



AGAI Ripple

Association of Gallatin
Agricultural Irrigators

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Greetings from AGAI's president Walt Sales

I would like to welcome you to an opportunity to join with several Gallatin River irrigators in protecting our Rivers' future. As you read thru the newsletter on AGAI you will have a better understanding of our focus and goals. The "making of AGAI" has been a project in the works for more than two years and is now formed with membership from water users around the Gallatin Valley.

As a water right holder and a fourth generation rancher in the valley my family has seen this area change quite a bit. It seemed we had two choices regarding our water, to keep ranching day to day and let the change come to us, or join together and be involved with the change, giving it a balance that we can live with. To get this balance we must first be willing to join together and then be invited to the "table." I am pleased to say both have taken place.

In regards to the snow levels and river flow for the next irrigation season, I feel we need to be ready to turn water in early and try to build up the water table as early as possible. This really seemed to help last year.

Thank you for your trust and participation in AGAI, and please feel free to call me with any concerns you have with the job we are doing or how we can serve you better. We are looking for members to help work on the committees; this will not only help with the workload but also give us more input. If you find one that you feel you can add to please call a director to see what is expected.

I am sure that you would agree with me that we cannot continue to roll with the flow. With your support, AGAI will be able to provide a voice of balance that will help shape the future of the Gallatin Valley and River. Please join us in protecting what the Gallatin River has to offer this still beautiful and living valley.

Thank you,
Walt Sales

Treasurer's Update

The finance committee would like to begin with an apology to AGAI members for any confusion the "2004 receipts" caused. The 2004 receipts are for tax purposes, and members should check with their tax preparer to see if they are eligible for deductions.

The first step for AGAI was to set up Quickbooks. We recently completed the 2005 billing, and urge members to **please pay as soon as possible**.

Since AGAI is still in its first year, we are seeking financial support wherever possible. Members can help AGAI out by soliciting contributions from businesses and individuals.

The AGAI Foundation will be formed soon to facilitate donations from non water right holders to reduce dues to members. We'll keep you posted on the status of the AGAI foundation.

AGAI's Mission

The mission of the Association is to be the guardian and advocate of the Gallatin River system and its historically decreed water rights.

Water Report

Bozeman Chronicle Headline: Snowpack nearing record lows of 1997

Much of Montana is in its seventh year of drought. A report by Roy Kaiser, water supply specialist for the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service stated that the Gallatin drainage is at 85 percent of average snow pack. The averages are computed from 30 years worth of data collected from 1971 to 2000.

Kaiser attributes the lack of snow pack in the mountains to a combination of high daytime temperatures, Chinooks, and a lack of freezing temperatures at night.

This winter is comparable to 1997 and 2001, both low-snow years that preceded summers filled with wildfire.

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Spencer Smith, Treasurer
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Mick Seeburg
Brad Bean
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Alan English

Legislative Activity

Local Issues

AGAI has been asked by the District Court to assist with the interview and selection of the West Gallatin Commissioner. AGAI will interview applicants and present Judge Holly Brown with AGAI's recommendation.

The Legislature requested 2350 draft bills of which 1329 were introduced for consideration by the House and Senate. As of 2/23/05, 605 remain active in the House and 369 in the Senate. AGAI directors have been working hard in Helena this legislative season. AGAI has been promoting its bill, SB 269, that is designed to protect surface water rights while still allowing development to proceed. The bill aims to front load the groundwater development application to reduce objections by irrigators and facilitate a more efficient process for all parties. AGAI is pleased to report that Senate Bill 269 has passed the Senate by a vote of 37-13. Senators Wheat and Perry were strong supporters.

House Bill 22, the re-adjudication funding bill, was passed on the House floor on second reading by a margin of 98-1. It was then re-referred to the House appropriations committee for evaluation of the monetary content of the bill.

AGAI directors have been frequently testifying on other bills concerning water with the intent of protecting senior rights and reducing litigation. AGAI was instrumental in limiting HB 609 (loser pays both party's attorney fees in water disputes) to only un-permitted, illegal uses. AGAI has also testified against many undesirable bills, such as allowing FWP to own water rights for in stream flows and participated in crafting of bills to further irrigators' interests.

Policy Update

AGAI directors are working hard to establish policy and procedure for the organization. Currently a rough draft is under review by AGAI directors.

AGAI will need membership assistance while SB 269 is being considered by the House. Please contact your representative and urge them to vote for SB 269!

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Irrigation Ditches & Weeds

Surface irrigation water has been shown to carry many kinds of weed seed into pastures and cropland. A study in western Nebraska showed that surface irrigation water could contain up to 77 different kinds of weed seed and deposit 9 seeds per square yard, or approximately 38,000 seeds per acre during an irrigation season. The removal of weed seed from irrigation water with seed screens and the control of weeds on ditch-banks provides an effective way to reduce weed seed in irrigation water. For our situation, controlling weeds along ditch banks and in our pastures is probably the most practical way to keep weeds from becoming a bigger problem than they already are.

“The economic impact to agricultural and wild lands from these weeds is substantial. The potential annual loss to Montana’s economy from spotted knapweed alone is estimated to be \$42 million.” This quote was taken from a MSU State University Extension publication.

Weed of the Month: Spotted Knapweed

- Is a prolific seed producer with up to 1000 or more seeds per plant!
- Seeds remain viable in the soil for more than 8 years!

“The goal of a management program should be to develop healthy plant communities that are weed-resistant and meet other land-use objectives such as livestock forage, wildlife habitat or recreation.” MSU State University Extension Circular 311.

The Gallatin County Weed Control District has a Cost-Share Program for noxious weeds that includes re-imbursment for ½ of the chemical cost. The program is easy and it saves you money!

You can reach the **Gallatin County Weed Control District at 582-3562.**

