Meeting Minutes
April 8, 2025

Hosted in-person at the Fremont County Annex Building in St. Anthony, ID and hybrid via Zoom

Attendance

- **26** in-person
- **41** via Zoom

Introductions and Community Building

Aaron Dalling, co-facilitator from Fremont-Madison Irrigation District, welcomed everyone to the hybrid meeting. The group went around with introductions and then called for a moment of silence before opening for announcements and community building.

Announcements

Dick Spackman encouraged the group to watch *Life in the Land*, a series on Montana watershed councils. He noted the councils are relatively young but have compelling stories of collaboration and progress. Christina Morrisett shared that Congressman Simpson's staffer Charly Roselund has moved on, and a new representative will attend HFWC meetings starting next month.

Water Supply Update (Henry's Fork Watershed)
Rob Van Kirk, Henry's Fork Foundation

On the topic of **natural streamflow**, Rob shared that over the period April 1—September 30 is predicted to be 91% of the 2001–2024 average: 83% in the upper Henry's Fork subwatershed, 95% in Fall River, and 94% in Teton River. For comparison, last year's April–September natural flow was 92% in upper Henry's Fork, 92% in Fall River, and 114% in Teton River. When compared with the historic 1978–2000 period, this year's expected water supply is substantially lower: 75% of the historic average for the watershed and 65%, 80%, and 82% of that average for upper Henry's Fork, Fall River, and Teton River, respectively. Timing of natural flow, as measured by the hydrograph center of mass, is expected to continue the long-term trends of occurring earlier in snowmelt-dominated subwatersheds and later in the groundwater-dominated subwatersheds. Models predict that center of mass in 2025 will be two days earlier than the 2001–2024 average in Fall River and Teton River and within a day or two of last year. Center of mass in the upper Henry's Fork subwatershed is predicted to be one day later than the 2001–2024 average and two days earlier than last year.

On the topic of **irrigation management**, Rob shared that irrigation management and regulated streamflow are expected to be very similar to last year. Island Park Reservoir will fill by May 31 at outflows most likely in the range of 400–750 cfs. The earliest that reservoir draft will be needed to

meet irrigation demand and lower-watershed streamflow targets is May 31, with an expected date of June 24. By way of comparison, reservoir draft started in 2024 on June 20. Initial reservoir draft will coincide with need to deliver water from the Henry's Fork to the Teton River through the Crosscut Canal, as Fall River is expected to contribute more streamflow than it did last year. Streamflow in the lower Henry's Fork and Teton River will drop to irrigation-season low-flow targets in late June and stay there for the remainder of the summer if not even into the month of October. Peak outflow from Island Park Reservoir is expected to be around 1,500 cfs for much of July but could reach as high as 2,000 cfs during the middle of the month. The reservoir is expected to end the irrigation season at 36% full, compared with around 44% full last year and on average. However, the expected range of outcomes is large and dependent on summertime weather, and there is a 40% chance that the reservoir will end the summer at or above the long-term average.

Q&A: Water Supply Update

- Jan Brown asked about differences in precipitation and streamflow. Rob Van Kirk responded that while overall precipitation hasn't changed, more of it falls as rain than snow. He also added that soil moisture deficits and a longer growing season are other key changes influencing consumption and evapotranspiration.
- Russell Clark asked if agricultural practices could reduce soil moisture deficits. Rob noted his presentation focused primarily on the upper Henry's Fork (i.e. the source of water) and not on irrigated agricultural land (i.e. the place of use) but confirmed that agricultural practices like cover crops and crop rotation can improve soil moisture.
- Brandon Hoffner asked for context on how current scientific understanding developed. Rob explained that it was initially believed more precise management of reservoir draft and water delivery would resolve, to some degree, both water quality and quantity issues. However, that approach didn't fully address the problems. Further, he added, research pointed to soil moisture and growing season extension as significant factors influencing water yield—the portion of precipitation that becomes streamflow.

Water Supply Update (Upper Snake Basin)
Brian Stevens, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Brian Stevens gave an update on total system storage (above median), natural streamflow projections (85% of normal into Island Park; 95% of normal on the Teton River), and outflow plans for Jackson Lake (lowered to conserve water for storage allocation) and Palisades Reservoir (increased for flood risk management).

Q&A: Water Supply Update (Upper Snake Basin)

- No questions were asked.

Surface Water Program Updates and Solicitation for the Teton Watershed Advisory Group (WAG)
Alex Bell, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality

The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) surface water program has several components—I provided a brief overview of the people, processes, and strategy involved in the application of the surface water program in the Eastern Idaho region. The foundation of the surface

water program is the Beneficial Use Reconnaissance Program (BURP), where DEQ annually collects wadable stream water quality data. After we collect water quality data, we conduct waterbody assessments that will go into the Integrated Report, which is submitted to the EPA on a biennial basis. Waters that are added to the 303(d) list require the development of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) that determine the reduction of given pollutant load needed to restore support of beneficial uses. The Idaho Soil & Water Conservation Commission then develops implementation plans to help facilitate water quality improvement. To help fund restoration projects, DEQ offers two grant opportunities: Federal § 319 Grants and State Agricultural Best Management Practices Grants. The Federal § 319 grant is currently open for applications.

The Idaho Falls Regional DEQ office is also currently seeking membership for the Teton River Watershed Advisory Group (WAG). The Henry's Fork Watershed Council has previously and expertly served as the WAG for the Upper and Lower Henry's subbasins as well as the Teton subbasin for all previous TMDLs. The intent of this solicitation is to gauge interest in a more focused group in the Teton subbasin. We hope membership of the Henry's Fork Watershed Council will help us advertise this solicitation, serve as appointed members, and/or continue to provide invaluable collaboration to facilitate the DEQ mission in the Henry's Fork watershed. Anyone interested in serving on the WAG should contact Alex Bell at (208) 528-2679 or at alex.bell@deq.idaho.gov by 5 p.m. on April 28, 2025, MDT. Meetings are open to the public and the date and location of the first meeting will be announced soon.

Q&A: Surface Water Program Updates and Solicitation for the Teton WAG

- Jan Brown asked why a separate Watershed Advisory Group (WAG) is being created for the Teton, given past Idaho legislation that allowed the HFWC to serve as the WAG for the broader Henry's Fork watershed in the past. Alex was unsure, but explained that in his understanding, the HFWC has *served* as the WAG in the past but has not been *officially designated*.
- Craig Chandler asked if any surface water monitoring has focused on silver iodide, a product used in cloud seeding. Alex Bell responded that, to his knowledge, there is not.
- Sheryl Hill asked why WYDAHO Soil District is involved in TMDL implementation, and whether Soil and Water Conservation Districts are involved in wastewater discharge. Alex Bell was unsure about soil districts and TMDL implementation but explained that TMDLs do include waste load allocations when determining load capacities, so they do consider wastewater discharge. Brad Higginson added that agricultural involvement in implementation plans is tied to funding—grants are often contingent on implementation plans, which makes agricultural participation practical.
- Dick Spackman asked who typically receives 319 grants. Alex Bell responded that recipients include producers, farms, and nonprofits like Friends of the Teton River, depending on the nature of the application.

State of Idaho Legislative Update

Candi Larsen, University of Idaho College of Law

Candi is a law student at the University of Idaho and was placed with the Idaho Water Users Association for the 2025 Legislative Session as Henry's Fork Foundation-funded extern. Given the variety of backgrounds by the audience of this meeting, the legislative summary was an attempt to provide an overview of the overall legislative session, the areas that this group may be interested in and then working down to water laws for the year; some Candi was involved with, some Candi was not. The presentation starts with an overall throughput of bills and legislation for the year, what changes in appropriations occurred in natural resources, and the key actions as identified by the legislature for the year (including those bills relating to land, water, and resources).

The middle of the presentation was a summary of water-specific legislation for the year relating to flood control, groundwater districts, irrigation districts, canal companies, domestic exemption, conjunctive management order restrictions, lien priority, water bank forfeiture restart, and water budgets and goals. The final portion provides the path for individuals to do their own research on topics and bills that interest them, see exactly what language is changing, and how to watch sessions live next year. In general, this was just to help individuals stay informed and involved directly.

Q&A: State of Idaho Legislative Update

- Sheryl Hill asked how Right to Farm laws differ from the 2024 Ag Protection Areas Act (APAA). Candi Larsen said she wasn't sure and would need to research APAA requirements.
- Jack McLaren asked if House Bill 194 and Senate Bill 1040 are related to the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer. Candi confirmed S1040 is but wasn't sure about H194.
- Elaine Winegar asked why, in times of low water, sediment in Island Park and Blackfoot Reservoirs can't be dredged and sold off to increase storage rather than raising the reservoir level. Candi said she was unsure about Island Park Reservoir. Aaron Dalling added that dredging is often discussed but is cost-prohibitive.

Wakesurfing and Water Quality on Island Park Reservoir

Jack McLaren, Henry's Fork Foundation

Wake surfing boats and eutrophication—also known as excess algal growth—are both emerging problems that increase turbidity and threaten water quality and the fishing economy in Island Park and the Henry's Fork River. The Henry's Fork Foundation monitors water quality in the Henry's Fork River and Island Park Reservoir to understand sources of water quality problems. New technical analysis of conductivity, algal, and temperature data gave insights into natural and human-caused phenomena affecting algae growth and turbidity in Island Park Reservoir and the Henry's Fork River downstream. Historically high winds in June 2024 naturally oxygenated parts of Island Park Reservoir, creating unusually clear water, high dissolved oxygen concentrations, heavy aquatic plant growth, low algal growth, and good fish habitat in the reservoir and excellent water quality in the Henry's Fork River downstream. This positive response to natural oxygenation suggests that mechanical oxygenation—an established tool for improving water clarity and plant growth in lake ecosystems—could be successfully applied to Island Park Reservoir. However, stratification and eutrophication resumed in July, and an unexplained plume of high turbidity water originated in Island Park Reservoir and flowed into the Henry's Fork River. This turbidity plume damaged the economically important

fishing experience during the traditional peak fishing season. Growing recreational pressures—particularly wake boats—likely interacted with algal growth and eutrophication to create this turbidity plume and subsequent degradation of water quality. Long-term monitoring allows the Henry's Fork Foundation to understand new phenomena and advocate for adaptive management actions that improve water quality and address new threats. The Henry's Fork Foundation is seeking to increase monitoring of Island Park Reservoir, and will be exploring engineered solutions to eutrophication in order to improve water quality.

Q&A: State of Idaho Legislative Update

- Tim Scanlan asked who has the authority to regulate wakesurfing on Island Park Reservoir. Jack said it's unclear—it could be the Bureau of Reclamation, Fremont-Madison Irrigation District, Fremont County, or Idaho Department of Land—and that authority needs to be clarified.
- Elaine Winegar noted that wakesurfing's popularity has grown over the years and seems to correspond, at least in her perception, with declining water clarity. She thanked Jack for sharing the information and for a very interesting presentation.
- Russell Clark asked about the mechanism for oxygenation in Island Park Reservoir. Jack described it as similar to irrigation lines in a backyard garden, but pumping out oxygen and installed along the reservoir bottom, designed to be invisible from the surface. In response to a follow-up question, Jack said other ideas for improving water quality include reducing nutrient loads into Island Park Reservoir through upstream wastewater treatment upgrades and the possible use of algicides—though the latter is unlikely due to potential downstream and other unforeseen impacts.
- Zach Filmore asked if wakesurfing causes more bottom disturbance than bank erosion. Jack confirmed that for wakesurfing boats, yes—but erosion, especially on the west end of Island Park Reservoir, also contributes.

Community Building and Wrap Up

- Rob Van Kirk and Alex Bell discussed development of the Teton WAG and the history of the HFWC.
- Jan Brown and others expressed appreciation for the group's years of dedication and science-based work. She also noted how rare it is to see a group sustain that level of involvement over decades.
- Brad Higginson echoed Jan's comments and noted his appreciation for the progression of science in the watershed, with specific reference to the advancement of science in the river reach upstream of Island Park Reservoir.
- Sheryl Hill announced that Governor Little appointed Mark Chandler to fill the commissioner vacancy previously held by Scott Kamachi (who recently passed).
- Jan Brown announced an upcoming event on Saturday, April 12 from 3:30–5:30pm at the Idaho Falls Public Library hosted by the Bonneville County Democrats to discuss Camas National Wildlife Refuge and the implications of SJM 104.

- Zach Filmore asked who has regulatory authority over Island Park Reservoir. Jack McLaren and others noted that IDL, USACE, and IDEQ all have roles. For recreation specifically, it's unclear, but authority may rest with the water rights holder. PacifiCorp, for example, regulates boating on other reservoirs in the Bear River basin. Brad Higginson mentioned that Fremont County's past ordinance limiting motorboats on the Henry's Fork may serve as precedent for local authority.