

Become a partner in Bitterroot River Health Check’s

Bitterroot Front Water Quality/Quantity Monitoring Project

The Bitterroot River Health Check program consists of a collective of non-profit organizations, businesses and individuals dedicated to establishing and maintaining a network of water quality monitoring and flow monitoring stations on the Bitterroot River and major tributaries throughout the watershed. The program has been gathering data on basic parameters such as temperature, specific conductivity, pH, dissolved oxygen, turbidity and chemical analysis for nutrients since 2018. Flows are also measured to determine discharge rates of nutrients as well as the volume and timing of run-off. The program is currently monitoring six permanent sites on the Bitterroot River Mainstem and 11 permanent sites on six tributaries to the river along the Sapphire Front. Our latest project involves extending this monitoring network by installing monitoring stations on up to 12 tributaries across the Bitterroot Front. The plan aims to monitor all these sites in perpetuity.

While we were not exactly ready to venture on such an ambitious expansion the network on our own, when the Bitterroot National Forest announced its own intentions to develop a proposal for managing the entire Bitterroot Front we saw an opportunity to collaborate. The result was an MOU expressing mutual interest in establishing water quality and quantity monitoring stations on all major tributaries across the Bitterroot Front. Partnering with the Bitterroot National Forest, the Bitterroot River Protection Association has submitted a grant application to Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation for a $35,000 Watershed Management Grant to install a pair of monitoring stations on 12 streams. One located at the Wilderness boundary on each stream to monitor the water entering the forest and another at the Forest Service boundary below to monitor the water where it flows off the forest onto private land.

The total cost of the two-year long project, which includes locating the sites, installing the flow gages, monitoring for an additional year to establish a base line for each stream and issuing a Final Report, is estimated at $99,238.48.

We have come a long way, but we are looking to the wider community now for the final contributions needed in order to reach our goal. If you are interested in partnering on this project or just want more information, please call Michael Howell (406) 239-4838 or email bitterrootriverprotection@gmail.com.

More information is available online by going to www.bitterrootriver.org. and clicking on Bitterroot River Health Check program.