

Minutes
Upper White River Public Meeting
April 19th, 2022

22 in attendance

Outcomes

- Priority one (1A): Lake Avery expansion
- Priority two (or 1B)- Forest Management work

Minutes

Bailey Franklin, CPW, and Kelly Sheridan. YJWCD, gave an update on the proposed Lake Avery expansion and on the status of dam repairs.

Lake Avery proposed expansion:

- YJWCD has successfully transferred its Sawmill water rights to Lake Avery
 - Deeded uses are: municipal and industrial, agriculture, domestic, recreation, augmentation, and instream flow.
- In 2018, CPW agreed to allow YJWCD to store water in Lake Avery
- As of right now, the CPW has not agreed to an expansion. This is the next step that must happen before any other work can be started.
 - Local CPW will get a proposal ready and take it to the Director, if it is approved it will go before the Wildlife Commission for consideration.
- Neither YJWCD nor CPW can act as a fiscal agent for grants
- Maximum expansion would add approximately 5,000 AF to Lake Avery
 - Expansion is limited by private land and the desire to keep the reservoir solely on state owned lands.
- This proposal does not compete with the proposed White River Storage Project.
- If CPW agrees to the expansion several assessments must be made before permitting and final plans can be completed or funding obtained for the work.
 - Flood hydrology analysis – what happens if dam is breached
 - Geotechnical Data – can the surrounding geology support an enhanced dam
 - Feasibility and Cost analysis
 - Permitting, financial planning, funding
 - Final design and funding
 - Construction
- Proposed cost is 3.5 to 25 million dollars
- Timeline is 4 – 20 years

Lake Avery Dam repairs

The dam is 60 years old and is in need of repair. This work is moving forward and is scheduled for the summer of 2024. Lake Avery will be drained for the work and should be refilled in 2025. It is classified as a high hazard dam.

- 2021 Inspection listed several items to be repaired

- Ditch with senior water rights needs to be reworked
- Outlet and spillway have deteriorated and need to be redone.
 - Exposed rebar, concrete erosion
- Outlet gate seals are eroded
- Estimated cost of repairs \$ 2-3 million

Forest Management – Curtis Keetch, District Ranger USFS, Kamie Lone and Ron Cousineau, CO State Forest Service

The USFS and CSFS are able to work together through the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) to do forest work across the private/public land ownership lines. This facilitates work on a landscape scale and is more meaningful to decrease the fire risk. All presenters emphasized that fires are going to occur, it is a matter of what happens when the fire starts. With proper management in place before a fire starts, the fires are of less intensity and cause less long term damage. The Troublesome fire was of such high intensity it is estimated it will be years to decades before there is any regrowth in the burn scar. The goals of management will vary by location and type of vegetation to be treated. In general, the overall goals of forest treatment are:

- Decrease fire intensity
- Create fire breaks to prevent a fire from spreading exponentially
- Increase wildlife habitat
- Improve the watershed
- Decrease loss of critical infrastructure

The GNA allows the CSFS to:

- Form agreements with USFS and private landowners to treat a landscape
- Design treatments specific to the landscape
- Tailor the project to work the best for the private landowner

One of the big areas of concern for the Blanco District is the market for the wood produced. The nearest mill is in Montrose and the cost of hauling is significant. All woods going to the Gypsum Biomass plant must be chipped before shipping. This increases the cost of roads to be built as well and the handling of the wood. The CSFS presented a map showing the relative risk of fire in the White River, Blanco District. The risk is moderate to fairly high, but the intensity of the fire is predicted to be extremely high. Moderate risk/high intensity. There are a few areas that are high risk/high intensity. Ed Smercina, Rio Blanco Emergency Manager, spoke about Community Wildfire Protection Plans. He is in the process of updating the plan for Rio Blanco County.

Recommendations to the PAC

- Lake Avery expansion is desired by all who attended
- Forest Management – is supported by all who attended. The discussion focused on starting the work on forest management while the CPW is getting their approvals to start the process of expansion. It is felt there are several areas on the public/private boundary that would qualify for the Categorical Exclusion NEPA. This would shorten the lead time to several months instead of years.