



December 19, 2008

Dear Mr. Rung and 319 Grant Review Committee,

I am writing to express my support for the Montana Watercourse grant application "Riparian and Wetland Buffer Education." Healthy riparian buffers are critical to protecting water quality, stabilizing banks and providing wildlife habitat. Buffer education and resources for Montana's youth and their mentors is needed to promote a culture that truly understands the value of these areas and works to restore and protect them. MTWC is a trusted source of information and programs for water resources and is in a good position to deliver effective on the ground buffer education.

Montana Watercourse proposes to target Montana's educators and students in areas that are experiencing rapid development and that are also targeted in a Riparian Campaign currently being funded by a 319 grant. By leveraging awareness generated through this campaign and the resources of local partners, MTWC will provide complimentary, on the ground, buffer-related resources and programs. Reaching students reinforces the message being targeted to adults in these communities, when school-aged children bring additional information home and discuss what they are learning with their parents. With support from this grant and partnerships with local groups and experts, MTWC will conduct outreach to educators and students through buffer service learning projects, tours, curriculum, resource development and a mini symposium for partners of Eric Vincent's "Riparian Repair Teams". Leveraging other statewide watershed efforts, MTWC will coordinate with other statewide entities such as the Governor's Riparian Task force and the Montana Watershed Coordination Council. An educational campaign aimed at educators and students will be a powerful way to involve Montana's youth in first-hand, experiential learning of the importance of riparian protection.

As a partner of the Riparian Education Campaign, I will work with the Montana Watercourse to ensure that the programs are coordinated and relevant to the local community. Missoula Water Quality District staff would also be available to help with field activities in our area as needed.

In conclusion, this project would leverage and reinforce related efforts directed at other age groups, and would be an effective way to reach the young people in our community. Please support this important project.

Sincerely,

Michelle Hutchins
Environmental Health Specialist
Missoula Valley Water Quality District