

**Platte River Basin Advisory Group (BAG)  
Meeting Record  
Saratoga, WY  
April 12, 2005**

**Welcome**

Facilitator Dale Gregory welcomed the group and called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. He circulated a sign-in form and asked everyone to introduce him/herself. Mr. Jon Wade, WWDC, introduced attendee Mr. Jeb Steward as a newly-appointed member of the Wyoming Water Development Commission.

**Water Development Commission Report**

**River Basin Planning Update:**

Mr. Barry Lawrence, WWDC, provided a river basin planning update. The following BAG meetings have occurred recently:

March 22	Wind/Big Horn River BAG met in Riverton,
April 4	Bear River BAG met in Evanston,
April 5	Green River BAG met in Marbleton, and
April 6	Snake/Salt River BAG met in Afton.

Two BAG meetings are scheduled for next week, including:

April 20	Powder/Tongue River BAG will meet at the Ucross Foundation, and
April 21	Northeast Wyoming BAG will meet at the Niobrara County Fairgrounds in Lusk.

Mr. Lawrence referred members of the Platte River Basin BAG to the WWDC web site for additional information regarding basin plans.

**Legislative Update:** Mr. Jon Wade, WWDC, updated the BAG regarding the recently completed Wyoming legislative session. He talked about some of the WWDC water projects that were authorized by the Legislature and encouraged BAG members to ask questions

**Framework Water Plan:** Ms. Jodie Pavlica, WWDC, talked about the pending Wyoming Framework Water Plan. She noted that the river basin planning process started about five years ago. The Platte River Basin Plan is the last basin plan in the state to be completed. Now that all of the basins have been completed, WWDC wants to update the statewide framework. The Wyoming Legislature appropriated \$500,000 for this work, and WWDC is in the process of hiring a consultant who will take the information from the individual river basin plans and develop a statewide summary. The resulting framework water plan will then be used as a planning tool. WWDC received two proposals from consultants and is in the process of reviewing those proposals. A consultant will be selected the first week in May. Ms. Pavlica welcomed questions from BAG members.

## **Draft Basin Plan Final Report**

Mr. John Galbreath, Trihydro Corporation, presented the draft Platte River Basin Plan Final Report (Final Report). He requested BAG input both during and after his presentation.

The Final Report is a compilation and condensation of numerous basin plan technical memoranda. Mr. Galbreath expressed appreciation for the cooperative assistance provided by a wide number of groups and agencies, including the BAG. The work plan being completed by Trihydro consists of four major parts: 1) technical memoranda, which will be on the WWDC web site when finalized; 2) the Final Report; 3) the Water Atlas educational tool, which is an internet-based tool with summarized information from the entire basin plan; and 4) a basin Geographical Information System (GIS), which is a digital map-based database.

Mr. Galbreath reviewed the table of contents of the Final Report and everyone at the BAG meeting was given a CD containing the Final Report. He encouraged BAG members to ask questions and provide input. Following a request by a BAG member, the contents and organization of the CD were demonstrated to the BAG. The means by which BAG members could obtain the "Adobe Acrobat" reader required to access CD files was also discussed.

After some discussion, a final date of May 20, 2005 was set for submittal of comments regarding the draft Final Report by BAG members to Trihydro. BAG members were encouraged to submit their comments as soon as possible. Additional discussion related to future availability of full basin plan technical memoranda. Ms. Jodie Pavlica, WWDC, asked BAG members to contact her directly regarding availability of specific basin plan technical memoranda.

The remainder of the Trihydro presentation focused on basin plan calculations of agricultural consumptive use of irrigation water. Basin plan consumptive use of irrigation water calculations are not related to past, ongoing, or future consumptive use calculations associated with Platte River litigation. Trihydro calculated consumptive use in each of the seven Platte River Basin subbasins for a 30-year study period, 1972 through 2001.

BAG members questioned the methodology and accuracy of Trihydro's calculations. Mr. Galbreath assured the BAG that the calculation methodology was based on accepted standards and parameters. During discussion, Ms. Pavlica encouraged BAG members to "step back" and consider the purpose of the river basin planning process – to inventory water resources on a basin-wide scale in order to obtain data about the basin that can be used as a planning tool for the future.

Mr. Galbreath then summarized consumptive use calculation steps, showed calculation results, and provided examples of consumptive use data assessment. He reviewed specific data for the various subbasins, stressing the nature of the relationship between

streamflow gauging data and calculated consumptive use. A discussion with BAG members followed concerning consumptive use calculations in other basin plans and the use to which WWDC intends to apply the results of consumptive use calculations. Other BAG questions and comments pertained to the relationship between consumptive use of flood irrigation water versus sprinkler irrigation water, the validity of calculation results, and consumptive use regulations.

Following Trihydro's presentation, Mr. Ed Harvey of Harvey Economics, Denver (HE), discussed the Final Report economic assessment and future water demand projections. Mr. Harvey referred to the presentation his associate, Mr. Andy Fritsch, had made at the February 2005 BAG meeting. HE's presentation during this meeting included assessment of each of the economic sectors, a forecast of economic and demographic activity in the basin, and projection of future basin water demand.

HE developed high, medium, and low forecast scenarios. The high scenario is the most optimistic view of what is likely to occur in an economic sector over a 30-year time frame. The opposite of that, the low scenario, is the most pessimistic view for a particular water use sector. The mid scenario is considered to be the most realistic view. When developing the assumptions and forecasts for each sector, HE analyzed historic trends and looked at the underlying economic drivers behind the economic sectors.

Agriculture was identified as the largest water-using sector in the Platte River Basin. Cattle production correlates with beef prices, is affected by drought, and has become increasingly efficient. Crop use does not correlate exactly with cattle production because basin hay also feeds out-of-basin cattle.

The average age of ranchers is rising. Therefore, a number of ranchers are beginning to sell their property. This demographic change is going to impact future water use. Some ranchers are selling to corporations, while others are selling their ranches for subdivision into smaller units. The current number of irrigated acres within the basin is over 600,000, largely in hay production. HE projections suggest no change in the quantity of irrigated basin acreage through 2035 under the middle scenario, an increase of about 36,000 acres (5 percent) under the high scenario, and a decrease of 11,000 acres under the low scenario.

HE then considered basin tourism, noting that basin recreation is driven to some extent by visitors from Colorado. Many basin recreational activities are controlled by federal and state agencies. Water-based recreational activities have increased and will continue to increase.

Power generation was discussed, followed by oil and gas production. HE noted that significant coal bed natural gas (methane) production is unlikely in the Platte River Basin but that economic "spill-over" into the basin may occur as a result of development in adjacent basins. HE then addressed traditional mining, including coal, uranium, and other minerals, and manufacturing.

HE discussed the methodology for incorporating all of these sectors into the basin plan economic and demographic forecasts, including employment forecasts and labor force estimates. The aging population in the basin was noted as a significant economic factor. HE projected an average annual future increase in basin employment of about 2,000 jobs. Basin population was projected to increase from about 220,000 people today to about 340,000 in 2035. More detailed information, organized by subbasin, is available in HE technical memoranda.

Discussion with BAG members regarding economic and demographic issues followed, after which HE discussed basin water demand projections for the year 2035. HE described “demand factors” for each key economic sector and application of these factors to derivation of economic and water use projections. HE then summarized current projections regarding future agricultural water use, municipal and rural domestic water use, and industrial water use.

HE discussed recreational water use in the context of issues such as instream flows, minimum reservoir releases, and U.S. Forest Service bypass flows.

Discussion with and questions from BAG members regarding the HE presentation followed.

### **Adjournment**

The BAG meeting adjourned at approximately 1:00 pm.