

State Engineer

❖ *Mission and philosophy*

The mission of the Wyoming State Engineer's Office(SEO) and Board of Control is to provide for the general supervision of the waters of the state and of its appropriation, distribution and application to beneficial use as provided under the prior appropriation doctrine, and to maintain the flexibility within that framework to meet the changing needs of the residents of Wyoming. The State Engineer's Office collects, analyzes, maintains and provides water related information for ensuring the appropriate management and regulation of Wyoming's water resources.

❖ *Results of outcomes*

A time of change is facing the agency in the wake of the resignation of Gordon W. "Jeff" Fassett after 13 years as state engineer. His leadership and "big-picture" management style will be missed. Any new initiatives initiated by the new state engineer will be reflected in next year's strategic plan.

The State Engineer's Office strategic plan for this reporting year contained a single goal and four objectives for reaching that goal. As all of the efforts of the agency revolve around the single mission of the proper administration of the state's water resources, this single goal accurately reflects the interrelated activities of the office.

Several accomplishments were met during the fiscal year.

Water rights database conversion

An enormous number of water rights have been issued in the state since the territorial days of the state. Tracking these water rights through a database means real time savings in searching the records for specific water rights. The water rights database has converted to a more powerful, relational database, and further refinements are being made to aid in more reliable, more efficient searches for water rights information.

Coalbed methane activities

The large-scale development of coalbed methane wells in northeastern Wyoming has created a huge increase in the workload of this agency in trying to permit each of the wells under the state's groundwater statutes. The workload increases not only for the groundwater staff in moving these applications through the permitting process, but also for other agency divisions, for example in the number of checks that need to have receipts written and in each of these permits that need to be microfilmed and added to the water rights database. As additional groundwater is brought to the surface by coalbed methane development, an

General information

Gordon W. (Jeff) Fassett, State Engineer
(through June 15, 2000)
Richard G. Stockdale, Acting State Engineer
(effective June 16, 2000)

Agency contact

Sue Lowry
307/777-6150
Herschler Bldg., 4E
Cheyenne, WY 82002
seoleg@state.wy.us

Other locations

Cokeville, Riverton, Sheridan, Torrington

Year established

1890

Statutory references

Constitution, Article 8 and Wyoming Statutes - Title 41

Number of authorized personnel

97 full-time, 25 part-time

Organizational structure

Administration, Ground Water, Surface Water, Board of Control, Technical Services, Special Projects, Water Division Nos. 1-4, Board of Registration

Clients served

General public

Budget information

| | |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| General fund | \$0 |
| Water development fund | 5,522,134 |
| Federal funds | 319,848 |
| Other funds (private) | 71,761 |
| Total | \$5,913,743 |

increase in reservoir and stock reservoir permit applications has increased the workload for the surface water division of the agency.

River basin planning

The 1999 Legislature provided an appropriation to the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC) to begin basin-wide water planning. The State Engineer's Office received an additional employee to work in concert with the WWDC in preparing water resource information on a basin-wide scale. The Bear River and Green River plans are nearing completion.

Water resource mapping

Mapping capabilities are now in place in each of the four water divisions across the state as well as in the Cheyenne office. As water rights are attached to the land, geographic information systems (GIS) analysis fits well with the technical work of the agency and should be a great help in analyzing complex water right and water resource issues.

Records preservation

Many of the water right records of the office date back to before statehood. As these records are still accessed daily by water rights analysts and technicians, they are showing much wear from body oils, tears from tight, cramped filing drawers and deterioration from general use. The records preservation project has prioritized these documents to address the most vulnerable records first. During this reporting period, new map cases were purchased to house the old maps in mylar envelopes with acid free paper to increase the likelihood that these maps can still be handled in a limited fashion but also retained as evidence of the property right associated with the water right. Several of the old record books were also revamped to allow for the individual pages to be removed in a releasable type filing book.

Microfilm upgrade

All water rights, correspondence, petitions and other records of the office are microfilmed as the long-term storage and access solution for the records management of the agency. Much of the older microfiche was of poor quality and so the original microfilm was accessed as it tended to have better clarity. However, the continual access to the vault by multiple personnel leaves those records more vulnerable to loss or misfiling and less likely to be recoverable should some type of disaster strike the Herschler Building and damage the State Engineer's Office records. All fiche is being reviewed for clarity and, as new fiche is created, the original film is being stored off-site in cooperation with the Archives Division.

The trend toward forging new or expanded cooperative arrangements with other state and federal agencies seems to be continuing. As costs for basic research and data collections continue to rise, these cost-sharing arrangements allow for the agency to

stretch its limited dollars toward gaining additional water resource information. This agency has joined with the Bureau of Reclamation in identifying several water gaging stations across the state that are in need of rehabilitation and equipment upgrade. A cost-share arrangement is in place with the Bureau of Reclamation for the Water Conservation/Water Management program in the agency. Another agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation is providing for GIS mapping to be completed of some irrigation district lands that are served by Bureau of Reclamation facilities. The agency also spends much time and resources on the activities of the Platte River Cooperative Program that is examining ways to meet the needs of downstream species listing under the Endangered Species Act while limiting the impacts on existing water right holders in Wyoming. The litigation over the North Platte River in the *Nebraska v. Wyoming* lawsuit was set to go to trial in May, 2000, but a preliminary settlement agreement was reached between the parties; the details are being worked out and will be submitted to the Special Master in the case on Dec. 1, 2000.

❖ Strategic plan changes

The current agency plan (fiscal year 2001) contains one goal and four objectives, which are unchanged from the previous year:

Goal: Provide for the proper regulation, administration, management and protection of the waters of the state of Wyoming (Wyoming Constitution, Article 8, and W.S. Title 41).

Objective 1: All water being put to beneficial use in the state is permitted and is distributed to beneficial use in accordance with state law.

Objective 2: Aggressively protect Wyoming's apportionments provided through the various interstate compacts and decrees to which Wyoming is a party.

Objective 3: Gather, analyze and publish data regarding Wyoming water resources for administration, regulation and management purposes.

Objective 4: Educate the public and agency personnel in water resources issues and make information from the SEO available to the public.

Although the goal and four objectives in the strategic plan did not change, several new individual strategies will commence in fiscal year 2001. Funding was received to hire two new clerical positions in the Groundwater Division to help with the workload demands of coalbed methane. Funding was received to expand the agency's mapping capabilities within the field and Cheyenne offices and to complete the upgrade to the microfilm resource. The water rights database enhancement and personal computer and software upgrades will occur during the upcoming period. Funds were also appropriated to increase the scope of the cooperative program, with the US Geological Survey for basin water resource data collection.

In looking outward five years, several contemporary water issues will need to be addressed, including the following:

- Further investigating and integrating the public interest into the water rights application process,
- Providing new opportunities and incentives for water conservation within the basic legal tenets and protections of Wyoming water law,
- Playing an active role in the Statewide River Basin Planning Program,
- Considering and evaluating additional water right transfers between water users in the more fully appropriated river basins,
- Examining the use of the instream flow law to allow private individuals to change the use of their water rights to instream flow and to hold these rights,
- Upgrading gaging facilities for real-time, accurate recording of streamflows and diversions,
- Responding to the increase in the surface water/ground water conjunctive use requests for administration,
- Examining the potential impacts of new water quality regulations on water quantity allocations,
- Addressing environmental restoration needs for additional water supplies at habitat sites in downstream states that will further complicate Wyoming's ability to complete future water development,
- Continuing to inform and assist water users and the general public on Wyoming water rights and their practical administration, and
- Evaluating long-standing agency business practices in preparation for entering into the Enterprise Portal environment for providing services to the residents of the state electronically.

State Engineer organization chart

