

Henry's Fork Watershed Council Meeting Minutes

May 17, 2023

Introductions and Community Building

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

Will Stubblefield, Friends of the Teton River (FTR) shared that FTR will be hosted a series of events this summer. These include a State of the Fishery meeting, Agriculture Tour and much more. Visit their website to learn more: tetonwater.org.

Katie Guetz, Teton Regional Land Trust (TRLT) announced that TRLT is hiring a seasonal stewardship position for May-October of this year. The job announcement can be found on their website: tetonlandtrust.org.

Rob Van Kirk, Henry's Fork Foundation announced that Teton County will be repeating their Recreational Use Survey again this summer for the third year in a row. Also, the Henry's Fork Foundation will be conducting recreational use assessments (counts, but no interviews) on 3 sites in the Henry's Fork Watershed – Box Canyon, Big Springs, and Warm River – Ashton.

Nitrates in Groundwater

Flint Hall and Destiny Locke, Idaho Dept. of Environmental Quality

The City of Ashton is interested in a source-water protection plan, so Idaho Dept. of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) suggested nitrate sampling. IDEQ conducted regional monitoring in the Teton Basin-Ashton Region in 2013 and 2017. The monitoring found that nitrates increased at some sites. Also, when you look at all nitrate data from all sources (organizations, agencies, IDWR, ISDA, etc.) from 1990-2000, ¼ of the wells sampled exceed ½ of the drinking water standard. Specifically, the drinking water standard is 10 mg/L, and these wells exceeded 5 mg/L. There is not as much data since 2010. Sources of nitrates include: fertilizer, waste or N-fixation (legumes, alfalfa).

Goals of the Ashton Public Nitrate Sampling include to have a sampling event, identify sites of increased nitrates, encourage local partnerships and connect with the community. Their goal is to sample 50 locations.

Upper Snake Basin Water and Reservoir Operations Update

Jeremy Dalling, US Bureau of Reclamation

The US Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) is part of the Department of Interior and, in our region, they operate reservoirs above Milner Dam. Current storage in the Upper Snake Reservoir system is 69%; with Jackson Lake at 38% (50% of average for the date), Palisades Reservoir at 60%, Island Park Reservoir at 94%, and Ririe Reservoir at 84% of capacity. Palisades Reservoir's current storage is 120% of average for the date because most years, USBR would have the level lower at this time for flood control. The current level of 60% is as high as it can be with the expected snowmelt and runoff into the reservoir. The Upper Snake Reservoir system as a whole is currently 420,000 acre-feet higher than last year at this time.

The current forecast summary for May-June predicts 180,000 ac-ft of runoff into Island Park Reservoir. The reservoir's capacity is ~135,000 ac-ft and currently only has about 15,000 ac-ft of room remaining, so that is 165,000 ac-ft of extra water that has to be let out. However, also note that between April and May, that forecast for predicted runoff has declined 15-20% based on changing conditions. USBR must coordinate with the Army Corps of Engineers on flood control at Palisades, Ririe and other reservoirs.

Palisades storage was similar to 2022 at first, but started to fill more quickly, and is now forecast to fill in late June. To find a year similar to this year, you have to look pretty far back (i.e., 1980s). Island Park inflow came in much higher than predicted this spring, likely due to multiple bands of snowmelt. Inflow is now receding and USBR expects continued active operations as they maintain fill.

Release targets for Jackson Lake are 280 cfs (may not fill before July), for Palisades – 8500 cfs, for Island Park – 1600 cfs, and for Henrys Lake – 46 cfs, but may increase.

For questions about Jackson Lake Operations, contact Michael Coffey Public Affairs Specialist.

Henry's Fork Watershed Water Supply Update

Rob Van Kirk, Henry's Fork Foundation

Water Year 2022 was the lowest water supply since 1978 at 73% of average. The US Drought Monitor shows dramatic improvement in drought conditions for the Western US between May 10, 2022 and May 8, 2023. HFF's medium-term drought indicator is 3-year average annual watershed precipitation. The Henry's Fork Watershed really entered the current drought in July of 2020. Conditions have improved recently, but we remain in medium-term dry conditions, with that 3-year figure below average.

It has been really cold this winter and spring, with above average snowpack (120% of average); much better than 2022. But, as recently as February, snowpack was below average. Things can change quickly, which impacts decisions when it comes to reservoir fill and outflow, etc. Winter inflow in 2023 was the 4th lowest in the 90-year record.

This year's natural inflow between Henrys Lake and Island Park Reservoir is predicted to be quite similar to 2019 at 109% of average. Natural flow in the watershed as a whole is expected

to be most similar to 2018, at 105% of average. Predictions also indicate a 90% chance that Island Park Reservoir will be 68% full on September 30 (reservoir carryover), vs 43% full on average for the date.

Community Building and Wrap Up

Next meeting will be the annual watershed tour in August, then, possibly an October meeting.