



## Drought and Water Supply Advisory Committee

### RE: Annual Review of the Montana Stream Gage Network

The following information is presented at the June 9, 2026, Governor's Drought and Water Supply Advisory Committee (DWSAC) meeting as required under 2-15-3308 (3)(h)(ii), MCA, which requires "an annual review of the funding status and potential alterations to the [state stream gage] network."

## Montana Stream Gage Network

Montana's stream gage network includes real-time stream gages operated and maintained by the following entities:

1. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) operates 245 real-time gages across Montana (Montana USGS Stream Gage Network). These gages are primarily located on Montana's mainstem rivers and their large tributaries.
  - Forty-two sites are known as federal priority stream gages (FPS) that are primarily funded by the federal government, although four receive partial funding from other partners. These gages support federal activities such as Bureau of Reclamation reservoir operations and USGS studies.
  - The remaining 203 sites, known as cooperatively funded gages, are funded through a mix of state (The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP)), tribal, local, and private-sector funding. These gages support a wide variety of Montana water users.
2. DNRC operates a network of real-time stream gages (Montana DNRC Stream Gage Network). DNRC gages are typically located on smaller streams and tributaries not monitored by the USGS. As of May 1, 2026, DNRC operates 82 of the 100 planned real-time gages and is installing the remaining 18 stations, with full buildout expected in 2027.
3. Tribal nations in Montana operate stream gage networks to support water administration and distribution of tribal water resources.



## Funding Status

### Montana USGS Stream Gage Network

FWP and DNRC are among many entities that provide annual operations and maintenance funding for the cooperatively funded USGS stream gage network. DNRC currently funds 52 gages that support water administration across the state, including federal and tribal water compact administration. FWP currently funds 59 gages used primarily for fisheries management.

Although FWP and DNRC fund only a portion of the network, both agencies rely on data from all 245 USGS stream gages to meet natural resource management objectives and statutory responsibilities.

Additional congressional appropriations to the USGS were distributed between the FPS network and the cooperatively funded stream gage network in early 2026 (via Public Law 119-74 and further directed in H. Rept. 119-215). In the short term, this funding allowed five at-risk FPS gages to continue operating and kept costs to funding partners relatively stable, with no significant cost increases or decreases.

## Alterations to the Network

### USGS Montana Stream Gage Network

The State of Montana and U.S. Geological Survey Stream Gage Notification Plan (notification plan) (May 19, 2022) outlines the steps the USGS Wyoming-Montana Water Science Center and the state take to ensure timely communication about funding or program changes that could affect operation of the USGS stream gage network in Montana.

As reported in the 2025 annual report, 10 FPS gages were endangered due to lack of funding. During fiscal years 2025 and 2026, USGS and partners sent multiple notifications under the notification plan to seek support and maintain as many gages as possible. As of May 1, 2026:

- Two are now operated by DNRC (#06108000, #06119200);
- Two are still operated by USGS as cooperatively funded gages, rather than FPS gages (#06155500, #06091700);
- One has discontinued operation (#12363500); and
- Five were scheduled to be discontinued, initially on December 31, 2024, then on July 1, 2025. Additional federal funding through the passage of Public Law 119-74 has now extended operations through September 30, 2026 (#12352500, #06063000, #06076690, #06195600, #06154400).

Other notable alterations include the addition of nine cooperatively funded stream gages and the installation of temperature and water quality sensors at multiple cooperatively funded sites statewide.

**Table 1.** Status of endangered USGS FPS gages.

<b>Site</b>	<b>Status</b>
Teton River at Dutton (#06108000)	The USGS operations have ceased. DNRC is operating a stream gage at this site.
Milk River at Malta (#06155500)	DNRC swapped this gage for a cooperatively funded gage near Nevada Creek. DNRC now cooperatively funds this gage and operates the Nevada Creek stream gage as a DNRC site.
South Fork of Musselshell River at Martinsdale (#06119200)	USGS operations have ceased. DNRC is operating a stream gage at this site.
Bitterroot River near Missoula (#12352500)	H. Rept. 119-215 provided federal funding to continue the USGS operations until Sept. 30, 2026.
Tenmile Creek near Helena (#06063000)	H. Rept. 119-215 provided federal funding to continue the USGS operations until Sept. 30, 2026.
Smith River near Ft. Logan (#06076690)	H. Rept. 119-215 provided federal funding to continue the USGS operations until Sept. 30, 2026.
Shields River near Livingston (#06195600)	H. Rept. 119-215 provided federal funding to continue the USGS operations until Sept. 30, 2026.
People’s Creek near Hays (#06154400)	Stream gage discontinued on Oct. 22, 2024, due to insufficient funding for the FPS program. The USGS operations resumed with funding identified in H. Rept. 119-215.
Two Medicine River near Browning (#06091700)	DNRC compacts funded this gage for 4.5 months until federal funding was secured for continued operation until at least Sept. 30, 2026.
Flathead River at Kalispell (#12363500)	Due to a lack of federal funding, the USGS data collection at this gage ceased on Dec. 31, 2024.

## Montana DNRC Stream Gage Network

In 2023, HB 2 (Sec.C-DP2403) provided funding to install 32 new stream gages throughout Montana. As of June 15, 2025, all 32 have been installed.

In 2025, HB 2 (Sec.C-NP24014) provided funding for an additional 24 gages to meet the 2015 State Water Plan recommendation of 100 DNRC stream gages statewide. Of these, six were installed in fall and winter of 2025-26. The remaining 18 are scheduled for installation in 2026 and early 2027.

DNRC prioritizes new gage locations from sites nominated by stakeholders. Selection criteria include administrative needs for DNRC; federal and tribal compact administration; water distribution projects; partner needs (including municipalities, watershed groups, and conservation districts); multiagency benefits; public awareness and education; and support for academic studies.

DNRC continues to accept nominations for new stream gage sites and will rank and prioritize them if additional funding becomes available.