

September 8, 2017

For more information, contact:

Jennifer Schoonen, Blackfoot Challenge, 406-360-6445 or jennifer@blackfootchallenge.org

Blackfoot Drought Response Update: Low Flow Trigger Will Not Be Activated

Each summer, the Blackfoot Drought Response Committee monitors water supply conditions and coordinates implementation of the Blackfoot Drought Response Plan as needed. This year, the Blackfoot River dropped below the first drought response trigger level of 700 cfs on August 10, prompting the committee to ask irrigators to implement their individual water conservation plans. This shared commitment from Blackfoot communities helps retain instream flows for native fish, while allowing producers to continue operating their farms and ranches in a sustainable way during low-water years.

The Drought Plan also includes an extreme low flow trigger for additional water conservation action when the Blackfoot drops below 500 cfs at the Bonner stream gage. Over the last couple of weeks, the river has been steadily dropping toward that level. However at this time, the Drought Committee has decided NOT to recommend additional water use restrictions because:

- The Blackfoot Drought Plan was written with intentional flexibility to respond based on annually fluctuating conditions and special circumstances;
- The plan recommends typically wrapping up drought response by mid-September based on reduced water demand moving into fall; and,
- This year's wildfire season is placing enormous pressure on Blackfoot communities, and the committee wants to ensure that landowners remain safe and able to protect property through the use of their water rights.

The Blackfoot Drought Response Committee appreciates all of the community participation in drought response this year. The committee will gather this fall for its annual meeting to review and make recommended updates to the Blackfoot Drought Response Plan. Meeting details will be posted to the Blackfoot Challenge web site in a few weeks, and the public is welcome to attend.