messaging. Specifically, NPS will work with these programs to coordinate where NPS reductions can provide a more economically feasible approach to meeting standards.

### 7.1.9 DEQ Funding Programs

Periodically, opportunities arise for collaborative funding of NPS pollution prevention activities with other DEQ work units (e.g., the Abandoned Mine Lands program, State Revolving Fund, the Wetlands program, and the Volunteer Monitoring Lab Support program). The NPS program will continue to explore joint funding opportunities with internal funding partners.

## 7.2 EXTERNAL COORDINATION

The NPS program works in a collaborative manner to engage a broad group of external stakeholders who are working to address NPS pollution. State and Federal agencies manage a significant portion of Montana's land base. These agencies pursue actions, such as BMP implementation, to mitigate or reduce nonpoint source pollution on public lands, sometimes with jointly funded projects with DEQ or by other forms of collaboration. Nonprofit organizations and local governmental entities provide critical connections to private landowners who may be interested in improving water quality. Section 5.0 of the 2017 Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan outlines the NPS program's plan for coordination with external entities. Appendix E of the 2017 Plan provides detailed descriptions of the NPS pollution prevention activities of specific entities.

### 7.2.1 Governmental Partners

Listed below are some of the federal agencies, state agencies, and local government entities that provide a variety of important resources toward NPS management in Montana. Section 7.3 describes planned outreach efforts to engage these partners.

Federal Agencies:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
  - Forest Service
  - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- U.S. Geological Survey
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

State Agencies:

- Department of Natural Resources & Conservation
  - Conservation and Resource Development
  - Forestry
  - Trust Lands
  - Water Resources
- State Library
  - Natural Resources Information System
  - Natural Heritage Program
- Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Agriculture



**Local Governmental Entities:**

- city and county planning
- public health departments
- public works departments
- conservation districts
- irrigation districts
- local water quality protection districts

**7.2.2 Non-Governmental Partners**

In addition to government agencies, local watershed groups and other non-profit organizations are critical partners in achieving Montana's NPS Management Program vision. These organizations often lead development and implementation of watershed restoration plans (Figure 1). While the level of knowledge and data on water quality and restoration is sufficient for addressing a majority of Montana's water quality issues, DEQ will continue to expand and refine the state's understanding of water quality problems and solutions for implementing targeted and efficient solutions. However, engagement of local stakeholders is necessary for achieving DEQ's water quality goals. DEQ relies on partnerships with local organizations such as watershed groups and conservation districts to directly engage landowners. Conversely, these local organizations often rely on technical and financial support from DEQ to implement appropriate and effective projects and practices.

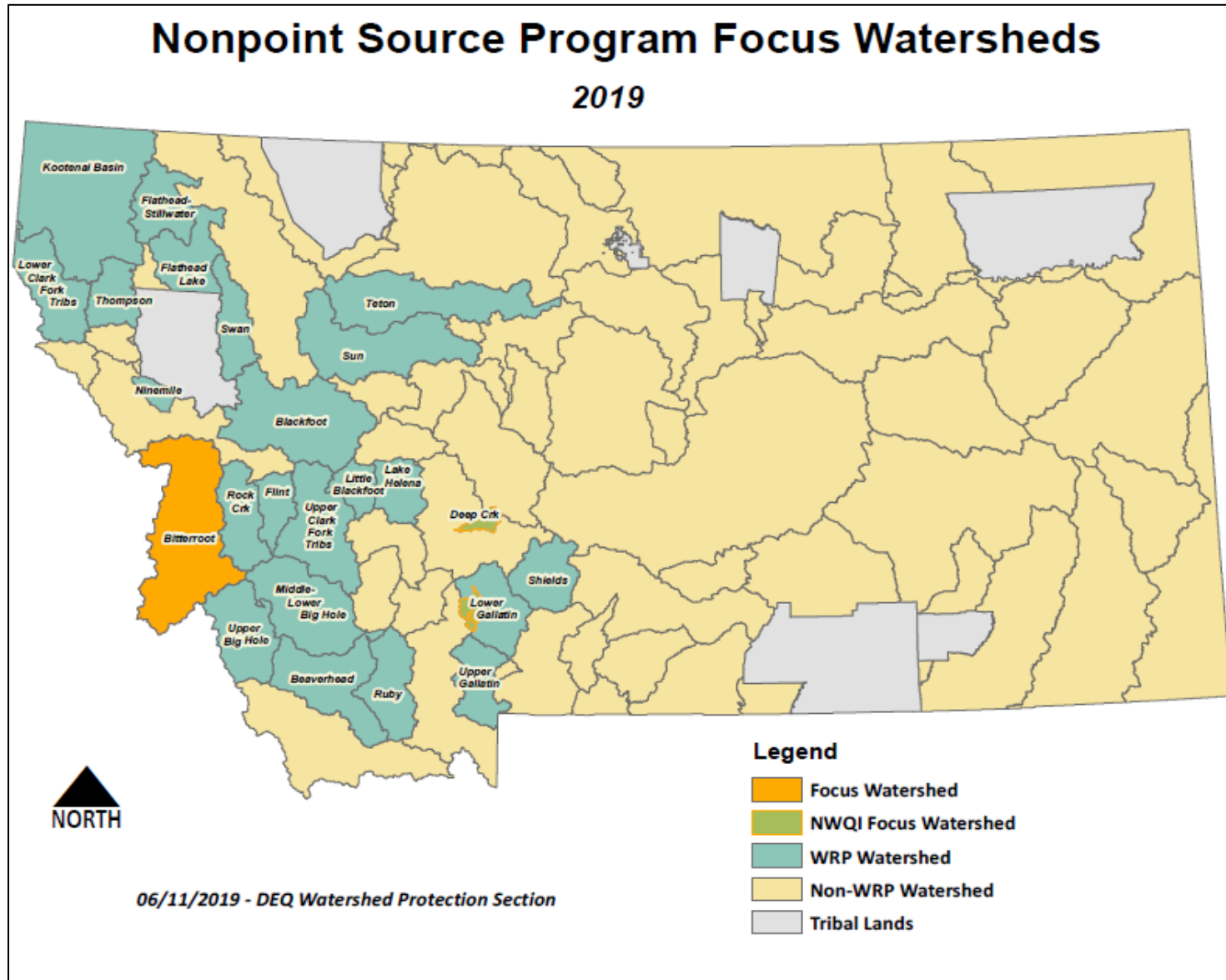
The list of non-governmental organizations is too large to list individually; many are described in Appendix E of the 2017 NPS Management Plan. However, DEQ engages these individual organizations where possible. DEQ maintains close partnerships with the Montana Watershed Coordination Council and Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana, who support local groups and CDs to ensure we are connecting with groups and addressing local needs.

**7.3 COORDINATION MOVING FORWARD**

The full extent of interaction and coordination with the above internal and external partners is an evolving process. As we begin to implement this strategic plan we will collaborate with key partners regarding the strategic actions proposed in this document and solicit feedback on ways the NPS Program can improve on meeting common goals. These efforts should help identify overlapping goals, enhance opportunities to leverage funding and technical resources, and direct DEQ priorities where NPS involvement can increase synergy and outputs among various programs. This coordination will also help DEQ develop a process in selecting the next NPS Focus watersheds.

The NPS Program continues to meet with stakeholder groups throughout the state to provide varying levels of support. To initiate the Bitterroot Focus Watershed pilot, NPS Program staff started meeting with local stakeholders in the Bitterroot watershed in December 2018. These continuing meetings are intended to inform stakeholders on our priority approach, articulated strategies, example metrics or products that DEQ can provide, and get feedback on where DEQ staff resources can best support actions and activities that will lead to water quality improvements. Moving forward, annual or biannual meetings with interested stakeholders will be held in focus watersheds. The meetings will provide a venue for DEQ and stakeholders to share projects and products developed or in development for the watershed and communicate successes and lessons learned. The NPS Program will continue to work with partners to document varying levels of water quality, social, and economic successes in Focus, WRP, and Non-WRP watersheds.

## ATTACHMENT 1 - MAP



## **ATTACHMENT 2 – DEQ NPS SUPPORT IN NON-WRP AREAS**

Most of our DEQ nonpoint source program resources are geared toward supporting those areas where a combination of DEQ staff and local stakeholders, such as a watershed group, have completed significant water quality planning activities. This includes updated assessments and TMDL development by DEQ followed by locally driven watershed restoration plan (WRP) development. The DEQ NPS program resources include NPS project funding, linked to CWA Section 319 funds, in areas where WRPs have been developed.

In the non-WRP areas, the NPS program support may include:

- Assistance with WRP development in those areas where TMDL development is underway or completed
- Identification of other agency funding sources that may apply
- Feedback on water quality project ideas and likely pollutions sources of concern
- Feedback on success of water quality projects implemented in the past, particularly 319 funded projects
- Input on what it takes to be prioritized for updated impairment assessment work and subsequent TMDL development
- Technical assistance for local stakeholder-driven monitoring activities
- Support for education and outreach, including mini-grant opportunities
- Feedback on project or landowner actions toward water quality protection and efforts to highlight this work
- Ideas on how to develop or incorporate watersheds of interest into existing WRPs and/or healthy watershed plans
- Identifying linkages to downstream waters including potential linkage to existing downstream TMDLs and/or WRPs
- Overview of monitoring and assessment activities, strategic plan components, and scheduled activities
- Overview of TMDL development, strategic plan components, and TMDL development schedule
- Discussion of TMDL implementation details, ideas and recommended priorities to focus on.
- Identifying the benefits of NPS pollution control activities as they relate to flood protection, baseflow, livestock health, wildlife habitat
- Identifying linkages between wetland health and water quality health

## ATTACHMENT 3 – BITTERROOT FOCUS WATERSHED TASKS AND SCHEDULE (VERSION 2)

