

Climate Issues Report
Committee Meeting Information
November 30, 2009
Webinar and in the WDA Conference Room
Cheyenne, WY

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) Director Jason Fearneyhough, Co-chairman
State Forester Bill Crapser, Co-chairman
Toss Ballard, USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)
Milward Simpson, State Parks
Marty Griffith, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
John Keck, National Park Service
Steve Ferrell, Wyoming Game and Fish
Steve Gray, State Climatologist and Water Resources Data System (WRDS)
John Barnes, State Engineer's Office
Domenic Bravo, State Parks

VIA WEBINAR

John Lawson, Bureau of Reclamation (BuRec)
Ron Vore, Water Development Office
Jeri Treblecock, Conservation District Representative
Steve Furtney, Governor's Office

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Mark Nelson, Game and Fish
Leanne Stevenson, WDA Natural Resources and Policy Manager

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chairman Jason Fearneyhough called the meeting to order. The following summarizes the committee proceedings by agency. Please refer to the materials index for meeting sign-in and complete agency reports.

BuRec

John Lawson said the water supply in the Buffalo Bill Reservoir was low in 2007 and about average in 2008 and 2009. He said the late spring snow and rain can play havoc with the numbers and makes it difficult to store water or reduce the levels.

They stored quite a bit of water because they didn't think the runoff was going to be sufficient, and then the rain came and they had to release the water fairly fast. That created a concern with sewer systems and lagoons, etc. This scenario was similar with the other reservoirs - statewide. He also went through the numbers for each reservoir. Storage on the North Platte has gone from 171,000 acre feet in 2007 to 1,700,000. He did remind everyone that it could also go back to 171,000 in 2 years so not to get comfortable with the high numbers. He also noted the producers are still being very conservative with their usage.

BLM

Marty Griffith said they are infusing climate change into their land use plans and continuing to work with permittees on good management decisions. They are also pursuing funding for climate change projects.

Several projects were submitted and they are being forwarded to DC for final ranking and funding. The majority of them involve flora and fauna with a few being habitat improvements.

WRDS AND STATE CLIMATE OFFICE

Steve Gray reviewed some of the slides from his presentation noting some of the wetter and dryer month of the year. He noted that he agrees with John Lawson on the predictability of runoff and rain being problematic. The 09 season was plagued by extreme swings between dry and wet conditions.

The Water Resources Data System Office is concentrating on their on-line tools, which is assembling climate changes in one place. They are also developing maps on crop irrigation requirements and monitoring data copulations.

There is a project called the FoSTER (Forest, Steppe and Tundra Ecosystems Research) Initiative and they are in the process of raising 20 million to monitor and understand how changes to vegetation affect everything. There is a way for everyone to work cooperatively on these projects. The WRDS office now has 25 soil monitoring sites with rain tipping buckets. They are asking for money from the Ag Research Station. Ginger Page is one of the people working on this monitoring project. 9 monitoring sites are now automated and they have 5 snow-tell sites. Their scenario planning program might be helpful for groups or agencies when developing climate change policy.

WDA

Leanne Stevenson said the drought monitor is showing Wyoming is not in a drought, but the variability in runoff and rain has made changes in agriculture practices. The value of hay is less because of the rain. Several crops were affected by the hail, and early freezes, and grasshoppers. The grasshopper season is probably going to be even worse in 2010. Jason said he is working with Animal and Health Inspection Service (APHIS), but their budget is limited. They agreed to take care of federal land and help the state as much as possible.

Jason said in visiting with the Governor, he said we cannot allocate enough money to eliminate the problem. Leanne went on to say there had been a few counties asking for disaster declarations and several counties received contiguous declarations.

STATE FORESTRY

Bill Crapser indicated the '09 fire season was very light due to the increased moisture, but there were more man-made fires this last season. The beetles continue to cause severe problems on state forests. They are assessing the impacts of runoff and sedimentation. They also saw the beetles flying in May and again in August. In a normal year they only fly one time. This now means twice the crop as last year. They are also seeing some other species changes. Bill said their office is working with carbon storage on the Ponderosa Pine. He said State Lands have had several requests for the use of state lands for renewable energy, which is keeping them quite busy.

GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

Steve Ferrell said the Wyoming State Wildlife Plan is due for revision in July. Our Game and Fish Department was instrumental in creating the National report which has been issued by the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies. Steve said their department is having a climate issues workshop on January

12 and 13 in Casper. Even though it is mainly for staff, he said if anyone was interested, they could probably find room for them. The object of the workshop is to get staff to start working on incorporating climate change into their planning.

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

Steve said he had nothing to report.

STATE ENGINEER'S OFFICE

John Barnes said their office is preparing for the next drought. Utah is cloud seeding and are in the process of asking for another three years of funding. Their office is automating their stream gages which will be available on their website this summer. They are also putting together current information with modeling efforts.

STATE PARKS

Milward Simpson said they are closely watching the beetle situation. The beetle- killed trees are affecting their campsites and they are closing them, as they eliminate those infected trees. They participate in the States Assurance for Natural Resources which is a collective voice to impact legislation on Natural Resources. The group has cabinet level participants. Rain has caused some flooding to their campgrounds. He also talked about how climate changes affect the snowmobiling trails. His office is responsible for the grooming, but the base has to freeze in order for them to groom the trails. He said the wind energy development around the state has also had an impact on their agency.

CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Jeri Treblecock said they have nothing to report.

NASS

Todd Ballard said the overall crop production was at a record high, but damage from hail and early freeze caused severe problems. Corn is behind but has been trying to catch up. Pastures and water look better than past years and overall things looks better with the exceptions of a few pockets scattered throughout the state. The final crop report is due out mid January.

No report from the US Fish and Wildlife, Forest Service, US Park Service or Farm Services Agency. There wasn't anyone from the Wyoming Business Council or DEQ to give reports. The National Weather Service and NRCS were not on the call and had no report. UW was not at the meeting and Ron Vore had to leave before he could give a report from Water Development. John Keck from US Geological Service had to leave the meeting before he could give his report.

Leanne reminded the members the direction they have chosen is to cooperate on projects with other agencies and to use the committee to disseminate information. The action is to let the university know what we would like them to be working on and potential research projects that may help individual agencies with decision making. The members decided to continue making the webinar available for meetings. She also noted the presentations and reports will be posted on the Wyoming Department of Agriculture website which is <http://agriculture.wy.gov>

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Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Leanne Stevenson, Manager
WDA Natural Resource and Policy Division