

Mystic Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting Notes 2025:

**January 29, 2025
9:00 AM to 11:30 AM
FWP Billings Office
2300 Lake Elmo Drive, Billings, Montana 59105**

TEAMS Option
[Join the meeting now](#)
Meeting ID: 228 247 887 862
Passcode: yXtdq4

Welcome/Introductions:

Attendance - Mystic TAC Meeting 2025:

Participants	Agency	Status (Present or Absent)
Joe Hagengruber	NorthWestern Energy	Present
Jon Hanson	NorthWestern Energy	Present
Andrew Welch	NorthWestern Energy	Present
Grant Grisak	NorthWestern Energy	Present
Jordan Tollefson	NorthWestern Energy	Present
Sady Babcock	NorthWestern Energy	Present (Online)
Bryan Giordano	Montana FWP	Present
Ben Bailey	Montana FWP	Present
Evan Torres	Montana FWP	Present
Keenan Storrar	Montana DEQ	Present (Online)
Aaron Page	Custer Gallatin National Forest	Present
Jake Chaffin	Custer Gallatin National Forest	Present (Online)
Clint Sestrich	Custer Gallatin National Forest	Absent

Overview of 2025 TAC Meeting:

Joe Hagengruber (NorthWestern Energy) reviews the Mystic TAC 2025 agenda.

TAC Business:

- Joe Hagengruber (NorthWestern Energy) reviews the quorum requirement for the Mystic Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) as established in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). There is sufficient representation from NorthWestern Energy, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, and the Custer Gallatin National Forest to proceed with the meeting.

- Joe Hagengruber (NorthWestern Energy) discusses the new responsibilities associated with the Mystic TAC. Sady Babcock takes over the role of Director of Environmental Lands and Permitting for NorthWestern Energy in early 2024.

Mystic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Review:

- Joe Hagengruber (NorthWestern Energy) reviews the Mystic MOU, which was implemented in 2024.
- Joe Hagengruber (NorthWestern Energy) provided an overview of the Mystic TAC Adaptive Management Funding Commitment, which extends through 2033. Starting in 2025, annual payments for TAC projects will be subject to an escalation of 2.5% each year.

<u>EXHIBIT "B"</u>										
Adaptive Management Fund Accounts NorthWestern 10 Year (year 2024-2033) Commitment										
Mystic MOU TAC funding 2024 thru 2033 (2.5% increase in annual funding post 2024) MOU TAC funding begins January 1, 2024										
	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033
Mystic Fisheries Budget	\$25,000	\$25,625	\$26,265	\$26,922	\$27,595	\$28,285	\$28,992	\$29,717	\$30,460	\$31,221

- Joe Hagengruber (NorthWestern Energy) provides an overview of the Mystic TAC reserve account. Funds not utilized by the TAC within each year will accumulate in the TAC reserve account, with a maximum allowable balance of \$25,000.
- Joe Hagengruber (NorthWestern Energy) presents the new TAC proposal form, which was introduced in 2024. This form is designed to enhance the TAC's understanding of fund allocation and aims to promote awareness of collaborative projects and prospective initiatives among TAC members.

Mystic Lake Water Quality Update:

Jordan Tollefson (NorthWestern Energy) delivered an update regarding the water quality data obtained during the Mystic Lake sampling initiative conducted in the summer of 2024.

Mystic Whitewater Program 2024 Review and Plan Update:

Jordan Tollefson (NorthWestern Energy) provided an update to the Mystic TAC regarding the activities associated with the 2024 whitewater program. Jordan Tollefson elaborated on the updated Whitewater flow plan submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) following agency review and approval in January 2025.

- The TAC engaged in discussions on strategies to incentivize paddlers to utilize the user registration box. Aaron Page (Custer Gallatin National Forest) proposed implementing an electronic sign-in form as a potential solution.

Mystic Weed Management Plan Update:

Joe Hagengruber (NorthWestern Energy) presented the updated Mystic Weed Management Plan for 2024 to 2034, submitted to the FERC on November 10, 2024. This revised plan retains the core principles of the previous ten-year strategy. However, a significant addition to the plan involves the incorporation of biological control methods into the annual management actions. Specifically, NorthWestern Energy plans to implement the release of weevils, including both seed-head and root-feeding varieties, within the project area.

Flow Deviation Update:

Joe Hagengruber (NorthWestern Energy) conducted a review of the flow deviation that occurred on December 20, 2024, at the Mystic Hydroelectric Project. This deviation resulted in reduced water flows in the Bypass reach. NorthWestern Energy formally submitted the deviation letter to FERC on December 30, 2024.

Visitor Surveys:

Joe Hagengruber and Jon Hanson of NorthWestern Energy discuss the forthcoming Mystic visitor surveys scheduled for 2025. The Mystic Lake HED Visitor Survey is set to take place from Memorial Day through Labor Day 2025. The primary objective of this survey is to collect data pertaining to visitor and trip characteristics, as well as opinions and satisfaction levels regarding recreational amenities and opportunities. Additionally, the survey aims to identify visitors' issues and gather demographic information.

- The Mystic TAC discussed the incorporation of questions related to fishing activities in the area.
- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) recommended including open-ended questions in the survey. These questions may address topics such as species-specific harvest rates, the lakes visited by respondents, and the reasons behind their choices to fish at locations, considering factors such as fish availability and aesthetic appeal.

2024 Project Review and Accomplishments:

Joe Hagenruber (NorthWestern Energy) reviewed the 2024 budget, during which he provided a brief overview of the projects for the year. Joe Hagenruber addressed the Mystic TAC, stating that the reserve account had accrued \$7,712.00 in 2024.

Project #	Project Title	Agency	Approved Cost
2024-1	Montana FWP – Personnel (Technician 4)	MFWP	\$6,288
2024-2	US Forest Service – Personnel (Fish Technician GS 5 Step 1)	USFS	\$11,000

Montana FWP 2024 Update:

- Evan Torres and Bryan Giordano of Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (Montana FWP) have provided an update regarding the projects completed in 2024. On November 8, 2024, Montana FWP successfully conducted fall redd count surveys on West Rosebud Creek. Additionally, both lower and upper bypass shocking operations were performed between the dam and the powerhouse on West Rosebud Creek. Site tours were also conducted to identify and incorporate habitat enhancement projects along West Rosebud Creek.
- Evan Torres (Montana FWP) reviewed the Mystic Lake sampling that NorthWestern Energy performed on August 7 and 8, 2024.
- Evan Torres (Montana FWP) initiated a discussion regarding the declining population trends of Mountain Whitefish. Evan Torres outlined two primary factors that may be influencing these trends, as indicated by a comprehensive literature review. The potential determinants appear to be related to specific lake conditions, notably depth and fluctuations in water levels due to hydropeaking during critical spawning periods. Mountain Whitefish require deep (approximately 35 feet), cold, and clean water, yet West Rosebud has been observed to lack sufficient depth. These fish typically spawn in the fall, with peak activity from late October to early November. To better understand the situation, Evan Torres analyzed water flow data from October 19 to November 18 for

each year from 2005 onward. Notably, daily hydropeaking occurred from 2013 through 2021, as well as in 2023 and 2024. Considering these findings, Evan advocates for implementing future increased monitoring for mountain whitefish. Grant Grisak (NorthWestern Energy) further noted that similar concerns regarding whitefish populations downstream of Missouri River dams have been raised.

- Evan Torress (Montana FWP) addressed concerns regarding water fluctuations and pulsing flows at the dam, which could potentially affect eggs in the substrate. Evan Torres referenced flows at West Rosebud Creek at Emerald Lake Campground near Roscoe, Montana, as recorded by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) on October 27, 2024.
- Montana FWP has committed to completing and submitting the annual report by March 1, 2025.

US Forest Service – Custer Gallatin National Forest 2024 Update:

- In 2024, the Custer Gallatin National Forest collaborated with Montana FWP to conduct backpack electrofishing in the bypass reach of West Rosebud Creek (lower and upper).
- In August 2024, Clint Sestrich from the U.S. Forest Service facilitated a site tour to examine prospective habitat enhancement projects along West Rosebud Creek, with participation from representatives of Montana FWP.

2025 Mystic TAC Proposed Project Overview:

The Mystic TAC convened to discuss the future of side-channel habitat enhancement projects on West Rosebud Creek.

- TAC members addressed the potential acquisition of LiDAR technology to identify historic/relic side channels. Andrew Welch (NorthWestern Energy) presented information regarding the costs associated with employing a fixed-wing aircraft for LiDAR acquisition. It was suggested that utilizing a drone equipped with LiDAR capabilities might be a more advantageous approach.
- Jordan Tollefson (NorthWestern Energy) recommended exploring the resources available at the State of Montana library to determine if any existing LiDAR data has already been collected for West Rosebud Creek.
- Joe Hagenruber and Jordan Tollefson of NorthWestern Energy further discussed the possibility of deploying a drone to survey the designated habitat enhancement area along West Rosebud Creek during the upcoming spring, coinciding with high flow conditions, potentially aligned with the planned Mystic Whitewater flow release. In addition, Jordan Tollefson mentioned the installation of stage loggers to monitor water levels in West Rosebud Creek during periods of elevated flow.

Montana FWP 2025 Proposed Project Review:

- Montana FWP reviews its forthcoming objectives for the year. In 2025, FWP intends to conduct electrofishing activities on West Rosebud Creek, focusing specifically on the Mackay Flat section below Emerald Lake. Additionally, Montana FWP will perform fall surveys to assess brown trout redds in West Rosebud Creek. Additionally, Montana FWP agrees to engage in the West Rosebud Creek side-channel habitat enhancement project initiatives for the year.
- Joe Hagenruber (NorthWestern Energy) has extended an offer to assist the Montana FWP with monitoring tasks during 2025. This support may be pertinent as a technician from Montana FWP is set to depart, resulting in a potential shortage of staffing resources.

US Forest Service – Custer Gallatin National Forest 2025 Proposed Project Review:

- Jake Chaffin (Custer Gallatin National Forest) has informed the Mystic TAC that the U.S. Forest Service is currently unable to hire a 1039 position and will instead pursue an internship through the University of Montana (UM). Should an intern from UM prove unattainable, Northwestern Energy has expressed willingness to explore potential arrangements to provide assistance to the Forest Service, possibly considering the direct hiring of the intern.
- In 2025, the Custer Gallatin National Forest will collaborate with personnel from Montana FWP to engage in fish population monitoring as outlined in the six-year strategic plan. Additionally, the Custer Gallatin National Forest will gather channel morphology data to support the design of the side channel habitat enhancement project on West Rosebud Creek and conduct pre-project monitoring to assess fish habitat and populations.
- The Montana FWP emphasizes identifying the habitat types that juvenile fish utilize.

2025 allocation of TAC Funds:

Joe Hagenruber (Northwestern Energy) discusses the budget for 2025 with the Mystic TAC. The dialogue addresses two proposed projects alongside the corresponding budget allocations, the status of the current reserve account, and the remaining unallocated funds designated for 2025.

Project #	Project Title	Agency	Requested Funds	Approved Funds
2025-1	Montana FWP – Personnel (Technician 4)	MFWP	\$13,877	Approved

2025-2	US Forest Service – Personnel (Seasonal Technician Funding)	USFS	\$11,000	Approved
	Total Request For 2025		\$24,877	
	Available Annual Funds For 2025		\$25,625	
	Remaining 2025 Balance		\$738	
	Available Reserve Account from 2024		\$7,712	

- Joe Hagenruber (NorthWestern Energy) made a motion to approve the two proposals for the year 2025. The total financial request for 2025 amounts to \$24,877.
- Voting Members of the Mystic TAC: Unanimous Approval
- Joe Hagenruber (NorthWestern Energy) has committed to share the meeting minutes and corresponding budget for 2025. Joe Hagenruber informed the TAC that the meeting minutes and proposals will be available on NorthWestern Energy’s website under the Mystic Tab.
- Joe Hagenruber (NorthWestern Energy) has agreed to initiate the development of contracts with the Montana FWP and the Custer Gallatin National Forest upon completion of the TAC meeting.