

State Engineer's Office

❖ *Mission and philosophy*

The mission of the Wyoming State Engineer's Office 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*

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 its territorial days. Tracking these water rights through a database means real time savings in searching the records for specific water rights. Most recently, the water rights database was converted to a more powerful, relational database. This conversion will make the water rights data more efficiently retrievable, not only by water rights technical staff within the agency but also by the public.

■ **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 Wyoming groundwater statutes. The workload increases not only for the groundwater staff in moving these applications through the permitting process, but also in the number of checks that need to have receipts written and for each of these permits that need to be microfilmed and added to the water rights database. Funding was received by this agency to drill monitor wells in the areas of intense coalbed methane activity to better document if impacts to existing water wells in the areas are occurring. These monitor wells were drilled during the reporting period.

■ **Records preservation:** Many of the water right records of the office date back to prior to statehood. As these records are still accessed daily by the office's water rights analysts and technicians, they are showing much wear from body oils and tears from tight, cramped filing drawers and general use. The records preservation project has prioritized these documents to address the most vulnerable records first. During this reporting period, new

General information

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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	5,479,119
Federal funds	119,770
Other funds (private)	10,099
Total	\$5,608,988

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 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, so the original microfilm was accessed as it tended to have better clarity. However, the continuous access into the vault by multiple personnel leaves those records more vulnerable to loss or misfiling and decreases the chance that these records would be recoverable if some type of disaster strikes the Herschler Building and damages the State Engineer's 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 this 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 upgrade of equipment. 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 geographical information system (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 continuing litigation over the North Platte River in the Nebraska v. Wyoming lawsuit also consumes much of the State Engineer's personal time as well as that of several members of the staff.

❖ *Strategic plan changes*

The current agency plan (fiscal year 2000) 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).

Obj. 1: All water being put to beneficial use in the state is permitted and is distributed to beneficial use

in accordance with state law.

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

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

Obj. 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 2000. Funding was received to hire a position in the State Engineer's Office to participate in the River Basin Water Planning program that was approved by the 1999 Wyoming Legislature. This position will work with the Interstate Streams staff in the agency and with the Water Development Commission as the water plans for each river basin in Wyoming are developed. The agency also plans to expand its mapping capabilities within the field and Cheyenne offices. As water rights are tied to legal descriptions, the mapping options within geographical information systems work very well in analyzing water rights and any overlaps that may occur between rights.

In looking toward the 2001-02 and 2003-04 bienniums for a five-year forecast, several contemporary water issues will need to be addressed, including:

■ Furthering investigation and integration of 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;

■ Dealing with 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;

■ Addressing public expectations that additional information and services will be provided electronically; and

■ Continuing to inform and assist water users and the general public on Wyoming water rights, and their practical administration.

State Engineer's Office organization chart

