



Board of County Commissioners - Staff Report

Meeting Date: November 3, 2025
Submitting Dept: Public Works

Presenter: Chris Peltz, Water Resources Coordinator
Subject: WORKSHOP – Water Quality Advisory Board Update

Statement / Purpose: To provide the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) with a progress update on the activities of the Water Quality Advisory Board (WQAB) since its formation in January 2025, including sharing WQAB recommendations, consideration of communication and funding request intervals, and discussion of future priorities.

Background / Description (Pros & Cons): On October 29, 2024, the BCC appointed seven members to the Water Quality Advisory Board (WQAB). Establishing this board with knowledgeable community members was an immediate action identified in the Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP). This step was emphasized as an early action in the WQMP.

As envisioned, this board assists Teton County staff in developing strategic priorities, informing and balancing financial trade-offs, and developing policy and programmatic tools to improve water quality throughout the county. Meetings of the WQAB are public, serving as a venue at which projects, initiatives, and policies are discussed and evaluated to provide recommendations to the BCC. WQAB meeting agendas and minutes can be accessed here:

www.tetoncountywy.gov/2796/Water-Quality-Advisory-Board

As presented at the August 26, 2024 BCC meeting, ***Consideration of a Resolution to Establish a Water Quality Advisory Board and Technical Working Group***, staff proposed a process for WQAB involvement:

Projects, initiatives, and policy recommendations originate from County staff or from a sponsor or project proponent. Priority will be given to recommendations outlined in the WQMP or those directly related to them. Feedback will be sought from the staff-led Water Quality Technical Working Group. As the idea is developed with input and feedback, staff will present the information to the WQAB for further deliberation and feedback. Following these steps, the item(s) will be presented by Public Works staff to the BCC for consideration, including the recommendation of the WQAB. The discussions held by the WQAB will be important for developing and providing recommendations to the BCC for water quality projects.

With direction provided by the BCC, Public Works staff developed three broad focus areas and priorities for the WQAB engagement, as follows:

- Big picture/long-term goals, prioritizing human and natural resource health;
- Assist staff by evaluating proposals and providing recommendations; and,
- Assist staff with developing strategic priorities, informing and balancing financial trade-offs, and contributing to a process through which future water quality improvement projects are evaluated openly and equitably.

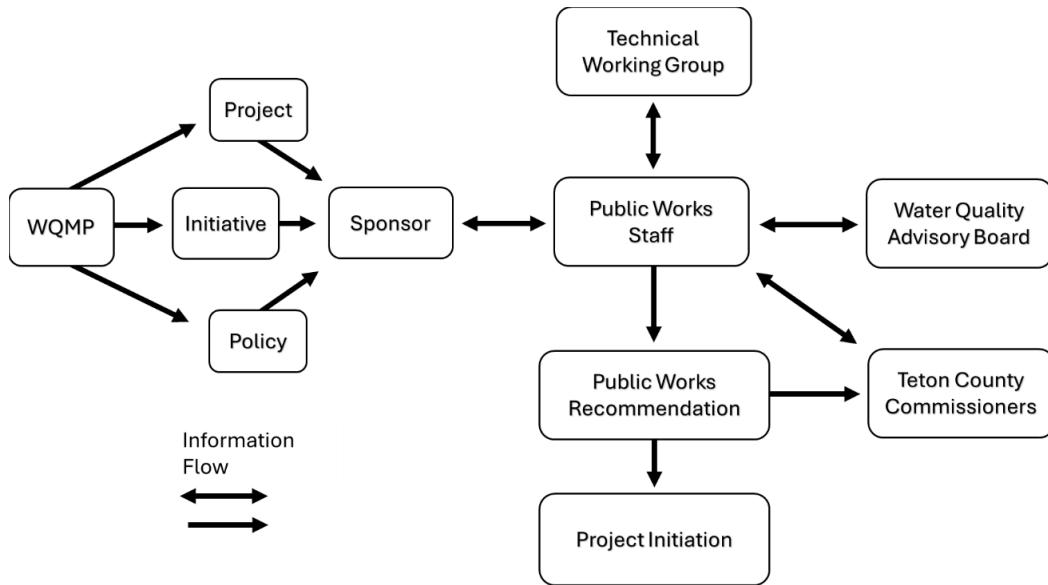


Figure 1. Information flows for water quality projects, policies, and initiatives identified in the WQMP.

The enabling resolution also outlined the primary role for the WQAB: “(1) Defining a vision for the protection of water resources; (2) Recommending projects for a county water quality cost-share program, including multi-year projects; (3) Recommending potential revenue sources; (4) Recommending long term goals prioritizing human and natural resource health; and, (5) Providing other recommendations as requested by the Board of County Commissioners.”

Recognizing that the WQAB will be tasked with considering proposals for funding, as well as making recommendations for changes to county regulations, care was given to ensure that the WQAB represents a broad cross-section of Teton County community members, with individuals who have wide experience and expertise. These characteristics were listed in the resolution establishing the board:

- Residents of Teton County.
- Appointed by the Teton County Board of County Commissioners, with seats reserved for individuals with a strong interest, knowledge, and significant experience in water quality, hydrology, land-use planning, engineering, public health, infrastructure planning, and regulatory understanding to ensure the board's expertise and capability.
- The Board of County Commissioners will strive to include a Town of Jackson resident and current board member of a water, sewer, or improvement and service district, and board member or representative of a water quality issue-oriented public interest group.
- Comprised of not less than five (5) and no more than seven (7) members.
- Appointed to terms of office, with term length being (3) three years. County Commissioners will appoint board members to staggered multiple-year terms.
- Board members are limited to serving no more than two (2) consecutive terms.
- Board officers to include one (1) chairperson, one (1) vice-chair, and one (1) secretary.
- The term of board officers shall be one (1) year.

Following are highlights of the WQAB's activities thus far:

1) WQAB Priority Setting Workshop with BCC, December 2024

Prior to the first official meeting of the WQAB, the appointed WQAB members participated in a planning and strategic goal-setting session with the BCC in December 2024. The focus of that

workshop was to introduce WQAB members to the BCC, its staff, and the public, and to engage in a discussion on strategic planning for water quality. This discussion enabled the WQAB to hear from the BCC about water quality priorities for the near term and to inform the WQAB's priorities for FY2025.

Based on the BCC workshop and over the past ten months, the WQAB has focused on five key areas:

1. The creation of a vision and long-term policy guidance for protecting water resources;
2. Development of a criterion and process for the evaluation of water quality initiatives and projects;
3. Development and recommendation of long-term goals (LDRs and Title 9);
4. Recommendations for projects to receive county water quality cost-share; and,
5. Other priorities as identified by the BCC (water and sewer expansion).

The WQAB has worked diligently to provide informed recommendations that address each of the identified priorities. The following section outlines some of the key highlights and recommendations of the WQAB.

2) Board Organization and Initial Development

Early meetings focused on:

- Developing and adopting bylaws;
- Defining roles and procedures; and,
- Clarifying the advisory relationship with County staff and the BCC.

3) Developed Draft Water Quality Vision

The draft policy vision guidance recommendation was identified by the WQAB as an essential step towards implementing the WQMP, providing a unifying vision for the water quality actions outlined in the plan. The WQAB and staff worked in an iterative process to develop the draft policy statement, which states:

“Teton County will prioritize protecting and enhancing surface and groundwater resources to support a healthy ecosystem, resilient communities, and a sustainable economy for current and future generations. Through science-based management and alignment with the Comprehensive Plan’s focus on ecosystem stewardship, adaptive management, proactive policies, and community collaboration, we will exceed regulatory requirements and uphold our community’s stewardship values.”

*Staff plans to bring this draft vision statement to the BCC in the near future for consideration

4) Reviewed Regulations and Provided Recommendations for Staff

Title 9 – Small Wastewater Facility (SWF) Regulations

- a. Repeated discussions focused on revising and strengthening septic regulations.
- b. Board emphasized the need to reduce risk from decentralized wastewater systems, improve inspections, and incentivize sewer connections.
- c. Explored the importance of inventorying all septic and waste systems in the county.

Land Development Regulations (LDRs)

- a. Supported integration of water quality goals into LDRs, especially around waterbody setbacks, pond regulations, and waterbody protections.

5) Evaluation of Project Proposals and Funding Requests

Adopted an evaluation tool to evaluate water quality project proposals, streamlining recommendations to staff and the BCC. The following proposals for funding were reviewed and recommended as indicated:

- Snake River Headwaters Group/Trout Unlimited – Recommend for support (August 2025)
- USGS Proposal for Snake River Water Quality Data Analysis – Recommend support (August 2025)
- Elk Refuge ISD Sewer Project – Recommended funding via long-term loan rather than SPET
- Wilson Sewer District Phase 4 Expansion – Under review
- Hoback WSD funding request for a wastewater feasibility study – Recommend support (October 2025)

Development of Evaluation Criteria/Understanding Matrix: Given the distributed and highly complex nature of water management, it can be challenging to determine how to best allocate limited financial resources to water resource management actions. For example, a project to extend a sewer line, a few 1000 feet often includes questions related to: financial considerations, land use planning, environmental impact, coordination between local, state and federal agencies, long-term operation and maintenance, and community vs. private benefit, as well as how a project might impact and shape future decisions by either limiting or expanding future amounts and types of development.

To best inform the equitable and systematic allocation of financial resources for water resource management, the BCC requested a more rational approach. In response to this request, the WQAB prioritized the development of a systematic approach to evaluating funding proposals, as well as other initiatives and water quality mitigation measures. The goal is to develop a tool that supports more consistent, transparent, and equitable evaluation of water quality projects. The mechanism to do this is proposed as an evaluation matrix:

- Environmental Benefit (e.g., groundwater protection, stream health)
- Community Impact (e.g., public health, service equity)
- Financial Considerations (e.g., cost-effectiveness, funding sources)
- Regulatory Alignment (e.g., Title 9 compliance, LDR consistency)
- Operational Feasibility (e.g., timing, permitting, partnerships)

Each project is assessed qualitatively based on the best available information. This approach ensures that every project is asked the same core questions, allowing BCC and WQAB discussions to focus on tradeoffs, gaps, and implementation strategies. This matrix is not intended for scoring or ranking different projects against each other. Instead, the matrix and project application are meant to gain a deeper understanding of a project and its impact. It is designed to ensure that the same questions are asked of every proposal. With limited funding and growing community needs, the matrix helps to clearly explain to the public and the BCC how a project fits into the larger picture. It provides every project with a fair and structured platform to showcase its strengths and helps anticipate challenges early.

Table 1. Evaluation Matrix for Water Projects

Category	Sub-Category	Criteria
WQMP Alignment	Project Relevance	Alignment with 2024 Water Quality Management Plan goals and priorities.
	Mitigation Measure	Is the project listed as one of the 32 Mitigation Measures in the WQMP? And how does it address the goal of the specified mitigation measure?
	Water Quality Protection Overlay Zone	Is the project located in an identified Water Quality Protection Overlay Zone (Surface or Groundwater Zone 1 or 2)?
	Wastewater Priority Zone	Is the project in an identified priority area for wastewater collection and treatment?
	Water Quality Impact	How does this project impact water quality and how will that impact be evaluated?
Project Deliverables, Financing, and Monitoring	Deliverables & Outcomes	How tangible, trackable, and well-defined they are?
	Feasibility & Cost Justification	Readiness, practicality, and affordability.
	Monitoring & Evaluation	Plan to evaluate success and measure outcomes
	Budget & Financial Leverage	Realistic budget, matching funds, or cost-share from partners. What percentage of the projects costs are requested from Teton County?
	Capacity & Experience	Applicant's ability to manage grants and implement projects.
Coordination/Innovation/Application	Partnerships & Collaboration	Collaboration with agencies, landowners, or stakeholders.
	Innovation or Efficiency	Resource-efficient, scalable, or innovative approach.
	Completeness & Clarity	Quality and clarity of application.

To utilize the project evaluation matrix, information about each project is needed. To facilitate this information-gathering exercise, staff developed a grant application. The application draws upon the Wyoming Water Development Commission, EPA Water Grant Funding, and other state and federal grant applications. This offers applicants consistency and integration with other state and federal applications.

6) Development of Alternative Funding Ideas

Planning for SPET-funded projects, recognizing that funding gaps will delay implementation for several years. Explored alternative funding streams, including:

- Capital Improvement Plans (Public Works) Fund 37
- Long-term loans (State Revolving Fund)
- County cost-share programs ("Teton County Revolving Fund")
- Mill Levies for Watershed Protection

7) Public Engagement & Stakeholder Coordination

Multiple public comments received during WQAB meeting, primarily from:

- Protect Our Water Jackson Hole (POWJH)
- Snake River Headwaters Group (SRHWG)
- Teton County Board of Health
- Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance

8) Board Coordination with Other Volunteer Boards

- Proposed joint meeting to be held between WQAB and the Water Quality Technical Working Group (WQTWG).
- Planned updates with Board of Health.

9) Identified Infrastructure Priorities

Munger Sewer Line Connection Strategies

- Explored incentive programs, regulatory tools, and fee waivers to encourage sewer hookups.
- Discussed concerns with new connections to the Town of Jackson wastewater facility and Teton County coordination.
- Identified cost-sharing structures and project staging for connections.

10) Identified 2026 Priorities

- Title 9 SWF regulatory updates
- Education/outreach strategy
- LDR amendments
- Alternative water quality financing tools

Stakeholder Analysis & Involvement: The WQAB meetings include regular public comment and have welcomed presentations from nonprofits, technical groups, utility districts, and residents. Public concerns have included nitrate contamination, inadequate oversight of septic systems, and transparency in governance.

Fiscal Impact: Recommendations from the WQAB inform how SPET funding and the Public Works CIP projects are prioritized. The board is exploring long-term financial tools, including low-interest loans and targeted cost-sharing.

Staff Impact: Staff support remains essential for coordinating board meetings, processing funding applications, drafting regulation updates, and synthesizing recommendations. Public Works staff support WQAB functions through agenda preparation, technical evaluation of project proposals, interagency coordination, and the drafting of policy documents. This work requires ongoing staff time across the Public Works, GIS, Legal, and Planning departments. A continued, significant investment of time is anticipated through FY2026 and beyond.

Legal Review: Gingery

Staff Input / Recommendation: Staff acknowledges the WQAB's early accomplishments and continues to support its regulatory, financial, and planning workstreams. Staff recommend regular coordination with the BCC on key priorities, including Title 9 updates, LDR amendments, and the development of long-term funding mechanisms for water quality initiatives.

Attachments:

- [August 26, 2024 Matters from Staff Agenda Item #14: Consideration of a Resolution to Establish a Water Quality Advisory Board and a Water Quality Technical Working Group](#)
- Water Quality Advisory Board: agendas and minutes
<https://www.tetoncountywy.gov/2796/Water-Quality-Advisory-Board>
- [December 16, 2024 BCC Workshop Staff Report](#)
- [Advisory Board Six-Month Feedback Summary](#)
- [Teton County Water Quality Project Grant Application](#)

Suggested Motion: None.