

Green River Basin Advisory Group
Meeting Record
Sublette County Library, Pinedale WY
April 11, 2000

Welcome

Facilitator Joe Lord welcomed the group and the meeting was opened at 1:15 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.

Planning Team Issues

Mr. Jon Wade described a tour of the lower Colorado River taken recently by he, Jodie Jackson and Barry Lawrence of the WWDC offices. The tour of the lower basin was very informative, and resulted in a photographic journal consisting of about 150 pictures. When catalogued, a presentation of the trip will be made.

The first BAG meetings in Northeast Wyoming will be held on April 26th (Sundance) and 27th (Sheridan). If anyone from the Green BAG is interested, those groups could benefit from your knowledge, and so please consider yourself invited to attend!

The future meeting schedule for the BAG was discussed. The following dates and locations were set:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
May 9, 2000	Baggs	5:00	TBA
June 13, 2000	Marbleton	5:00	TBA
July 11, 2000	Wamsutter	5:00	TBA

Consultant Update

Pat Tyrrell of States West gave a brief project update. A map of the 1999 irrigated lands mapping effort was presented. Which gave a current estimated irrigation of about 318,000 acres compared to 303,000 acres in the earlier 1973 Framework Water Plan. Mr. Tyrrell also indicated he had attended a coordinating meeting with Clarence Kemp of Forsgren Associates in Evanston on April 10th. Because the two plans need to be closely coordinated, these meetings are important.

One BAG member commented at this point that they are still looking for more Wyoming Game and Fish (WGF) attendance and involvement at the meetings. Mr. Tyrrell indicated that the WGF had in fact made a presentation at the previous meeting in Rock Springs (Ron Remick's presentation). Because the WGF has a say in water development they should be a regular attendee, the commenter pointed out that they were not at this meeting.

Mr. Tyrrell then introduced Mr. Jake Strohman, of States West Water Resources Corporation. Mr. Strohman delivered a water quality presentation for the Basin. Mr. Strohman's presentation was given to the WWDC staff for inclusion on the website. This presentation along with others can be viewed online at <http://waterplan.state.wy.us/BAG/green/briefbook/>.

Mr. Strohman, after acknowledging the water quality topics addressed at earlier BAG meetings (e.g. TMDLs, Source Water Assessment and Protection Program) provided a list of water quality related programs administered by state and federal agencies. He also gave a quick review of how water quality was described and dealt with in the 1973 water plan. Groundwater quality will be presented using selected literature sources and agency reports.

After discussing the water quality classification system in the State, Mr. Strohman showed a map on which the stream classifications were illustrated. Also, on this map were USGS surface water gaging stations (active) in the basin. A map of stream classification will be part of the final planning document.

Mr. Strohman then described a product available from the University of Wyoming's Spatial Data Visualization Center (SDVC) which presents aquifer sensitivity and groundwater vulnerability information. Created as a way to estimate the risk of contamination of shallow aquifers by pesticides, the maps show areas of greater, or lower, aquifer vulnerability. As a planning tool, such maps are important in locating improvements, industrial features, or shallow drinking supplies.

Mr. Strohman then described the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality 303d list, which contains currently impaired water bodies. In the Green River Basin, these include Bitter Creek near Rock Springs and Haggerty Creek in the Sierra Madre Range.

Questions of Mr. Strohman follow:

One questioner asked if the stream classification map would be more legible (greater detail) in the final version, to which the response was "yes."

Another commenter noted that the water table problems in Killpecker Creek were not, in his opinion, so much the result of man's activities as the return of the local hydrology to historic patterns.

A questioner wanted clarification as to what was meant by aquifer sensitivity/vulnerability. Briefly, this is the overall risk of contamination of the uppermost aquifer and is a function of depth to the water table, aquifer properties and surface land management practices, among other factors.

Additional Presentations

Green River Groundwater and Alternate Storage Project

The next presentation, made by John Jackson, Jodie Jackson and Mike Besson of the WWDC, concerned the Green River Groundwater Recharge and Alternate Storage Project. John Jackson explained that the project was the result of being added by the legislature, and introduced Ms. Jackson as the Project Manager. Ms. Jackson indicated that the BAG would be involved in determining the scope of the project, and that the intent was not to duplicate work in the ongoing basin planning study.

Mike Besson, WWDC Administrator, explained that this project, budgeted at \$100,000, would be used to expand on areas of deficiency highlighted by the current plan. As such, the project will not be started until most of the results of the current planning project are known.

Questions and comments on this presentation follow:

One commenter, echoing sentiments from many in the room, was concerned that this project was neglectful of the ongoing work of the BAG. The question was raised as to why, with a basin plan ongoing, more money should be spent on water issues that will be, to some extent anyway, addressed in that plan? Mr. Besson's answer was that the project sponsor, Rep. Nick Deegan from Campbell County, wanted downstream states to further see our resolve in managing our water.

Coal Bed Methane Development in the Green River Basin

The next presentation topic was Coal Bed Methane (CBM) Issues in the Green River Basin, by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Rawlins District Office. Presenting on behalf of the BLM were Brenda Vosika Newman (Mining Engineer), Ken Peacock (Hydrologist) and Mary Apple (Public Administration Officer). The project currently proposed is entitled the Atlantic Rim CBM Project, and is located in the Little Snake River Basin, north of Baggs and southwest of Rawlins.

The proposed project has 96 wells, in three pods. Proposed depth of the CBM wells is 800-2,500 feet. There is little data from which to estimate impacts in this area, so the presentation made use of photographs from CBM development in Campbell County. Absent additional data, the BLM is assuming CBM development will progress similarly to that region (in style, if not in quantity). A major difference compared to Campbell County is that this region is mostly public land. Because of this, the BLM assured the BAG that sufficient conditions could be attached to leases and permits to allow orderly development of the resource.

Quality of the produced water is unknown, but regional coal quality water ranges from 750-2,000 mg/l total dissolved solids. Discharge of this quality of water could be accomplished under the cap imposed by the Salinity Control Forum. However, it would have the ironic effect of adding salts to one part of the Green River (Little Snake) Basin while we are spending significant money and effort in other parts to remove salinity.

Mention was made of an earlier CBM project in Sweetwater County pursued about 10 years ago by Triton Oil. Barrett Resources and River Gas have filed permits on nine wells in the same vicinity, but as of yet none have been drilled. The Triton project was conducted on the region defined as Townships 22 and 23 North and Range 102 West.

Questions of the BLM follow:

A questioner asked how the BLM could condone CBM development without hard data to rely on. First, BLM indicated they do not necessarily “condone” the proposed project. The response was that without an exploratory project, data cannot be gathered. There is no firm knowledge of the economic potential of the area. In addition, permission for the work is essentially in place because, following what was done for the Buffalo Area Resource Management Plan, the project is covered under standard oil and gas development language.

Another questioner asked why the BLM is not conducting a statewide Environmental Impact Statement on CBM development. The answer indicated that, other than this project there is not necessarily statewide interest (no proposed development in the Rock Springs District, for example).

Origins of Wyoming’s Water Law, Implications for Today

Ms. Anne MacKinnon made the final presentation. Anne’s presentation dealt with the origins of Wyoming water law. Handouts were provided that contained the essence of her history lesson, and the writings of Elwood Mead, Wyoming’s first State Engineer.

Three points made by Ms. MacKinnon included:

- Mr. Mead saw the laws governing water in Wyoming as establishing a “creative tension” between private and public interests;
- Mr. Mead also saw that our water law had to allow for the transfer of water uses in some fashion, or else the “dead hand” of the pioneers would prevent social and economic change with time;
- Finally, Mr. Mead seemed to want to create a system of law and administration that provided for the overall good of the community.

Anne finished by tying together Wyoming’s water law origin with implications for both today’s allocation of water and the river basin planning process. Furthermore, she indicated that the basin advisory group must be broad based, not just water users, but those with other interests must be brought into the fold. An on going dialogue must continue as more people are brought into the planning Process and issues intersect.

Closing - The meeting was adjourned at 4:35 p.m.