

**Bighorn River System Issues Group Meeting Summary Notes**  
**Billings, MT**  
**October 13, 2011**

Meeting Outcomes/Expectations and Discussion Opportunities

The audience was asked to provide the issues they would like to have discussed and expectations/outcomes for the meeting:

- Prediction capability – What opportunities exist to improve forecasting of weather events, snow pack, moisture availability, runoff, etc.
- Process for revisions to Operating Criteria – Can the process for seeking input on revisions be improved, how comments are addressed, and opportunity to comment.
- With today's forecast, how is water year 2012 going to be different than 2011
- Discharges to river – Is there a way to minimize fluctuations in the discharge to the river? What reservoir elevation would provide a more stable flow to river?
- Make revision process a true collaborative effort – can we enhance the process to improve stakeholder participation?
- Yellowstone/Missouri Influence on Operations – How do conditions on these rivers affect the operating criteria? Can the relationship be better defined?
- Basin Coordination – Look at ways to maximize collaboration between Montana and Wyoming facilities to enhance operations of the basin.

Operating targets

Resource agencies and stakeholders discussed their interests associated with setting various operating targets:

**Lake**

WY Game & Fish discussed the targets for maintaining a healthy Sauger fishery.

National Park Service provided that their lake level preference is based on location of constructed recreation facilities and water access (i.e. at elevation 3620, there is no reservoir at south end). They also offered that they have no plans as of yet to schedule a review of their recreation facilities locations.

MT Fish, Wildlife, and Parks discussed the targets they had provided in the past were based on fisheries recommendations. They have since provided comments for revisions based on waterfowl management.

**River**

The following topics were discussed as issues to keep in mind when looking at the river targets:

- Maintaining flows through spawning
- Maintaining consistent flows
- Water temperature (too warm can have negative effects on the fishery)
- Duration of flows and at what rates (cfs)
- Minimize steep increases/decreases to flow
- Operate to minimize erosion
- Operate to prevent undesired flows (too high or too low)
- Minimize high level flows

**Power** – No comments were provided on these targets

## **Flood Control**

The following issues/concerns were shared when identifying flood control targets:

- Impacts of 20-25k flows should be recognized and identified
- Channel Capacity Study needs to be completed
- Flows should be adjusted to address expected precipitation/runoff
- Operations need to conform to legal documents/commitments
- Operations and changes to operations need to be based on appropriate science
- Fairness needs to be considered when evaluating effects of operational changes

## Draft Operating Criteria Revisions for Consideration

The following issues were identified by the audience during the discussion on revising the draft operating criteria:

- 2011 data should be included/addressed in the criteria;
- To what extent and when are operations affected/influenced by the Corp of Engineers;
- What is the October target and when is it set.

## Update on other Issue Group Activities

The following updates were provided on other Issue Group Activities:

### **Sediment Study –**

- An on-site tour was held this past summer
- Exploring potential marketing opportunities for sediment
- Completed an analysis of the soil/sediment, results available
- Aerial photographs of south end at reservoir elevation 3655 were taken
- Investigating sedimentation effects on fish passage

### **River Channel Restoration –**

- Side channel sediment removal project delayed due to last year's precipitation
- Necessary paperwork has been completed
- Surveying had been completed
- Areas for removal will need to be resurveyed
- Funds are available to complete work
- Reclamation's Technical Service Center working on side channel restoration study
- TSC staff completed a field visit last week

### **Inundation Maps -**

- Preparing maps to evaluate impacts of flows at 15k, 20k, and 25k cubic feet per second
- Reclamation completed high definition aerial photography of the river this past summer
- Targeting Spring 2012 for mapping availability

## Future Topics for discussion

- Kirby Creek

### Next Meetings

- An Operations Meeting has been scheduled for Thursday, November 3, 2011, 6:30 p.m. at the Billings Hotel and Convention Center.
- Operations Conference Calls – Last year's schedule appears to have worked to keep stakeholders informed on activities. A similar schedule has been proposed for water year 2012.
- Next Issues Group Meeting in about 6 months (March-April of 2012).