

Green River Basin Advisory Group
Meeting Record
Community Center, Farson WY
November 14, 2000

Welcome

Facilitator Joe Lord welcomed the group and the meeting was opened at 1:05 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 agenda.

Planning Team Issues

A review of the upcoming meeting schedule was provided:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
December 12 th , 2000	Rock Springs	1:00	Western WY College, Rm 1302
January 9 th , 2001	Rock Springs	1:00	White Mountain Library, Gasson Rm
March 20 th , 2001	Pinedale	10:00 AM	TBA

Jon Wade then updated the group on the schedule for upcoming basin plans. The WWDC and Select Water Committee has given tentative approval to the advancing of legislation calling for the initiation of the River Basin Planning Process in the Wind / Bighorn and Snake River Basin. Final WWDC approval is set for December with legislative approval pending the 2001 session of the Wyoming Legislature.

Consultant Update

Pat Tyrrell of States West presented a continuation of the previous meeting's discussion of draft plan results. Emphasis was placed on projected recreational uses and criteria for ranking future water use opportunities.

To begin, Mr. Tyrrell presented current municipal, industrial, agricultural and environmental uses as a review. It was noted that following a State Engineer personnel check of irrigated acres, which resulted in a small increase in irrigated acres, the estimate of current agricultural use in the basin increased from 390,000 AF to 401,000 AF.

The Wyoming Water Development staff had previously commented on the percentage of future storage for supplemental agricultural use that could be assigned as depletion. Tyrrell had earlier used a fraction of about one third, based on studies of the High Savery project. The WWDC comment indicated this value might be too low to use basin-wide, and suggested an increase. Therefore, future agricultural depletions now show a range based upon the percentage of constructed storage in a range from about one third to one half. Revised use projections were presented in the slide show.

With the agricultural use projections refined, Mr. Tyrrell then discussed recalculated numbers estimating future uses (until 2030) for the three growth scenarios. Under the high growth scenario, 87,000 acre-feet per year is left undeveloped. In previous Basin Advisory Group (BAG) meetings, this was described as

the amount of water potentially available for future in-state trans-basin diversions. As a historical review, Tyrrell noted that all previous trans-basin proposals had also included in-basin storage as a component. The sites most often listed in these export studies included:

Enlarged Boulder Lake
Enlarged Fremont Lake
Kendall Reservoir
New Fork Narrows Reservoir
Sanders Ranch Reservoir
Lower Green River
Plains Reservoir

While not explicitly recommending export as a use of excess water, Tyrrell noted that should such a project take wing, efficiency and multiple-use considerations would argue that such a reservoir serve in-basin needs as well.

Mr. Tyrrell then introduced Mr. Gary Watts to discuss future recreational use projections. To begin, Mr. Watts presented estimates of current recreational uses for categories including fishing, boating, waterfowl hunting, canoeing/rafting, and sailing. For purposes of the plan, Watts noted that the decision was made to only include those activities that required water. If water were incidental to an activity (such as picnicking), it was not included.

Watts then described how future recreation uses were estimated, using population and tourism growth rates as the basis. From his work, recreation use was estimated to grow at rates of 1, 2, and 3 percent annually for the low, moderate, and high growth scenarios. These rates were then converted to recreational activity days, using Wyoming Game and Fish Department estimates of current use days as the starting point. The Game and Fish keeps information on lake and stream fishing participation, and waterfowl hunting as well, a good source for quantifying boating, sailing or similar water sports is virtually nonexistent.

The goal was to compare current and projected use rates against numbers representing use supply or “capacities” as a way of estimating current or future needs for recreational opportunities. Unfortunately, the Game and Fish Department has moved away from publishing capacity numbers in recent years, although some efforts were directed at this effort in the early 1990s. Acknowledging the Game and Fish’ current practices, Watts went on to compare current and future use rates to the previously calculated supplies as the best way to establish recreational needs.

Fishing data were compared in this manner. Of interest was the determination that lake fishing opportunities appear to exist, given current flat water resources, in excess of demand for all growth scenarios. Stream fishing opportunities, on the other hand, already appear at or below current demand levels, and thus are less than desired for all future growth scenarios. A contributing factor to the lower stream fishing supply estimate is that private lands without public access are not available for meeting public stream fishing desires. Thus, public use is confined to areas with access, much evidenced by the extensive use made of the BLM landing on the Green River at Warren Bridge. Therefore, private holdings with fishable streams will find themselves with an ever more valuable resource.

In closing, Watts indicated that an important result of this work is the perceived current and future need for stream fishing opportunities in the basin. To the extent future water development can accommodate this need, such as by the creation of tailwater fisheries with public access, there will be a significant value associated with it that possibly can help in a project's cost effectiveness.

Mr. Tyrrell then continued the presentation, focusing on criteria for evaluating future use opportunities. A review of the scope language was provided. A list of development priorities was presented. These priorities were created following the last BAG meeting's discussion on the same topic. The proposed priorities for water development are:

1. Rehabilitation projects that preserve existing uses and economic dependencies.
2. Projects that rectify existing demands/shortages.
3. Projects that meet projected demands/shortages.
4. Projects that develop/use water in-state.
5. Sale or lease of water for out-of-state use.

Under each priority, several criteria were used to rank projects qualitatively. These criteria included:

- Water availability
- Cost effectiveness
- Number of sponsors/beneficiaries
- Legal/institutional concerns
- Environmental/recreation benefits
- Reversibility
- Economic stimulus

Under each priority, these seven criteria take on different levels of importance. For example, water availability may be of little importance to rehabilitation of an existing feature (priority 1), where there is no question water is available once repairs are made. Availability of water is of much greater importance for projects developing water for future uses (priority 3). Then, under each potential project, each criteria is ranked from 2 (large positive effect) to -1 (negative effect) to express differences in water availability, institutional problems, cost effectiveness, etc. among the possibilities.

The ranking process uses the priority/criteria combination in a scoring system to determine the most favorable projects under each priority. The relative "importance" of a criteria is multiplied by the ranking (2 to -1) of each project to determine an overall score. While the score in itself is meaningless, the relative ranking it provides is designed to sort projects among the different priorities on the basis of most to least favorable or most to least likely to succeed. Tyrrell indicated that this procedure was open to review, but cautioned the BAG that the numbers on the slide were still under review and could change (either due to BAG comments or through continued internal review).

Several comments were received on the ranking procedure. The most debated issue involved priority 5, and whether the study should even publish the possibility of sale or lease of water as what might appear to be a state-sanctioned viable option. The BAG appeared in agreement on this issue, as was the consulting team, and priority 5 will be removed from future rankings. However, the topics of sale or lease must be at least discussed in the final report text, if only due to the public attention the topics get.

Tyrrell then showed brief slides of two reservoir sites proposed by different members of the BAG. These sites, Green River Lakes (raising) and Warren Bridge (the Narrows) are not studied in depth in the many planning documents Tyrrell had reviewed, and so were suited to review as “new” ideas. Both these projects suffer institutional hurdles, with Green River Lakes creating certain impacts to the Bridger Wilderness and the Narrows site located on popular (and Class 2) stream-fishing water. However, both could serve multiple users and provide late season water. It was emphasized that just because these were the only two reservoirs included in the presentation slides, in no way does that mean the consulting team is recommending them. However, they will be on the long-list.

Tyrrell offered to take comments on the ranking procedure until December 5th. Other suggested projects and / or opportunities will be considered as well, and should be submitted by BAG members accordingly. (A copy of the proposed ranking procedure was mailed to the group for review.)

Significant discussion was held on Wyoming’s apportionment of the Colorado River Basin water, the advisability of out-of-basin transfers, and sale vs. lease vs. do nothing regarding downstream states. Among all the points made, the clear BAG opinion is that Wyoming must protect its full entitlement under the compacts.

Additional Presentations

Ann Strand made a brief presentation. Her primary point was that the State, facing perhaps a significant budget surplus in the coming biennium, should be asked (via the legislature) to appropriate \$100 million for further reconnaissance studies in the Green River Basin. Ms Strand stated that this would “enhance Wyoming’s control of its water”. Additionally, she asked that the BAG reissue a letter similar to the one agreed to last year that stated opposition to de-earmarking of water development funds. Her suggestion was that the BAG also support funding water-related budget items (such as the Wyoming State Engineer's Office and Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality) from the General Fund instead of through the Water Development accounts as is currently done.

Dan Budd suggested that a letter covering all three issues be drafted before the next BAG meeting and reviewed at that time. A second BAG member agreed, and commented that this would give the group time to digest and further discuss the issues.

Closing

The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 p.m.