



Meeting Minutes October 13, 2026

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

Attendance

- 21 in-person
- 21 via Zoom

Introductions and Community Building

Aaron Dalling, Henry's Fork Watershed Council co-facilitator on behalf of the Henry's Fork Foundation, welcomed everyone to the hybrid meeting. The group went through introductions and then called for a moment of silence before opening for community building.

- During introductions, Zoom attendees noted difficulty with audio from the in-person meeting room (reporting audio as garbled, delayed, in and out). **Christina Morrisett**, co-facilitator, acknowledged the report but was unable to resolve the technical difficulty, attributing it to internet issues with the room.

Jan Brown shared that she regularly cites the Henry's Fork Watershed Council as proof that people can collaborate and solve problems constructively, even though its work gets less attention because it isn't driven by public conflict.

Brian Murdock shared a thank you to Fremont County for the new chairs in the Annex Building meeting room.

Water Supply Update (Henry's Fork)

Rob Van Kirk, Henry's Fork Foundation

Rob introduced his review of the 2026 water year, comparing his April forecast with what actually happened. The year was the warmest in the Upper Snake River Basin's 132-year record. Although precipitation was near average (96%), snowpack peaked early at just 67% of average and was at a record low by April 1. As a result, only 30% of precipitation became streamflow, making the water supply among the lowest on record—likely the lowest since 1934, though records farther back are uncertain.

Rob said the year had been the warmest on record and that water supply had ranked among the second- to fourth-lowest, though probably not the absolute lowest. NOAA records showed temperatures had risen since the mid-1970s, while precipitation had shown no clear long-term trend, despite periods of drought and wetter years.

He also described a declining share of precipitation becoming streamflow, in part because more precipitation had fallen as rain rather than snow and had been taken up by plants in the headwaters, citing work from Dr. Sarah Newcomb (Trout Unlimited). The long-term natural-flow trend depended on the comparison period: recent flows had been similar to those of the 1930s, while the mid-1960s through late 1990s had been wetter.

Turning from the climate/water landscape to the to the Upper Snake reservoir system: Rob explained that Upper Snake River reservoirs has generally been filled from the top of the system downward and drawn down only as needed to meet demand and other operating requirements, such as streamflow targets, dam safety, and flood control. Flood-risk management was not needed in 2026, and not every reservoir had the same legal or operational obligations for purposes such as hydropower.

He emphasized that the water physically stored in a reservoir did not necessarily belong to the water-right holder one might expect. Because American Falls had a large, senior storage right, about 70,000 acre-feet in the Henrys Fork reservoirs had legally accrued to American Falls in 2026—even though it was physically stored upstream. The Henrys Fork reservoirs had peaked at roughly 97% full in May, while the overall system had reached about 76–77% of capacity.

Rob said his models, developed in 2017, had historically predicted natural flow with about 10.5% error. On April 1, 2026, he had forecast natural flow at roughly 50–60% of average and expected water to be sent from the Henrys Fork reservoirs to American Falls.

The observed flows were close to his forecast. He overpredicted flow in the Upper Henrys Fork but underpredicted it in the Fall River and Teton River, where summer rains boosted flows. Overall, the model's error was about 5%, its best performance to date, despite the unusual conditions. Summer flows remained well below the recent average.

At Parker, the river reached the 350-cfs target for Henrys Fork needs in early April and stayed near it through June. On July 12, water was released above that target to meet the American Falls obligation. The flow above the target added up to about 70,000 acre-feet, matching the amount owed. Rob said his model had anticipated the release but had projected it for around August 1 and underestimated its volume.

Rob said his model had predicted 80% full for Henry's Lake, 9% for Island Park, and 46% for Grassy Lake. More water than expected was released from Henry's Lake, while more remained in Island Park; Grassy Lake was close to forecast. The model's estimate of the three reservoirs' combined volume was within 3%. Turbidity had been slightly lower than predicted, sediment outflow had been lower, and water temperature had been cooler.

Looking ahead, Rob projected very low winter inflow to Island Park—potentially near the record low of 302 cfs—and winter releases of about 80–90 cfs. He said the reservoir's fill was expected to be slow and uncertain: there was a 60% chance it would reach the 93% ice constraint by May 1, but also a greater-than-5% chance it would remain below 87%. He considered the chance of filling the entire upper Snake system nearly zero under the conditions at the time. He said it was uncertain whether 2026 had been an outlier, but recommended planning for less snow and streamflow as a possible new normal.

Q&A: Water Supply Update (Henry's Fork)

- **Brian Stevens** asked about the photos on Rob's first slide.
 - **Rob Van Kirk** compared mid-March photos of Island Park from 2019 and 2026. He described 2019 as an above-average snow year and the last particularly good snow year there, contrasting it with the sparse snow in 2026.
- **Bronson Smart** asked about Rob's observations relative to precipitation ranges—higher highs and lower lows?
 - **Rob** said precipitation had been more variable in some periods, especially since the 1980s, when both some of the wettest and driest years occurred. The 1920s and 1930s had been more consistent by comparison. He noted that the pattern depended on the time period and how variability was measured.
- **Brian Murdock** asked what happened in 1935, given that 1934 was the warmest and driest on record.
 - **Rob** said 1935 had below-average precipitation and continued the drought, which took several years to recover from. It was much cooler than 1934. He cautioned that conditions then were difficult to compare with today because major reservoirs had not yet been built and irrigation demand was lower.
- **Tyler Pratt** asked if HFF had developed minimum streamflow targets in the Henry's Fork downstream of Island Park Reservoir.
 - **Rob** said there is no minimum streamflow target or ecological threshold downstream of Island Park Dam. The main constraint is a minimum gate setting that keeps releases at either zero or roughly 80–90 cfs to prevent damage to the tunnel's concrete. He contrasted this with Christina Morrisett's study near the St. Anthony irrigation diversion complex, where a threshold had been identified for wetted habitat, groundwater connection, and adequate head at the diversion.
 - **Tyler** followed up and asked whether water-conservation projects aimed to store more water in Island Park Reservoir so higher winter releases could be made had a goal, specific flow target, or threshold.
 - **Rob** said Island Park Reservoir carryover had exceeded historical expectations for the water supply for nine consecutive years, averaging about 20,000–25,000 acre-feet. In 2026, however, there wasn't enough water to support higher winter flows. Rather than reduce releases to zero in October and November and then raise them to 80 cfs, managers chose to keep them near 80 cfs; there is no realistic prospect of spilling that water at Milner the following spring.
- **Brian Stevens** asked a question about only 30% of precipitation becoming streamflow.
 - **Rob** defined runoff efficiency as the share of precipitation that appeared as streamflow, noting that the measure had limitations. He said it had declined in recent decades, especially in the Upper Henrys Fork near Island Park, but not in the Teton. He suggested that the Upper Henrys Fork's flatter terrain and denser forest cover allowed plants to use more of the spring rain and snowmelt before it reached streams. The trend across the entire basin had not yet been fully assessed.

Water Supply Update (Upper Snake Basin)

Brian Stevens, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Brian Stevens described how Reclamation had managed the reservoir system, coordinating with Fremont-Madison Irrigation District on operations between Island Park and Grassy Lake. He noted that farmers' crop choices and water use also influenced the system's outcomes.

In 2026, snowpack had been similar to 2022 early in the season, but warm temperatures caused substantial early snowmelt. Natural flow at Milner briefly reached about 180% of normal in March and early April, then fell very low by June and early July; compared with 2022, more runoff had arrived earlier in the year. The early runoff and warm temperatures had coincided with high early-season irrigation use.

By early September, storage above Milner had been about 400,000 acre-feet, or 28% of normal—roughly 40,000 acre-feet above the 2003 record low. Brian said timely rain and conservation had helped keep storage from falling as low as he had initially expected, and that the difficult conditions could create even greater operational challenges the following year.

Brian said that if the next year brought the same runoff and storage use as 2026, the system could run out of storage by late August, so either runoff would need to improve substantially or storage use would have to change.

Brian then shared information about runoff and demand, storage levels, reservoir distribution and tradeoffs, and power at Palisades.

Runoff and demand: Total runoff was about 77% of normal. Diversions surged to roughly 350% of normal in late March and early April, then settled near 80% of normal through summer. Storage was used heavily in spring and early summer as natural flow fell, but storage use had declined to about 1,500 cfs by September.

Storage levels: Timely late-season rain and irrigation-district conservation has slowed the drawdown. The system ended about 40,000 acre-feet above the historical low; minimum storage was around 390,000 acre-feet, compared with the 2003 low of roughly 350,000. Brian estimated that filling the system might require 120–125% of normal snowpack and runoff, and said the chance of a substantial refill the next year was close to zero without very high runoff.

Reservoir distribution and tradeoffs: The Henrys Fork reservoirs reached a combined minimum near 90,000 acre-feet. American Falls and Minidoka reached about 100,000 acre-feet in August–September, with concerns about low levels affecting pumping, water quality, and ESA-related needs. Coordination helped preserve about 40,000 acre-feet in Jackson Lake, leaving it near 65,000 acre-feet, though that could have shifted impacts to the lower system and Palisades.

Palisades and power: Reclamation kept more water in Palisades because of concerns that dropping below about 50,000 acre-feet could compromise power generation and grid support. Jackson, Palisades, and the Henrys Fork reservoirs were operated together to balance these needs; Palisades is expected to maintain a winter flow of about 900 cfs.

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

- **Tyler Pratt** asked whether Reclamation had used its flexibility to draw more water from Jackson Lake and preserve storage in Island Park and the other Henrys Fork reservoirs, in order to support power generation at Palisades.
 - **Brian** confirmed that Reclamation had used water from several sources, including the Henrys Fork Basin, to preserve more water in Palisades.
 - **Tyler** confirmed his understanding that Reclamation had drawn more water from Jackson Lake than in some other years and had flexibility to balance reservoir operations rather than follow a single, rigid procedure.
 - **Brian** said Reclamation has considerable flexibility in reservoir operations, but using too much could leave USBR unable to meet future storage commitments if conditions changed unexpectedly. For that reason, USBR uses their flexibility sparingly.
 - **Aaron Dalling** added that Reclamation's flexibility opens them up to a lot of advice and harassment.
- **Tyler Pratt** asked how the Committee of Nine ties into Reclamation's reservoir management, asking if the Committee represents storage holders.
 - **Brian** clarified that the Committee represents all water users. He explained that the Committee of Nine serves as the advisory body between Reclamation and water users under their contracts. Reclamation shares system-wide operating plans with the committee, and they discuss the benefits and drawbacks of different choices, reflecting the varied water rights and perspectives across irrigation districts and geographic areas. Brian was unsure of the exact division of representatives between the upper and lower valleys—guessing at 6 in the upper valley and 4 in the lower valley.
 - **Tyler** asked if that is because there are more space holders in the upper valley.
 - **Aaron Dalling** answered that representation is based on water rights.
 - **Tyler** summarized his understanding that the Committee of Nine advises Reclamation's operations and that Reclamation works in good faith with the Committee, but that Reclamation has the ultimate decision-making power.
 - **Brian** said Reclamation coordinated with the Committee of Nine on regional issues such as flow augmentation, with many legal communications happening at that level rather than through individual irrigation districts. About 40,000–45,000 acre-feet of “powerhead” water remained, but Reclamation was cautious about using it because of concerns about Palisades' ability to generate power. Brian said it was unclear whether that power-generation issue had been fully considered when the term sheet was developed.

- **Brian Murdock** asked if Jackson Lake was drafted more than was traditional this year because the Idaho Water Resources Board took some of the Palisades powerhead earlier in the season.
 - **Brian Stevens** asked if Brian Murdock was talking about the transfer.
 - **Brian Murdock** confirmed and asked if because the transfer took place and water was taken from the powerhead earlier, if that is why Jackson was drawn down more later in the season.
 - **Brian Stevens** confirmed.
- **Rep. Jerald Raymond** asked for more details on the system-wide reservoir drawdown that occurred over the last few weeks.
 - **Brian** said Reclamation had expected American Falls and Minidoka to reach low levels, with a projected range of about 60,000 acre-feet. They ended up near the high end of that range. To help protect pumping access for Falls Irrigation District, Reclamation moved water from Lake Walcott to American Falls. That swap did not change the total amount of water in the lower system or users' diversion rates; it changed where the water was stored. Some Lake Walcott pumpers ran out of water, so the decision involved balancing risks among water users.
- **Aaron Dalling** acknowledged that reservoir operations are never perfect and said a fixed procedure would be preferable—noting that the flexible approach brings plenty of advice from others.
 - **Brian** added that either Reclamation has it locked in and they do it, or there is a lot of flexibility and discussions.

Additional Water Supply and Management Discussion

with questions directed at Brian Stevens (USBR) and Rob Van Kirk (HFF)

- **Jan Brown** asked whether, given the trend toward higher temperatures, state investment should favor new water storage or efficiency improvements.
 - **Brian Stevens** said irrigation districts have followed different water-supply strategies. One (not specified) relied heavily on natural flow until aquifer levels declined, while Northside had invested in storage. He noted that districts' portfolios reflect different circumstances and said managed recharge should also be considered.
 - **Rob Van Kirk** asked Jan to clarify what she means by efficiency.
 - **Jan** said efficiencies in delivery systems as well as recharge.
 - **Rob** said irrigation efficiency has benefited individual farms and districts but has reduced return flows at the basin scale, contributing more to the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer's decline than groundwater pumping. He distinguished efficiency from precision—defined as using better data, forecasts, and instrumentation to move water where and when it was needed. He said more precise operations helped keep water higher in the system in 2026, and estimated that perfect flood-risk forecasting

could have retained an average of about 80,000 acre-feet per year over the prior 25 years.

- **Jan**, reflecting on Brian and Rob's responses, noted that precision tools and managed recharge would be wise investments.
 - **Brian** said the system still had room to improve its operational precision. He cited the previous year, when about 400 acre-feet had been spilled while roughly 20,000 acre-feet were recharged. He cautioned that efforts to manage water precisely could still leave a storage-right holder short when forecasts and operational margins were uncertain.
 - **Rob** said precise water management could help, and that irrigation efficiency was valuable when using stored water. In shoulder seasons, however, less-efficient practices—such as springtime flood irrigation under existing water rights—could put more water into the ground for recharge. He described a proposed pilot combining that approach with more efficient sprinkler irrigation during the storage-use season. He cautioned that new storage would not have changed the outcome in 2026: the existing system had been about 992,000 acre-feet short of filling, so extra capacity would not have created more water. In wetter years, such as 2024, surplus water might have been stored, but doing so would require suitable locations and decisions about when to use it. Since water users had faced shortages in 2025, he thought stored surplus would likely have been used before 2026.
 - **Brian Murdock** said water investments should not be an either-or choice: storage, recharge, and other approaches all had a role. While acknowledging the debate over the value of additional storage, he praised the state for spreading investments across different priorities, including recharge. He also asked Brian Stevens for an update on the basin study.
 - **Brian Stevens** said the state has been managing water risks year to year, and that the basin study it funded is expected to provide data to guide decisions amid limited water availability. He framed the choices as either investing in conveyance for recharge or in surface storage, since there was little unallocated natural flow left to develop.
 - **Rob** agreed that no single strategy would solve the water-supply challenges; a portfolio of demand reduction, managed aquifer recharge, and storage would be needed. He said new storage could be most useful for holding surplus water in wet years and releasing it for recharge during the off-season, rather than expanding irrigated acreage. He noted that all the options—including storage, recharge capacity, and paying producers to reduce demand—were expensive. Estimates suggested costs of hundreds to thousands of dollars per acre-foot, roughly 10 to 100 times the cost of existing water supplies. He concluded that policymakers would face difficult spending choices because no option appeared substantially cheaper than the others.
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IDEQ Regional Update: From Hydropower to Wastewater

Alex Bell, Idaho Dept. of Environmental Quality

Alex described the water quality program and its work across a large region with a small team. The program is largely non-regulatory and follows a cycle: monitor water quality, identify impaired waters, develop pollution cleanup plans (TMDLs), and support implementation through best management practices and grants.

Budget holdbacks have affected monitoring. Because the Beneficial Use Reconnaissance Program is not legally required and lab analyses are costly, DEQ has proposed cutting the program's monitoring by half over the next few years. As a result, there was no monitoring update for the past season.

The draft integrated report, submitted to the EPA every two years, documents statewide water quality and identifies impaired waters to help prioritize restoration. DEQ is also developing ways to interpret temperature data, since temperature criteria are difficult to apply consistently across varied conditions.

The TMDL review updates water-quality data and checks whether existing pollution cleanup plans remain appropriate. In the Teton subbasin, early findings show:

- Many waters have improved since the plans were first developed in 2003; about half appear roughly unchanged, while a few have worsened.
- Nitrate concentrations are higher than the original target at some main-stem Teton sites, and at times on the North Fork. Moody Creek appears to be meeting the target.
- Total phosphorus has declined at all the monitored sites, so DEQ plans to recommend delisting some waters for phosphorus while continuing to monitor nitrate.
- These are concentration comparisons from a two-year monitoring period; flow was not factored into the results.

DEQ has first drafts of the Teton plan review and proposed new plans, with work in the Medicine Lodge area still at an early stage.

Jaimie Hayne asked why the nitrates are higher.

- **Alex Bell** said restoration efforts since 2003 largely targeted phosphorus. Because phosphorus binds more readily to sediment than nitrate, reduced sediment may be linked to the phosphorus improvements observed in the Teton subbasin. He noted that the review mainly tracks whether pollution levels are going up or down, rather than identifying specific causes, and emphasized reducing nonpoint-source pollution such as sediment.
- **Brian Murdock** offered a farmer perspective and suggested that crop rotations (such as potatoes versus wheat) and changing fertilizer prices and application choices might help explain the higher nitrate readings—for example, farmers potentially applying more nitrate fertilizer when it is cheaper relative to phosphate. This was raised as a possible explanation, not confirmed as the cause.

- **Alex** asked if rotation data is available in a GIS data layer or if he needs to just call people and ask what they're growing.
- **Brian** said that it is hard to track, but he is looking at the presented data and trying to think back to the price of phosphate that year.
- **Alex** noted that he's never considered that angle and appreciates the suggestion.
- **Brian** added that thinking about where the fields are located relative to sampling locations and what crop they're producing could be helpful.
- **Alex** clarified that the results are coarse seasonal concentration figures and are not adjusted for river flow. Looking at nutrient loads—the amount transported over time—could produce a different picture. The overall goal is to reduce those loads.

Returning to his presentation, Alex described several funding sources for nonpoint-source water-quality projects: state agricultural BMP grants, federal Section 319 grants, and partner funding. Applications are reviewed and ranked by basin advisory groups and then statewide. Since funding has not kept pace with the number and rising cost of projects, fewer may receive full funding.

For point-source pollution, the Idaho Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (IPDES) uses individual permits for complex or unique facilities and general permits for similar types of operations, such as aquaculture and stormwater.

Regional updates included:

- Driggs: Back on track with its wastewater-treatment plant upgrade and submitted a 60% design as required under its federal consent decree.
- Rexburg: Working under a compliance agreement to expand its facility and address capacity constraints.
- Last Chance: Completed upgrades that could allow treated wastewater to discharge to an intermittent swale leading to Blue Springs Creek. A permit has not yet been completed.

Alex also covered federal permitting, water-quality monitoring concerns, and regional projects:

Section 401 certifications: Idaho certifies certain federal permits, including U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredge-and-fill permits and FERC hydropower licenses. The Army Corps' new nationwide permits prompted updates to the state's general certification.

WOTUS: A supplemental rulemaking on the definition of "Waters of the United States" had recently closed for public comment. Alex said the final rule could substantially change which waters receive Clean Water Act protections.

Hydropower projects: The Felt project's draft certification had completed public comment and a hearing, with submission due in early December. The Ashton certification was expected in early 2027; St. Anthony and Idaho Falls projects were anticipated to follow.

Blooms and funding: Island Park Reservoir had a cyanobacterial bloom with detected toxins since mid-September; Henry's Lake had not worsened as much. Budget limits could reduce future lab testing for toxins and cell counts.

Fish-tissue mercury: DEQ is updating its dataset with Fish and Game. Samples from below the Gem State Project appeared to exceed the 0.3 mg/kg human-health criterion, so DEQ plans to update its integrated report and continue monitoring the Snake River.

Collaboration: DEQ and the Henry's Fork Foundation installed a real-time monitoring station at Harrop's Bridge and are considering additional sampling at Henry's Lake.

Q&A: IDEQ Regional Update

- **Tyler Pratt** asked for more information about the mercury exceedance threshold.
 - **Alex Bell** said elevated mercury in fish tissue below the Gem State Project (below Gem Lake) has been known since the early 2000s. Reservoir conditions can promote conversion of mercury into methylmercury, which is more bioavailable and can accumulate in fish. DEQ's priority is to monitor upstream to determine where the issue begins.
- **Jan Brown** asked if DEQ has the authority to increase permit fees to cover monitoring costs, adding that DEQ can't do its job without monitoring.
 - **Alex** affirmed that DEQ's director and senior leadership regularly raise applying fees to support program funding and reduce year-to-year budget volatility. However, determining which programs should have fees and how much to charge is a lengthy process.
- **Rob Van Kirk** thanked Alex for the Henry's Fork Foundation's collaboration at Harrop's Bridge and on Island Park Reservoir.
 - **Alex** added that it has been mutually beneficial. Given that IDEQ has a lot of ground to cover, these collaborative projects help both partners.
 - **Rob** noted that he hopes the Henry's Lake project works out.
 - **Alex** said the proposed multi-year Henry's Lake project would use several monitoring stations to track water quality year-round. One goal is to investigate whether seasonal conditions—particularly winter water quality—may help explain juvenile cutthroat trout survival and mortality patterns.

Restoration on the Henry's Fork and Mainstem Snake River

Josh Rydalch, Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game

Josh introduced Cartier Slough, a roughly 1,000-acre mitigation property established around the time of the 1976 Teton Dam failure. Managed by the Bureau of Reclamation and BLM, it was intended to support riparian and river habitat, not just waterfowl or fish ponds. The area lies along the Henry's Fork in a historically wet, flood-prone floodplain with several channels and confluences.

Josh described restoration at Cartier Slough, a historically wetland floodplain along the Henry's Fork. The work aims to restore natural water movement and habitat by removing man-made barriers, dikes, berms, and obsolete water-control features. Culvert crossings were replaced with hardened crossings, and some silted-in channels were reopened. Section 6 funding supporting yellow-billed cuckoo habitat helped fund the work.

Monitoring with piezometers and pressure transducers showed that restored channels now carry water during high-flow periods, saturating soils and reconnecting about seven miles of waterways. The project has also seen more fish diversity, including abundant leech chub, beaver activity, and increased wildlife use when seasonal flooding limits visitor access. Drone surveys are tracking changes in riparian vegetation.

Josh then introduced a separate Beaver Dick Park habitat-restoration project on the main Snake River, on BLM-owned land that was formerly a ranch. The habitat restoration occurred on a roughly 3,100-acre property established in 1997 as partial mitigation for Palisades Dam. The goal is to convert former agricultural areas near the river into riparian habitat and support more diverse wildlife, including yellow-billed cuckoo.

Before construction, the team spent about 1½–2 years collecting data and modeling floodplain conditions to assess potential impacts and inform permits. Bathymetry, lidar, soil observations, and piezometers helped characterize the site. A flood model examined a 20-year event and helped address neighbors' concerns about water reaching the other side of the canal.

At one site, the team removed a small section of a berm so high flows could move north into the floodplain. The work is intended to reconnect channels and floodplain areas during sufficiently high flows, though such flows are uncommon. At the second site, the team plans to plant about 4,375 trees and shrubs, along with dormant seeding, to establish riparian vegetation for areas mapped from historic channels. An eight-foot deer fence will protect the young plants from deer and moose. The aim is to establish a healthier riparian shrub and forest habitat.

At Beaver Dick Park on Highway 33: This early-stage project would restore floodplain function by removing some historic rock plugs, reconnecting channels, and potentially using berms or other features to guide floodwater and sheet flow. The team plans to monitor water levels and model the effects, while coordinating with the nearby BYU-Idaho Livestock Center to avoid adverse impacts. Funding is limited, so the project team is seeking additional partners and grants, including support for habitat benefiting yellow-billed cuckoos.

Q&A: Restoration on the Henry's Fork and Mainstem Snake River

- **Brian Murdock** asked why there is an emphasis on yellow-billed cuckoos.
 - **Josh Rydalch** explained that the yellow-billed cuckoo is rare and endangered, with limited, specialized habitat along rivers. It relies on cottonwood canopy and dense understory, including willows near the edges, and needs abundant insects for food. Its nest is fragile, but young develop quickly—about 39 days from egg-laying to flight. Changes in river habitat contribute to the scarcity of suitable places for the bird.
 - **Brian** asked if the goal is to see more cuckoos to get more funding to continue projects like the ones Josh presented.
 - **Josh** said the restoration work focuses on creating suitable habitat for yellow-billed cuckoos. The species can help attract funding, and its habitat needs align with

broader ecological benefits for the area. He also noted that protections for listed species can constrain land-management activities.

- **Jerald Raymond** asked Josh to talk about water yield as it relates to the plants he's planting, given that "everything green takes water." How will these plantings affect how much water gets used?
 - **Josh** said his understanding, based on studies and experience, is that riparian vegetation uses water through transpiration, but it may not represent additional water loss compared with what would otherwise seep or be lost. He described the floodplain as a "sponge" that stores water and releases it as river levels fall. He noted that water use varies by plant type—cattails, Russian olives, and tamarisk may behave differently—and acknowledged he did not have specific figures for the sites discussed.
 - **Brian Murdock** raised concerns that Russian olives around the north end of American Falls Reservoir may be spreading and using too much water. He noted that some people have suggested removing the trees, though they also provide cover for hunting, and asked whether some plant species use more water than others.
 - **Josh** said his crew has been removing tamarisk from islands near Sportsman Park at American Falls Reservoir, but has left the Russian olives because they appear to suppress tamarisk. He noted there are tradeoffs: some species can affect soil salinity or inhibit other plants from growing beneath them, and research is available on these effects.
- **Brian Stevens** asked what management plan was in place for Cartier Slough and if there is a yearly progress report to measure project progress/success.
 - **Josh** said that he uses wildlife management plan created by IDFG wildlife managers. Plans are reviewed about every five years and use SMART goals. Monitoring may include annual tracking of maintenance work, while long-term project monitoring—such as LiDAR surveys to measure habitat changes—can be built into a restoration design. He noted that whether planned monitoring is carried out can depend on the manager and supervisory support.
- **Christina Morrisett** thanked Josh for sharing photos and lessons from installing piezometers, saying the work is physically demanding and the information would be useful if she had to do it again in her work.
 - **Josh** added that the pressure transducers have been a reliable, relatively inexpensive monitoring tool, with some still working since 2018. Three were moved to other sites, while three remain at Cartier Slough for a planned five-year monitoring period, along with a barometric-pressure instrument. He also noted that a Bureau of Reclamation mitigation well supplied cold water to a stream at Cartier Slough, helping it remain wet and support trout when it might otherwise have dried. The team plans to account for this and other influences when interpreting monitoring results.
- **Aaron Dalling** asked if there is a groundwater gain in the Cartier Slough.

- **Josh** said one ditch clearly gains water where it passes through basalt, and wondered whether other wet spots that persist in dry years— even when the mitigation well is off—are also fed by groundwater moving through the basalt. He was unsure whether those flows might instead be related to irrigation upstream.

Community Building and Wrap Up

- **Jan Brown** contrasted the severe interstate conflicts over Colorado River challenges, as recently presented at a gathering in Idaho Falls by Rep. Britt Raybould, with the value of local-scale adaptation. Jan praised the Council’s incremental efforts, saying they can make a meaningful difference and give communities more flexibility.
- **Jaimie Hayne**, a new Fremont County landowner, said the meeting was information-rich and fascinating. They appreciated the participants’ expertise and the Henrys Fork Foundation for bringing people with different perspectives together.
- **Christina Morrisett** noted that there will be no Watershed Council meeting in November. Members were invited to attend the Snake River Headwaters and Eastern Idaho Water Rights Coalition meeting in Idaho Falls on Tuesday, November 10. The Council will reconvene for the annual conference on Tuesday, December 8. The annual conference is currently being planned, with the goal of having a theme of hydropower in the Henry’s Fork.
- **Brandon Hoffner** thanked the water managers and partner organizations—including Fremont Madison Irrigation District, the Bureau of Reclamation, Water District One, and the Henrys Fork Foundation—for collaborating on end-of-season reservoir management. He praised the work at the planning table to make the best of a difficult situation.
- **Jan Brown** clarified that the Watershed Council was not simply “instigated” by the Henrys Fork Foundation. The Council grew from a joint response to a major sediment event in the Henry’s Fork, convened by DEQ. Fremont Madison Irrigation District stepped up to co-facilitate with the foundation, bringing the irrigation district and fishing interests together to work through differences. Jan reflected that the agencies were initially waiting to see how the collaboration would go, but it proved successful.
- **Christina Morrisett** adjourned the meeting.