

Powder/Tongue River Basin Advisory Group Meeting Record
Buffalo, WY
March 20, 2002

Welcome

River Basin Planner Barry Lawrence welcomed the group and the meeting was called to order at 6:01 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. Meetings are scheduled July 17 in Dayton and November 20 in Sheridan.

Water Development Commission Report

Barry Lawrence updated the BAG on the status of the plans for the other basins. The BAGs for the Snake/Salt and the Wind/Bighorn Basins will be meeting April 9 in Cody and April 10 in Jackson; whereas the BAG for the Northeast Wyoming Basin will be meeting March 21 in Newcastle. The Bear and Green BAGS met March 18 in Cokeville and March 19 in Lyman. Barry discussed the status of these interim basin studies, and schedule for future meetings.

Jon Wade, River Basin Planning Administrator, indicated both the planning and construction bills were uncontested during the legislative session. 32 planning projects are currently in the consultant selection process. Opportunities in the basin include: Ranchester Master Plan, Ten Sleep/Hyattville Master Plan, York/South Side Ditch Master Plan, Buffalo Tank, Gillette CBM Aquifer Storage and Retrieval, Dayton Groundwater, Pine Haven Well, Sheridan Hydropower, Lake DeSmet Master Plan, Wright Well, Sleepy Hollow, and Town of Upton Tank projects. Also, supplemental funding of \$1 million for the Groundwater Grant Program was received.

State Engineer's Office Report

Sue Lowry, Interstate Streams Engineer, indicated the Yellowstone Compact Commission met December 4, 2001. At a January 16, 2002 meeting, the State of Montana raised questions regarding the enlargement of Tongue River Reservoir and resultant water supply flows. A meeting of the North Platte Decree Committee, which includes Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming, and the Bureau of Reclamation will be held April 12. Due to the additional reporting of consumptive use and total numbers of acres under irrigation required as part of the North Platte River settlement, 7 new people, mainly field people, have been added to the staff of the State Engineer's Office.

Water Resources Data System Report

Robin Gray gave a brief overview of the current activities of the Water Resources Data System (WRDS). She also reported that as of March 18, the Snotel average for entire state ranges from 57% in Laramie County to 84% in the

Yellowstone area. The snowpack average for the Powder/Tongue River area is 82%.

The state drought task force is meeting March 19. New online data includes a monthly climate report, drought monitor/studies, and links to other regional and national data sources. Of special interest is:

- Surface water supply index for March, which ranges from -2.25 to -3.9. Drought maps and forecast products are also available.

The water library is acquiring part of State Engineer's Office collection. The 2002 municipal system survey study will be available in another month or so. The Green River Basin report, including the GIS products, is 99% online with the Bear River Basin report due to be online by mid-April.

Coalbed Methane Activities Update

Mickey Steward, Coalbed Methane Coordination Coalition, summarized the responsibilities of county commissioners and conservation districts with regard to the evolving environment and its capacity. Consideration must be given not only to a town's physical structure but also those associated with coalbed methane and oil industry needs, such as railroads, pipelines, and roads. Interim enhancement, such as wind breaks and trees to utilize water being developed and help with noise pollution from generators, are measures that can be utilized to mitigate such development. Total containment reservoirs for CBM discharge water are being developed, and must be managed. Mickey stressed the need for long range planning, which identifies all those involved and develops programs and related funding to manage the impact of CBM development.

Lake DeSmet Update

Bruce Yates of the Lake DeSmet Coalition indicated Lake DeSmet was acquired from Texaco on February 12, 2001. Normal operation of the reservoir is 208,000 AF, however, currently the reservoir operates at 175,000 AF capacity. Total commitments from storage are 87,445 AF. No revenues are received from these commitments and income from Campbell, Johnson, and Sheridan Counties is \$25,000-\$30,000 annually. The coalition is trying to offset expenses through water sales, but the operating plan needs to be reconfigured, which is one of the purposes of the WWDC Lake DeSmet Master Plan Study.

Prairie Dog Project Report

Dave Engels of EnTech, Inc. reported on the Prairie Dog Creek Watershed Master Plan, Level I study. He indicated the watershed is comprised of water from the South Piney and North Piney Creeks. Major study tasks involved the inventory and description of the watershed, development of a watershed management plan, and an economic analysis/financing plan. Principal areas of investigation included irrigation delivery systems, coal bed methane, water quality, and channel morphology. Major irrigation delivery systems included the

Prairie Dog Water Supply, Piney Cruse Creek Ditch and Meade-Coffeen Ditch Companies. Water quality testing was performed to determine impacts due to human activities and transbasin diversion systems, and to obtain baseline information to determine possible future impacts due to coalbed methane development. Turbidity, fecal coliform bacteria, total suspended solids, and sodium adsorption ratio were the main items tested.

Basically the watershed is generally in good condition, but problem areas, such as various diversions and delivery systems, channel instability, coalbed methane surface discharge and water quality issues with fecal coliform were detected. Dave suggested potential solutions to problem areas, potential funding agencies, and the need to form a public entity, such as an irrigation district, conservancy district, or watershed improvement district.

Three Horses Watershed Management Plan Update

An update to the Three Horses Watershed Plan, Level I study was presented by Dave Engels, EnTech, Inc. The study area includes the Spotted Horse Creek, Wild Horse Creek and Dead Horse Creek watersheds in Campbell, Johnson, and Sheridan Counties. The scope of work analyzes the effect of current or proposed coal bed methane (CBM) development on the 3 watersheds. At this point in the study, identified problems exist with soil erosion and reclamation, CBM discharges, and access. Dave further stated that CBM discharges have made changes in vegetation, created channel erosion, and caused destruction of meadows from spreader dikes. Possible watershed management plan alternatives include regionalized water treatment, piping to other rivers, reinjection, and impoundments for evaporation of water.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:43 p.m.