

# Lake Seventeen & Little Suction Creek Watershed Plan

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**Public Scoping Meeting**

September 17, 2024



Natural Resources Conservation Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE





# Agenda

- Introductions
  - NRCS PL-566 Program Overview
  - Planning Effort Overview
  - Study Area
  - Identified Problems
  - Potential Project Alternatives
- NEPA Process
  - What Will the Plan-EA Include?
  - Next Steps / Project Schedule
  - Public Input
  - Where to Find Project Information
  - Project Contacts



# Introductions

## LEAD AGENCY



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Meagan Heinen, P.E., *NRCS State Office Engineering Watershed Program*  
Alyssa Fellow, *NRCS State Office Environmental Compliance Biologist*

## PROJECT SPONSOR



Kyle Stiffarm, *USDA Tribal / Federal  
Agricultural Liaison*

## CONSULTANT TEAM



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# NRCS Watershed Protection & Flood Prevention Program (PL-566) Overview

- ◆ Authorized by Public Law 83-566 (as amended) – Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954
- ◆ Helps units of federal, state, local, and federally recognized tribal governments address resource issues (soil, water, wildlife) at watershed scale.
- ◆ Provides technical and financial assistance for planning and evaluating projects from an economic, social, and environmental framework.
- ◆ Design and construction cost-share funds can be requested by the Sponsor for completed Plans that identify projects meeting one or more authorized purposes
  - Flood Protection
  - Watershed Protection
  - Public Recreation
  - Fish & Wildlife Habitat
  - Agricultural Water Management
  - Municipal & Industrial Water Supply
  - Water Quality Management



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# Planning Effort Overview

- ◆ Project Sponsor = Fort Belknap Indian Community
- ◆ Sponsor applied for funding from the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program and NRCS authorized the development of a Watershed Plan-Environmental Assessment (Plan-EA)
- ◆ Plan-EA will focus on Lake Seventeen and Little Suction Creek and their watersheds in Blaine and Phillips counties
- ◆ Plan-EA will consider opportunities to conserve and improve habitat for fish and wildlife, public recreation, and agricultural water management, including how best to use Tribal water rights



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# Previous Planning & Current Effort

## 💧 Previous Watershed Plan-EA (2018-2020)

- Initiated in 2018 under the NRCS PL-566 dam rehabilitation purpose and terminated in 2020 due to challenges in the planning and incomplete analyses from contractor.

## 💧 Proposed work

- Will build upon previous effort by using relevant data, but will be a clean slate
- Will take a broader view of the whole watershed and water use opportunity because of the flexibility of the purposes allowed by PL-566 Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program
- Will include stakeholders who were involved or expressed interest in the previous effort





# Key Definitions

- ◆ **Watershed:** The land that drains to one stream, lake, or river. Consists of surface water and underlying groundwater.
- ◆ **Diversion Structure:** Manmade structures such as levees and dams that change the movement of water.
- ◆ **Berm:** A mound of soil or artificial bank constructed to protect the banks of a body of water from erosion and/or direct the flow of water.
- ◆ **Spillway:** A structure that controls the release of water from a dam or levee.
  - Primary Spillway: The smaller spillway that is used on a regular basis to control the release of water during normal conditions.
  - Auxiliary Spillways: The larger spillway that is used in emergencies or extreme events to release large amounts of water.



# Key Definitions (Cont.)

- ◆ **Breach:** The unintended development of a hole or opening in a protective structure.
- ◆ **Impoundment:** Artificial lake or pond created for storage of water, like a reservoir or stock pond.



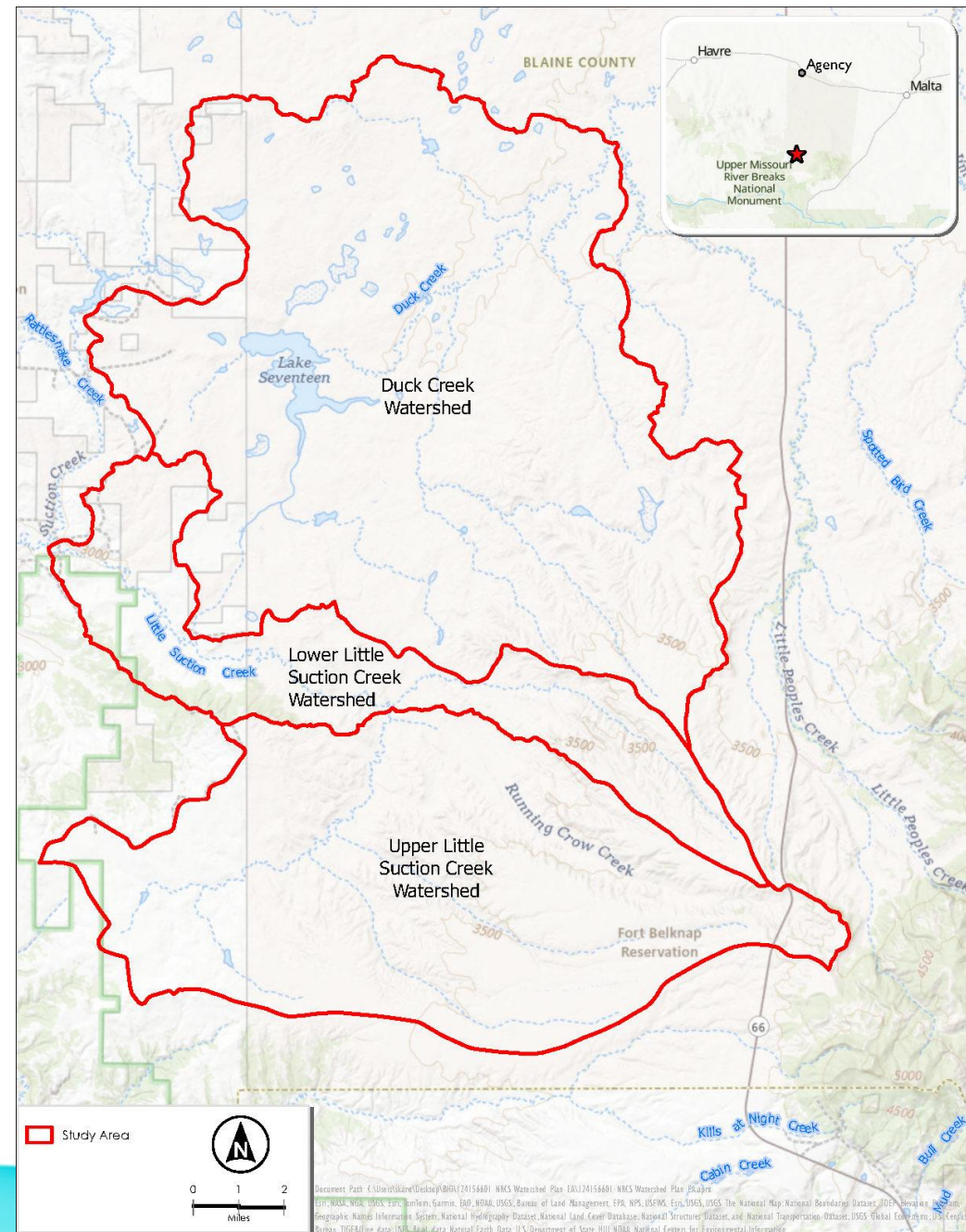
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# Study Area

- 70,867 acres
- Primarily Fort Belknap Indian Community
- Blaine and Phillips counties



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# Study Area (cont.)



# Overview of Identified Problems

| Water Supply                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Recreation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Fish & Wildlife Habitat                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Not delivering Tribal water right to lake or Duck Creek drainage</li><li>▪ Dam cannot safely hold full lake level or meet current safety standards</li><li>▪ Significant erosion in Little Suction Creek and lack of groundwater connection</li><li>▪ Unsafe access for cattle to water</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Decreased use of the lake for boating and fishing</li><li>▪ Decreased use of the lake area for hunting of upland game birds and big game</li><li>▪ Decreased use of the lake and Little Suction Creek areas for hiking and camping</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Degraded lake water quality/stagnation</li><li>▪ Lack of variation in lake water depths</li><li>▪ Reduced water tables and decreased wetland areas along Little Suction Creek and diversion channel corridor</li></ul> |





# Identified Problems (Cont.)

## Little Suction Creek and Diversion Structure

- Diversion Structure is an earthen berm primarily constructed of soil, which previously diverted water from Little Suction Creek to Lake Seventeen
- Diversion Structure is currently breached and eroded and water is no longer directed toward Lake Seventeen



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# Identified Problems – Little Suction Creek

## Little Suction Creek

- Creek is significantly incised upstream of the berm
- Creek is 5-8 feet lower in elevation than the diversion channel corridor that connects Little Suction Creek and Lake Seventeen which prevents water from flowing to the lake
- Reduced water table and decreased wetlands areas along the creek and diversion channel



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# Identified Problems – Lake Seventeen

## Lake Seventeen

- Decreased water levels because primary water sources are now limited to runoff and precipitation
- Decreased water quality due to sedimentation in the northern portion of the lake
- Decreased wildlife habitat within the Lake Seventeen area due to historical droughts and increased water evaporation
- Degraded and decreased fish habitat





# Identified Problems – Lake Seventeen (cont.)

## Lake Seventeen

- Principal spillway needs to be rebuilt to improve alignment with the outlet channel
- Auxiliary spillway does not meet current standards
- Unable to handle historical flows out of Little Suction Creek



# Potential Project Activities

- ◆ No Action: Maintain current conditions with no changes
- ◆ Address the breached diversion structure on Little Suction Creek and restore the connection between the creek and the diversion channel that links the creek to Lake Seventeen
- ◆ Stabilize or modify (raise/lower) the Lake Seventeen dam and outlet structure to create a larger/smaller impoundment. Study potential to store and provide water for irrigation, water table recharge, and/or stock water downstream.
- ◆ Create/enhance wildlife and nesting habitat along water delivery corridors and lake shore. Enhance fish habitat in the southern portion of Lake Seventeen through creation of deeper pool areas.



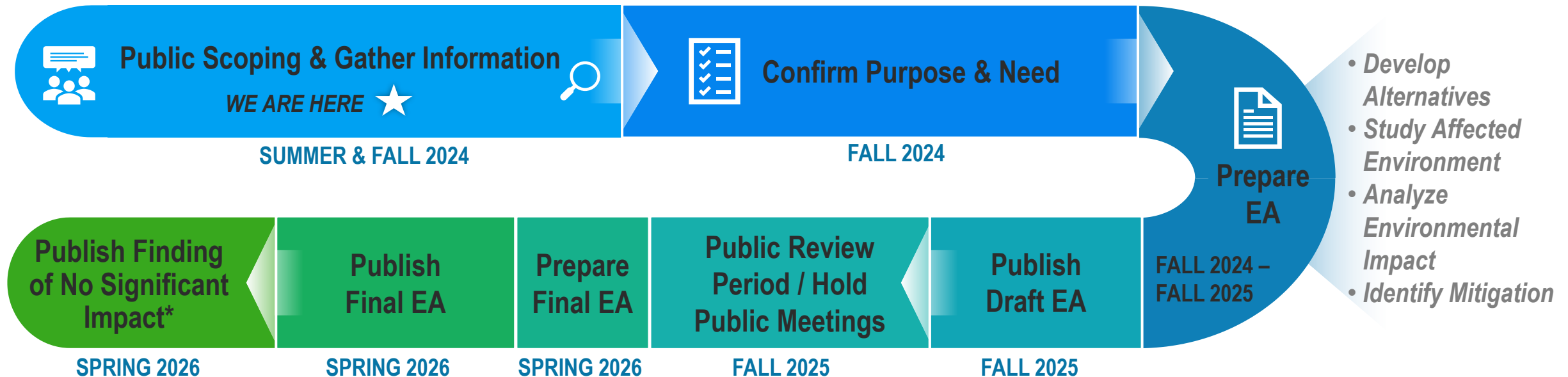
# National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Process

- NEPA ensures that federal actions comply with federal, state, and local laws and regulations and that federal agencies consider the environment in decision-making
- NRCS funding or approval of a watershed project plan is a federal action subject to NEPA
- An EA will be part of the watershed plan to assess the environmental, social, and economic impacts of the formulated alternatives.

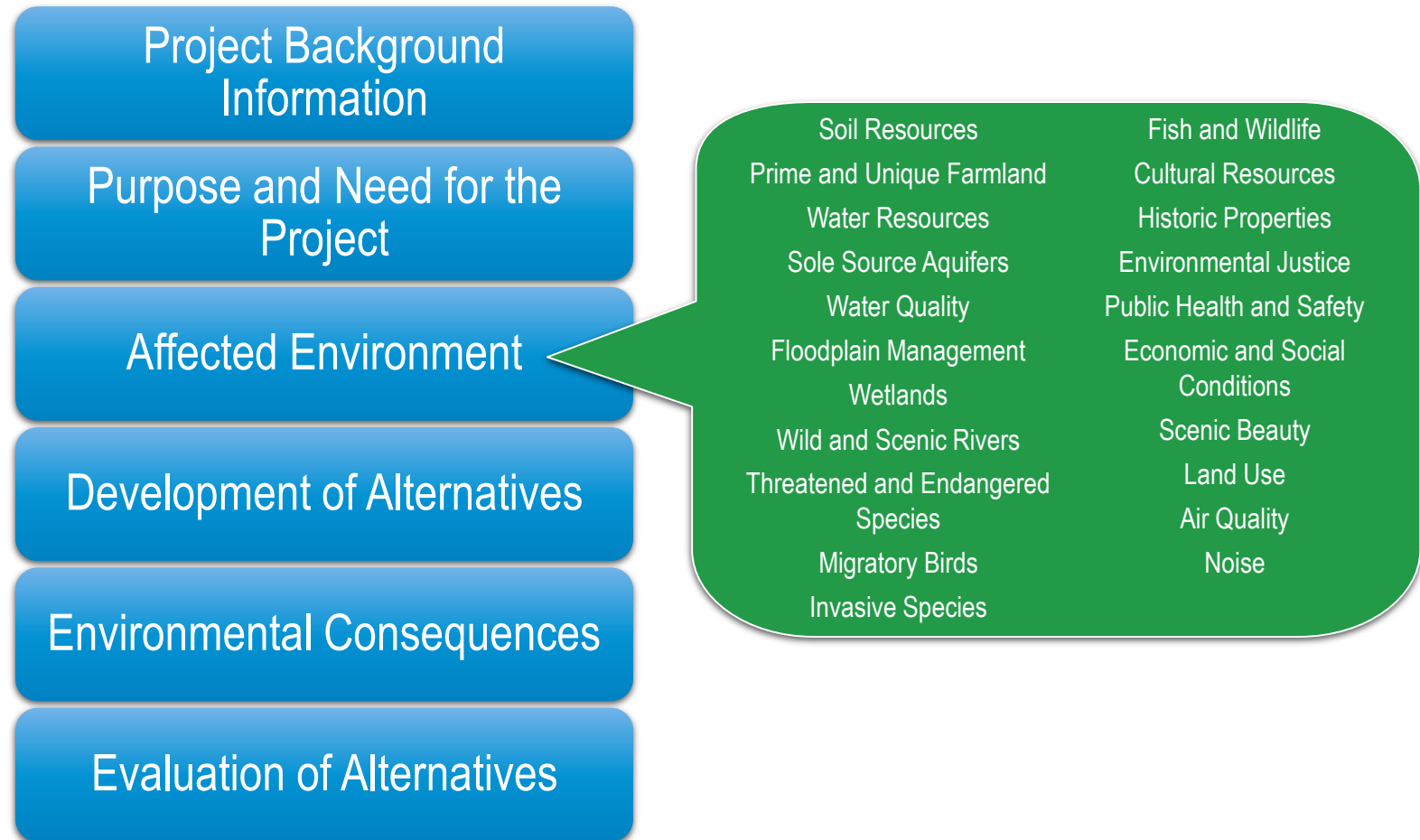




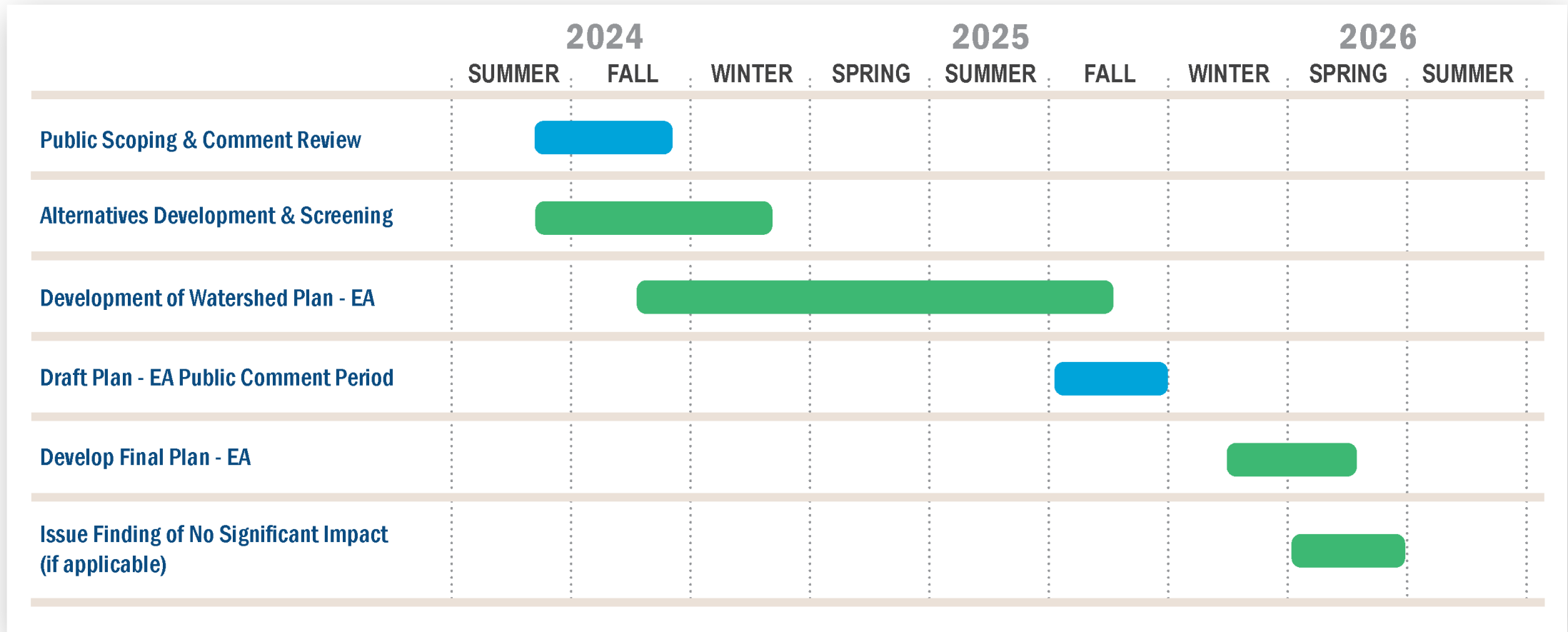
# NEPA Process (cont.)



# What will the Watershed Plan-EA Include?



# Next Steps/Project Schedule





# Public Input: How to Submit Comments

- Submit your comments on the project between **September 4 and October 4, 2024**.
- There are three ways to comment:

## Comment Card

Submit a written comment at today's meeting



## Mail

USDA NRCS Montana  
Attn: Alyssa Fellow  
10 E Babcock St, Room 443  
Bozeman, MT 5917-4704



## Email

Lake17@pinyon-env.com  
Subject Line: *"Lake Seventeen Watershed Plan-EA Comment"*



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# Where to Find Project Information



Visit the project website for project information, slides, and materials from today's meeting:

[www.nrcs.usda.gov/montana/watershed-and-flood-prevention](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/montana/watershed-and-flood-prevention)

Direct questions to:

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# Thank You for Your Time

Questions?



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