

Green River Basin Advisory Group
Meeting Record
Rock Springs, WY
March 25, 2003

Welcome

Facilitator Sherri Gregory welcomed the group and the meeting was called to order at 10:04 a.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 8 at the Seedskaadee National Wildlife Refuge.

Water Development Commission Report

Barry Lawrence updated the BAG on the status of the plans for the other basins. The BAG for the Snake/Salt Basins will be meeting 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. The Bear River Basin met March 24 in Cokeville. Open houses for the Platte River Basin will be held this spring. Barry discussed the status of all basin studies, and agendas for future meetings.

John Jackson indicated that four new commissioners had been appointed, including Dan Budd in Division IV. Nineteen new projects were authorized in the Omnibus Water Bill – Planning, including the Bridger Valley Reservoir project study. Twenty-seven projects were authorized in the Omnibus Water Bill – Construction. The two in this basin included the Big Piney Water Supply project, which will add new storage, and a connecting pipeline to Marbleton and the rehabilitation of the Jon's Drop and Four Mile Flume in the Little Snake River drainage. 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.

Upper Green River Joint Powers Board Update

Randy Bolgiano, Green River BAG member, indicated that Sweetwater, Sublette and Lincoln Counties have signed the joint powers water board formation paperwork. Carbon County has withdrawn and Uinta County has not signed at this time. The document has been submitted to the State of Wyoming Attorney General's Office for review. Each of the three counties will appoint three members to the joint powers board. Discussion followed.

Instream Flow Issues and Filings in the Green 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, 35 segments, covering 145 miles, were located in the Green River basin. Priority dates range from 1989 to 2002. The State Engineer has approved 2 of the basin's instream flow rights. Paul described each segment's habitat. Discussion followed.

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, has been upgraded to an extreme drought. As of March 24, 2003, the average snowpack in the Bear River basin was 85%. He emphasized the importance of precipitation in April for the basin. A brief discussion followed

Instream Flow Issues and Filings in the Green River Basin (Cont'd)

The Green River Basin BAG asked to continue the discussion with Wyoming Game and Fish representatives regarding the methodology utilized to review Instream flow applications before being submitted to the WWDC. Discussion centered on Wyoming Game and Fish Department staff versus Wyoming Game and Fish Commissioner roles.

Tree-Ring Based Reconstructions of Precipitation Variability in Southwest Wyoming over the Past 750 Years

Steve Gray, University of Wyoming, indicated that almost all water-resources planning is based on the climate of the past 100 years due to the instrumental records only covering that timeframe. This timeframe may not adequately reflect long-term trends and cycles. However, tree-ring archives provide long duration records. In this area, 174 trees were used in the study, which included piñon and limber pines. The reconstructed precipitation from the tree ring samples indicated that past centuries point to droughts being more pronounced and longer in length. In assessing the instrumental record for the 20th century, it appears that droughts were relatively short with unusually wet conditions in contrast to earlier timeframes. A lengthy discussion followed.

State Engineer's Office Report

Pat Tyrrell and John Shields provided an update on Colorado River programs and issues. These included:

- California's Colorado River Water Use Plan
On January 1, 2003, the annual delivery of Colorado River water to California was reduced from 5.1 million acre-feet (MAF) to 4.4 MAF and

the interim surplus guidelines were suspended due to the state's failure to execute the Quantification Settlement Agreement by December 31, 2002. However, the Imperial Irrigation District was granted its full allotment of Colorado River water by U.S. District Judge Thomas Whelan on March 18. It was ruled that Interior Secretary Norton didn't follow procedure and breached water contracts dating to the Great Depression.

- **Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program**
The Salinity Control Forum at its October 2002 meeting adopted the Triennial Review report of the Colorado River water quality standards for salinity.
- **Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program**
The program is a cooperative effort between the States of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming, federal agencies, water and power users, and environmental groups for endangered species recovery in conformance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The continued program has resulted in the humpback chub and Colorado pikeminnow making progress in gaining population for downlisting from endangered to threatened status.
- **Yuma Desalting Plant**
Minute No. 242 to the 1944 Mexican Water Treaty provides for the treatment of saline agricultural drainage water from the water delivered to Mexico. The Yuma Desalting Plant is the primary measure authorized by Congress to minimize adverse effects on the use of Colorado River water. However, the high annual operation and maintenance costs for the plant make it less than desirable. The USBR is proposing to lease water from willing sellers on a year-to-year basis to provide a replacement water supply to offset the saline agricultural drainage water.
- **Colorado River Delta**
A workshop was held in October 2002 to discuss and develop conservation goals in the lower delta over the next two decades. Species of particular concern include the Yuma Clapper Rail, Totoaba Sea trout, and Vaquita porpoise. Representatives of the basin states were invited to participate as observers.
- **Snowpack and Water Supply Situation**
As of March 24, 2003, the Green River basin had 85-88% of average snowpack. The recent snowstorm in the Rockies/plains helped reduce, but not eliminate the drought and water supply concerns from central Colorado northward to the Canadian border. Jade Henderson, Water Division IV Superintendent, commented on the water supply situation in the basin. It was announced that Loren Smith had been appointed the Water Division III Superintendent.

Discussion followed.

CBM Water Quality Applications to Surface Use

Mickey Steward, Coalbed Methane Coordination Coalition, indicated that the Atlantic Rim, Hanna and Seminoe areas had the most potential for coalbed methane (CBM) development in the basin. The coal is deeper in southwest Wyoming than in the Powder River basin and there will be different issues with the development of CBM in this area, including wildlife management issues, snow and wind related impacts in the winter, and more extensive road development and related dust control issues. Mickey discussed some of the concerns that evolved from CBM development in northeast Wyoming, including the various types of discharges, infrastructure needs, and water quality. Mickey noted that CBM water should be seen as a resource, to be used potentially as a source for stock watering and irrigation, or potentially for a controlled grazing system. A lengthy discussion followed.

The meeting adjourned at 3:44 p.m.