

Henry's Fork Watershed Council
Tuesday, May 12, 2015

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

Dale Swensen of Fremont-Madison Irrigation called the meeting to order. Introductions were made with the 29 people in the circle. After two minutes of silence, Brandon thanked the Drought Management Planning Committee, Fish and Game, and other collaborating agencies for providing information in advance of events such as change of flows out of Island Park Reservoir and electrofishing. It is information important to the Henry's Fork Foundation's constituents, and having it allows us to provide a service by getting it out.

Community Building

Gordon Jenkins, an Island Park cabin owner, asked about a report he read that water is being taken out of the Island Park reservoir and sent downstream. Brandon said there is no pipeline project to take water out of the basin and referred the question to Clen Atchley as it might concern the Marysville Irrigation project to move -water through pipes utilizing gravity and eliminate open canals and ditches. Clen explained the project has saved 20,000 acre feet of water per season so far. That is water that stays in the river. Cathy Koon said Mr. Jenkins questions might refer to storage water that belongs to rights holders in American Falls Reservoir that is often temporarily stored in Island Park Reservoir. Brandon advised Mr. Jenkins that his questions might be answered during the day's presentations, and if not, he was welcome to ask more questions.

Brian Reed from Soil and Water Conservation Commission reminded everyone he is seeking comments for a study of agricultural water uses.

Dale excused himself and left early to attend another meeting.

Jan Brown, representing Fremont County, reported the 60 projects proposed through the Teton View Regional Plan process had been narrowed down to 20. She met with the Watershed Council two months ago to encourage people to get involved by commenting on the projects. The top 10 projects, not surprisingly, were water- and agriculture-related, she said. Being part of the plan puts entities in a better position for funding, she said. She provided copies of the final document listing the region-wide initiatives.

Gordon Jenkins said he is interested in the plans for raising the reservoir and the reason for it. What are the impacts and who benefits other than the detriment to property owners, especially on Bills Island who are losing property by raising the reservoir 4 feet. Why? What is the economic purpose? Brandon said he would get his answers during the first presentation.

Island Park Reservoir Enlargement Land Assessment Update

Idaho Water Resource Board

Cynthia Bridge Clark

Cynthia explained the difference between the Idaho Department of Water Resources and the Idaho Water Resource Board. She listed water management issues under the auspices of the IWRB, other pressures, recent water legislation, the Snake River Plain Aquifer and managed recharge, the Henry's Fork Basin Study outcome, and the Island Park Reservoir Enlargement.

In response to a question from Jan Brown about the possibility of incentives for measurement and monitoring efforts such as metering for cities like Idaho Falls, Jeff Raybould of IWRB said

the board is working with cities on water for development and other demand issues.

In response to a question from Gordon Jenkins, Cynthia said the board is paying canal companies to deliver water through their delivery systems for recharge.

The proposed reservoir enlargement would convert flood surcharge to storage space without raising the dam, increasing the pool capacity by 26,700 to 35,000 acre feet. This would happen for a short time in the spring, and would not likely be a year-round increase.

It would require increasing the capacity of the emergency spillway, and replacing the one-foot rubber bladder with a five-foot bladder at an estimated cost of \$6.5 million, which Cynthia said was “cost-effective water.”

Studies so far indicated only two structures would be impacted by the four-foot raise of the reservoir. IDWR is doing a land assessment, identifying the flood easement around the reservoir owned by BOR utilizing LiDAR. The assessment will identify potential impacts to land and property. A more detailed assessment is needed to see if there are impacts that would stop the project—impacts to private and public lands, structures, access corridors, easements, shoreline features, utilities.

Gordon asked if property owners would be compensated for any impacts. Cynthia said the board would have to evaluate mitigation. That is the next step beyond evaluation.

It was pointed out the emergency spillway has never been used.

The board plans to issue an RFQ in May or June for a contractor to complete the study by winter 2015-16. The process will include public outreach including public meetings, notification by correspondence to landowners for access, updates through the Watershed Council, and a webpage and other information materials.

IWRB will be coordinating with BOR throughout the process. Jeff Raybould commented that IWRB is looking for alternatives to keeping more of the water in the Heny’s Fork basin and won’t promote the reservoir enlargement unless it can be done with the least inconvenience to landowners.

Gordon asked how the talk of a national monument affects this project. No one could answer that question, but Brandon said it would proceed without consideration of a National Monument Designation.

View the entire presentation at <http://henrysfork.org/watershed-council>

Water Supply Outlook

Mike Beus

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Mike started his presentation with a brief history of water in Idaho, starting with zero-flow policy at Milner Dam. The policy’s intent is to fully develop all water resources upstream of Milner. However, flow at Swan Falls Dam is made up almost entirely of spring flows from the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA), and the primary source of recharge to the aquifer is surface water that originates in the system upstream of Milner Dam. In the long-term, the ESPA must be managed to sustain springs flows sufficient to meet Swan Falls minimum flow. Curtailing water rights is not a good solution.

Looking back, one-half million acres of irrigated land was developed in the Snake River Basin before 1900. From 1900 to 1920, another half million acres were developed below Milner. Springs at Blackfoot and Thousand Springs increased to twice the pre-development flows, due primarily to percolation from surface-water irrigation. Then came WWII and development of bigger drills, deeper wells, bigger pumps, and resulting development of groundwater irrigation from the aquifer. Originally, people looked at pumping as the cause of the decline in the aquifer. Now it is realized that the primary cause is reduction of recharge incidental to surface-water irrigation.

Mike used graphs to demonstrate this water year in comparison to prior years. System storage is leveling off due to early demand for irrigation water, which lengthens the irrigation season. Most of the demand is downstream of American Falls and so requires more delivery of storage from American Falls than would be usual for this time of year.

“Thanks to Brandon, Dale and phone conferences, we played this perfectly,” Mike said about the release of water from Island Park Reservoir to meet demand and maximize storage to get through the early months of the year.

Unless we get more snow, the release from Island Park Dam will be cut back in a few days.

The reservoir system is currently at 84 percent of capacity, which is slightly higher than average for this time of the year.. American Falls is not full, and Palisades is filling slowly. Compared with other drought years, we are lucky to be at 84 percent of system total storage, Mike said.

View his slide presentation at <http://henrysfork.org/watershed-council>

Water District 1 Data Collection Technology

Rob Keller

Water District 1

Rob explained the telemetry equipment and new monitoring systems the water district is installing. In the past, the district gathered data with equipment compatible with the Bureau of Reclamation’s (BOR) equipment. It was transmitted to BOR, where it was analyzed and forwarded to the water district. But when BOR starting charging \$350 per year per monitoring site, the district considered developing its own system and purchasing equipment to eliminate that cost. The process is testing a new system is now underway.

Through a combination of cellular and radio communications, the district was able to lower the cost to \$35 per site per year and eliminate BOR involvement up front by analyzing the data within the district. BOR will be able to access the data online in the same manner as all user groups The pilot information is currently available for viewing.

Solar-powered equipment has been installed at nine locations so far.

View his slide presentation at <http://henrysfork.org/watershed-council>

HFWC WIRE Project Updates

Rob Van Kirk

Henry’s Fork Foundation

Rob talked about the Ashton wastewater treatment plant and the water-quality monitoring projects that were evaluated earlier through the WIRE process of the Watershed Council.

View his slide presentation at <http://henrysfork.org/watershed-council>

Community Building and Wrap-Up

Participants moved back into a circle, with 23 people, for the wrap up. After a minute of silence, Rob Van Kirk said he just returned from California and eastern Oregon. He said it made him appreciate what we have here, the amount of water and the institutions. We are in a drought but nothing like California, where drought dominates the news. We have a world-class irrigation management system here and transparency in administration. In California there is no possible way you can go to a website and see whose water rights are in priority like we can here. Equally importantly, we conjunctively manage our ground and surface water. He said media reports in California are incorrect or misleading. You hear how wasteful irrigation is, but actually it is very efficient. They use every drop. They are not educating the people at all. It's a train wreck, and a bigger one is coming.

Jan Brown announced she has accepted a new position at the Montana Cooperative Development Center in Great Falls, Mont., and is leaving the end of June. Her territory will include eastern Idaho and western Wyoming and she will address such issues as local food coops, senior housing, and broadband, .

Darrell Reinke complemented Rob and the Foundation for assisting the city of Ashton with its wastewater treatment issues. He said it is the model of collaboration we -hope for.

Brandon said there will be no June meeting and probably no July meeting. There will be an August field tour. He asked for ideas for the tour. He hopes to put together a committee to plan the field trip.