

**Big Horn River System Long-Term Issues Group
Flip Chart Summary
Fort Smith, Montana
April 12, 2007**

Welcome and Introductions

Participants introduced themselves and were welcomed by the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and Big Horn County, Montana. The agenda and ground rules were reviewed and an overview of the first meeting held March 8, 2007 in Powell, Wyoming was provided. Participants at that meeting agreed to continue meeting to address long-term issues. This is the second meeting of the group. Reclamation has established a website where information from this group will be posted (may be subject to change):

www.usbr.gov/gp/mtao/yellowtail/index.cfm

Clarification on the Roles of Various Participants

At the first meeting of this group there was concern over if, how, and when the public participated in the discussions. Having done some research between meetings, Lenny Duberstein of Reclamation talked about the requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA.) He believes this group does not fall under that authority because the group will be developing a variety of recommendations for Reclamation and other state and federal agencies, some of which will likely be consensus recommendations and some which probably will not be based on a consensus. If this effort did fall under FACA, it would be directed by the Secretary of the Interior, rather than locally. As a result the concerns about having only governmental entities on this committee in order to retain the local focus have been alleviated. The following roles of participants were reviewed.

- The public will be free to attend any and all meetings and participate in the deliberation of issues along with the government representatives. Reclamation has set up a website where information about this process will be posted and available to anyone.
- Tribes have been invited and encouraged to participate as sovereign nations as they deem desirable.
- Reclamation is the convener of the group and will also support the group with staff time and some level of funding.
- State and federal agencies involved in the process will participate as group members, technical experts, and provide other resources as needed such as meeting facilities, etc.
- Elected officials and their staff will participate as they desire, represent interests they serve, and may be able to procure grants or other funding to support the needs of the group.

Draft Problem Statement

Draft language was sent out with the meeting agenda. The group discussed the language of the draft problem statement and made a few changes before endorsing the following statement by consensus.

“The amount, timing, and location of water available in the Big Horn River system to support all required and desired uses including, but not limited to, tribal obligations, recreation, aquatic organisms, power generation, and irrigation is limited and variable. Our challenge is to take a new look at all uses and needs, while recognizing commitments to authorized project purposes and other legal obligations—including water rights.”

Draft Group Charter

Draft language was sent out with the meeting agenda. The group discussed the draft charter and was not able to reach agreement because more information is needed on how the river downstream from the dam and the water in Big Horn Reservoir fit within the river and water management system as a whole.

“The Big Horn River System Long-Term Coordinating Group has been formed to identify, explore, and recommend alternative courses of action to the federal and state agencies responsible for managing Big Horn River and Big Horn Reservoir resources for their consideration as part of long-term management strategies.”

A great deal of discussion occurred over the concept of the river system as a whole and the scope of this effort. Those present agreed that more information is needed on the operations of dams on the river and how Yellowtail Dam is operated in relation to Boysen and Buffalo Bill dams. (As a follow-up item, Reclamation will provide a speaker at the next meeting to address this subject.)

Additional points of discussion, but not agreement included;

- What is the definition of the Big Horn River system as used here?
- The observation that what happens upstream affects the downstream situation (e.g additional water development, sediment, or other issues.)
- Tackling issues in the whole system would significantly broaden the scope of this effort. And if the scope is expanded, the appropriate people (or their representatives) will need to be invited to participate.
- Building support for the recommendations of this group should start at the beginning by involving affected interests,
- There is a relationship between size of group/scope of effort and how quickly the effort will produce results.
- Focusing only on fisheries and recreation issues is too restrictive.
- There are many other models of successful collaboration out there that could be looked at, including Indian tribe compacts.

- Education of members of this group and beyond will be key to success.
- Studies have been done on upstream conditions and other issues related to this effort. What information is already out there that could be helpful?

The issue of scope of the effort in this draft charter will need to be revisited after the presentation on how reservoirs are operated in the whole river system.

Overview of Authorities

Lenny Duberstein of Reclamation presented information about the authorities of the Yellowtail Unit and the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area. The power point presentation can be found on Reclamation's website given on page one of these notes.

Reservoir Operations

Gordon Aycock of Reclamation presented information about the operations of the Yellowtail Unit. The power point presentation can be found on Reclamation's website given on page one of these notes.

Planning Process

Several options for how to organize future meetings and problem solving were outlined. The tasks would be to prioritize the issues, develop problem statements for the top issues, generate ideas and recommendations, seek endorsement of the whole group, and finalize the recommendations. The group recognizes that consensus recommendations by the whole group will probably have the best chance for becoming incorporated into the agencies' long-term plans.

The participants at this meeting developed and agreed to their own method of organizing the work and proceeding. The decision is as follows: The group will function as a whole (not breaking into smaller issue-driven groups.) The first portion of each meeting will be devoted to education and information about one or more topics identified by the group. The second portion will consist of discussion and problem solving by the whole group of participants with follow-up assignments as needed. Points raised during the discussion included the need to have a full set of facts about each topic, and the need to continue with a separate but parallel communication process for the annual water management deliberations and decisions. This approach selected by the group will enhance communications, build trust among the participants, and improve the understanding of decisions that are made by Reclamation and others.

It is likely several technical groups will need to be formed to develop information for the group. While some information needs may arise at or during a meeting,

others will probably take more time. Technical expertise may be needed on the following issues:

- Sedimentation (note: Reclamation will resurvey the reservoir this coming year)
- Forecasting and modeling (Gordon A. of Reclamation will help with this)
- Fish habitat and reproduction
- Flood pool elevations
- Water rights
- Down-cutting in the river

The group did not make any decisions on establishing specific technical groups except to charge Lenny Duberstein with investigating and following-up as he deemed necessary. Members of the whole group are to contact Lenny with volunteers to participate on these or other technical groups.

Power Generation

Doug Hellekson of the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) provided information and answered questions on power generation and marketing from the Yellowtail Unit.

Wrap-up

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for June 8, 14, or 15 in Lovell, depending on the availability of key speakers requested by the group. Notes from this meeting will be posted on Reclamation's website found on page one of these notes. Reclamation will post the notes and then send out an e-mail to the participants notifying them that the notes are available on the website. Future meetings will be scheduled on approximately 6-week intervals with the locations continuing to rotate between Montana and Wyoming.

Field Visit

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks lead a tour that included two stops on the Big Horn River below the dam. The first stop was at the Afterbay Dam and the second stop was at the 3-mile access point. The group discussed the impacts of water management to the river and fishery downstream of the dam at each stop.