



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Blackfoot Drought Committee closely monitoring water supply and potential for drought

OVANDO, MT – Due to a lack of late-winter snowfall and early snowmelt, this summer is shaping up to present potential low-flow conditions in the Blackfoot River and its tributaries. The Blackfoot Drought Committee is encouraging irrigators, fishing outfitters, residents and recreationists to stay informed of changing water supply conditions to plan for potential low flows and rising water temperatures later this summer.

“In years like this where we see the potential for reduced snowpack and earlier runoff, the Blackfoot Drought Committee wants to encourage people to plan ahead,” said Land Lindbergh, Blackfoot landowner and member of the Drought Committee. “The drought response process is about protecting the Blackfoot’s native fish, but we also want to help ensure we can support sustainable agriculture and the recreation-based businesses of the Blackfoot.”

Currently, snowpack is below average and Blackfoot River flows are higher than average for this time of year. The snowpack and precipitation conditions are very similar to 2013 – which is the last year that the Drought Committee initiated drought restrictions in the Blackfoot (on August 21, 2013). The most recent NRCS Water Supply Report demonstrates why the Drought Committee is alert to conditions this early in the spring:

- In the month of March, the Upper Clark Fork Basin lost 29% of its snow water equivalent.
- The January 1 to April 1 flow volume on the Blackfoot is 18% greater than what we would typically expect, putting the river approximately a month ahead of its average flow rate.
- In March, the Blackfoot drainage received only 68% of average precipitation.
- Current snowpack, precipitation and snowmelt conditions are at a tipping point, where continued lack of snow and warm temperatures could lead to drought conditions, though spring snow and rain could greatly improve water supply conditions to near normal.

In 2000, the Blackfoot Drought Committee was formed to coordinate the development and implementation of a voluntary drought response effort, now known as the Blackfoot Drought Response Plan. The plan is based on the premise of “shared sacrifice,” with the goal that all Blackfoot water users (agricultural, irrigators, outfitters, anglers, recreational users, government agencies, homeowners associations, businesses, conservation groups and others) voluntarily agree to take actions that will result in water savings and/or the reduction of stress to fisheries resources during critical low-flow periods. This cooperative effort aims to minimize the adverse impacts of drought on fisheries, while also aiding in the equitable distribution of scarce water resources.

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Approximately 90 Blackfoot irrigators have signed on to participate in drought response, each agreeing to take both short-term and long-term actions that reduce their water usage during low river flows. Fishing outfitters have also stepped up to participate, supporting an educational brochure that outlines voluntary fishing technique restrictions to reduce stress to fish in low water periods.

The Blackfoot approach offers an alternative to angling restrictions and traditional enforcement of the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in-stream flow right (known as the Murphy Right), while engaging the stakeholders of the Blackfoot Valley in the protection and conservation of its water and fisheries. The Blackfoot Drought Committee monitors drought indicators, informs and educates water users about drought conditions, holds public meetings when necessary, and conducts watershed-wide outreach to help water users prepare for and respond to drought.

For more information about the Blackfoot Drought Response program and to see updates from the committee, please visit www.blackfootchallenge.org.

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ABOUT THE BLACKFOOT CHALLENGE

The **Blackfoot Challenge** is a collaborative community-based organization that coordinates stewardship of the Blackfoot River, its tributaries, and adjacent lands. Assuming this ridgetop-to-ridgetop approach, the Challenge's mission is *to coordinate efforts to conserve and enhance the natural resources and rural way of life in the Blackfoot watershed for present and future generations*. We address rural values through community-driven processes that coordinate voluntary, incentive-based private land conservation, collaborative processes for public land management, and partner cooperation.