



FEMA/BIL Funding to DNRC for Dam Owner Assistance – *Status Report*

Michele Lemieux PE

DNRC Dam Safety Section Supervisor

DAM INSPECTION EXPENSE ASSISTANCE - OPTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Montana reservoirs provide multiple public benefits. Few realize that Montana dam owners pay all expenses related to owning and operating a dam. Few also realize that in general, these reservoirs do not generate sufficient revenue from water supply and irrigation releases to cover these expenses. This puts many reservoirs in jeopardy, at a time when water storage is critical to addressing Montana's on-going drought.

DNRC used funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure law to assist owners of dams with defined public benefits pay Five Year Inspection expenses in 2024 & 2025. This effort provides necessary information to craft a new grant program for consideration by the 2027 legislature.

“It is exceedingly rare for properly inspected and maintained dams to fail.”



*A Report to
Montana
Dam Owners*

*By the
Montana
Department
of Natural
Resources &
Conservation*



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2025

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- Importance of Inspections in Preventing Dam Failure
- Typical Expenses for Dam Inspections/Evaluations for Fiscal Note
 - Survey of engineers / dam owners
 - \$130,000 for 2024 - 17 dams
 - \$202,704 for 2025 - ~27 dams (*may be higher is DNRC SWPB taps into funding*)
- Public Benefits of Dams
- Options for Implementation
- Cost Estimate to Implement Program
- Comparison to Other States
- Challenges – Private Dam Ownership



Bipartisan Infrastructure Funding – Recent Cuts

- Originally anticipating \$890,000 per year for Five Years
- Reduced to Two Years¹
 - 2024 (funding in place)
 - 2025 (anticipated in May 2025)

¹MULTIPLE years to perform

Dam Owner Assistance Projects



Dam Inspection
Expense
Assistance

Emergency
Action Plan
Modernization &
Exercises



Operation &
Maintenance
Manual
Enhancement

Dam Owner Tools



Emergency Action Plan Modernization



Development of Functional Dam Specific Plans

- Hire multiple engineering contractors to work one on one with dam owners
- Develop EAPs that work for specific dam/dam owner (not force template)
- Improved mapping



Current 2024 Funding

- Prioritize dams according to downstream risk and need (condition of current EAPs and maps)
- Develop schedule & cost estimate
- Develop guidance
- Begin work on priority dams

Operation & Maintenance Plan Enhancement



Development of Practical Dam Specific Plans

- Hire multiple engineering contractors to work one on one with dam owners
- Update where appropriate:
 - Reservoir stage- storage relationships
 - Spillway / outlet discharge relationship
 - Reservoir measurement improvement
- Collect and organize information to help dam owners manage and maintain their dams

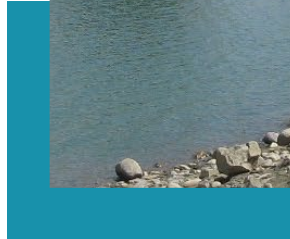


Current 2024 Funding

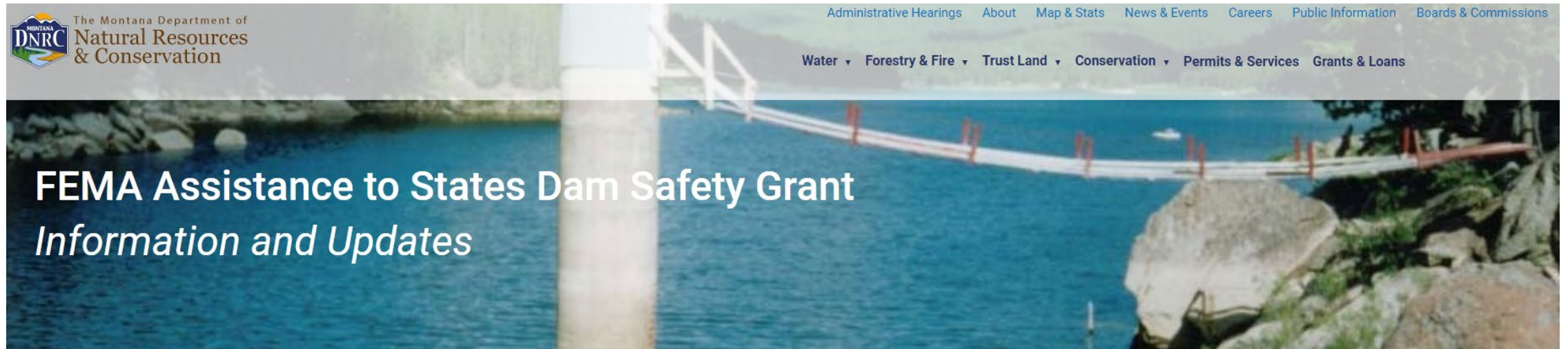
- Prioritize dams according to need (condition of current O&Ms)
- Develop schedule & cost estimate
- Develop guidance & templates
- Conduct pilot study for Box Elder Creek Dam (City of Plentywood)

Dam Owner Tools

- Outlet inspection sleds available to borrow.
- Confined space entry forms and information; gas meters in each regional office.
- Improved dam owner annual inspection forms & photo templates.
- Other ideas? Please let us know!



For More Information on Projects:



The screenshot shows the website header for the Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC). The logo is on the left, and navigation links are on the right. The main banner features a photograph of a dam structure over a blue lake with the text "FEMA Assistance to States Dam Safety Grant Information and Updates" overlaid.

The Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation

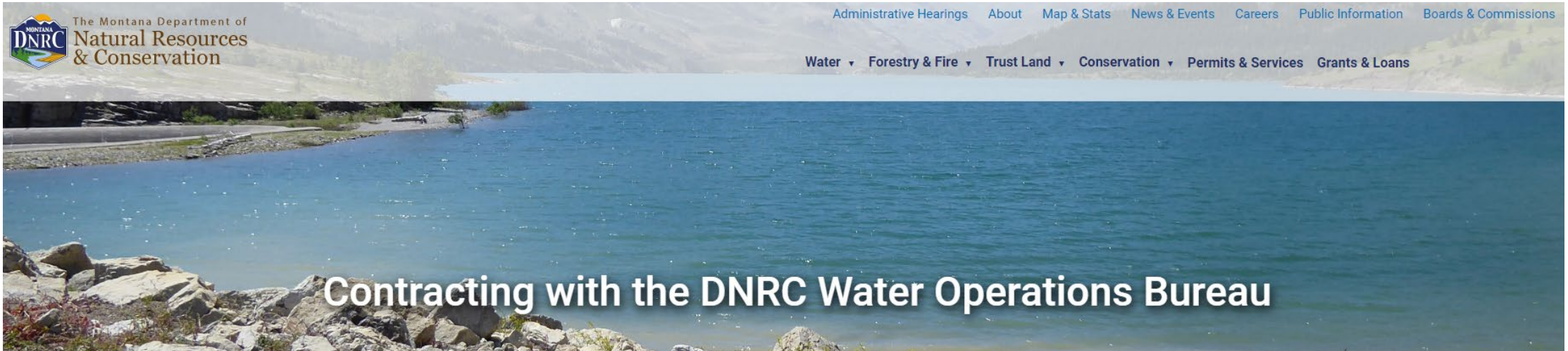
Administrative Hearings About Map & Stats News & Events Careers Public Information Boards & Commissions

Water ▾ Forestry & Fire ▾ Trust Land ▾ Conservation ▾ Permits & Services Grants & Loans

FEMA Assistance to States Dam Safety Grant
Information and Updates

<https://dnrc.mt.gov/Water-Resources/Dam-Safety/assistance-to-states>

For More Information on Contracting with the Dam Safety Program



https://dnrc.mt.gov/Water-Resources/WOB/Contracting_DNRC_WOB



2025 Legislature –

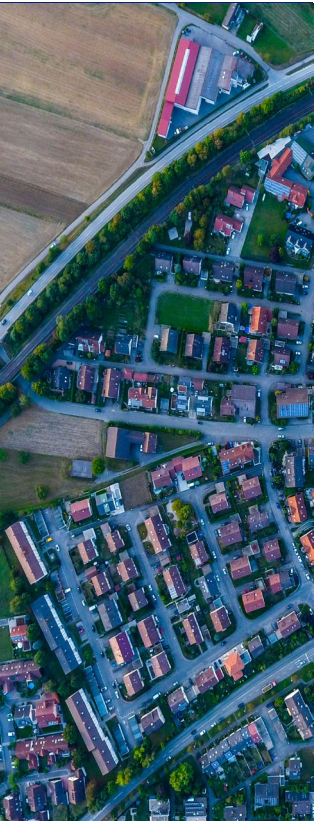
Important Next Steps for Owners of Dams with Public Benefits

Trevor Watson

*DNRC Water Resources Division Deputy
Division Administrator*



Comprehensive Water Review



Stakeholder Working Group

- Vicki Baker (irrigation)
- Jocelyn Cahill (irrigation)
- Krista Lee Evans (irrigation)*
- Spencer Woith (domestic, new development)*
- Mark Taylor (domestic, new development)
- Kelly Lynch (municipal)*
- Brian Heaston (municipal)*
- Ryan McLane (attorney multiple)*
- Nicole Rolf (stock water)
- Raylee Honeycutt (stock water)*
- Jan Thomson-Rouse (hydropower)
- Alan Olson (industrial)
- Arnold Bighorn (tribal)
- Abby Brown (attorney, multiple)*
- Andrew Gorder (conservation)*
- Clayton Elliott (recreation)
- Julie Merritt (consultant multiple) *

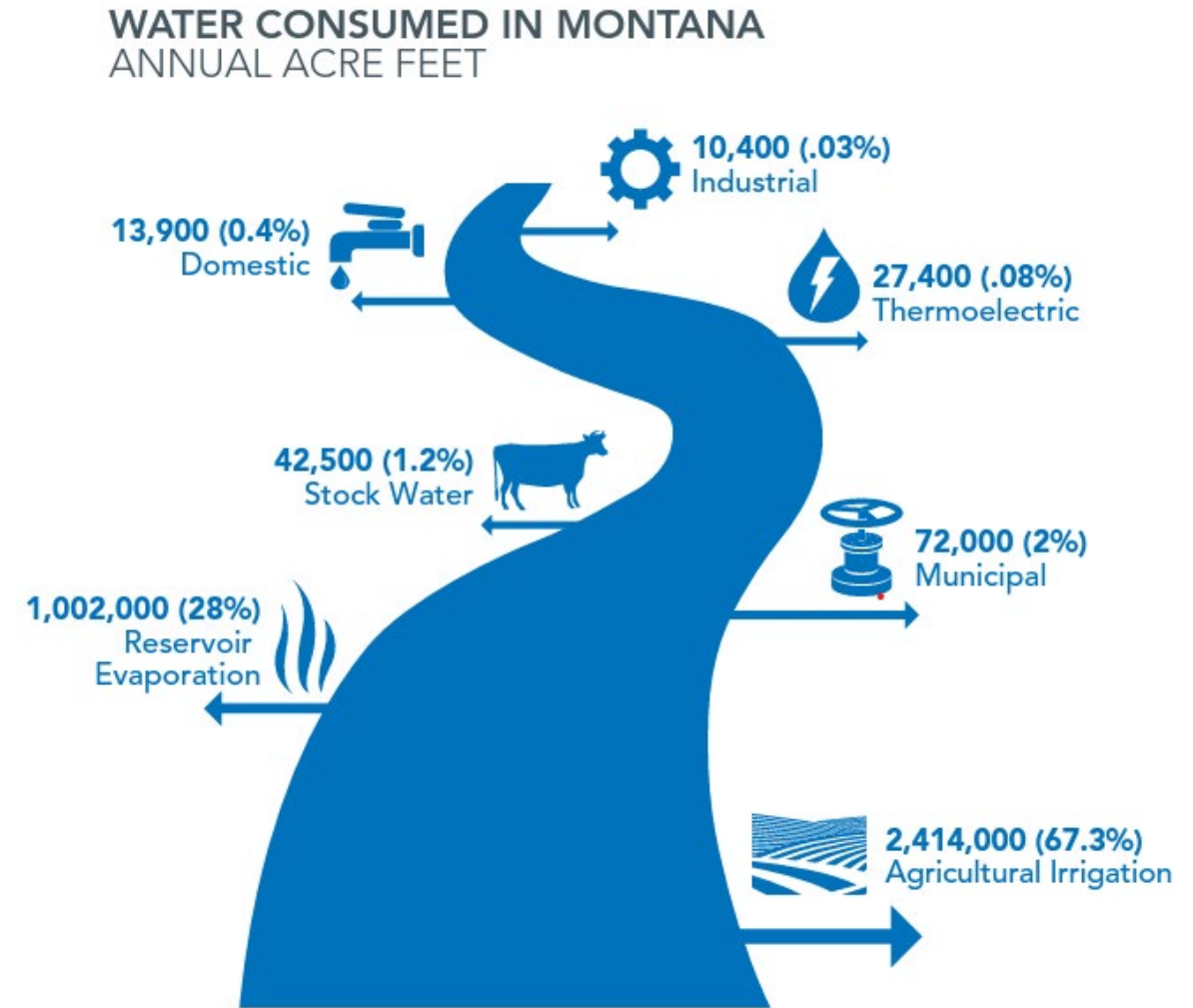


Figure 10: Water Consumption in Montana by Purpose

Bills, Funding, and Recommendations

FINAL DECREE TRANSITION

Bill 1: Role of the Judiciary- Utilizing the Existing Division Courts

Bill 2: Process for Provisional Permits and Changes- Consistency with Final Decrees and Finality

PLANNING, GROWTH, AND EXEMPT WELLS

Storage:

Funding 1: Funding Package for New Storage & Existing Storage

Mitigation & change process:

Bill 3: Bring back the Waiver of Adverse Effect

Bill 4: Streamlined Change Process: Municipal Place of Use, Stock Tanks, and Replacement Wells

Public Water and Sewer:

Funding 2: Funding Package to Incentivize PWS

Exempt Wells:

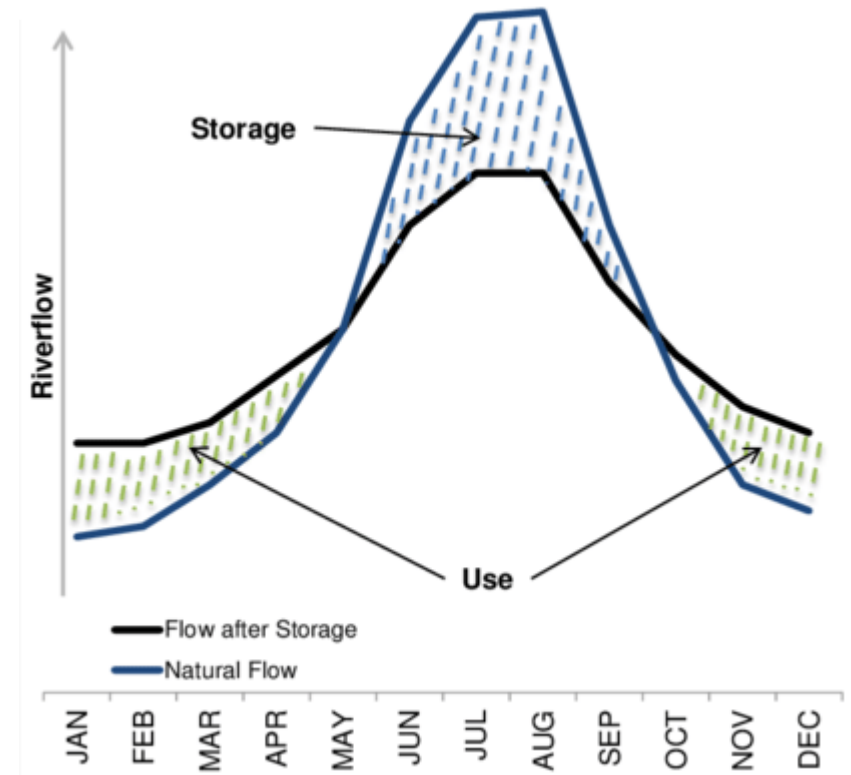
Bill 5: Agency Coordination and Notice of Intent for Exempt Wells

Bill 6: Exempt Wells

Recommendations: Review Policy Changes/Barriers for Storage; Formation of a DNRC Technical Advisory Team on Mitigation; How to Make it Easier for Cities to Utilize Their Existing Water Rights and Systems?; Notification and Outreach Plan for Exempt Wells

Storage: Funding 1

- **Issue:** How can we utilize storage to increase availability and timing of supply?
- **Funding 1:** Funding to support existing and new storage concept



Gurung (2015)

QUESTIONS?

<https://dnrc.mt.gov/Water-Resources/>

Get Involved: <https://dnrc.mt.gov/Water-Resources/Comprehensive-Water-Review/>

