



Healthy River Initiative
Ag Producers and Irrigators
7/18/16

Jenny Wells	Steve Dutcher	Tim Wilson
John Armstrong	Joe Artery	Dick Hudson
Tina Cunningham	Ryan Blake	Ivan Laird
Hyle Miller	Don Gaddie	Anjie McConnell
Linda Miller	Bill Yankee	Cathy Rosenthal
Peggy Hornecker	Mike Hornecker	Timmery Hellyer
Thomas Jones	Mark Hogan	Steve Pokorny
Al Zelenak	Rajean Strube Fossen	Zebadiah Whipp
Ryan Hedges	Cale Case	Bryan Hamilton

Kelsey Beck, Popo Agie Conservation District, opened the meeting by explaining what this Healthy River Initiative is all about. Several agencies and groups in our community have a similar goal which is to sustain and improve our water resources. The Healthy River Initiative will bring structure and coordination to the effort of combining forces. Kelsey explained that nothing is set in stone, but we had to start somewhere. A small initial core group has come up with a vision, a mission, and a proposed three-facet strategy: management, storage, and conservation (see attached handout). The purpose of this meeting was to explain the big picture of what we are trying to do. Over 90% of our water use is for agriculture. We really need buy-in and participation from this group.

Why now? This Initiative is being presented at this time because of three main reasons:

- 1) Funding opportunities.
- 2) Several agencies and groups have conveyed they think we should pool our resources and focus our efforts.
- 3) It has been over 10 years since we formulated a plan for the entire watershed; it is time to re-visit priorities and ideas.

Jeri Trebelcock has been Manager of the Popo Agie Conservation District (PACD) for 20 years. She is now retired and serves on the Board of Supervisors. She presented some history starting in the 80s and 90s. In 1999, a large community group with lots of different perspectives came together and created the Popo Agie Watershed Plan. The plan was approved by the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality in 2005. At that time the main issues were broken into four categories: water quality, water quantity, riparian wetlands, and upland. PACD has provided voluntary, incentive-driven opportunities over the years that include irrigation water management, grazing management, control structures, and stream bank stabilization. In 2002 a stretch of the Middle Fork was listed as impaired due to high E. coli numbers. We have worked

with several landowners to install best management practices and repair failing septic systems and we have seen a drop in the E. coli numbers over time. We have extensive documentation of the seepage rate some of our ditches are experiencing which could help prioritize projects. We have spent extensive time and effort on developing a flood mitigation plan and can provide valuable data there as well.

Bob Tipton, retired US Army Corps of Engineers, explained that projects that have a well thought out plan get higher priority for funding than those with no plan when it comes to requesting Federal, State, and other financial assistance. Therefore we are developing this strategy and mechanism to synchronize our efforts and develop a long-term plan. The name "Healthy River 2050" was created to help people realize this is a long-term deal. Once a working group is formed, the name may be changed. Bob conveyed that he feels storage of water is key. Aquifers are maxed out and we need to focus on managing our surface water. In the future, water storage will not only include traditional reservoirs but could also include storing water underground in underground cavities. There are also "micro storage" option we can explore. Conservation is important and NRCS supports producers to be more efficient with their water. He reiterated that we are looking to the Ag community to help identify projects and help up front with creating this long-term plan.

Kelsey explained that we have submitted an application for Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funds. Applicants will be notified within the next week or so as to which applications have been chosen. If chosen, we will need to submit a detailed plan and how we will provide the "match" funds.

Although several agencies are involved, contact PACD if you have input or would like more information. We want to put together a working group by this fall.

(Minutes recorded by Diana Olson, PACD)