

Henry's Fork Watershed Council Meeting Minutes

October 11, 2022

Introductions and Community Building

Aaron Dalling, co-facilitator from Fremont-Madison Irrigation District (FMID) 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.

Teton County River Use Ordinance

Rob Marin, Teton County Idaho

As river use and river use conflict began to increase on the Teton River, the county began looking into the issue and working with partners to brainstorm solutions. Started by assessing who has legal authority for what. The Idaho Outfitters and Guides Licensing Board oversees guided outfitters, but does not limit number of boats. Idaho Dept of Fish and Game (IDFG) regulates hunting and fishing and oversee Rainey access site. Cannot prevent commercial launching from private lands. No authority to regulate group size. Recreational floating not within their purview. IDFG creates commercial operate use agreement for access sites and incorporated them into the ordinance.

A lot of the authority falls to the county. County can institute private and commercial group size limits. Can regulate commercial operators beyond boat ramps. Next step was to determine baseline of use to compare 2018 and 2021. Found about a 26% increase in use and more than 60,000 users on the Teton River in 2021. 2022 shows almost identical counts. Less than 10% of use was coming from commercial rental/shuttle companies. Private recreational use is the lion's share of use.

Teton County hosted a whole host of outreach – surveys and stakeholder meetings. Surveys found strong support for further recreational management. Environmental protection was the number one concern for people, followed by crowding. Limiting group size, signage and hiring personnel had a high level of acceptance. Using public input, they developed an ordinance. The ordinance was adopted in June 2022. Outfitters are not regulated by this ordinance as they are currently limited on upper Teton and the current level of use is not an issue. Commercial operators (rental shuttles) – only issuing two commercial operator permits (two existing), can only launch at current access sites and on certain sections. Limited to 12 launches per day with 15 people per launch. 9:30 am – 6:30 pm time limit. They pay \$1 per person they launch to go to County river fund. For all users, limit groups to 15 persons or less. Hard to enforce but next summer hope to have enforcement. Also, no littering, harassment of wildlife. Paid parking will begin May 2024 with small daily fee or affordable season pass.

FTR led an education campaign this summer to increase awareness. Also formed Teton Waterways Recreation Advisory Committee. Installed signage at ramps with regulations. This summer hired a camp host and that eliminated squatting at Rainey Creek immediately. River Ambassador/Ranger – working to build additional funds for this. This is balancing people management with resource management.

Upper Snake Basin Water and Reservoir Operations Update

Jeremy Dalling, US Bureau of Reclamation

Upper Snake Reservoir system currently 14% full and 36% of average. Compared to last year, just under 19k ac-ft lower than last year at this time. Island Park Reservoir is 46% full and Palisades is 8% full. Very low natural flow last year made it so we filled slower this year than even in dry years. Total natural flow available for water supply, above Milner, 74% of average – decreased over the course of the water year. Early June precipitation helped quite a bit.

Consumptive use in watershed above Milner Dam, including evaporation, diversion, irrigation, etc., cooler spring allowed water conservation during April-May period. That April-May period did a lot for water supply and conditions compared to what could have been. WY 2022, April 1 – Sept 25, lowest consumptive use for 35-year period. More moderate releases from Palisades this year. Maximum of 12,000 cfs vs 16,000 last year. Within the Upper Snake, different water users have different contracts in different reservoirs. As those users use water, it is first charged to American Falls. The American Falls paper water is used first within the system.

Outlook: Palisades is drafting and releasing 4,500 cfs, but will likely be at storage flows by November 1. Henry's Fork will likely be at initial storage seasons flows in the next 7-10 days.

Henry's Fork Watershed Water Year Recap

Rob Van Kirk, Henry's Fork Foundation

This water year saw the watershed in a "snow drought", with snow water equivalent (SWE) at 29% below average and precipitation at 9% below average. A cool spring delayed snowmelt, but July-September temperature was the highest on record. Short-term drought saw some improvement, but medium-term drought worsens, and long-term drought continues.

Fremont-Madison Irrigation District had only 66% of storage allocation and natural-flow priority at St. Anthony first dropped to 1895-11-05 on July 13, vs July 16 on average. April-September diversion was 87% of average, Crosscut Canal delivery was 77% of average, and Teton River exchange wells 191% of average. Lower watershed streamflow targets during reservoir draft was 350 cfs in the Henry's Fork downstream of all diversions, except when water was sent to American Falls from August 24-September 18.

Factors affecting Island Park Reservoir carryover include: 1) watershed total natural flow (79% of variability explained), 2) total diversion (an additional 3%), and 3) streamflow in the lower Henry's Fork (an additional 3%). End of season Island Park Reservoir content was 60,791 ac-ft compared to an expected 17,199 ac-ft, allowing for a forecast 220 cfs winter outflow vs an expected 99 cfs. Island Park Reservoir Fill strategy is to reduce outflow to ~100 cfs until December 1. Then, increase outflow on December 1, hopefully high enough for the power plant to operate. Target fill of 126,000 ac-ft by ice off.

On another note, HFF's WaterSMART Applied Science grant Year-2 accomplishments include compiling Teton Valley GW model inputs, installing Buffalo River real-time stream gage, moving all hydrologic data to cloud storage, and developing hydrologic data website template, among others.

Island Park Bacteria Investigation

Flint Hall, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) launched an investigation into sources and factors behind seasonal bacteria detections in drinking water wells in the Mack's Inn and Island Park Village areas. The area sees heavy use during the summer and winter months due to recreation and vacation homes. There is also high groundwater vulnerability due to shallow soils and alluvium and fractured rock. The investigation aimed to answer the following questions:

- What are the primary sources/drivers?
- What are the drivers for seasonality and locations?
- What factors control the sites impacted?

In the fall of 2020, 36 sites were sampled. In spring of 2021, 38 sites were sampled. The investigation concluded that wastewater is a contributing factor, possibly from sewer and septic systems. Melting snows are also likely a factor in driving existing bacteria into groundwater. Surface water from Henry's Lake outlet and the Henry's Fork at Mack's Inn are less likely to be a significant influence on bacteria occurrence. Impacted sites more frequently included older wells completed to older and less-stringent construction standards. Some impacted sites were close to sanitary sewer collection lines and showed impacts correlated to peak flow in the wastewater system, suggesting possible leaks in the sewer collection system.

IDEQ proposed paths forward include new wells that seal out shallow sources of contamination, onsite treatment, new well construction or connection to public water supply for domestic users, and investigating contamination sources and developing and enforcing ordinances at the county and city levels. IDEQ education and training are also good options moving forward.

A story map with more information can be found here:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6897a2392cea45f49e9272a44da7f513>

Community Building and Wrap Up

Keith Esplin, Eastern Idaho Water Rights Coalition (EIWRC) shared that he appreciated FMID and HFF's efforts to increase irrigation efficiency. Also, EIWRC will sponsor a meeting on Dec 8th on drought resilience and conservation, and looking at some of the administrative issues.