Yellowstone Conservation District
April 6, 2023

Fly Creek Water Quality Meeting

Jason Eastwood, The Water Guy-Quality Water Treatment Solutions, explains the reverse osmosis system that was installed at the Stoltz Ranch. This system was installed as a way to provide safe drinking water to livestock along the Fly Creek property.

Introduction

Thirty people were in attendance at the Fly Creek Water Quality Meeting Thursday April 6th, held at the Stoltz Ranch on Fly Creek. Seanna Torske from the NRCS gave an overview of the Fly Creek Water Quality Sampling Grant and all that it entailed. The Grant supports the

sampling of ground and surface water along Fly Creek on a twice-yearly basis for five years, and will be a collaborative effort between BigHorn and Yellowstone County Conservation Districts and NRCS, with results being shared with the State Hydrologist and Geologist specialists. The goal of the meeting was to spread awareness of this opportunity to landowners along Fly Creek in hopes of getting 10 testing sites enrolled for sampling to begin later this month.

Surface and groundwater in the area around Fly Creek in BigHorn and Yellowstone Counties are documented to have high levels of sulfates greatly exceeding the recommended levels for livestock. Currently the NRCS has a Targeted Implementation Plan (TIP) focused along Fly Creek to provide safe drinking water for livestock. This proposed project will complement that plan, and allows landowners affordable access to water sampling and quality monitoring. The grant will pay for 60% of each sample cost, with the landowners responsible for the other 40%. The Yellowstone Conservation District will provide an employee to carry out the water sampling, and is scheduled for five years currently. The districts hope to re-evaluate the plan and apply for continued funding for a second phase.

Montana Salinity Control Association specialist Scott Brown explained how Saline seeps form and further discussed the cause and growth of dryland salinity in the state. Saline seeps related to agriculture can be reclaimed with changes to the land farming practices. The effects on surface and groundwater were discussed as well as the process of determining solutions to saline seeps utilizing appropriate reclamation plans.

Additional resources were shared by Yellowstone county extension agent Trestin Feagler on water quality testing options available to producers. The Well-Educated program through MSU extension provides information on how to take and interpret water quality results, and has made kits available to anyone needing them. Testing is available through your local extension office and has been expanded to include testing of water for livestock.

Several Board members were present from both BigHorn and Yellowstone Conservation districts to answer any questions about the project. Additional resources were provided to landowners including tools for NRCS conservation planning and water quality information for livestock. This project will be considered successful if the water quality reports can show a consistent trend for the state of the surface and groundwater within this watershed.