

Meeting Notes
Henry's Fork Watershed Council Meeting
January 13, 2009

The first meeting of the new year was held January 13, 2009 in Rexburg at the Cottontree Conference Center with nearly 50 participants. The meeting began with introductions and community building followed immediately by Clen Atchley. Clen gave a presentation to the Council about phase 3-5 of the North Fremont Canal System Gravity Pipeline System. The pipeline system will deliver irrigation water to water users on the Marysville and Farmers Own Canal systems, completing the project started in 2002. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) partnered with the canal company and landowners to fund the first phases of the project but completion of the project will require additional funding sources. Project partners hope to secure funding from the federal government and want a letter of support from the Council.

The Council WIREd the project using the Watershed Integrity Review and Evaluation criteria and came to a consensus to endorse the project. Project proponents offered general observations including:

- Negative effects on aquifer recharge.
- Effects on local wells unknown, state should conduct groundwater research to document any changes.
- Project viability in perpetuity given changing demographics.

According to Clen, the project will remove between 2000 and 3000 horsepower from the power grid and reduce water consumption in the Fall River. Completion of the project will also remove a diversion structure from Fall River, returning a long section to a more natural state and removing a fish barrier allowing for fish passage.

Construction of the project will also secure local jobs and has long-term consequences of helping to keep agriculture sustainable. The Council will write a letter of support.

Next on the agenda was Rob Van Kirk of Humboldt State University. Rob introduced his project "Conservation of surface and ground water in a Western watershed experiencing rapid loss of irrigated agricultural land to development." Under the supervision of Van Kirk, research will be conducted in the Henry's Fork Snake River watershed over the next three years to model ground and surface water management solutions in the face of population growth and changes in landscape in the rural West. With a \$620,000 federal grant, graduate students will investigate stream and canal gains and losses while examining existing data to construct a model of surface and ground water flow. The model will be used to predict future scenarios given the changes in land use. The study hopes to identify economic, regulatory, and physical mechanisms that will encourage water conservation and facilitate efficient water management.

Rob was seeking input from participants and posed questions to stimulate discussion. Council members discussed the project in component groups. Among the discussion items were water management issues pertaining to the protection of water quality, flow management and the effect on fisheries, beneficial use, and agriculture as a sustainable business. It was recommended that project coordinators involve BYU-I, U of I, and ISU faculty and students to the extent possible and the Fremont County GIS officer. Also, a recommendation was made to develop a Web site to share information as it becomes available.

The project will be presented to the Council again possibly in March 2009 to gather more stakeholder input. During the summer of 2010, the Council will host a field trip to visit areas of interest with regard to the project, and then in 2011 the results will be used to develop water conservation and management strategies. Then, upon completion of the project, the Council will hold a meeting for WIRE deliberation.

A final community building session was held before the meeting adjourned at noon.