

Henry's Fork Watershed Council Meeting Minutes

November 17, 2020

Introductions and Community Building

In the second meeting of the Henry's Fork Watershed Council's three-part annual conference series, presentations cover projects in and around the Teton River. Aaron Dalling, co-facilitator from the Fremont-Madison Irrigation District (FMID) welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting via Zoom. The group went around with introductions and then called for a moment of silence before opening for announcements and community building.

After a moment of silence, the meeting was opened for announcements or comments.

Jamie Laatsch, Henry's Fork Foundation (HFF) shared that the final meeting in the annual conference series will be Tuesday, Dec 8th from 9-11 am via Zoom

Keith Esplin, Eastern Idaho Water Rights Coalition (EIWRC), shared that the water conference for legislators on November 16 had to be postponed due to COVID restrictions. They may do a short Zoom meeting or a larger meeting next summer or fall.

Spring Hollow Access Project

Brett High, Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game

Darin Schneider, Regional Access Forman was lead on this project, the US Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) provided funding and owns the property, and Fremont County did a lot of work on the roadway for this project. Spring Hollow access is on the Teton River, in the canyon section, one of few access points to canyon. There has been no maintenance at the site since the 1970s. There was an existing concrete ramp and rough road. An angler opinion survey in 2019 showed that, to anglers/hunters, the 2nd most important thing that IDFG does is create and maintain access. Teton Canyon is a unique resource. When Teton Dam failed, 70% of hillslopes along the canyon slid down into the river, which created a series of pools punctuated by rapids.

The fishery has a strong trout population and draws people to this area. There are over 1,800 trout per mile in this section (RBT and YCT), compared to 870 – 1,200 trout per mile upstream. Whitewater is a deterrent, but also an attractant. There are some dangerous hydraulics, which is important to note as they improve access. In late fall 2018, engineers from IDFG assessed and then came up with a plan to install a boat ramp and amenities. A new road was built by Fremont County. It has been two years and the road is still in really good shape. There is a new toilet on site, ADA accessible, with parking spot and sidewalk. This was the old boat ramp for Teton Reservoir. The new ramp uses boat ramp tiles due to the remoteness of the ramp. It is a 20-foot-wide boat ramp. The boat ramp tiles are bolted together, then smaller rock put over top. IDFG also added sign kiosks in the new turn around area, plus safety signs. They want users

to be safe. Kiosk signs are to be printed and installed soon. There is also new parking uphill of the ramp. In collaboration with FTR and local artists, the inside of the toilets were painted, which helps deter vandalism. In 2019, they installed a traffic counter and found over 50 per day, being highest in summer. 4,000 vehicles per year was a surprise, indicating this has been a popular access point.

Teton Coalition Project Updates

Mike Hilliard, US Bureau of Reclamation (USBR)

A few years ago it was brought to USBR's attention that there were concerns about activities at the Teton Dam site, including large holes in ground, breached tunnels and vandalism. In an effort to control that and plan for sustainable recreation, USBR got together with various stakeholders and created the Teton Recreation Coalition. The group formed to promote sustainable recreation within the Teton Dam site and Teton Canyon. Initially the items identified were: unsafe road access, lots of visitors/tour groups. USBR didn't have designated funding, so they had to look for funding and rely on partners in the coalition. Several dump sites were cleaned up and a design was put in place with Federal Highways to improve safety. Madison County Road and Bridge Department assisted on road improvements and helped remove large amounts of concrete slabs from the Teton Dam Admin Site, so it is prepped for future use. Chain fence at Teton overlook was replaced with a nicer looking boulder barrier. A boulder barrier also blocks access to a former dam structure for safety.

This was a cooperative effort, including outreach to help reduce the numbers of issues. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has helped with enforcement and the coalition has done outreach to local schools. So far everything is contained and secure. Kudos to members of the coalition including, Fremont-Madison Irrigation District, Fremont County, IDFG, Madison County, BLM, Friends of the Teton River, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, and others.

Linderman Dam is currently involved in a project to help lessen the deadly hydraulic on that structure, increase habitat improvement for fisheries and maintain water rights with pumpers. The design has been completed. Right now they are in the process of securing supplies and staging. In August 2021 they will start construction, which will be ongoing for a couple of years.

Upper Snake Water Supply and Operations Outlook

Brian Stevens, US Bureau of Reclamation

Island Park Reservoir is currently 72% full (96,932 acre-feet) with 220 cfs outflow. The system as a whole is 51% full (115% of the 1991-2020 avg) and 284,313 acre-feet less than last year. Jackson Lake is currently 76% full, with 255 cfs winter flow. Palisades' outflow is 900 cfs and the reservoir is 49% full. WY 2020 experienced 113% monthly precipitation in Oct above Heise, dropped off in Nov – Dec, and then Jan-March had above average precipitation for those months. June was a big month for precipitation, which helped the system fill. However, only

70% in July and 19% in August, which is why Palisades drafted more than anticipated. So far in Water Year 2021, precipitation is 89% of average above Heise in October, and 153% for November, so far. This year we're seeing La Nina and good amounts of precipitation in the northern half of the basin. There is a drop in soil moisture in the Henry's Fork and Snake River above Palisades compared to last year. The lack of precipitation is showing up in soil moisture.

Currently, we are above average in total system storage, but lower than 2020 by about 200,000 ac-ft. USBR will wait until late winter/early spring to see what that's looking like to determine management. We will likely end up above average peak storage this year. Jackson Lake is currently sitting at maximum winter pool and target filling in June. They will be sending about 70,000 ac-ft of storage from Jackson Lake to Palisades at end of 2021 WY to accommodate gate inspections at Jackson Lake. Palisades Reservoir is currently above average, but 300k acre-feet lower than last year. South Fork baseflows are 92% of the 1991-2020 average. 1997 was highest, then 2012 and 2018. USBR is projecting April 1 storage between 925-1,050K ac-ft, and not quite to fill before irrigation starts. Will watch what winter precipitation contributes.

In the Henry's Fork Watershed, we are currently below minimum for the period of record in terms of soil moisture. Baseflows have decreased over the past few years into Island Park. Projected operations are to fill to 120,000 ac-ft by December and then pass inflow. Average 460 acre-feet of gain per day since October 5.

October's 1- and 3-month outlooks are showing La Nina with above average precipitation for the Pacific Northwest and an equal chance of average or above average in Idaho. We will need solid precipitation to fill the system, and things are looking good for above average runoff. Jackson Lake will stay at winter flow until next spring; same for Palisades. Island Park will begin passing inflow in December when pool reaches winter pool.

Community Building and Wrap Up

Jamie Laatsch, Henry's Fork Foundation called for one minute of silence to reflect on the meeting and prepare any final announcements or comments.

Aaron Dalling, FMID shared that it was great to hear about all the projects going on in Teton Canyon and said thank you to the presenters.