

**Powder / Tongue Basin Advisory Group
Meeting Record
Sheridan College, Sheridan, WY
December 12, 2001**

Welcome

The facilitators opened the meeting at approximately 6:00 pm and reviewed the agenda to set the expectations for the meeting. Participants introduced themselves by stating their name, affiliation, and place of residence. The facilitators then sent a sign-in sheet around the room.

The facilitators stated that the next BAG meeting, as selected by the BAG members, would be held January 16th in Sheridan. The facilitators explained that following the January BAG meeting, interim BAG meetings would be held every four months. The first such meeting was scheduled for March 20th in Buffalo. The BAG members then selected July 17th in Dayton as the date and location for the next subsequent meeting.

Planning Team Issues

Barry Lawrence spoke to the group on the role of the BAG following plan completion. He indicated that it was critical that the group continue to meet, albeit not as frequent, to continue to discuss the current issues affecting the basin and to provide a two-way street of communication between the residents of the basin and the resource management agencies. Barry then updated the BAG on the status of the plans for the Snake/Salt, Wind/Bighorn, Northeast, Bear, and Green River Basins. He detailed the current activities in each, as well as the invited BAG speakers, and consultant work in progress (if applicable). He then invited interested individuals to attend any or all of the BAG meetings in the other basins.

Status of the Current Drought and Related Issues, Jan Curtis - State Climatologist

Jan explained that the drought that began in Wyoming in the Spring of 2000 has affected the Powder-Tongue, Belle Fourche, and Cheyenne-Niobrara basins to differing degrees. The forecast through the end of May 2002 indicates: 1) a greater than 22 percent chance for above normal precipitation, thus ending the drought for the Powder-Tongue basins; 2) no chance for the drought to end for the Belle Fourche basin; and, 3) a 74 percent chance for no drought conditions to exist for Cheyenne-Niobrara basins. It was noted that the regional forecast is for winter to have a 50-50 percent chance for above-below normal precipitation and temperatures.

In an attempt to quantify drought, Jan indicated that he was developing a drought trigger mechanism that will provide ample lead-time to prepare for drought (i.e., declare emergency, implement water priority access, etc.). The triggers are based on 1 Oct historical reservoir level departures, actual winter snowpack by 1 April, and soil moisture. Using winter and summer precipitation forecasts (6 months in advance) and April's forecast (one month in advance) for prairie grassland growth potential, a template is expected to assist State of Wyoming departments on being more proactive in reacting to a developing drought. If the drought is more than one year long, additional factors are added in order to determine just what amount of precipitation is required to end the drought.

Jan indicated that the Water Resources Data System (WRDS) website at: <http://www.wrds.uwyo.edu> has important real-time and forecast links pertaining to water/snow, soil moisture, reservoir levels, fire potential, and precipitation. The one-stop shopping link is: http://www.wrds.uwyo.edu/wrds/wsc/wy_drought_2001/wy_drought.html

Coalbed Methane Activities Update – Mickey Steward, CBMCC

Mickey reported that the Coalbed Methane Coordination Coalition has been in existence for twelve months and she was in the process of preparing a summary report of their activities. The CBMCC will be narrowing their focus in the future. Mickey further indicated that surface discharges are still a major concern, and this issue will be intensified by the drought. It was noted that dust abatement on county roads was also a significant issue, particularly in the eastern portion of the Powder River Basin.

Consultant Update – Wade Irion, HKM Engineering, Inc.

Wade reported that the consulting team was finalizing technical memoranda and would be making a summary presentation of the final results to the BAG in January. Following that presentation, the final report will be submitted to the WWDC.

Water Quality Issues – Chris Ewers, HKM Engineering, Inc.

Chris presented a summary of the contents of the Water Quality memorandum from Task 5. He noted that the memorandum provides information on ongoing water quality projects, indicates any cooperation or collaboration that might be possible between groups interested in water quality, and points out the locations of water quality work in the basin. Chris highlighted the efforts of the Department of Environmental Quality's Water Quality Division, the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts, and the U.S. Geological Survey as ongoing water-quality programs. He noted that much more data would soon be available from a number of groups interested in coalbed methane produced water.

Legal and Institutional Constraints – Joe Lord, Lord Consulting, LLC

Joe explained that the purpose of the legal and institutional constraints memorandum was to identify and discuss federal and state laws, rules, regulations, and policies that affect water development and management. The presentation addressed the following topics:

- ◆ Federal environmental laws including the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Clean Water Act (CWA);
- ◆ Federal lands and the requirement for Special Use Permits;
- ◆ Wyoming environmental laws including Section 401 (CWA) state certification, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), non-storm water discharges, and Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure (SPCC) plans;
- ◆ Wyoming water law;
- ◆ Yellowstone River Basin Compact; and
- ◆ Wyoming Water Development Program.

Future Water Use Opportunities – Joe Lord, Lord Consulting, LLC

As a review for BAG members, Joe explained the purpose of Task 5 was to identify future water use opportunities that will satisfy present and projected demands, and to rank these opportunities according to the likelihood the project is desirable, functional, and can receive the support required for implementation. He explained that individuals and organizations that need to develop a water supply, would use the ranked short-list of future water use opportunities to satisfy their specific needs. It was emphasized that the ranked short-list would not be used by the WWDC to establish funding priorities.

Joe then explained the process followed to develop and rank the short-list of future water use opportunities. He indicated that the long-list and short-list were distributed to BAG members following the October BAG meeting and comments and suggestions were solicited and received. Assigning weights to the evaluation criteria and scores to each of the projects yielded the ranked short-list. This list was then distributed to BAG members for review. Joe again asked for questions and comments on the ranked short-list.

Following a question and answer session, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 pm.