

Wind/Bighorn River Basin Advisory Group Meeting
June 18, 2009 - 6:00 p.m.
Lander, WY – Fremont County Library
Meeting Record

I. Welcome

Jodie Pavlica, Wyoming Water Development Office, called the meeting to order at approximately 6:00 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.

II. Basin Plan Update Presentation

Jerry Gibbens, MWH, was introduced as being part of the consultant team that is preparing the surface water portion of the Basin Plan Update. Mr. Gibbens described the progress on both Task 3, Surface Water Profile, and Task 4, Available Surface Water Determination.

Within Task 3, a draft of the Water Law and Water Administration technical memorandum has been submitted to the WWDO for review. Work is wrapping up on the Municipal and Domestic Water Use, Industrial Water Use, Recreation and Environmental Water Use and Water Use from storage technical memorandums. Technical work is progressing on the Agricultural Water Use sub-task. The Basin Advisory Group Water Related Concerns technical memorandum will commence following the current BAG meeting so that it is available in draft form for the next BAG meeting.

Task 4 progress includes the development and population of a hydrology database, summarization of historical data and development of dry-average-wet year hydrology. A draft of tech memo 3A - Surface Water Hydrology, is currently underway. Work on the StateMod sub-task has been postponed indefinitely by WWDO until internal decisions are made regarding the appropriate model for use within the State and within the Wind-Bighorn basin. WWDO and the consultant team are currently working to develop alternatives to its implementation.

A summary of historical hydrology was also provided, focusing on how the addition of 2002 through 2008 hydrology data affects the dry-average-wet year hydrology used in the spreadsheet models. In general, averages decrease in all data sets. However, there are cases when dry-year hydrology increased, while average and wet year average decreased due to the inclusion of different hydrology years in each hydrologic group.

It was suggested that the memorandums prepared as part of Task 3 provide a description of federal laws (i.e. Bureau of Reclamation laws) that pertain to administration with the basin.

The consultants should ensure that the discussion in the Environmental Water Use memorandum on instream flow rights include a discussion of Federal reserved “bypass flow” rights that are a part of the Phase II adjudication.

Ed Harvey provided a general description of activities on Task 5, Demand Projections. Demands are being quantified within each major economic sector (e.g. agricultural, energy, industry, tourism, etc.) 50 years into the future. Mr. Harvey would appreciate any information on expected future economic activities within any of these sectors.

III. Tribal Water Plan

Kate Vandemoer, Ph.D., was introduced as a consultant to the Northern Arapahoe Tribe and gave a presentation. Ms. Vandemoer introduced Baptist Weed, Mitch Cottenoir and James Pogu who were also in attendance representing the Tribes. Ms. Vandemoer gave a presentation on the Draft Tribal Water Plan called “Our Water, Our Future, 500,000 af”.

Research & activities that were conducted during development of the Tribal Water Plan include:

- The Tribes were awarded water as a volume which is associated with the irrigation of agricultural lands. Regional issues that are of concern to the Tribes include drought and impacts of the Crow Tribe settlement.
- The Tribes have developed their own spreadsheet models and are developing a new model similar to Bureau of Reclamation models. Ms. Vandemoer expressed that results of the Tribal models and the Basin Planning models should generally agree
- The BIA has recently accepted the Wind River Water Code, and must administer the irrigation system accordingly.
- The Wind River Irrigation System is in disrepair, requiring \$65 million in repairs.
- The Tribes are starting to get a good handle on hydrologic data during drought conditions and how to manage water resources during the drought.
- Tribes do not get crop insurance during droughts, so drought management is important.
- There are about 96 private ditches on the reservation. Many of these ditches are in disrepair, but some assistance can be obtained through NRCS and other agencies.
- The Owl Creek Basin Water Management Plan was developed to assist in management activities.
- The Tribes are working on educational programs for youths and adults on water issues. The Tribal Elder-Youth Conference on Water has held. There is a 50 minute video available that was prepared by the Tribes. The video was produced to assist in education of all persons with interest in the basin. Ms. Vandemoer can provide this video to anyone interested.

- The question was asked “What would you like to do with the water?”. Answers were widely varied.

There are several issues in the use of the awarded water rights that have been considered.

- Big Horn Decree, Federal Reserved Water Rights Principals, Wind River Water code, Instream Flow Decision, Big Horn Decree Finalization Process constrain how the water can be used.
- Many administration issues remain to be worked out.
- The federal government has a roles and responsibilities in water management in the Wind River Basin. The Tribes are working on getting data to federal government to assist them with this.

The Water Plan is a plan for the use of water. There are three phases of water development included in the plan:

- Securing the Homeland – instream uses, such as streambank restoration, riparian areas, community gardens and parks, bottled water (first substantial identified use), rangeland
- Strengthening the Foundation – Money for irrigation project improvement, futures projects (Riverton East may be first), utilities (replacement of asbestos pipelines), fire storage, building out distribution systems
- Building the Homeland – Storage, groundwater recharge, integration into basin.

What’s next? Choices, decisions, strategy, community and planning. Why does it take so long? Because water is connected to everything: control of assets, spirituality, kinship and personal efficacy.

Sequence of development: Riverton East (within next few years), storage near Steamboat Butte (or other storage projects above Diversion Dam), possible irrigation diversions. Under a full development situation, Tribes could divert 630 cfs out of the Wind River. The Tribes do not have a “use it or lose it” rule. Some small storage projects could be easier to construct than fewer larger reservoirs.

The Tribal Water Code does not have a one-fill rule. Some reservoirs could be filled more than once by adjusting administration.

Rehabilitating Wind River Irrigation Project could save tens of thousands or even 100,000 acre-feet. Tribes currently have about \$7.5 million dollars from the federal government and the Wyoming Water Development Commission for irrigation system improvements.

IV. Groundwater Update

Scott Quillian from the WSGS was introduced to the group. He will assume the lead role in updating the groundwater portion of the basin plan update. Mr.

Quillian passed around booklets containing a compilation of maps that have been produced to date for the work. Scott then reviewed the scope of work for the GW study.

Mr. Quillian presented a map of the basement geology for the entire state. This will be incorporated into the Basin Plan update. Several general cross-sections of the Wind River and Bighorn Basins, and percentages of aquifers within major geologic structures, were presented.

Overall, the study is progressing. Aquifers in the basin are being inventoried and characterized from the available data.

V. Public Comment

The following public comments were provided:

- Claudette Stroh passed out a worksheet containing figures on the economic impact of sugar beet production within Park County (over \$100 million per year). Claudette can provide information on other crops if someone is interested.

VI. Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 17, 2009 at 6:00 p.m. in Powell. The location is to be determined.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:15 pm.