

Powder/Tongue Basin Advisory Group  
Meeting Record  
Buffalo, Wyoming  
April 7, 2004

**Welcome**

Facilitator Sherri Gregory welcomed the group and the meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.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 7 in Sheridan.

**Water Development Commission Report**

Barry Lawrence updated the BAG on the status of the plans for the other basins. The BAG for the Northeast Wyoming Basins will be meeting April 8 in Beulah. Barry discussed the status of all basin studies, and agendas for future meetings. Handouts from the prior meeting were distributed.

John Jackson indicated that 33 new projects were authorized in the Omnibus Water Bill – Planning. The Statewide Water Research program was appropriated an additional budget of \$200,000. The Small Water Project Program was amended to include irrigation as a purpose and to increase the monetary size of the project from \$50,000 to \$200,000. However, WWDC participation is still limited to a maximum of \$25,000. Funding for the program was increased by \$1,500,000, which is split equally between the Rehabilitation and New Development accounts.

In the Powder/Tongue Basin, the new projects approved were:

Planning

Lake DeSmet Master Plan, Phase 2	\$ 150,000
Mead Creek Ditch	\$ 75,000

Construction

Dayton Well Purchase and Mitigation	\$ 3,000
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More information can be found at:

<http://wwdc.state.wy.us/legreport/2004/approvals.html>

**Wyoming's Drought Status**

Jan Curtis, State Climatologist, presented an overview of the revised Climate Atlas, which is available at: [http://www.wrds.uwyo.edu/wrds/wsc/climateatlas/title\\_page.html](http://www.wrds.uwyo.edu/wrds/wsc/climateatlas/title_page.html), particularly referencing the Drought chapter (<http://www.wrds.uwyo.edu/wrds/wsc/climateatlas/drought.html>). The current drought started in 1999, with 2000 and 2001 being the driest back-to-back years since 1895.

The greatest months for precipitation are May and June. The effectiveness of the moisture falling during this time is critical to emerging plants. Jan went on to say that precipitation in this state is a function of elevation; the lower elevations experience four

times more evaporation than precipitation. Without the mountains to capture the moisture in the form of snow, Wyoming would be a virtual desert. Until March 1, this year looked favorable for improving water supplies. However, higher than usual temperatures coupled with below normal precipitation have eliminated any gain and this year's drought is expected to be extreme to exceptional across much of the state. The current forecast products are available at <http://www.wrds.uwyo.edu/wrds/wsc/dtf/drought.html> .

Jan distributed flyers on the Community Collaborative Rain and Hail Study (CoCoRaHS) and discussed the importance of the data and how it would be used in Wyoming. Funding for this program comes from the Colorado State Climate Office. Further information on this program can be found at <http://www.cocorahs.com/> .

### **Treating Roads and Trails to Improve Watershed Conditions in the South Tongue Drainage**

Dan Scaife, US Forest Service, gave a history of the Woodrock project, which is 10 years old. The project has identified four problem areas, which are threats to healthy forests and grasslands: unmanaged recreation, hazardous fuels buildup, invasive species, and a loss of open space. The area has a historical use of grazing, recreation, and timber harvesting. Proposed actions to improve watershed conditions include closing or relocating existing roads and allowing motorized travel only on designated routes. The impacts of roads on aquatic resources include accelerated erosion, fish/insect habitat impacts, stream channel shape changes, and altered runoff characteristics. Within this drainage, there are 111 miles of open roads, many of which need upgrades or maintenance and are located adjacent to streams. There is an additional 45 miles of user created roads, which are maintained and contribute large amounts of sediment to streams. The proposed alternative is to reduce road miles from 111 to 67, and close all user created roads. Discussion followed.

### **Proposed Amendment to the State Engineer's Office (SEO) Coalbed Methane (CBM) Policy**

John Barnes, SEO, indicated that the first applications for storage of CBM water were received in 1999. The first applications were received from those in the eastern portion of the basin where the landowner was the applicant and owner of the reservoir. As the growth has gone west and north in the basin the operator has become the permittee and owner of the reservoir. Due to water quality concerns, the landowners want the reservoirs removed when the CBM wells are plugged and abandoned. The draft amended policy recognizes the storage of CBM produced water as a beneficial use, with the reservoirs having a 15-year permit with a mandatory breach and reclamation limitation. Extensive discussion followed.

### **Dynamic Watershed Characterization**

Mickey Steward, Coalbed Methane Coordination Coalition, is working with the Lake DeSmet Conservation District on a multiple resource management tool. The tool will help the individual landowner and conservation district deal with resource management issues. This tool is being provided electronically to the conservation district and in

hardcopy to the landowner. The test watershed was the Dead Horse Creek Basin, which covers 98,000 acres. There are three climate stations within the test area, and the time frame utilized was 1971-2000.

Watershed baseline conditions include:

- Climate
- Substrate, i.e. geology, geomorphology
- Surface hydrology, i.e. stream channels, peak flows
- Soils, i.e. percent clay, road suitability, road rutting, and reclamation characteristics
- Aerial photography, i.e. color infrared
- Vegetation, hazards, i.e. earthquakes and tornadoes
- Man-made environment, i.e. roads, pipeline routes, land ownership, existing oil and gas wells, CBM (active, inactive, planned) wells, and permitted facilities, (SEO water wells, NPDES discharge points, DEQ compressor sites)
- Cultural resources, which includes historical data for area.

It was noted that the purpose of the project was to build a usable tool for the landowners. Discussion followed.

The meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.