



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bringing the Bitterroot Together for River Health: Heather Mullee Barber Receives Montana Watershed Stewardship Award

HAMILTON, MT, May 13 – Building partnerships on common ground is Heather Mullee Barber’s strength. It’s the skill that has allowed her to nurture relationships with ranchers, farmers, anglers, river guides, irrigation districts, schools, businesses, conservation partners, and public land managers. It’s the approach that has allowed the organization she leads, the Bitter Root Water Forum, to improve river and stream health across the Bitterroot Watershed with widespread community support.

In her 10 years as Executive Director of the Forum, Heather has grown this grassroots watershed organization from one part-time staff member to a staff of three plus a Big Sky Watershed Corps AmeriCorps member. Along the way, she has led the development of the Bitterroot Watershed Restoration Plan; built a successful community watershed education program; and fostered the restoration, protection, and improvement of 24 stream miles, providing direct benefits to the Bitterroot River and the communities that rely on it.

“The development of the Bitter Root Water Forum into a successful watershed restoration organization is a direct result of Heather’s leadership, vision, and commitment,” said Charlie Larson, the Forum’s Board president. “We are extremely fortunate to have Heather working for the benefit of our water quality and riparian habitats. She cares deeply for the Bitterroot watershed and the people it serves.”

In recognition of her inclusive, collaborative approach to local watershed health, the Montana Watershed Coordination Council (MWCC) has selected Heather as a 2021 Watershed Stewardship Award recipient. The biennial Wetland and Watershed Stewardship Awards are a joint project of MWCC and the Montana Wetland Council (MWC) to honor individuals and groups who embody excellence and commitment to wetland or watershed conservation, protection, and restoration. Award recipients will be honored at a ceremony during the [Fall Watershed Tour](#) to be co-hosted by MWCC and local conservation partners September 15-17, 2021 along the Rocky Mountain Front.

Among Heather’s many accomplishments during her time with the Forum are:

- Completing 14 water quality and wildlife habitat improvement projects across the Bitterroot Valley, including revegetation of riparian (streamside) habitat, riparian fencing and grazing management, bioengineered streambank stabilization, and restoring deteriorating forest roads to the natural landscape. These projects have protected and improved 2,000 acres of public and private lands.
- Creating a tour for real estate agents and the public that explores the details of water rights and irrigation infrastructure. Established in collaboration with local irrigation districts, the tour fosters understanding of irrigation practices and needs in the Bitterroot.
- Connecting Bitterroot middle schoolers to their local water resources with the Earth Stewardship Program, hosted with local seventh grade teachers.
- Protecting Hamilton’s new Skalkaho Bend Park from rapid riverbank erosion.

Learn more about the Bitter Root Water Forum through their [website](#).

For more information about Watershed Stewardship Award recipients, contact Terri Nichols at 406-210-1217 or terri@mtwatersheds.org.