

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 and protection of both inter- and intra-state waters of the state. This includes its appropriation, distribution and application to beneficial use as provided under the prior appropriation doctrine. The SEO also maintains the flexibility within the framework to meet the changing needs of the residents of Wyoming. The 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 serving for 13 years as the state engineer. Fassett left the agency on June 15, 2000, and Richard G. Stockdale was named acting state engineer. Stockdale served in this capacity until Patrick T. Tyrrell filled the office of state engineer; effective Jan. 16, 2001. Tyrrell has made organizational changes in the agency, primarily with the re-creation of the deputy state engineer position, which was filled by Stockdale. Additional organizational changes are anticipated during the next fiscal year.

The office's strategic plan for this reporting year contained a single goal and four objectives for reaching that goal. All the efforts of the agency revolve around the single mission of 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:

Drought year water administration: Very low snow-pack conditions were experienced across Wyoming during this reporting period. In many areas, record-low stream flow amounts were recorded. During a dry year, demands on the field staff increase, as many creek systems are in regulation that would not be under normal hydrologic conditions. As a majority of the items in the agency's strategic plan revolve around the day-to-day administration of Wyoming's water resources, a drought year emphasizes the quality of the agency staff and their commitment to the agency mission.

Coal-bed methane activities: The large-scale development of coal-bed methane wells in Northeastern Wyoming has created a huge increase in the agency's workload, as the wells are permitted under the agency's groundwater statutes. There are workload increases for the groundwater staff in moving these applications

General information

Patrick T. Tyrrell, state engineer
(Jan. 16, 2001)
Richard G. Stockdale, acting state engineer
(July 1, 2000 to Jan. 15, 2001)

Agency contact

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Other locations

Cokeville, Riverton, Sheridan and
Torrington

Year established

1890

Statutory references

Constitution, Article 8 and W.S. 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 and
Board of Registration

Clients served

Public

Budget information

General Fund	\$0
Water Development Fund	\$6,351,932
Federal Funds	\$91,494
Other Funds (Private)	0
Total	\$6,443,426

through the permitting process, and increases are also seen in the number of checks that need to have receipts written. Each permit also needs to be micro-filmed and added to the water rights database. As additional groundwater is brought to the surface through coal-bed methane development, the number of reservoir and stock-reservoir permit applications has increased the workload for the surface water division.

Negotiated Settlement of the Nebraska v. Wyoming litigation: A settlement was reached among the parties (Wyoming, Nebraska, federal government) as the trial before a U.S. Supreme Court appointed a special master and was set to begin in May 2000. The past year has been spent finalizing the provisions of the settlement. The parties are hopeful the U.S. Supreme Court will accept the agreement in the fall 2001. Under the settlement, Wyoming will be obligated to report specific water use and water administration information annually to Nebraska and the other parties.

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. The Green River Plan was completed in December 2000, and the Bear River, Powder/Tongue and Northeastern Wyoming Basin plans are almost complete.

Water Rights Database conversion: An enormous number of water rights have been issued in the state since the territorial days. Tracking water rights through a database means real-time savings in searching the records for specific water rights. The database has been converted to a more powerful, relational database, and further refinements will be made to provide more reliable and efficient searches for water rights information.

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, GIS analyses works with the technical work of the agency and help analyze complex water right and water resource issues.

Records preservation: Many of the water-right records date back prior to statehood. Because the records are accessed daily by the state's water rights analysts and technicians, the records show much wear from body oils, tears from tight cramped filing drawers and general use. The records preservation project has prioritized these documents to address the most vulnerable records first. Additional

map cases have been purchased, and the most vulnerable paper records have been sealed. The next phase of records preservation will be to create electronic images of the records; therefore, eliminating the need to handle the original record.

Microfilm upgrade: All water rights, correspondence, petitions and other records of the office are microfilmed for long-term storage. The microfilm and microfiche are systematically examined and re-filmed to further decrease the amount of handling of the original water rights records.

Water conservation: The state engineers office initiated a water conservation program in July 1998. During the three years of the program, a contract position was hired to access the opportunities for expanding water conservation efforts in Wyoming. A cost share arrangement with the Bureau of Reclamation helped fund the program. In 2001, the Wyoming Legislature determined to move the water conservation program from the agency to the Wyoming Water Development Commission.

Stream aging rehabilitation: 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, the cost-sharing arrangements allow the agency to stretch its limited dollars toward gaining additional water resource information. The agency has joined with the Bureau of Reclamation in identifying several water-gaging stations across the state in need of rehabilitation and upgrade of equipment.

Interstate river compact administration: As the downstream states continue to grow at a rate greater than the growth rate in Wyoming, additional pressures are placed on the water supplies allocated to Wyoming by Interstate Compact or court decree. The needs of declining species populations listed under the Endangered Species Act also place demands on already short water supplies in many parts of the West. It continues to be imperative that the state be represented at the various water basin commissions and organizations.

Strategic plan changes

The current agency plan for fiscal year 2002 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 Wyoming (Wyoming Constitution, Article 8, and W.S. Title 41).

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

Objective 2: The agency will **aggressively** protect Wyoming's apportionments provided through the various interstate compacts and decrees to which Wyoming is a party.

Objective 3: The agency will gather, analyze and publish data regarding Wyoming water resources for administration, regulation and management purposes.

Objective 4: The agency will **educate** the public and agency personnel in water resources issues and make information from the SEO available to the public.

In looking outward toward the next biennium, several new initiatives are anticipated, pending budget approval:

- expand the Web presence of the agency and offer additional water right services to the public through the Internet;
- reorganization within the agency will consolidate the technical and computer services into a single administrative division, as well as create a stand-alone division for the interstate streams activities of the agency;
- implement the provisions of the North Platte Decree Settlement, including initiating the North Platte Decree Committee;
- address the additional workload demands due to coal-bed methane development by increasing staff in key areas of the agency;
- continue to play an active role in the statewide River Basin Planning Program;
- examine the potential impacts of new water quality regulations on water quantity allocations;
- continue to inform and assist water users and the general public on Wyoming water rights and practical administration; and
- evaluate 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

