

**Green River Basin Advisory Group  
Meeting Record  
Community Center, Farson WY  
February 15, 2000**

**Welcome**

Facilitator Joe Lord welcomed the group and the meeting was opened at 1:00 pm. The overall meeting agenda was reviewed, followed by an introduction of all attendees. A sign-in sheet was passed around to record attendance.

**Planning Team Issues**

Jon Wade discussed the ongoing efforts to begin the planning process in Northeast Wyoming. To kick off the water planning efforts in the Powder / Tongue and Northeast Wyoming, open houses were held in Buffalo on January 25<sup>th</sup> and on January 26<sup>th</sup> in Newcastle. Jon also mentioned that the omnibus planning bill, which would fund these studies, was progressing through the legislature.

The future meetings schedule for the BAG was discussed. The following dates and locations were set:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
March 14, 2000	Rock Springs	1:00	TBA
April 11, 2000	Pinedale	1:00	TBA
May 9, 2000	Baggs	5:00	TBA
June 13, 2000	Marbleton	5:00	TBA

Times for the April (and subsequent) meeting will be reviewed at the March meeting in Rock Springs in the event the BAG determines a change is desirable.

**Consultant Update**

Pat Tyrrell of States West gave a brief project update. He indicated that water right attribution is almost complete. Because of the complexity of some of the water rights, this work is behind schedule. However, the overall project schedule is not in jeopardy, and the time spent on developing accurate attribution information is important.

Irrigated Lands Mapping - Mr. Tyrrell then introduced Jack Meena of States West, who presented an update on the irrigation mapping and water right attribution work.

Mr. Meena presented an on-screen example of the irrigated lands polygon work and how the water rights are attributed using ArcView. The Little Snake River basin was used in the example. Diversions are attributed so that by clicking in Arc View, the user can view water right information associated with each point. Irrigated polygons are also linked to diversion points so the water rights information for each polygon can be viewed by

clicking on the polygon in Arc View. Water rights are listed so the user can see permit numbers and permitted flow rates, and can tell if it is an original, supplemental or secondary supply. While overall polygon acreages are given, the attribution does not assign individual irrigated acreage amounts to individual water rights. Wells are similarly attributed, although non-irrigation wells will not be tied to irrigation polygons.

Questions asked of Mr. Meena were as follows:

One questioner asked to clarify the coverage along Muddy Creek (tributary to the Little Snake). Upon closer viewing, the coverage in the upper reaches of Muddy Creek did appear to include the lands under question.

A second questioner asked how diversions in Colorado with Wyoming rights were handled (and conversely, Colorado rights served by diversions in Wyoming). The response was that those performing the modeling were aware of the Colorado rights of interest, and that all diversions would need to be handled to model the river in a hydrologically appropriate manner. However, uses and depletions would use the Wyoming rights only. This is an issue because of the way the Little Snake River straddles the state line, crossing back and forth between the states many times before finally staying in Colorado.

A third questioner asked how unattached secondary permits were handled if the lands they serve could vary from one season or year to the next. Mr. Meena responded by explaining that is one reason the attribution is complicated, because all unattached permits have to be attributed to include all lands to which they could potentially be applied.

Questions of the Consultant Presentation in general included:

One questioner asked if, in the consultants contacts with federal agencies regarding their future plans, it had been specifically asked if issues existed relating to the reserved doctrine or reserved water rights (e.g. reserved USFS rights or reserved tribal rights). The response was that our questions were posed in a general manner, asking for any future plans, but that the federal contacts could be revisited and asked the “reserved” question specifically.

A second questioner asked if, in the groundwater work the effects of drilling deep oil wells on shallow water wells was being looked at. This is apparently an issue in the upper basin where drilling is suspected to interrupt the performance of adjacent shallow water wells. The response was that such an issue is not being looked at specifically as it appears to be more a regulatory issue. The plan will be looking more at the aquifers themselves and well production from those horizons.

## Local Presentations

History of the Eden Valley Irrigation District - Ms. Shirley DeLambert presented a history of the history of the Eden Valley. A copy of her full presentation is available from the WWDC. A list of highlights from that presentation include:

- The Eden Valley was heartily promoted in its early days, with descriptions such as “All aboard for Eden, the new paradise of the West. Don’t get a round trip ticket. Come to stay.”
- Water rights for irrigation from the Big Sandy Creek were issued as early as 1886.
- The project survived two foreclosures before the Eden Valley Irrigation and Drainage District (EVIDD) was formed in 1950.
- The Bureau of Reclamation constructed Big Sandy Reservoir and other project components. The operation and maintenance of the Project was turned over to the EVIDD in 1970.
- At an elevation of 6,600 feet, the growing season for frost-resistant crops is 124 days, while the average frost-free season is 61 days.
- Chief crops in the Project are alfalfa and grass hay, wheat, barley, oats and pasture.

Mr. Dana Hadley followed with a brief operational description of the Project.

Ms. Karen Johnson of the NRCS field office provided an overview of the salinity control measures employed in the Eden area. Highlights of her presentation follow:

- The Big Sandy Unit of the Colorado River Salinity Control Project is a voluntary federal program designed to reduce salinity in the Big Sandy River resulting from deep percolation of irrigation water.
- Federal funding typically tries to cover 70 percent of the costs of improvements, while landowners pay the remaining 30 percent.
- Total project work to date includes 107 sprinkler systems, 5 improved surface systems, 2 drip irrigation systems and 112 on-farm conveyance systems.
- The project includes 54 regulating reservoirs, some of which provide wetland habitat.
- Out of a goal of 15,700 acres to receive improvements, 8,680 acres are under improved irrigation methods today. There are 18,370 acres in the project with water rights.
- The project includes successful efforts to mitigate wetlands lost to the improvement work.
- Out of a goal of 52,000 tons per year of salt load reduction, the project to date has shown a reduction of 32,534 tons per year.
- Improved irrigation methods provide an estimated 12, 513 acre-feet per year of water savings.

One question posed of Ms. Johnson was why the project wetlands were not considered jurisdictional for purposes of mitigation. Ms. Johnson responded that because it is a voluntary federal program involving private interests, the wetlands are not required to

strictly meet Corps of Engineers criteria. However, there is ongoing monitoring to evaluate wetland establishment.

### **Other Presentations**

Mr. Jack Smith of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, Water Quality Division made a presentation concerning Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) regulations. Highlights of his presentation follow:

- Mr. Smith described the difference between *beneficial uses* (for which water rights are granted) and *designated uses* (to which TMDLs are applied).
- The different classes of surface water (I through IV) were described, and it was noted that there are designated uses for each.
- DEQ water quality standards exist for each class and are used to determine if a water body can meet its designated use. When water quality is insufficient for a designated use, TMDLs can be applied.
- A TMDL is the maximum concentration of a pollutant a water body can handle before its designated use cannot be achieved.
- Seasonality (the effect of high and low flows on pollutant levels and use characteristics) is considered in the development of a TMDL.
- The 303d list includes those water bodies with a history of water quality impairment or exceedances in water quality parameters. A “history” means the occurrence of two exceedances in a three year period, within the last five years.
- A TMDL can be assigned in the absence of a violation of a standard if a narrative quality parameter is violated. A narrative standard violation can be determined using *credible data* showing a combination of physical, biological and chemical evidence of impairment.
- Water bodies on the list are then prioritized for action, with those situations involving threat to human health having the highest priority.
- Sources of the offending pollutant are researched to determine what proportion is naturally occurring and what is man-caused.
- Point source contributions can be addressed through the DEQ permitting process.
- Non-Point sources are approached using best management practices.
- Prior to establishing a TMDL, it is possible for local interests to organize and create a watershed management plan. Creation of a management plan can reduce the priority of a water body’s listing.

One question asked of Mr. Smith dealt with how tributaries of a Class I stream are handled. Mr. Smith responded that an undesignated stream falls under the same classification as the stream it enters. A “use attainability analysis” can be performed to change the classification of such a tributary stream.

A second questioner wondered whether one could always move an impaired water body back to a condition where it is within the standards. Mr. Smith responded that some impairment may be irreversible, or that returning to within standards may be difficult.

Programmatic Biological Opinion on the Yampa River - A final presentation was made regarding the proposed Programmatic Biological Opinion (PBO) on the Yampa River. According to John Shields, a PBO is in the works for the Yampa following issuance of a non-jeopardy opinion for a 15-mile reach of the upper Colorado River. This “umbrella” opinion, which would be issued by the Fish and Wildlife Service, would have the effect of satisfying Section 7 consultation requirements that may be required for future development in that basin. The PBO is of interest here because the Little Snake River is tributary to the Yampa and would be covered thereunder.

A requirement of the PBO is the development of current and future depletions to the system. The water planning work (irrigated lands mapping, attribution and modeling) would serve as Wyoming’s statement of the hydrologic condition of the Little Snake basin. Since the data are not needed until approximately July 6, there is little effect on the schedule of the water plan.

The next speaker, Larry Hicks, followed John’s talk with the concern that care needs to be taken when submitting the requested data for use in the PBO. The PBO issuance may come with “sideboards” that further restrict development, or allow development only with certain stipulations. Mr. Pat O’Toole also echoed skepticism of the federal intent by describing some administrative impacts seen by the High Savery Project. He also indicated because the Game and Fish have impacts on the mitigation of development projects, he would like to see them attending the BAG meetings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.