

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

The meeting was held at the Spring Hill 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 Dale Swensen (Fremont-Madison Irrigation District) and Brandon Hoffner (Henry's Fork Foundation).

Community Building

About 40 people were present in the opening community-building session. Several people expressed thanks to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) for leading the Henry's Fork Basin Study process and producing a useful final report that incorporated stakeholder input. Others expressed appreciation for the Watershed Council's facilitation of constructive and respectful discussions about water management.

Upper Snake River Water Supply Outlook: Mike Beus, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
The 2013-2014 winter started with very low reservoir carryover from 2013 and below-average precipitation. Since February, precipitation has been well above average over most of the upper Snake River basin, with the highest amounts in the Snake headwaters, resulting in above-average snow water equivalent in most basins, including the Henry's Fork. However, some of the basins to our west and south did not receive enough late-winter precipitation to even reach average. Low reservoir carryover and a gradual melt has left the reservoir system still only at 64% of capacity, despite the above-average snowpack. American Falls Reservoir has been steady at around 95% of capacity for several weeks. Some space was evacuated in Palisades Reservoir for flood control purposes, and it is now filling slowly. Jackson Lake is filling more rapidly and remains low enough that flood control operations will not be necessary there. Island Park Reservoir was approaching full last week, and outflow was increased at that time, based on a two-week weather outlook that called for warm temperatures. However, the weather cooled, which reduced inflow and resulted in a slight decrease in the reservoir contents. Outflow from Island Park is being reduced to stabilize the reservoir level and allow it to fill when inflow increases again. Mike briefly summarized ongoing discussions among water managers and stakeholders about whether more water should be delivered from Island Park Reservoir during dry years such as 2013 to avoid drawing down American Falls as low as it was during September of 2013. As a percentage of volume, American Falls was drawn down to less than 5% of capacity, whereas Island Park was drawn down to only about 25% of capacity. However, American Falls Reservoir is almost 10 times as large as Island Park, so drawing down Island Park further would have negligible effect on American Falls but would have large negative consequences for water users and streamflow on the Henry's Fork.

Current forecasts for May-July runoff call for 133% of normal in the Snake River at Heise but only about 87% of normal in the Henry's Fork at Island Park. This Henry's Fork forecast falls between those of 2000 and 2009 but is well above the runoff observed in 2013. Island Park Reservoir is expected to fill over the next few weeks, and good supply throughout the basin should limit the need for large delivery of storage later in the summer. Carryover in Island Park is expected to be high, resulting in good winter flows in the Henry's Fork during 2014-2015. Flood control is expected to determine management of Palisades Reservoir through June, and projected storage availability will be sufficient to deliver 185,000 acre-feet from the rental pool to the lower Snake River for salmon flow augmentation and an additional 20,000 acre-feet from uncontracted space in the upper Snake reservoir system. Over the next six weeks, day-to-day operations and river flows will be determined in large part by the weather. Extended periods of very warm weather and/or significant rain on existing snowpack could accelerate melt and increase streamflow and rate of fill in Jackson and Palisades. At the same time, significant precipitation in the valleys can limit irrigation demand, allowing a greater proportion of supply to contribute to reservoir fill. Mike concluded by saying that in a spring when snowpack is above average but reservoir carryover is low, "timing is everything."

Final Report on Henry's Fork Basin Study: Bob Schattin, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Bob announced completion of the Henrys Fork Basin Study, even though the final version will not be posted on Reclamation's website until approval from higher levels within the agency. The Basin Study will be presented to the Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB) on May 27, and Bob anticipates a formal press release and posting of the study on the website around that time. The study was funded jointly by IWRB and Reclamation. The Henry's Fork Watershed Council served as the stakeholder workgroup for the study.

The final document presented and analyzed 12 alternatives that could improve water supply and/or water management within the Basin. These included five possibilities for new storage, expansion of Ashton and Island Park reservoirs, managed aquifer recharge, water marketing, canal automation, canal piping, and demand reduction. The Basin Study itself is a technical, factual document that compares the alternatives based on total cost, effect on water supply/budget, cost per unit of water stored or saved, benefits and impacts, and stakeholder input. The study also incorporated potential effects of climate change and issues associated with implementation of each of the alternatives. However, the study did not make any recommendations.

Reclamation received 64 pages of comments on the draft final document. These generally fell into four categories: technical issues, Teton Dam opinion, input from the State (IWRB and Idaho Department of Water Resources), and internal Reclamation policy. Technical comments addressed issues ranging from accuracy of background information on geology to economic analysis of demand

reduction and deficit irrigation. Ninety-five percent of the comments specific to Teton Dam expressed opposition to rebuilding Teton Dam. However, many of these comments were received as a form letter originating from the same source. The State recommended distinguishing alternatives that would create “new water” from those that would manage existing water differently and is interested in storage in general because it creates new water. Reclamation Policy required analysis of climate change and potential strategies to mitigate its impacts.

Bob concluded his presentation with a brief overview of the Island Park expansion alternative, which proposes to increase the water surface elevation at full pool but would not increase the height of the dam itself. Currently, Reclamation is authorized to store about 30,000 acre-feet of water above the reservoir’s normal full pool (an additional three feet in water-surface elevation), and the expansion alternative would use this existing surcharge space for operational storage. However, this will require increasing flood routing capacity at the dam. The Basin Study includes eight different possibilities for accomplishing this.

Idaho Water Resource Board perspective on Basin Study, and Next Steps: Cynthia Bridge-Clark, Idaho Department of Water Resources
Cynthia presented the IWRB’s perspective on the Henry’s Fork Basin Study, starting with an overview of water management issues throughout the entire Snake River basin and the direction of the IWRB in addressing these issues. The single largest basin-wide issue is declining storage in the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) and associated reduction in discharge from the aquifer, particularly at Thousand Springs. The ESPA is the sole source of drinking water for many cities and most rural residents in the Eastern Snake Plain, partially or fully irrigates 1.2 million acres of agricultural land, and supports food processing, aquaculture, and river flows. Aquifer storage and spring discharge have been declining since the 1950s from a combination of decreased recharge incidental to surface irrigation, increased groundwater pumping, and drought.

From a water rights and management standpoint, the Snake River is divided into “two rivers” at Milner Dam, which is the downstream-most point of diversion in the upper Snake system. The majority of water that spills over Milner Dam is available for new appropriation above Milner; spring discharge and irrigation return are the primary sources of flow in the “second river,” downstream of Milner. Thus, the operational objective for the upper Snake system is “zero spill at Milner.” However, as formalized in the Swan Falls Agreement, flow in the Snake River at the Murphy gage must be at least 3,900 cfs during irrigation season and 5,600 cfs the remainder of the year. Because of the “zero spill” policy, the minimum flows at Swan Falls are maintained largely by Thousand Springs discharge, emphasizing the importance of increasing ESPA storage and discharge. Other basin-wide issues include the need to deliver 427,000 acre-feet of water annually from the Snake River upstream of Hell’s Canyon for salmon flow augmentation, providing water to support continued population growth and

economic development, and mitigating effects of climate change, particularly the trend toward less snow and more rain.

To address these and other issues, IWRB is committed to increasing ESPA storage and discharge through managed recharge, replacement of groundwater irrigation with surface water, reduction in groundwater use, and cloud-seeding. The IWRB is also in the process of addressing aquifer management issues on the Wood River, Mountain Home Air Force Base, Rathdrum Prairie, and the Treasure Valley. Potential new surface-water storage projects include Galloway Dam on the Weiser River and expansion of existing reservoirs at Arrowrock and Island Park. During the 2014 session, the Idaho legislature approved the Governor's request for \$15 million to fund various water projects, including further study of Island Park Reservoir enlargement and construction of aquifer recharge infrastructure.

The IWRB will review the storage alternatives in the Henry's Fork Basin Study and prioritize those alternatives, along with others from around the state, based on cost and on physical, social, and environmental factors. The current draft prioritization for storage projects in the Henry's Fork Basin is to pursue enlargement of Island Park Reservoir over the next seven years, consider enlargement of Ashton Reservoir over an 8-25 year time frame, and revisit new storage in the Teton subwatershed in 25 years. The IWRB will also continue over the short-term to pursue and coordinate non-storage alternatives such as aquifer recharge, water marketing and conservation measures, based on stakeholder interest and participation. The IWRB's plans for pursuing implementation of alternatives in the Henry's Fork Basin will be summarized in a supplemental document separate from the Basin Study itself. This document is scheduled to be presented to the IWRB's storage subcommittee in August and receive final approval from the full Board in September. The IWRB also plans to establish an Advisory Committee to guide the Island Park Reservoir enlargement process. This committee will provide a collaborative forum for review and exchange of relevant information throughout the process.

Overview of USBR's WaterSMART Grant Program, with Emphasis on Cooperative Watershed Management Program Grants: Lesa Stark, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
The WaterSMART ("Sustain and Manage America's Resources Tomorrow") program is a collection of individual grant opportunities, each targeted at specific aspects of water planning and management. The Basin Study program is the largest of these and funds water supply planning studies, in cooperation with other water management entities. The Henry's Fork Basin Study was funded under this program; the USBR financial contribution was matched 1:1 with funds from the Idaho Water Resource Board. Other programs under the WaterSMART umbrella include water and energy efficiency, system optimization, advanced water treatment, climate analysis, landscape conservation cooperatives, risk analysis, water re-use, and a web-based clearing house of information. Not all of these programs are currently funded.

The particular WaterSMART component that Lesa presented in detail was the Cooperative Watershed Management Program (CWMP). The program's purpose is to improve water quality and ecological resilience and reduce conflicts over water through collaborative conservation efforts. The program was authorized in 2009 and first awarded grants in 2012. Currently, the CWMP funds formation of locally led watershed groups or expansion of existing groups (Phase I). Phases II and III of the program are intended to fund implementation of watershed management projects, but these phases have not yet been implemented. Non-federal cost-share is not required for Phase I activities. The grants provide up to \$100,000 in federal funds for up to two years, with no more than \$50,000 awarded in any one year. Lesa presented examples of organizations that had received CWMP grants in Oregon, Colorado and Idaho, including Friends of the Teton River.

Final Community Building

Continuing the theme from the opening community-building session, people again expressed thanks to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for completing the Basin Study and for listening to stakeholders and incorporating their comments into the final report. Lesa Stark of USBR announced that she is moving from her current position in the Snake River Area Office to a Program Manager position in the Pacific Northwest Regional Office. She has enjoyed working with the Henry's Fork Watershed Council over many years and will continue to find ways to work with the Council. Some of her duties will be assumed by Ryan Newman, in the Snake River Area Office. Several people expressed optimism at the possibilities for improving water management in the Henry's Fork Watershed, as we move forward in using the information in the Basin Study and implementing some of its alternatives. This optimism was related to the excellent work done by the State of Idaho and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in managing the abundant water resources we have in the upper Snake River basin. People who have worked outside of the Snake River basin agreed that the water management system in the upper Snake River basin is world-class: it is transparent, progressive, and based on the best science. Brandon invited everyone to attend an informal discussion later in the afternoon about possibilities for funding and pursuing some of the alternatives presented in the Basin Study. About a dozen people attended the afternoon discussion.