

Green River Basin Advisory Group
Meeting Record
Lyman City Hall, Lyman WY
August 8, 2000

Welcome

Facilitator Joe Lord welcomed the group and the meeting was opened at 5:00 p.m. The overall meeting agenda was reviewed, followed by an introduction of all attendees. A sign-in sheet was passed around to record attendance. Joe Lord reviewed the meeting agenda, group mission statement, and the adopted rules.

Planning Team Issues

Jon Wade provided a rundown of the upcoming meeting schedule:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
September 12, 2000	Kemmerer	5:00	TBA
October 10, 2000	Green River	5:00	TBA
November 7, 2000	Farson	5:00	TBA
December 12, 2000	Rock Springs	5:00	TBA

Mr. Wade also briefly discussed the schedule for upcoming BAG meetings in Northeast Wyoming.

Mr. Ben Bracken was then introduced to the group to discuss recent activities of the Colorado River Water Users Association (CRWUA). The CRWUA is partnering in a made-for-TV documentary of the Colorado River. The program, hosted and directed by Huell Howser , will be a human interest story of people whose lives revolve in and around the Colorado River and its tributaries. For Wyoming's side of the story, Ben feels we need a "hook" to hold viewers' interest and assure more than token airtime. The selling point may well be the basin planning process and the various water users brought together each month. Ben suggested that the September BAG meeting may work as a focus for Mr. Howser's work in Wyoming, and asked if the BAG had any opposition to being included in the program. One issue to be handled is that the date of the BAG meeting (September 12) may have to be flexible if Mr. Howser's schedule requires changes.

After some discussion, it was determined to try and meet with Howser, even if it involves some change in the BAG meeting date. However, if the delay is significant, it was suggested to hold the September meeting as scheduled and move up the October meeting for that purpose.

Consultant Update

No consultant presentation was made.

Presentations

A presentation that had been postponed from the July BAG meeting was made concerning the State Engineer's Office Water Conservation Program, and proposed changes to State Water Law.

Mr. Ron Vore presented information on the Wyoming State Engineer's Office's water conservation program. The conservation program was undertaken as a cooperative effort between the Wyoming State Engineer's Office and the USBR two years ago. The program is intended to educate water users on the benefits of conservation, describe voluntary efforts that can be undertaken to conserve water, and provide contact information for assistance in funding conservation projects.

Mr. Vore's presentation presented possibilities for conservation in municipal/household, industrial and agricultural uses. Because most of Wyoming's consumptive use is created by agriculture, most of his discussion was geared toward agricultural water conservation. The primary source of inefficiency in agricultural applications is conveyance loss. Examples of conservation (reduction in conveyance loss) in agricultural practices include lining canals, gated pipe, sprinklers, surge valves and soil amendments.

Other mechanisms for conserving water that do not directly involve reducing conveyance loss include changing crops, construction of "upper reach" impoundments (delaying runoff by storing water high in a watershed), creation of plant diversity and forage along streambanks (riparian improvement) and streambank storage (also riparian improvement).

Concluding, Mr. Vore said that the success of conservation efforts increase when they are incentive-driven and users have to maintain a balance between consumptive and non-consumptive uses. To do this, the following points must be remembered:

- We must recognize traditional use values,
- We must recognize future use interests,
- We must recognize that conservation solutions are complex,
- We need to develop incentives and options,

Following Ron's discussion, Sue Lowry was introduced to discuss proposed changes to Wyoming Water Law. Primarily, these changes cover two topics: defining salvage uses and expanding temporary uses. Right now the salvage water definition bill and the temporary change language amendments have been authorized to be drafted and circulated for public comment by the Joint Agriculture Committee, while the permanent

change of use amendments have not yet been approved for development in draft bill form.

In essence, the salvage bill allows the owner of a right who salvages (save water through efficiency increases, etc.) to retain the right to the salvaged water for subsequent beneficial use. The draft bill expanding the definition of temporary uses would include nonconsumptive beneficial uses (i.e. instream flows) in the definition. Sue then provided examples of when and how this new legislation would be used and discussed some of the issues currently facing the Wyoming State Engineer's Office on these topics. Both draft bills have evolved from repeated requests over time to the Wyoming State Engineer's Office asking since water rights are property rights, how restrictive should those rights be when it comes to changing them?

Both draft proposals allow the water under a right to move to beneficial uses, which may be nonconsumptive. The temporary use language could also allow the use of subject water at a point other than the original appropriator's point of diversion. Both of these concepts prompted debate.

One commenter stated that you can't "brand" water, and that implementation of these changes would have detrimental effects when administration is required. Also, the commenter stated that changing water administration laws with 120 years of history behind them would simply invite lawsuits. It was also noted that once you give such language to the legislature, you're never sure what you will get back in the form of law as passed.

Flaming Gorge Dam Operations, Ed Vidmar

After Ms. Lowry's presentation, Mr. Ed Vidmar of the US Bureau of Reclamation, Upper Colorado Regional Office, made a presentation on the recommended changes to operations at Flaming Gorge Dam.

The four endangered fish in the Green/Colorado River Basins have prompted an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the proposed modifications to Flaming Gorge operation. These fish, the Colorado pikeminnow, bonytail, humpback chub and the razorback sucker, need flooded backwaters for successful reproduction. Scientific studies have indicated that 18,000 cfs is needed in the river at Jensen, Utah for this spawning flow. Since construction, storage in Flaming Gorge has often reduced this peak. However, 20 percent of the time the flows contributed by the Yampa River alone provide the 18,000 cfs needed. Therefore, only in years that the Yampa cannot meet the flows, will augmented flows be needed from Flaming Gorge.

Mr. Vidmar pointed out that meeting such flow needs is not out of the range of historical operational characteristics of Flaming Gorge. It is more a matter of the timing and duration of releases than of increasing releases to a point that water levels in the reservoir would be affected. Mr. Vidmar also noted that augmented releases would be dictated by the hydrology of the river in any particular year. In other words, if the water is not there naturally, the reservoir will not be drawn down to create artificially high flows.

Questions were asked about what the operation might do to water levels in Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Mr. Vidmar indicated that the Wyoming Game and Fish prefer level fluctuations less than 8 feet to assure Kokanee Salmon spawning success. Again, the release changes are in timing only, not in the overall amount of released water. Another questioner asked about the cost/benefit of saving these fish, and whether this was all worth it. Mr. Vidmar said the fish are used as an indicator of the overall health of the river system, and as such there is sentiment to save them even at high cost. Mr. John Shields also noted that efforts to protect these species are important in maintaining relationships throughout the Colorado River Basin States and to allow Wyoming, and other states, to be “players” in the basin so they can develop future water allocations as easily as possible.

Some discussion was held on problems seen with the Flaming Gorge spillway tubes, which were damaged by cavitation in releases some years ago. The cavitation evidence now replaces earlier thoughts that corrosion may have caused the damage.

Mr. Vidmar then presented slides showing historical flows in the Green with and without Flaming Gorge.

Closing

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.