Meeting Notes
Henry's Fork Watershed Conference
December 1, 2009

The annual Henry's Fork Watershed Conference was held December 1, 2009 in Rexburg, Idaho. The theme of the meeting was Dams and the Henry's Fork: Past, Present, and Future. More than 50 people were in attendance.

The meeting began with introductions and community building. Immediately following, John Martinson, Historian from the Bureau of Reclamation gave the keynote address. John gave an overview on the creation of the Snake River Plain and the catastrophic floods that shaped the area. When settlers arrived in Idaho, following the Native Americans, historic settlements and irrigation began. Sagebrush was cleared and the need for more water was evident. As these settlements grew in size, the need for water, as well as a reliable energy source to further promote economic growth and prosperity, became a defining purpose. Settlers would look for ways to store runoff water before it was "wasted" downstream.

To assist the earlier pioneers with water issues, the Federal government paved the way with the creation of the Reclamation Act. The Act would "reclaim" arid lands for agriculture and other uses to further development of pioneer settlements. Many water facilities were constructed from about 1902 to 1907, but much construction took place during the Depression and in the years following World War II. John provided a glimpse into the history of dam building and the dam's purpose in Idaho, including Minidoka, Jackson Lake, American Falls, Island Park, Grassy Lake, Palisades, Ririe, Henry's Lake, and the Cascade Creek Diversion Dam which forces water into Grassy Lake through a diversion canal. John also spoke briefly about the Teton Dam failure and the believed cause.

Mr. Martinson concluded his presentation by talking about the need for more water in the western states. A few examples of proposed projects includes: The Hoback Reservoir and Dam located at the lower end of Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Canyon Dam located above Palisades upstream from the Idaho-Wyoming State line. Bannock Creek located within the Fort Hall Indian Reservation and a supplemental storage water facility on Teton Creek for Teton Canyon Reservoir. The Bureau also proposed building a dam in the Bechler Meadow area near the southwest corner of Yellowstone National Park.

Today, the Bureau manages:

- Water supply projects in 17 western states
- Fifth largest electric utility with 58 hydroelectric power plants (averaging 42 billion kilowatt-hours annually),
- Administers or operates over 348 reservoirs
  (with a total storage capacity of 245 million acre-feet),
- 308 recreation sites
- Delivers 10 trillion gallons of water to more than 31 million people each year
- Provides one out of 5 Western farmers with irrigation water for 10 million farmland acres that produce 60% of the nation's vegetables and 25% of its fruits and nuts

After a short break the next presenter was Roger Raeburn from PacifiCorp. Roger gave an overview of the original construction of the dam and some of the problems that have occurred since it was built in 1916 as well as some of the modification that have been done to correct them over the years. Numerous remediation projects have been conducted to address sink holes, plumes and seepage. A concrete crest was added in 1991, lower level bypass tunnels were plugged with concrete, and a ballast was added to the upstream face of the dam. But the recent drilling to determine the extent of the degradation of the aging structure has caused engineers to halt further penetration and make a decision about what to do for a long-term solution.

The company plans to remove 40,000 cubic yards of fine-particle fill on the upstream side of the dam and replace it with multiple types of new fill i.e. multi-stage filtering to prevent further seepage and a compacted core material. Planned remediation will require a low level bypass tunnel be built to allow lowering of the reservoir during embankment reconstruction. Concerns were raised about irrigation water delivery when the water was drawn down and sediment releases downstream of the dam. Another concern was raised about the boat ramp upstream of the dam. PacifiCorp representatives did not have specific solutions for all the concerns regarding the drawdown but suggested that each of them will be addressed with continued dialogue with each constituent. A suggestion was made to form a subcommittee of the Watershed Council with this need in mind.

Construction will begin next year and the entire construction phase would last approximately two years.

Next on the agenda was Bryan Case from Fall River Rural Electric Cooperative. Bryan presented an update on the Buffalo Dam and Hydro project and the improvements that have been made over the past few years. One of the highlights of the improvements was a new fish ladder to replace the old ladder placed by the Henry's Fork Foundation. A newer design was implemented with a longer run and an out-migrant trap allowing fish to be counted as they return to the lower river section.

Bryan also brought the group up-to-date on the Chester Dam Hydro Project. Construction began this year and crews have completed extensive excavation to prepare for the new turbines, etc. Canals will be screened to prevent fish entrainment in the fall when irrigation

demand comes to an end and turbine intakes will also be screened to prevent fish mortality. Power generation is expected to begin in the spring of 2011. The project will also include better access for recreation when completed.

Jim De Rito of the Henry's Fork Foundation followed up with more information about the Buffalo Dam and the Chester Dam. Jim gave a brief history of the Buffalo Dam and the hydroelectric project then presented some of the data that the HFF has collected on upstream fish movement with the new fish ladder in operation this past summer. Jim also spoke about the fish screening equipment installed at the site. The fish screen allows fish to be captured and counted as they return to the lower river. Jim then gave an update on the Chester Dam. As part of the settlement agreement in 2007, improvements will be implemented to enhance the fishery i.e. fish passage.

The last speaker was Dale Swensen of Fremont-Madison Irrigation District. Dale talked about early water rights and the groups that formed to build dams for water storage. He also gave a brief history of the title transfer that FMID undertook in the 90s to take ownership and management of the Island Park and Grassy Lake dams. Dale spoke of other significant events like the early years when the Island Park Dam was shut down in the winter allowing only flow from the Buffalo River to the lower river. Since those days, a drought management committee has formed allowing water managers to meet with other interests to shape winter flows.

Dale spoke of the many changes he has seen through the years and the inspiration the Watershed Council has brought to the watershed. He expressed his gratification working with the many groups in the Council and the knowledge that comes from working with so many interests.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 noon.

Minutes submitted by Susan Steinman, December 3, 2008