

Bear River Basin Advisory Group
Meeting Record
Cokeville, WY
March 24, 2003

Welcome

Facilitator Sherri Gregory welcomed the group and the meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. All attendees introduced themselves, followed by a review of the overall meeting agenda. A sign-in sheet was passed around to record attendance. The next meeting is scheduled for July 7 in Kemmerer.

Water Development Commission Report

Barry Lawrence updated the BAG on the status of the plans for the other basins. The BAGs for the Green and the Snake/Salt Basins will be meeting March 25 in Rock Springs and March 26 in Alpine, whereas the BAGS for the Wind/Bighorn, Powder/Tongue and Northeast Wyoming Basins will be meeting April 1 in Cody, April 2 in Buffalo, and April 3 in Newcastle. Open houses for the Platte River Basin will be held this spring. Barry discussed the status of all basin studies, and agenda for future meetings

John Jackson indicated that 4 new commissioners had been appointed, including Dan Budd in Division IV. Nineteen new projects were authorized in the Omnibus Water Bill – Planning, including the Cokeville Reservoir project study. Twenty-seven projects were authorized in the Omnibus Water Bill – Construction. The two in this basin included the North Uinta/Bear Water Supply project, which will add new storage, a well, and a transmission line and for the Smiths Fork Flumes project, the installation of 3 new measuring devices on the Smiths Fork. The Groundwater Exploration Grant Program, which was amended in 2002, was appropriated an additional budget of \$1,500,000. Eligibility for the Small Water Project Program was amended to include the entire state.

Bear Lake Settlement

Claudia Conder and Carly Burton, PacifiCorp, detailed the proposed 2003 Allocation Addendum to the 1995 Bear Lake Settlement Agreement. The addendum provides for the development of a single interstate model and amends the allocation schedule to reflect conveyance losses between Bear Lake and the contract delivery points and system losses below Bear Lake. Hopefully, the addendum will be fully executed this spring.

Carly also summarized the 2000-2002 Bear Lake/Bear River operation and projected water supplies for 2003. Graphs of Bear Lake net runoff for the period of 1913-2002 and Bear Lake elevation from 1916 to 2002 were shown and discussed. It was reported that the Army Corps of Engineer dredging permit had been issued and that dredging should begin soon. A brief discussion followed.

What Happens to Fish in the Smiths Fork Irrigation System

Dr. Frank Rahel and James Roberts, University of Wyoming, indicated there are a variety of 14 native trout species in the western United States, all in declining populations. Dr. Rahel discussed the conservation status in relationship to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, the Nature Conservancy, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

James Roberts indicated the study site included the Covey, Mau and Spring Creek irrigation canals of the Smiths Fork drainage. The three objectives of the study included 1) determining the abundance of species and species composition of entrapped fishes; 2) determining the fate of the Bonneville trout in irrigation canals; and 3) determining the influence of headgate and canal structure on fish entrapment. During the 2002 surveys, 12 difference species were identified, with non-game fish, such as suckers, minnows, and sculpin, found with more frequency than the Bonneville cutthroat trout. 22 fish were implanted with transmitters and tracked through the three irrigation canals. Preliminary results of the sampling were shared with the BAG. James discussed the fieldwork planned for the summer of 2003. A lengthy discussion followed.

Instream Flow Issues & Filings in Bear River Basin

Tom Annear, Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), indicated that instream flow is beneficial in that it maintains a quality of life, is an important economic factor in tourism and is a legal tool for the State of Wyoming to protect a beneficial use of water. The goals are to either maintain existing flow patterns and habitat on public lands or to restore or improve flow patterns and fishery habitat on private property. The process to obtain an instream flow right has science, public involvement and legal/institutional components. These involve various state agencies, the public, and various state and federal laws.

Paul Dey, WGFD, indicated that of the 83 statewide instream flow segments filings, 17 segments were located in the upper Thomas Fork and Smiths Fork drainages. Priority dates range from 1995 to 1997, and the State Engineer has approved 12 of the 17 instream flow rights. Paul described each segment's habitat. Discussion followed.

Bear River Water Supply Outlook

Jade Henderson, Water Division IV Superintendent, stated that Snotel measurements indicate that statewide, every basin is ahead of last year's snowpack except the Bear River drainage. He discussed the Woodruffs Narrows and Sulphur Creek Reservoir storage restrictions. The anticipated runoff for Smith's Fork is 71,000 AF, or 60% of normal as of March 1. Jade indicated that interstate regulation would likely be experienced in both the central and upper divisions in 2003.

Wyoming's Drought

Jan Curtis, State Climatologist, introduced the drought website and drought related links, which included the palmer index, soil moisture and Snotel maps. Most of the state is in an exceptional drought, but due to recent snowstorms, most of the state, except for this area, has been upgraded to an extreme drought. As of March 24, 2003, the average snowpack in the Bear River basin was 68%. He emphasized the importance of precipitation in April for the basin. A brief discussion followed.

The meeting adjourned at 9:04 p.m.