

Henry's Fork Watershed Council Tuesday, May 10, 2016

Participants began registering at 8 a.m. at the Marriott SpringHill in Rexburg.

Brandon Hoffner of the Henry's Fork Foundation (HFF) called the meeting to order. Introductions were made with the 30 people in the circle. An additional five people signed in and joined the meeting after introductions.

Brandon called for 2 minutes of silence to open community building and asked participants to use part of that time to reflect on what a positive and effective meeting might look like, what they hope to gain out of the meeting, and what they can do throughout the meeting to make that happen.

Community Building

Brandon explained the agenda for the meeting, saying that we will hear about some of the conservation-related efforts locally and will discuss the direction of conservation efforts in our watershed in general. We'll also have time to discuss the Basin Study and brainstorm ideas on how we might regain some momentum.

Jon Flinders of the Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game (IDFG) announced that IDFG will be conducting electrofishing surveys on the Henry's Fork this year at Mack's Inn, Box Canyon, and Stone Bridge. Tom Bassista announced that IDFG's Upper Snake Region launched a Facebook page. He also mentioned that Eric Anderson would be conducting sage-grouse research with the BLM in the Sand Creek Desert, and that could lead to a potential presentation for a Watershed Council meeting. Finally, IDFG would be hosting an outdoor youth skills day from 9-2 at Beaver Dick Park this coming Saturday.

Mike Rasmussen of Egin Bench Canals announced that they have recharged close to 2,000 acre-feet of water this year under mitigation agreements.

Brandon wrapped up community building by saying that it will be good for Watershed Council participants to hear about the groups who will be presenting today. This will give us the opportunity to look for common ground and to learn about the tools others are using to improve conditions and maintain the natural resources we enjoy in our watershed.

Island Park Preservation Coalition

Ken Watts, Chairman and Island Park resident

This effort began with a community meeting in September of 2015 to discuss a path forward related to a potential National Monument in Island Park. Folks wanted to draft legislation to prevent a National Monument and keep the area the way it is. A working group was formed and first met in October of that year. They learned they must balance multiple use, conservation, and the desire to maintain and enhance the area. Thus far they've created a vision and mission statement, consulted and toured with congressional staff, expanded the coalition to be more inclusive, identified a list of outstanding and remarkable features they want to protect, studied other legislation, prepared a reference manual, established a bank account, mailbox and officers, defined their area of interest, and setup a website and Facebook page. Currently, the group is developing a critical path schedule, working on developing sub-groups, and will soon start writing legislative topics and statements.

What's the goal of the legislation you're creating? Multiple-use with conservation. Want to keep relationships with agencies as they are, but add conservation.

Do you envision the group continuing as a group regardless of or after the legislation? Yes, as an advisory group or committee.

Might be interesting to compare National Monument legislation to what you might want to do. It might help the group better define the issues they have with a National Monument.

How do you engage non-full time or summer-only residents of Island Park? We may have another community meeting or reach out via Facebook. *Neighborhood community meetings (HOA) might be helpful.*

High Divide Collaborative

Michael Whitfield, Executive Director, Heart of the Rockies Initiative

We live in a landscape that is dominated by public land, but private land is the key to conservation. The High Divide is a landscape located in southwest Montana and eastern Idaho, connecting the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem to the Crown of the Continent. This area is threatened by development, loss of public access, climate change, and habitat fragmentation. There is also a mistrust of the federal government, but a need to think across boundaries and develop shared goals. The High Divide collaborative is about building collaboration, building capacity and opportunities for conservation, and developing shared goals. In terms of scale, it can be thought of as 10 Watershed Councils rolled into one, but that's also the challenge – how to roll that collaboration up to a larger scale. The High Divide collaborative came together in 2012, and at its latest meeting, there were approximately 120 people in attendance. The Collaborative takes an “all lands, all hands” approach that focuses on building trust and providing science to support planning. The collaborative has a set of eight goals that all participants agree on and workshops to evaluate and dive deeper into each of those goals. So far, almost one million acres have been conserved or restored. Funding for these conservation projects has come from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), with \$16 million for FY2016 and the promise of \$14.5 million for FY2017. The Collaborative is currently submitting a request for an additional \$20 million for FY2018. LWCF money comes from off-shore drilling mitigation funds. Lessons learned thus far include the need to work collaboratively, engage stakeholders early, and think across boundaries. The group has also learned there is a need for good science, that results matter, and that it's important to celebrate success.

So, the funding goes to the federal government? Yes, funding goes to one of the four land management agencies (USFS, BLM, FWS, or NPS), but they've turned over the decision-making to us to determine which projects the money is spent on.

Henry's Fork Legacy Project

Dennis Glick, Director, Future West

Ten years ago, Larry Timchak (retired Forest Supervisor for the Caribou-Targhee NF) invited Dennis to a small meeting focused on how to better coordinate conservation efforts in the Henry's Fork Watershed. This became a network of local organizations dedicated to helping people in the Henry's Fork area conserve their rural landscapes, rural lifestyles, and unique natural resources. HFLP's three key program areas are: providing landowners with resources and financial incentives to protect working farms and ranches and the fish and wildlife they sustain, helping people conserve wildlife and reduce human/wildlife conflicts, and providing information and tools to help the community guide new growth

and development. The group was initiated in 2006-2007 and modeled after the Blackfoot Challenge. The original focus was on land conservation, and the group aimed to help organizations and agencies like the Nature Conservancy, Teton Regional Land Trust, and Idaho Fish and Game be more strategic in their efforts. In 2009, the group expanded its focus to include living with wildlife and land and natural resource planning. In 2011, the group created communications materials, and in 2013, three subcommittees were formed: land conservation, living with wildlife, and land use and public land management. From 2013-2015, the group created articles for IP News and created a website. In 2015, the group identified ITD's US-20 redesign project as a focus for a potential project. The group is now developing suggestions for ITD to use in their redesign to reduce wildlife-vehicle conflict. The pendulum swung until the group was almost solely focusing on that effort. Now the group is refocusing in an effort to find balance between this project, other subcommittees and general information sharing.

Group Discussion on the Direction of Conservation Efforts in the Henry's Fork Watershed

Ruth Shea commented on the overlap between these groups. Each group comes at it from different perspectives, but in some ways are trying to do the same things. Is there a way to find a better division of labor and avoid redundancy?

Dennis Glick commented that IPPC and the High Divide collaborative are both fairly recent and the efforts complement each other, but we do need to better coordinate.

Ken Watts commented that his group, IPPC, has been inviting guest speakers to learn what else is going on.

Michael Whitfield commented that the High Divide collaborative is not intended to supplant local efforts. It's a large-scale effort to bring folks together, work at the scale of large landscapes, and bring in more resources than more locally based efforts can.

Kim Trotter commented that it could be related to trust. It seems there is a citizens group and a conservation organizations group. HFLP hasn't done as much to successfully get citizen involvement, and it needs support from local residents to get traction.

Garth Blanchard commented that the value of our public lands is common to all of us. We might have different ideas on who/how they should be managed. He also commented that private lands tend to get roped off and it can be very constricting living in places that don't have much public lands. We have to maintain our public lands.

Water Outlook

Mike Beus, Upper Snake Water Operations Manager, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

As of May 8, the upper Snake reservoir system was at 83% of capacity, which is 112% of the average for the date and 99% of contents on this date last year. However, there are two major differences between the two years. First, April 1 snow-water equivalent (SWE) at most SnoTel sites was much higher this year than in 2015, and second, by this time in 2015, nearly all of the snowpack had already melted, whereas this year, a substantial amount of snow remains to be melted, especially at higher elevations. For example, at the Lewis Lake Divide SnoTel site, maximum SWE was a little over 30 inches this year, compared with about 22 inches in 2015. Furthermore, half of the maximum SWE remains in the snowpack right now, compared with less than 15% of the maximum remaining on this date last year. Nonetheless,

snowmelt has been much earlier than average this year, especially at the lower and middle elevations that dominate the Henry's Fork basin. The melt rate at the White Elephant site indicates that inflow to Island Park Reservoir has already reached its peak for the season, barring a large rain event. Recall that in 2015, heavy rains dubbed the "May Miracle" added a substantial amount of water to the reservoir system in the second half of May, saving what would have otherwise been a very poor water-supply situation. The May rains last year not only increased streamflow but also greatly reduced irrigation demand, which had been extremely high since April 1. This year's irrigation demand started out much lower than last year, more in line with average.

In summary, current reservoir-system content is only 27,000 ac-ft lower than last year, and forecast streamflow in the Snake River at Heise is 200,000 ac-ft higher. Despite early snowmelt this year, more snow remains to be melted, and above-average precipitation is forecast for May and June. We hope to fill the reservoir system, but the chances of doing so are only around 50%.

A Path Forward for the Henry's Fork Basin Study Alternatives

Discussion facilitated by Brandon Hoffner

The Henry's Fork Watershed Council served as the stakeholder workgroup for the Henry's Fork Basin Study, which was conducted between mid-2010 and early 2014 by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Funding for the \$800,000 study was contributed equally between Reclamation and the Idaho Water Resource Board. The Watershed Council and its participants thoroughly vetted and reviewed the study, which was completed by Reclamation's Pacific Northwest Regional office in May 2014. Toward the end of the study's completion, a small subgroup of Council participants met a few times to discuss a path for moving study alternatives forward toward implementation. However, the "path forward" effort stalled, as the Idaho Water Resource Board turned its attention to more immediate needs across the state and the Basin Study itself required over a year of review at the national level. The Basin Study was approved and published in its final form in June 2015.

It now appears that a local effort led by the Henry's Fork Watershed Council provides the best chance of moving forward toward implementations of some of the alternatives in the Basin Study, as well as some other complementary actions that were not specifically analyzed in the Basin Study but could improve water management in the Henry's Fork watershed. Toward that end, we are recruiting volunteers who are willing to serve on a subcommittee that will explore options for the path forward toward implementation and report back periodically to the full Council.

A number of people volunteered to serve on the subcommittee, and several other people not in attendance were suggested. Brandon will follow up with potential subcommittee members and schedule a meeting to be held in June.

Community Building and Wrap Up

Brandon asked for one minute of silence to wrap up the meeting before closing comments and announcements.

Melissa Muradian appreciated today's meeting and agenda, and the opportunity to hear about these groups and their mission statements.

Rob Van Kirk said that a new Teton Valley Water Users group had a meeting with FMID recently to discuss ways to improve water management in the Valley and basin-wide, and someone commented that

we should've done that 20 years ago. In fact, we did start thinking about water-management actions such as managed aquifer recharge 20 years ago, but then had 5 wet years in a row and forgot about it.

Brandon Hoffner announced they he attended a facilitation training and learned that the basics of how HFWC already operates is quite effective.

Rob Van Kirk adds that subcommittees have worked for HFWC in the past, which is why it was thought it might be a good structure to move forward on discussions of the Basin Study. The Idaho Water Resource Board is swamped with requests for funding a variety of water-management projects from around the state, so the Board is trusting us to develop and bring it a proposal that addresses water-management needs in our watershed.

Amy Verbeten appreciates that a lot of the work being done in conservation is moving from developing a plan and then bringing in partners to true collaboration, in which stakeholders identify issues and working on coming up with a plan together. It's rewarding, but really hard. She is excited the Basin Study is moving in that direction.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00.