

Henry's Fork Watershed Council Meeting Minutes

February 9, 2021

Introductions and Community Building

Jamie Laatsch, co-facilitator from Henry's Fork Foundation (HFF) 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.

Jamie announced that the next HFWC meeting will be May 11th and asked folks to please send ideas for future topics and presentations.

Rob Van Kirk, HFF shared that the water situation in the watershed isn't very good and isn't supposed to improve in the next few weeks. 80-85 % of average range anticipated snowpack.

Invasive Species Update

Cole Morrison, Idaho State Department of Agriculture

An update on the invasive species and noxious weeds program, including prevention and control as well as updates for the watercraft inspection stations. We operate boat inspection stations and do monitoring and control efforts for noxious and invasive species state wide.

PetSmart and Petco received shipments of Betta Buddy moss balls that were infected with zebra mussels. Have collected about 430 products infested with zebra mussels.

Idaho has 20 check stations, mostly near borders. Great cooperation with other states to ensure all areas are covered. 5,017 aquatic survey locations for aquatic noxious weeds in 2020. 913 total positive detections. Updated strategy for Idaho distribution mapping. Zoomed in to 20-acre hexagon instead of county by county to give more accurate sense of where issues are, while still protecting private landowner privacy.

Agricultural Best Management Practices and Teton Farms and Fish Program Update

Zena Wolcott-MacCausland, Friends of the Teton River

The Farms & Fish program in Teton Valley builds upon relationships cultivated between Teton Valley's farming and ranching community and conservation interests. Friends of the Teton River, together with the Henry's Fork Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, the Teton Soil Conservation District, Teton County Farm Bureau, Teton Regional Land Trust, as well as local elected officials, agricultural producers, and water managers, are developing locally based solutions for maintaining the viability and health of our working lands, open spaces, and stream corridors, while improving surface and ground water resources for the benefit of people, fish, and wildlife.

Beginning in 2016 the Farms & Fish program has provided financial, technical, and educational assistance to Teton Valley agricultural producers to implement projects and practices that protect and improve water quality and water quantity. Agricultural Best Management practices that have been implemented as part of the Farms & Fish program in Teton Valley include cover crop application, no-till or reduced tillage farming, and adaptive grazing management. Key lesson: start with a simply cover crop mix and add more species as you gain experience. Less expensive and easier to seed. Cover crops can be very effective when grown as a full season cover crop but less effective with a fall seeding after a cash crop harvest. When transitioning to a no-till cropping system, reducing tillage overtime, not all at once, may lead to a more successful transition. Livestock integration appears to lead to the greatest increases in soil organic matter as compared to the application of cover crops and use of no-till systems.

Approximately 500 acres per year participating in Farms and Fish Program in Teton Valley. 6 participating farms and ranches. Program will continue to provide early adopters with resources to offset the risk associated with adopting new practices that will address identified resource concerns. Aim to grow the number of acres and number of farms participating in the program. Share lessons learned and new ideas through education and outreach. Innovative ideas and solution that are developed and implemented by Teton Valley agricultural producers.

Upper Snake Collaborative Farms and Fish Program Update

Daniel Wilcox, Henry's Fork Foundation

The Upper Snake Collaborative Farms and Fish Program aims to improve water supplies and overall river health across the greater Henry's Fork Watershed. Their efforts are focused on devising solutions that are economically feasible for farmers and create market-based incentives to improve water management. The collaborative approach will lead to coordinated actions across the watershed, increase the scale at which solutions can be implemented, and improve information sharing in the region. Henry's Fork Foundation, Friends of the Teton River, Trout Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy work together, share data and help coordinate approaches.

Future opportunities include irrigation scheduling technology and establishing new markets for high quality malt barley through the Trout-Safe pilot program.

Community Building and Wrap Up

Aaron Dalling, co-facilitator from Fremont-Madison Irrigation District called for one minute of silence to reflect on the meeting and prepare any final announcements or comments.

Brandon Hoffner, HFF thanked all speakers this morning and co-facilitators for organizing another great meeting.

Rob Van Kirk, HFF shared that it's always good to think about how we got to where we got. USBR Basin study process started back in 2010, before that in 2008, grant from USDA both

started pushing us down the road of looking at how water flows through the system. It took a while to figure these things out and the drought of 2016 forced everyone to figure out some different ways to do things and that's when we really accelerated. Some of these things we've put in place we can really test of this year and next year if this ends up being a less than average water year.

Amy Verbeten, Friends of the Teton River shared that it is also important to look forward and think about things upcoming. We talk a lot about climate change. This Farms and Fish program builds in climate resilience in terms of resiliency of the soil and entire water system. Really exciting to be looking at our farms and ranches as places that are ahead of the curve in terms of resiliency.

Brandon Hoffner, HFF added that these projects are all voluntary. Looking into the future, we'll try to match what works for each producer so they can tailor the program to meet their needs. We'll need partners' help to identify projects that can have an impact and put those projects together to build that scale.

Keith Esplin, Eastern Idaho Water Rights Coalition (EIWRC) said thank you for a great meeting. The last few years, aquifer recharge had begun by now. Reservoirs are lower this year. Spring rains might help recharge. Idaho Water Users Association is requesting a list of infrastructure projects that are needed. Congress is looking at potentially a large infrastructure package. Make sure to let them know there are needs in water infrastructure as well.