

RESTORING THE MUSSELHELL BY RESTORING RURAL DEMOCRACY^{AFS}

Bill Milton
Lower Musselshell Watershed Coordinator
823 Hwy 87 N., Roundup, MT 59072
bill_milton@hotmail.com

The Musselshell River, a tributary of the Upper Missouri, drains over 8000 mi² of central Montana's mountains and plains. Less than 10,000 people reside within the borders of the watershed. Over 350 farms and ranches located along the Musselshell's mainstem and the tributaries rely on seasonal stream flow to support some portion of their agricultural enterprises. A number of small communities rely on the waters for municipal needs. In the past, the river has supported a fair cold water fishery in the upper reaches and a warm water fishery in the lower reaches. In 1991, The Montana Legislature, declared the Musselshell a chronically dewatered stream. In 1996, the Musselshell was placed on Montana's 303(d) impaired stream list thus requiring a restoration plan be developed to voluntarily address streambank stability and flow management. The watershed has experienced various levels of drought for over six years. The presentation will briefly explore the possible meanings of the following statement: there is no shortcut to lasting solutions and lasting solutions never last. How does a community and a landscape come to terms with each other? In human perception scarcity always exists. The act of restoring instream flows implies scarcity. How does the idea of democracy and respecting the individual voice respond to scarcity? If there is a better outcome for the whole, what role do the parts play in realizing that outcome? The speaker will offer for discussion, one, a process for public dialogue, along with the corresponding attributes useful for that dialogue; and two, how the process when skillfully applied can lead and has led to better outcomes for people and the landscapes they live in.