



## Meeting Minutes May 13, 2025

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

### Attendance

- 31 in-person
- 16 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

None.

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### Project Updates for State Parks in the Henry's Fork Watershed

*Jess Brumfield, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation*

Jess Brumfield oversees three state park systems: Henry's Lake, Ashton-Tetonia Trail, and Harriman State Park. He provided updates on each. At Henry's Lake State Park, management is working towards keeping the park open year-round (whereas it is currently closed seasonally). Given the snowmobile traffic to Island Park during the winter, state park cabin accommodations could attract guests and revenue. The visitor center in Ashton will be staffed this summer. In Harriman State Park, all buildings will be closed to public reservation this summer as the park does work on their water systems.

*Please contact Jess Brumfield for more information, only some scant details were captured in this summary.*

### Q&A: Project Updates for State Parks in the Henry's Fork Watershed

Jan Brown asked about completing the Greater Yellowstone Trail Connection between Ashton and West Yellowstone. Jess Brumfield responded that there have been no discussions yet on this segment. The Ashton-Tetonia Trail remains the current priority.

- Jan Brown asked about updates on the Mesa Falls Visitor Center. Jess noted that the U.S. Forest Service will assume management of the center as the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with IDPR will not be extended after a cost-benefit analysis revealed that the retail operation was no longer worthwhile.
- Christina Morrisett, co-facilitator from the Henry's Fork Foundation, inquired about paving the

Ashton-Tetonia Trail. Jess Brumfield explained that two meetings were held—in Ashton (2023) and Tetonia (2024). The 2023 plan was abandoned due to increased costs. The 2024 meeting surfaced concerns from horseback riders about paved surfaces being unsuitable for horses. The discussion highlighted how different trail surfaces support different user needs.

- Christina Morrisett asked about funding sources and impact of halted federal grants. Jess Brumfield shared that ARPA funds were used extensively. The agency is now focusing on preventative maintenance, which aligns with newer funding opportunities. He mentioned infrastructure issues, such as bat infestations in buildings, as examples of preventative maintenance needs.
- Jan Brown asked about inter-agency collaboration between IDPR, USFS, and IDFG. Jess Brumfield emphasized strong relationships with USFS and IDFG. He noted that several trails start in Harriman State Park and continue onto Forest Service land under MOAs. A 2024 wildlife assessment by IDFG led to beneficial changes, such as implementing rotational grazing in sensitive areas.

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### **Conant Creek Canal Lining Project & Remote Control Automation**

*Daniel Wilcox, Henry's Fork Foundation and Friends of the Teton River*

Daniel Wilcox provided a final update on the \$2.17 million Conant Creek Canal Lining Project & Remote Control Automation project. This project started in 2019 and will be completed in 2025. The basis for the project partnership was rooted in canal seepage, reservoir savings, and improving aquatic habitat for coldwater species. The project sought to modernize aging irrigation infrastructure by installing a state-of-the-art ditch liner, replacing concrete diversion and spillback structure headgates, and adding remote control capabilities for precision water delivery. The project will also conserve water for farms and fish, enhance irrigation reliability for 3,200 farmland acres, increase streamflow in Conant Creek through the summer, and store more water in Island Park Reservoir. Daniel shared before and after photos, the project timeline, and listed the many grants that made this work possible: WaterSMART WEEG, Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission Water Quality Program for Agriculture, IWRB Aging Infrastructure, IDEQ State Ag BMP Fund.

### **Q&A: Conant Creek Canal Project**

- Rob Van Kirk asked how the Henry's Fork Basin Study contributed to federal grant application success. Daniel Wilcox emphasized that the basin study was instrumental in identifying North Fremont County as a strong candidate for canal lining.
- Allison Brown asked about the lifespan of the canal liner. Daniel Wilcox stated it is about 40 years, adding that they covered the liner with dirt to double its longevity, since UV exposure would otherwise shorten the liner's life.
- Tyler Pratt asked about major construction hurdles. Daniel Wilcox said using a local contractor helped address issues promptly. However, the NEPA process revealed "encrypted rocks" from the Fort Henry era, triggering the need for on-site archaeologists for the first mile of construction.
- A local farmer asked if irrigation was affected during construction. Daniel Wilcox confirmed that work was done in the fall and spring to avoid disrupting water use. Aaron Dalling added that in 2021, although paper water rights existed, actual water availability was limited, making this project essential for future reliability.

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## **Reconnecting Canyon Creek (Updates)**

*Anna Lindstedt, Friends of the Teton River*

Canyon Creek is a tributary to the Teton River, the primary water source for the Canyon Creek Canal Company, and has one of the largest tributary populations of Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in the Teton Basin. But the lower 10 miles of Canyon Creek have been seasonally dewatered June–October due to a diversion by the Canyon Creek Canal and the annual dewatering of the system is impactful to the successful migration, holding, and rearing of Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout. Friends of the Teton River just completed Phase 1 of their project to reconnect Canyon Creek. Phase 1 took place 2019–2024 and used \$5 million in federal funding. Phase 1 worked with 10 of 11 Canyon Creek Canal irrigators, replaced 3 pump stations/point of diversions, replaced 30” of steel mainlines and PVC conveyance lines, and closed the 14-mile canal. Benefits of the project include streamflow restoration, irrigation water savings, installation of a telemetry flow gage, and increased Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout densities near the confluence with the Teton River.

With strategic direction encouragement from partners, Friends of the Teton River is pursuing Phase 2 of the project. Phase 2 will cost \$2.2 million and will work to complete a source switch, make improvements to pump and lines to accommodate water rights and conveyance, enter into a minimum instream flow agreement, and pursue other options to benefit ecosystem health. Unfortunately, after putting together a grant application to fund Phase 2 and just prior to application submission, the grant announcement was removed. Friends of the Teton River is ready to move this project forward, but progress is dependent on securing adequate funding.

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

- Jack McLaren asked about monitoring spawning redds. Anna Lindstedt responded that formal redd surveys will be conducted in Canyon Creek, in addition to the ongoing tributary trout assessments every five years.
- Jack McLaren asked what success looks like for the project. While Anna Lindstedt acknowledged the question, specific success metrics (e.g., redd counts, spawning pairs, population numbers) were not detailed during the discussion.
- Matt Lucia asked about the water right transfer process. Anna Lindstedt explained there were water savings involved in the project. Aaron Dalling clarified that by changing the point of diversion, they eliminated the need to pump groundwater back into the Teton River, simplifying the process.
- Keith Esplin congratulated the team and requested a layman’s summary. Daniel Wilcox noted that IDWR has one-pagers for the Conant Creek project ([linked here](#)). He will work with Anna Lindstedt to produce a similar summary for Canyon Creek.
- Allison Brown asked about power usage. Anna Lindstedt explained that pump station upgrades improved energy efficiency, but the added pumping means overall electricity is roughly the same—resulting in a net-neutral (“wash”) outcome.

## **From Washington D.C. to Our Backyard: What do federal-level changes mean for the Henry's Fork watershed?**

*A panel discussion moderated by Christina Morrisett and Aaron Dalling featuring Craig Chandler (Idaho Water District 1), Zak Miller (Idaho Farm Bureau Federation), Kathy Rinaldi (Greater Yellowstone Coalition), Sidney Decker (Congressman Simpson's Office)*

To begin discussion, the moderators asked each panelist to introduce themselves and answer an initial question, specifically written to address their expertise. Then the discussion was opened to invite questions from the audience.

*Note: the following meeting minutes are not verbatim and should not be treated as direct quotes. These notes were based on auto-transcription of audio-recording and made more succinct by Christina Morrisett.*

### **Conversation with Craig Chandler**

Aaron Dalling asked Craig Chandler to introduce himself and describe the role of WD1 in the Henry's Fork watershed. Craig Chandler said that Water District 1 tracks water rights, including in the reservoirs (Island Park, Grassy Lake, Henry's Lake). WD1 calculates how much storage accrues to those during the season and then they work with Fremont-Madison Irrigation District to deliver that storage to given entities. WD1 tracks and monitors all canal diversions and pumps that pull water out of the river. They monitor water rights priorities on a daily basis throughout irrigation season, tracking deliveries to those diversions and monitoring their supplies. Craig Chandler also noted the individual staff members who work for WD1 and their roles, including gage reading and canal measurements. Aaron Dalling added that although there are a few large diversions on the mainstem Snake River, there are "a gazillion diversions" in the Henry's Fork watershed. He expects WD1 spends more time with their staff in the Henry's Fork than in any of the other areas. Aaron Dalling noted his appreciation for Craig Chandler.

Aaron Dalling asked Craig Chandler how WD1 uses data from federal agencies. Craig Chandler shared that federal data is very important to administering water rights. For example, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is a key partner. WD1 contracts USGS to measure ~25 streamflow stations. Whereas WD1 measure pumps and canals, USGS measures streamflow in the river. Craig Chandler noted how USGS data are really important for calculating natural inflow to the system, especially given the need to maintain streamflow at specific thresholds where the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation operates. USGS data are critical to prevent the Snake River at Blackfoot from drying up. Without data from USGS, WD1 would not be able to calculate water right priorities and water deliveries.

In regards to the USBR, Craig Chandler noted that they manage reservoir releases. WD1 partners with USBR on the Hydromet data system, where WD1 installs and maintains a lot of the equipment and measurement of canals and pumps (the hardware) and then data are telemetered to the satellite network where USBR pulls them into the database and web interface. USBR data are really important for diversion data.

WD1 also uses NRCS SNOTEL data, which are important for forecasting. This time of year, the SNOTEL data are important for anticipating runoff. USBR and USACE also use SNOTEL data to forecast runoff and adhere to flood control rules. The precision of these forecasts are important, because if USBR lets out too much water, there is a risk to reservoir fill. But if USBR underestimates and lets out too little water, there may not be space available to capture unregulated runoff in storage reservoirs—risking flooding downstream. NRCS SNOTEL data are important for informing springtime reservoir management.

Lastly, WD1 uses data from the National Weather Service which is important for short-term forecasts. Understanding if it is going to rain this week or if it is going to be hot, dry, and windy directly informs WD1's daily water right projection—where WD1 posts what water rights are available in various places each day. These projections tell canal managers whether their water rights are on or off and allow them to plan their operations accordingly for the short-term. If we've got a lot of rain coming up, WD1 might be able to project a higher water right priority available, whereas if it's really hot and dry, then WD1 will project a lower available water right priority.

Aaron Dalling asked Craig Chandler if he has noticed any changes in federal funding or impacts to those programs. Craig Chandler noted no major impacts so far. However, Craig did acknowledge that the biggest shift has been the change in agency leadership as folks have retired [or taken deferred resignation offers]. For example, the manager of the USGS office in Idaho Falls retired and there is a new manager in the USBR. Some of the USBR leadership in Boise working on the Nez Perce agreement have also retired. But WD1 has met with USGS and is confident about the USGS commitment to their standard streamflow gaging agreement.

Craig highlighted the importance of communication, specifically communicating to Idaho leadership how important federal data and programs are to water in Idaho. Given the groundwater curtailment last year, although WD1 only deals with surface water and was not directly involved, Craig Chandler believes that the best way to avoid curtailment is to provide irrigators with quality data. If irrigators can be told up front what their water supplies are going to look like, they're able to plan around that supply better and use it more efficiently. So when it comes to curtailment, they're either able to avoid it because they have managed differently, or they're ready for it. That's one of the big things for data—is the ability to communicate to people what to expect.

### **Conversation with Zak Miller**

Aaron Dalling asked Zak Miller to introduce himself. Zak Miller is the CEO of the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation, a nonprofit organization created during the Great Depression to advocate and work on the behalf of farmers and ranchers. The Farm Bureau Federation operates in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. Zak serves Idaho specifically. Aaron Dalling noted that Zak also serves on two irrigation boards in the area: Egin Bench Canals and North Fork Reservoir Company.

Aaron Dalling asked Zak Miller to talk about federal farm programs, how they impact Idaho agriculture, and any changes that are currently impacting the industry. Zak Miller shared that compared to his peers in the Midwest, we don't talk a lot about the Farm Bill in the Western US but that everything is still based in the Farm Bill. The NRCS, for example, is all Farm Bill funding—a lot of

it is Title II (which is conservation). But, Zak noted that the biggest challenge with the Farm Bill is 80% of it goes to nutrition, rather than production agriculture. It is likely we will get a continuation of the 2018 Farm Bill, which isn't necessarily the worst thing for us. But given the shift towards spending reduction in Washington, there is a fight between parties who want more funding in nutrition and conservation. But there has been a real reduction in baseline safety net / crop insurance (Title I). Zak added that we're in a situation where people want more pots of money under an overarching structure that wants to reduce spending. Although there is a real argument and a real discussion about what's going to come, Zak suspects we will work to a continuation—which he said is okay, but lacks certainty and certainty is the lifeblood for folks who work in natural resources and agriculture.

In Idaho, specifically, Zak said that the biggest concern is the reduction in force when there has been an ongoing backlog to fill positions within the NRCS and FSA. These agencies are important for agricultural production. Zak noted that farmers and ranchers don't know what they don't know, and rely on these frontline agencies for help—farmers and ranchers have general ideas, but agency personnel help get producers connected. It also takes a while to train agency staff. But, Zak emphasized, that this is an ongoing challenge not specific to the current administration. USDA Secretary Rollins is committed to the frontline FSA and NRCS agencies. They are not on the chopping block, but are actively hiring to fill positions. It is encouraging, but the Farm Bureau Federation would like to see movement there. Zak has heard from folks on the ground that their biggest concern is knowing what programs are out there, let alone how to access and navigate them.

In terms of changes, Zak drew attention to the \$59 million Climate Smart grant awarded to the University of Idaho that was recently “pulled back” (Editor's note: [Press Release](#)). The grant title and [program] name has changed, but it remains uncertain whether or not those funds will “come back” or what that is going to look like.

Zak ended by noting that producers are seeing changes on the ground, but it is just too early to know what it really means. The Idaho Farm Bureau Federation isn't necessarily opposed to the reorganization we're seeing, but there is uncertainty at the moment.

### **Conversation with Kathy Rinaldi**

Christina Morrisett asked Kathy to introduce herself. Kathy Rinaldi is the Director of Conservation at the Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC), a conservation group based out of Bozeman MT with offices in Idaho (Driggs), Wyoming (Jackson, Lander, Cody, Fort Washakie). GYC's mission is to work with people to protect the lands, waters, and wildlife in the 25 million acre Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Kathy considers GYC to work on policy, like what Craig and Zak talked about; partnerships—GYC sits on a lot of collaboratives and coalitions to solve really complex problems; projects, especially with federal partners and state agencies; and planning—trying to plan for the future and getting modern plans in place to address contemporary challenges.

Christina Morrisett noted GYC's engagement in federal land management and asked Kathy Rinaldi to talk about how changes in federal staffing and priorities is impacting federal lands in eastern Idaho, and what kinds of changes she anticipates in the future. Kathy pointed to shared themes with what Craig Chandler and Zak Miller discussed previously, such as uncertainty. Kathy built on Zak's

previous point about staff shortages, particularly at the leadership level who have a lot of experience. For example, GYC has \$250,000 in partnerships with the U.S. Forest Service alone, a lot of which is work that has been done in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. Kathy noted that Mel Bowling, the Forest Supervisor, is retiring at the end of the month and there will be all new district rangers joining the forest. Another district ranger, Bill is retiring. Jay Pence in the Teton Basin Ranger District, Kathy pointed out, is the only district ranger who is not retiring. There will be new leadership and new people with a current staffing level that was probably already too low. So, Kathy warns, that without people in place, the process to get projects and permitting done will be really slow.

Kathy Rinaldi also pointed to retirements in the BLM, such as Mary D'Aversa who retired in April. It took a couple years to get the Upper Snake Field Office Manager in place and that person is brand new. So, Kathy points out, that retirements of agency leadership will impact Eastern Idaho because we rely on federal partners and federal funding to get work done (as evidenced by the three presentations earlier in the meeting). Kathy Rinaldi added on to Craig's point about USGS, noting that they provide baseline data for conservation, agricultural production, water administration, and grizzly bears. Although game agencies count grizzly bears, the USGS does the population modeling that is the basis for Yellowstone grizzly bear conservation strategy. Kathy noted that the entire USGS office working on grizzly bears just retired. Kathy highlighted that there is a lot of uncertainty.

### **Conversation with Sidney Decker**

Christina Morrisett asked Sidney Decker to introduce herself and the role of Congressman Simpson in eastern Idaho and the Henry's Fork watershed. Sidney Decker is the East Idaho Regional Director for Congressman Simpson's office, new to the position as of December 2024. Congressman Simpson represents Idaho's Second District in Congress. Congressman Simpson serves on the House Appropriations Committee as chairman, where he has been able to advocate for Idaho's priorities in the federal spending process. He gave support for and is proud of the legislation that gives robust funding for grants to the Henry's Fork Foundation, such as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART program. Congressman Simpson also supports funding for clean water infrastructure in eastern Idaho and programs that provide technical assistance to rural communities for safer, cleaner water. Congressman Simpson believes that Idaho's rivers are the arteries of the state. He supports the Henry's Fork Foundation and is grateful for their work in supporting river health.

Reflecting on how important federal grants have been to many of the projects presented earlier in the agenda (ex. Harriman State Park, canal companies, irrigation infrastructure), Christina Morrisett asked Sidney to talk about what the watershed council can expect in terms of federal grant opportunities in the region moving forward. Sidney Decker noted that there has been a lot of change since the turnover of the administration and that Congressman Simpson's office has heard from many people concerned about the grant funding status. Sidney added that many of the grants that people have brought to the Congressman's attention that were once frozen have largely been unfrozen and released. But if anyone is currently in a situation where an unreleased grant is impacting operations or will likely impact operations in the near future, the delegation would like to be made aware so they can assist accordingly.

Sidney Decker acknowledged that the new administration announced overarching funding reviews and a lot of people are rightfully concerned. However, Sidney noted that administration changes

always bring new priorities to the forefront and the federal grants process is no different. Sidney noted how, at present, it is difficult to tell how grant opportunities may change, in part because the administration is still going through and settling its priorities in different agencies, and in part because the FY 2026 appropriation process just started. But as organizations apply for future grant opportunities, Sidney offered that Congressman Simpson's office and the other delegates are happy to send out letters of support for projects that contribute to the district and align with the priorities of the delegation. Congressman Simpson is always going to fight for taxpayer money to come back to Idaho over other states.

### **Q&A from Washington D.C. to Our Backyard**

Christina Morrisett announced the end of the prepared portion of the panel and invited attendees to ask questions of the individuals or the entire panel.

- Jan Brown asked the panel to what extent farmers (for example) can be expected to be billed to take over expenses for relevant services, rather than having taxpayer support—specifically pointing to the USGS contract with WD1.
  - Craig Chandler responded that it's a mix of both, depending on the federal agency. Craig highlighted that WD1 contracts USGS to do stream gaging and there is a cost share agreement so that WD1 space holders do not have to front the entire cost. For other programs, such as NRCS SnoTel, WD1 does not have a contract in place and does not contribute to that program yet, although it is really important to WD1's operation.
  - Aaron Dalling added that recent meetings with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation indicated that USBR is looking for opportunities for additional title transfers, given the new administration. Aaron defined a title transfer as transferring federal facilities to irrigation districts or organizations to manage. That may come into play for a Canyon Creek lateral, where an old tunnel for power is still owned and managed by USBR. They have already approached FMID with that particular site, looking for some type of title transfer or transfer of responsibilities to private entities.
  - Zak Miller noted that Tom Schultz, an Idahoan, is currently head of the U.S. Forest Service and it's going to be interesting to get that perspective at the top level. Zak highlighted that there is still going to be good science happening, but there is also going to be more scrutiny and it is not going to be as easy as it was. He emphasized that there are still federal dollars, but the work will need to be justified. In the end, Zak believes that good projects are still going to be done.
  - To add to Aaron's point, Zak suggested that we're going to see more block granting and general [funds]—and he's in favor of that. Let Idaho make Idaho decisions. The funding is going to change, but the numbers may not. Instead, Zak speculates that more money will go into Idaho hands as the funding mechanism. Zak pointed to and applauded the Idaho legislature approving \$30 million in ongoing funding for water resources. Such an action is an example of doing things at a state level and keeping the feds out of Idaho's business. Zak, given his meetings with the delegation, also noted excitement about getting funds without all the red tape that comes with the

federal government, but acknowledged that its still speculative and general talking points.

- Kathy Rinaldi added that Idaho receives more federal funding than we put into the coffer. So as far as resource management issues, Kathy notes that we may expect to pay more as Idaho and maybe that's fair. But when it comes to grizzly bear management, an effort shared by three states and valued by the American public because they want to see a grizzly bear in Yellowstone, it may not be fair for Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming to foot the bill for all of it. Kathy highlighted shared management and shared responsibility—and how there are many legislative mechanisms (and useful tools) in place to facilitate this, such as O and M for a canal, a good neighbor authority for forest or vegetation treatment projects. Kathy pointed to the fact that more people visit the Greater Yellowstone Area than live in all three states combined, and that Idaho's Fremont and Teton counties get a lot of recreation visitor pressure that will see resource damage if there is no management. For example, counties and GYC do bear safe containers, but if there isn't the money/management for trash pickup, the containers make no sense. Kathy suspects we may see some pain before we realize that some of this stuff actually made some sense.
- Keith Esplin noted that part of the problem is the unprecedented amount of money spent on water infrastructure over the last few years because of the Inflation Reduction Act, the Infrastructure Bill, and COVID reliefs funds through ARPA—point to the fact that those fund were eventually going to run out, no matter what. Keith asked if that is part of the issue we're facing too? That these one-time funds are running out?
  - Zak Miller noted that although we may have had one-time money, we also realized the depth of our water concern—specifically pointing to the stress test to Idaho's economy in 2024 when red tags hit pumps. Zak highlighted how even in a very conservative state legislature that was cutting a lot of things, they still saw value for ongoing water spending. Zak noted that he agreed with Keith, but also sees the importance of Idaho keeping sovereignty of our water and managing it properly. Zak added that the when the science is there, we'll get there, but there is going to be scrutiny. Adding to Kathy's point, Zak said that “we're not gonna know what we don't know until we know,” but hat he is ultimately optimistic that we'll get there eventually, but that it will look differently in the meantime.
  - Kathy Rinaldi pointed to the presentations from earlier in the morning as great examples of how a one time push of money to do infrastructure improvements that last 40 years are a good investment and defer maintenance. Kathy noted how it is more expensive to let things fall apart and have to rebuild from the beginning.
- Brandon Hoffner asked Zak Miller about the University of Idaho's IAMP funds that were recently rescinded, and if Zak knows if those funds will come back around. Brandon disclosed that the Henry's Fork Foundation was ready to do technical service work on that

project and spent a month putting together an application, hoping to bring those dollars to eastern Idaho.

- Zak Miller disclosed that he serves on the advisory committee for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at the University of Idaho, so he has been fairly involved in that topic. The Farm Bureau signed on to the grant process and were supportive. But [the federal government] said that there was too much money going to overhead and administrators. Zak noted that people love to beat up on overhead, but that it is needed—though he is not qualified to say what that number should be, he understands the argument: not enough money is getting to the end of the row. The University is evaluating next steps, but is currently unsure if the program makes financial sense for them to pursue given the new overhead threshold, the [re-application] process, and the uncertainty of if the money will ultimately be there. Zak does not know if the goal post has been changed, or if the whole game has been changed. But he did highlight how many farmers did go out and proactively make investments, and some of them have taken the strike and said they were going to do it anyways and IAMP just motivated them to do it, and they'll be okay otherwise. But Zak acknowledged worry about putting funds out there, pulling it back, and potentially causing irreparable harm to operations that made a big leap and needed funding to get to the next level. Zak hopes that something will break loose, but that he isn't sure right now. The University is still evaluating whether or not they will move forward.
- Brandon added that funding uncertainty is making it difficult for all organizations and agencies trying to move projects forward.
- Adding on to Keith's earlier point, Rob Van Kirk noted that WaterSMART as a program and USBR and Dept. of Interior existed before we had money from ARPA, BIL, or IRA—these programs existed under appropriations and were then augmented. Rob asked Sidney Decker if, relative to the FY 2026 budget process, Congressman Simpson will try to keep programs like WaterSMART funded at some pre-BIL/IRA/ARPA level.
  - Sidney Decker responded that she has not been told that information specifically, but wouldn't be surprised if that would be his goal because these are important priorities to him. But Sidney noted that we'll have to wait and see how things play out. Congressman Simpson's office were hoping to have funding for a lot of things that aren't happening, for example community project funds that got cut for 2025 that they're hoping to see in 2026. But it all will ultimately depend on how these things play out in committee. It's a complicated process. Sidney invited additional comment from other delegation representatives.
  - Kathryn Hitch from Senator Crapo's office noted that the committee has already finished their bill for the reconciliation process and that the delegation supported these programs before it was under the IRA.
  - Anna Lindstedt tagged on that the WaterSMART funding Friends of the Teton River was going to apply to for Phase II of the Canyon Creek project was under a combined 24-

25 package that had already been approved and then, less than a month before the application closure date, was pulled off the table.

- Sidney Decker confirmed that Congressman Simpson's office has heard of that been happening.
- Anna Lindstedt noted that the announcement was closed and permanently put on pause.
- Sidney Decker offered to find out more, but that she wasn't aware of this specific case. She did note, however, that the new administration is looking at each agency and where to cut money.
- Aaron Dalling asked if there is still funding available for WaterSMART grants applied for in November or January (announcements that closed prior to the new administration).
- Sidney Decker did not know, but offered her email address to learn more specifics so Congressman Simpson's office can look into what each group has already applied for and the program status.
- Kathy Rinaldi admitted to being a news geek and encouraged everyone to watch the budget reconciliation process because the budget is big and either cuts or new revenue streams are going to have to happen. Part of that, Kathy pointed out, might be selling federal public lands. The House Natural Resources Committee included about 500,000 acres of land to sell in Utah and Nevada to make ends meet. Kathy noted how Congress is getting pretty creative, and that the delegation is both the problem and the solution right now—and that they won't know until they know because this work is getting done at 11:30 at night.
  - Sidney Decker confirmed that they are learning about most things in real-time along with everybody else.
  - Kathy Rinaldi acknowledged that Congressman Simpson's office has been a strong supporter of public lands and has joined a caucus to make sure we don't sell off any of our public lands. Kathy noted her thanks.
  - Jack McLaren followed up, noting that the current reconciliation bill has about a half million acres in public land sales or exchanges, as well as deep cuts to some of these programs that we've discussed as beneficial to eastern Idaho. With Congressman Simpson on the public lands caucus, as well as his stated support for these programs, Jack asked if—hypothetically speaking—there is enough for Congressman Simpson to vote against the reconciliation bill should it go to a vote. Would Congressman Simpson vote against his own party and this administration? Against this particular reconciliation bill?
  - Sidney Decker noted it was a great question, but that she is not part of Congressman Simpson's decision making and usually finds out after the fact. So she cannot speak for the Congressman on the matter.
  - Kathryn Hitch noted that it's a good question, but that it is important to remember that this was just one committee budget and, as Kathy said, is only part of the

reconciliation process. There will be several more procedural votes to make it through.

- Jack McLaren reaffirmed that that's why he was speaking hypothetically.
  - Kathryn Hitch noted that we should consider this a first draft.
  - Sidney Decker reaffirmed that there will be a lot of changes and iterations before Congressman Simpson even has an opportunity to vote on it, but it is something to be engaged in. Sidney added that the delegation makes sure that the concerns and what comes out of these committees is given to their bosses right away so they're aware. Sidney noted that that was probably why Congressman Simpson was so reactionary, because it's what his constituents wanted him to do. Sidney further invited folks to engage with the delegation.
- To Craig Chandler and Zak Miller, Rob Van Kirk asked about the Nez Perce Agreement and the Columbia Basin Treaty with Canada—noting that these are bigger issues that happen at a really high level—but that negotiations with tribes and with Canada do affect our water users and farmers in Idaho. Rob asked if they have any idea what is going on at that level and if anything is changing, acknowledging that the agreement expires in 9–10 years.
    - Craig Chandler said he knows people are actively working on the Nez Perce agreement now because it takes so many moving pieces to get everyone on board, noting that it does affect water users here because of flow augmentation. As far as specifics regarding what may or may not be affected, Craig does not have any new information. But Craig did note that a lot of the leadership orchestrating the talks and pulling people together at the Bureau of Reclamation have retired. Not everyone—there are still folks that have been involved and presumably need to step up and assume those leadership roles to keep the ball rolling. But it remains to be seen. Craig has worked with a number of the people who will be stepping into those roles and is confident they will do a good job. It was just shocking to see so much of that leadership group leave.
    - Zak Miller added that if we do not get the Columbia Treaty negotiated properly, then Island Park Reservoir becomes flood control—which, as Zak characterized, is not something any of us want to have happen and would be both detrimental and ineffective. The negotiation is going on now and, Zak pointed out, ten years is essentially tomorrow when it comes to the Nez Perce agreement. They're going to want more flow augmentation and it's really arguable if flow augmentation is the most important thing that we get. If we can push that [water] back upstream, Zak asked, what more can we do with it if we don't have to send it past Milner. That's going to be on the negotiating table. What can we get? What will the lawyers decide? What will science decide? The answer is somewhere in between and will be part of the discussion. Zak knows that Idaho Water Users is already very much the lead. These kind of political water discussions start with Idaho Water Users and then Farm Bureau likes to come in behind. Zak noted that the Farm Bureau tends to be the two of the statewide agencies on the political side that really jump into the middle of that stuff.

The Farm Bureau is already trying to kick and spur to get that discussion going because that negotiation is going to happen in the blink of an eye, and will have a generational impact on eastern Idaho depending on how those two treaties iron out.

- Sheryl Hill noted Zak's mention of 80% of Farm Bill spending going to nutrition, such as supplemental nutrition, SNAP, school lunch programs, etc. Sheryl asked Zak to explain how much of that expenditure goes to agriculture products that provide the food distributed through these nutritional programs.
  - Zak Miller noted that school lunch programs are supplemental nutrition or quote-unquote welfare programs for those lower income status. That's where all that money goes and that is one of the arguments that the Farm Bill is a grand compromise. Zak noted that there is always the argument to split the titles: have a nutrition title and a conservation farm title. But that has never been done before because you lose the urban legislators. Zak added that urban legislators are not going to vote for farmers if they don't have something to take back to their delegation. Zak also noted that the Farm Bill is the 2018 Farm Bill. It is supposed to be reauthorized every five years and it never does—which is really indicative of the climate we're seeing in DC because about as bipartisan of a program that there has ever been. Zak asked if we would even have the will to vote on any of the other things if the nutrition title was taken out. Zak reviewed that there are three main titles in the Farm Bill: conservation, nutrition, and safety net. In the West, Zak noted that we focus almost more on the conservation title—that's things like EQIP for conservation type things. In the Midwest, Zak compared, it is the baseline for corn and soybean farmers. The Farm Bureau pays attention in Idaho because we grow wheat, so we use the safety net, but it doesn't seem to go with our cropping styles and the things we do here, like dairy. It just doesn't seem to resonate amongst the farmers in Idaho like it does Midwestern farmers. Zak acknowledged the tangent, noting that that's why the Farm Bill looks the way it does—deferring to experts in the room for correction.
- In wrapping up the panel, Christina Morrisett invited the delegation to share a message with the Henry's Fork watershed—a vision for the future or anything else they would like folks in the room to know.
  - Sidney Decker invited folks to let Congressman Simpson's office know about challenges they're running into with regards to federal funding and different agencies. Congressman Simpson's office will try to sort things out so folks can get the funding they need. Sidney emphasized that Congressman Simpson considers rivers the arteries of Idaho—he's very supportive and his office wants to help continue the audience's successes as much as possible within the boundaries of the federal government.
  - Kyle Wilson with Senator Risch's office echoed Sidney. He asked the audience to let Senator Risch's office know what our thoughts and struggles are. The office can't help if they don't know what folks are going through. Kyle asserted that Senator Risch loves to hear from his constituents, inviting attendees to reach out, send an email, give call,

and provide updates. Senator Risch loves the work members of the Watershed Council does and wants us to keep up the good work. The office is here for support.

- Kathryn Hitch with Senator Crapo's office shared the same sentiments, and added that there is a lot of uncertainty right now, a lot of positions getting confirmed, and people at the top levels finally getting put into their spots. Senator Crapo's office is hopeful there will be more certainty in our agencies within the next couple of months. Kathryn imagines a lot of things won't look different, but that it is important for Senator Crapo's office to understand how these federal-level decisions are having a local-level impact, as the office relays that information to the White House. Kathryn noted, however, that positions in the White House have yet to be filled so the office isn't able to get answers very quickly. But Senator Crapo's office has a running list of the programs in each county and city and how they are being impacted to make sure things are being addressed with a scalpel instead of a chainsaw (an analogy, Kathryn notes, the Idaho delegation has used a few times). Kathryn explained that where chainsaw cuts are being made, they want to ensure they're appropriate and fix it if not. Kathryn emphasized that attendees should not hesitate to reach out and send emails. Senator Crapo's office is happy to support grant opportunities and will continue to do that and check in on ones folks have applied for. She shared that she has noted a couple WaterSMART grants to check in on and once again encouraged the audience to reach out to the Senator's office.
- Zak Miller added that Idaho is a small state with less than 2 million people. But that when it comes to representation, we have the Chair of the Finance Committee and the Chair of Foreign Relations, as well as one of the Cardinals of Appropriations. He noted that folks may agree or disagree with their politics, but as far as positioning goes, people sitting in St. Anthony Idaho have as strong a voice as we have probably ever had. Zak emphasized that Idahoans are punching pretty high above our weight when it comes to representation and responsiveness. [At the Farm Bureau Federation], Zak noted that they have a staffer whose primary job is to coordinate with the delegation daily and joked that sometimes they even listen. Zak re-emphasized how lucky Idahoans are with the representation and responsiveness we have. He encouraged folks to take the delegation up on that.
- Kathy Rinaldi reminded attendees that Congress is the one that appropriates and holds the purse strings. Kathy heard a lot of things about grants and data today—noting her agreement with Zak: our delegation needs to hear from us if things are going in a way we thought they wouldn't, if things aren't getting done, or if promised money or grant applications are frozen or stalled. Kathy emphasized that the delegation needs to hear from us directly to make sure they vote the way folks want on the things that folks care about—and if they don't vote in a way you wanted, they need to hear from you. Kathy noted that holding the delegation accountable is our responsibility in a limited democracy.

- Craig Chandler added the importance of services like water supply forecasting and how it ties to water supply operations.
  - Christina Morrisett thanked the audience and panel for the vivid discussion and moved the group into the closing circle for a moment of silence.
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### **Community Building and Wrap Up**

- Keith Esplin invited the audience to attend a meeting on tile drain recharge on Wednesday, May 14 in Idaho Falls.