

**Meeting Notes  
Henry's Fork Watershed Council  
January 14, 2014**

**The meeting was held at the Springhill Marriott in Rexburg. Sign in began at 8 a.m. and the meeting started at 8:30 a.m. with introductions and community building led by Brandon Hoffner (Henry's Fork Foundation) and Dale Swensen (Fremont-Madison Irrigation District).**

**Community Building**

**Brandon welcomed everyone (40 people in the circle). After two minutes of silence, Brandon asked if the February meeting could be moved one week to Feb. 18 to avoid a conflict with an AFS meeting. By a show of hands, most agreed.**

**Art Hill with the BOR announced he has taken a new job in Wyoming, starting Jan. 27 in Cheyenne. He said he had "a great time here" but the move will put him closer to family.**

**USGS River Gage Station Operation**

**Jake Jacobsen, hydrologist with USGS**

**USGS maintains 130 stream gages in western Wyoming and Idaho, including the Henry's Fork, Salmon, Big Wood, and main Snake River downstream to Twin Falls. Data from the gages is available online at**

**<http://waterdata.usgs.gov/id/nwis/rt>**

**Jake started by describing his work: "We measure water. . . . (but) we had a hard time last summer figuring out how much water was flowing out of Island Park Reservoir." He explained how gage readings are taken and the factors that impact them, such as discharge, stage (gage height), water temperature, velocity, and aquatic plant growth. And because readings are only taken periodically and not constantly, rating curves and averages have to be factored in to determine base ratings and actual flows.**

**Aquatic growth takes up space and artificially raises the elevation of the water, and the waving motion of the plants can distort the equipment readings. He showed charts showing the effect of aquatic growth as it changes throughout the season, increasing during warm weather and dying back when the temperature drops. The amount of water in the channel is the same, but the gage height reading is different because of the macrophytes. They are working on methods of predicting macrophyte growth and standardizing the readings.**

**Henry's Fork Water Quality Monitoring**

**Rob Van Kirk, Henry's Fork Foundation**

**Drought management discussions for the year began in June in anticipation of water levels dropping to 10,000 acre feet in Island Park Reservoir by fall.**

**Concerned about the amount of sediment that might be released into the river below the dam if water levels dropped that low, the HFF implemented a water**

**quality monitoring program, funded in part by the Bureau of Reclamation. The Foundation plans to present a three-year monitoring project to the Watershed Council to the WIREd.**

**Fine sediment can be mobilized and released when any reservoir is drawn down to low levels. That can reduce spawning success and reduce the abundance of aquatic invertebrates on which the fish feed. Excessive turbidity reduces the efficiency of photosynthesis of the aquatic plants, thus reducing the foraging success of the trout. Phosphorus, a limiting nutrient, can be transported by fine particles.**

**The last time Island Park Reservoir was drawn down far enough to transport large amounts of sediment downstream was 1992, when 50,000 to 100,000 tons of sediment were carried into the Henry's Fork.**

**The objectives of the 2013 study were to compare turbidity, phosphorus, and sediment concentrations upstream and downstream of Island Park Reservoir, develop a statistical relationship between turbidity and suspended sediment concentration, analyze the relationship between turbidity and reservoir volume, calculate sediment load in the river downstream of the dam, and compare conditions during late-summer 2013 with those that occurred in 1992. Sampling locations were Coffee Pot, upstream of Island Park Reservoir, and at three locations across the channel immediately downstream from Island Park Dam. Samples were taken four times a week. Turbidity was analyzed by HFF in Ashton. Sediment and phosphorus samples were sent to the BOR lab in Boise for testing.**

**Sediment and phosphorus concentrations were very low at Coffee Pot and 10 times higher below the dam. The phosphorus was not coming from the sediments but in soluble form in the water. Phosphorus comes from the Centennial Mountains where there is a known geological source. It enters Henry's Lake along Duck and Rock creeks, and Island Park Reservoir by way of Sheridan and Icehouse creeks.**

**Sediment input to the reservoir was 166 tons or 2.5 tons per day. Output was 718 tons or 11 tons per day, compared to 1,000 tons per day in 1992. That was a net output of 551 tons from mid-August to mid-October.**

**Henry's Fork Basin Study Update  
Bob Schattin, Bureau of Reclamation**

**Bob reported on the status of the basin study. The Draft Final Report should be posted to the web Feb. 7, followed by a 20-day comment period and public meetings. It will be released as a technical report that is fact-based and technically sound. The goal is to achieve broad stakeholder support. The basin study will not contain recommendations. A separate document, currently referred to as "The Path Forward", will be developed and presented by the Idaho Water Resources Board as a recommendation to the Legislature and the governor on how to proceed, based on the information in the basin study.**

**The latest information to be added was the comparison of alternatives that looks at the viability of new dams at Lane Lake, Spring Creek, Moody Creek, Upper**

***Badger Creek and Teton River, raising the water levels at Island Park and/or Ashton reservoirs, and automated canals. One possibility at Island Park is to increase flood routing capacity so that the water surface can be raised without raising the dam, allowing 30,000 af to be set aside from flood surcharge and used as active storage.***

***The costs of each alternative were compared along with the projected impacts. The study also looks at water rights, suggested environmental flows, water delivery, and climate change based on the last 30 years of data. Historically, Island Park fills 80 percent of the time.***

***Different options for use of the stored water were also considered. One option is to deliver all new water from Island Park Reservoir or any of the other storage projects through the Henry's Fork to be used downstream of the watershed instead of using groundwater, thereby reducing withdrawal from the aquifer.***

***MODSIM, a hydrologic model, was used to assess reservoir fill under climate change scenarios. Generally, climate models predict more runoff, so reservoirs will fill faster in the future.***

***Deficit irrigation was studied and found to be applicable in areas where water is chronically short. In short water years some farmers with storage water in the Henry's Fork basin actually practice deficit irrigation. Automated canals allow more precise control over diversion, particularly later in the season, when most canals are diverting storage. The option is not as cost effective as thought. It won't change the use of the water, but will save some storage water.***

***The final report will outline the development of alternatives:***

- ***Clear descriptions of existing conditions***
- ***Cost estimates of alternatives***
- ***Impact to water budget (needs)***
- ***Potential climate change impacts***
- ***Benefits and impacts***
- ***Key points from evaluation and feedback***
- ***Additional limits of analysis***
- ***Potential implementation***

***Asked what impact raising Island Park Reservoir would have on low-lying septic systems, in particular on Bill's Island, Bob said that is an issue that needs to be noted.***

***He said his favorite alternative is to expand the size of the tunnel at Island Park Dam to increase ability to deliver flood inflow, thereby allowing current flood surcharge space to be used to store irrigation water.***

***Island Park Caldera Comprehensive Resource Assessment  
Jan Brown, special projects director for Fremont County P&Z***

***Jan said the caldera monument study has now become the Island Park Caldera Comprehensive Resource Assessment: A Future's Study for Sustainable Development. In the way of background, she explained that in February 2012,***

**Fremont County received \$1.5 million from HUD to study sustainable development for four counties – Fremont, Madison and Teton, Idaho, and Teton, Wyoming – and write a model development code that includes a multi-modal assessment and development strategy, fair housing assessment, economic development planning, and a regional recycling feasibility study. The four-county group is called the Western Greater Yellowstone Consortium.**

**During the Bush administration, then-Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne directed Jim Caswell to study the possibility of a Mesa Falls National Monument under the Antiquities Act. The original study area included the Ashton and Island Park ranger districts, basically everything north of Ashton and Warm River. Fremont County Commissioners learned about the proposal when Idaho Statesman reporter Rocky Barker wrote an article in early 2013.**

**Jan said she began getting calls and led several on a tour of Island Park in summer 2013 with a monument designation in mind. She said Caswell is not giving up on the idea, and Fremont County P&Z Administrator Tom Cluff went to the commissioners about getting involved in the beginning of any process. The county has applied to HUD to use \$150,000 of the grant on a caldera assessment. That addendum has not yet been approved by HUD.**

**Jan has asked the Watershed Council to WIRE the process for resource assessment at its Feb. 18 meeting. Jim Caswell and Steve Woodruff of the National Wildlife Federation have agreed to attend and launch the study with a history of the national monument discussion. She proposed a schedule for discussion at Watershed Council meetings throughout 2014, starting March 11 with a winter recreation component. The rest of the proposed 2014 schedule includes:**

- **April 8 in Ashton – Land use and land manage analysis**
- **May 13 in Rexburg – Water management and aquatic resources**
- **June 10 in Island Park – Built environment/public works and infrastructure**
- **July 8 in Ashton – Summer recreation/transportation issues**
- **Aug. 12-13 in Island Park – Terrestrial resources – timber, range, wildlife**
- **Sept. 9 in Ashton – Cultural and historical values/community vitality**
- **Oct. 14 in Rexburg – Open date if needed**
- **Nov. 18 in Ashton (?) – Watershed Annual Conference/final recommendations**

**The Watershed Council won't be the only opportunity for public participation. Online resources will be used, as will surveys.**

**Jeff Patlovich asked to see the entire HUD grant published online so the public can see what is involved. He said he had made three public requests for the information. Jan assured him all information regarding the study, including the grant documents, will be posted at [www.sustainableyellowstone.org](http://www.sustainableyellowstone.org).**

**She was also asked whether the process might be opening a Pandora's box, that it "might not be as simple as we might think." There may be other forests in the**

**greater Yellowstone area with similar arguments for a national monument surrounding the whole park.**

**John Millar of Rexburg raised concerns that some of the organizations pushing for a monument are opposed to hunting, and hunting is important to the Island Park economy. It was remarked that the Forest Service has not received a request for input. Jan said the first requests went out to the regional forester.**

**She pointed out, "There is not a proposal on the table. No pre-determined outcome." By getting involved now, "we won't be surprised when some sort of proposal surfaces."**

**Rob Van Kirk asked if any thought has been given to an administration component.**

**"If we do anything different than what we do now, how would it be managed and by whom?"**

**Jan said she wants to let a contract for a study of the "land management plan of all four areas, where they are congruent and where they are not." She said she thinks Caswell would want some sort of coordinated shared management.**

#### **Wrap-Up and Community Building**

**Nearly 50 people sat in the circle for the wrap-up after observing a minute of silence. Brandon thanked everyone "for a room full of folks" and the BOR for using the council as a venue for the basin study.**

**Jan said anyone who wants to be on a subcommittee should contact her. Mini-grants of \$2,500 are available for each subcommittee. (Wasnt her offer \$2,500 per organization for their people to attend?)**

**Lyle Swank thanked Art Hill for his years of service.**

**Brandon announced the native trout subcommittee would meet in the same room at 1 p.m.**

**The video of the 2013 Watershed Conference will be posted on You Tube when the final version is done.**

**Adjourned at 11:49 a.m.**