The Water and Environment Committee convened on Friday, July 19 during the CSG Annual Meeting to discuss regional water and environmental issues. Specifically, the committee heard from a panel of resource experts on climate adaptation, private land conservation, and wild fisheries management across the West.

The resource experts on hand to speak and field questions were:

- Patrick Byorth, Director for the Montana Water Project, Trout Unlimited
- Scott Christensen, Deputy Director, Greater Yellowstone Coalition
- Erik Kalsta, Big Hole Watershed Committee and Rancher

Lost fisheries and habitat due to pollution and by products of industry and development practices have had significant impact in Montana. The 1970's brought a new awareness and commitment to restore and recover natural resources across the state resulting in a lengthy restoration and recovery process. Many lessons have been learned along the way, including the surprising ways in which the natural environment is resilient. For example, the ODell wetlands restoration undertaken by Rancher Jeff Lazlo has resulted in water that now continues to feed wild fisheries for the Madison River in areas that used to run dry.

Utilizing tools and strategies that do not require capital investment, ranchers like Erik Kalsta use labor, rock material readily available on site, and some thoughtful observation to address challenges. On his ranch, Mr. Kalsta has created small, shallow pooling wells in areas where rain run off resulted in soil erosion and lost water. Now, water run is interrupted and can pool and percolate into the soil, resulting in aquifer recharge.

Rising temperatures continue to pose a threat to many species and ecosystems. Forests in particular are expected to suffer mass die off. While some species and ecosystems can adapt and evolve to changing climate conditions, others cannot match the pace of change and are stressed or dying. Scientists, biologists, and ecologists are mapping the rising temperatures and the impacts on ecosystems, such as Yellowstone. While some individual species are likely to be severely reduced or extinct due to climate change, ecosystems may have the ability the adapt and survive climate change. Understanding how ecosystems adapt to gain or maintain
maximum adaptability to rising temperatures, changing precipitation, and other challenges is an important aspect to how well humans will be able to adapt to these changes as well.