

Meeting Notes
Henry's Fork Watershed Council
April 15, 2008

The Henry's Fork Watershed Council meeting began with introductions by Steve Trafton and followed with community building.

There was a slight divergence from the agenda to allow Clen Atchley from North Fremont Canal Systems, Inc to update the council on the Marysville pipeline. The Marysville pipeline project is a joint venture of canal companies, irrigators, NRCS, IDWR, with support from Idaho State Representatives to bury a pipeline to allow a pressurized system for delivery of irrigation water, replacing existing ditches and canals on the system. The project is still underway but phase one is near completion. Phase one, when complete, will eliminate 6 miles of open canal and save 819,000 KW of power. Phase two will begin in August of 2008 and will eliminate 9 more miles of open irrigation and save 1,281,000 KW of electrical power. It is hoped that phase two will be complete in spring of 2009. Plans are underway for phase three. A grand opening celebration of phase one will be held June 28, 2008. Interested individuals will meet at the North Fremont High School parking lot at 11:00 a.m. Attendees will travel from there to a designated location for a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Getting back on schedule with the agenda, Rob Van Kirk was the next speaker and addressed the group about the effects of climate change on mainstem systems and the implications to fish communities. According to Rob, climatic trends in Idaho will be warmer with a slight increase in precipitation. It is expected that there will be an increase in the frequency of big storms but the timing may be less frequent and precipitation will come as more rain and less snow as temperatures warm. There will also be an increase in orographic effects or clouds that develop in response to the uplifting of air in mountainous regions. Changes in Idaho's climate will have the greatest impact in northern sections while central and eastern Idaho will see less of an effect. Idaho will see greater extremes, and there will be less predictability in the water supply. It is expected that there will be a shift toward an earlier runoff and better likelihood of rain on snow events and possibly flooding because of this in some areas.

Because of rising temperatures, theoretically there will be a reduced range for cold-water species and a loss of isolated species or relict populations and an expansion in range of warm-water species. Some species of fish could thrive if conditions such as winter rains or spring rains cause extreme flows depending on the timing of the species' spawning habits.

It was also noted that because the Henry's Fork is largely a ground water system, water and unregulated flow is more constant and will be less affected by conditions of climate change. But, the river system is notably altered by dams and diversion structures.

The next speaker was Robert Gresswell from the USGS Northern Rockies office in Bozeman. Bob addressed the group on the effects of climate change on native species and invasive species. Bob introduced the group to information on species variations in historic ranges in the west and how human interaction has effected this composition. He went on to say that river flows have an important role in river biodiversity and that when expected climate changes combine with human alterations many species could become extinct in a very short span of time. On the other hand, some invasive species, since many of them have been introduced into their current ecosystem, may thrive because their new environment is close to their inherent climates and are therefore more tolerant to the changes. This scenario is virtually the same for all geographic biota and some of the likely changes in our area will be in the forested areas. Changes could not only occur as a change in species of plant life because of available moisture, temperature,

etc., other changes like a longer, drier, summer period could increase the likelihood of fires that would impart a whole new scenario for all habitation. Bob concluded by stating that it is time for people to begin to find solutions and work together. He sees the Watershed Council as playing a very key role in finding answers to address these issues through discovery and innovation.

Rob Van Kirk presented a proposal for WIRE to the council on conjunctive management of surface and ground water where rapid development on irrigated agricultural land is taking place. The project is anticipated to be for three years and will involve a research component where models will be developed to demonstrate ground and surface water interactions under historic, current, and future water and land schemes including agricultural and land that is being converted from agriculture to developed land. It is hoped that the outcome will lead to science-based decisions that will improve water quality of both ground and surface water. The Watershed Council will play a primary role in the project by facilitating meetings and field trips and bringing stakeholders to the table to facilitate a management strategy.

After the Council WIREd the project, the group decided to endorse it and have the Council write a letter of recommendation. It was suggested that perhaps the Council could go back to holding at least one meeting during the year in The Driggs area to ensure input from those people who have a difficult time traveling to Rexburg for the meetings.

After a brief community building, the meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.