



# AGAI Ripple

Association of Gallatin  
Agricultural Irrigators

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## Spring Update

### A Word from Walt

Springtime in our valley has arrived again. This “change of season” brings with it above freezing temperatures, rain, mud, calves, lambs, snow, more mud and much needed color. At times the change comes by way of heavy wet snow, freezing rain and hard unforgiving winds followed by blue sky- all in the same day. We are prepared to handle this, while enduring some storms on our own and understanding what worked best for past generations through their own trials.

Our valley is also going through a change, much like the spring storm that comes in fast and hard, catching us off guard. This change brings with it pavement, increased traffic, new neighbors and jobs. It’s time to face this “change of season” by looking to others who have been through it. We must build a plan, applying what works best for mitigating the impacts of this storm. AGAI has been working with others on forming plans and getting them implemented. At this point we are still involved in Helena with DNRC and have begun working with our local government through the Planning Department and County Commission to address water issues.

This past year while attending several meetings regarding this “change of season”, it has become very clear there are many groups pushing their agendas . . . a plan is being formed with or without us. AGAI has much to offer as guardians and advocates to the Gallatin River, we need to stay committed and make sure our concerns are noticed, heard and included. Your involvement helps determine how our valley will weather this “change of season.”

## Augmentation

Augmentation is the new word regarding water development for the rapidly growing Gallatin Valley. When AGAI formed two years ago, augmentation was only implemented in other states. Today, AGAI has proven its leadership role and forward thinking by working with development, government and environmental interests to ensure that as development happens, the river and water rights are not harmed. Simply put, augmentation is the replacement of water that development consumes. If a new subdivision consumes a barrel of water, the subdivision needs to account for its consumption of water to ensure that it doesn’t negatively affect the river. Replacement water can come from changing existing water rights from their current use, typically that of irrigation, and the water can either be left in the river or put back into the groundwater through infiltration galleries. The goal is to offset the consumption of the development. Through augmentation, there can be a net “zero” impact on the aquifer and the river. Ultimately this is a win-win situation for developers, environmentalists, government agencies, and irrigators. Ensuring that water is developed in a way that doesn’t negatively affect the river and water right holders is another way AGAI is working for its members.

## Weed of the Month: Houndstongue

- Houndstongue displaces native rangeland vegetation by capturing soil resources with its deep, well-anchored taproot. Currently in Montana, Houndstongue infests an estimated 36,000 acres.
- Research suggests that cattle are major dispersers of houndstongue, picking up about 65% of burrs in grazed paddocks. Seeds over winter within the top 1 cm of soil and are viable for 2-3 years and do not form large or persistent seed banks in the soil.
- It is a **poisonous plant**: pyrrolizidine alkaloids cause irreversible liver damage! To avoid poisoning do not confine animals in a pasture lacking sufficient forage. Avoid harvesting houndstongue in hay crops.

For more information, contact the **Gallatin County Weed Control District** at **582-3562**.

### 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.

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### Reminder:

**The Spring Water Meeting will be held on May 24.**



## West Gallatin River Commissioner Report

As I write this article the spring moisture condition looks good, but I can't tell you guys anything you don't already know. This morning (April 14) the Montana Snotel Snow Water Equivalent Update Graph recorded the Gallatin River Basin at 104%. So maybe the cuts this year will not have to go as deep as last year. For those of you who missed the Fall Water Meeting I gave a short report on what happened last year. I went on the job on July 18 and off on October 9. The cuts went down as far as the ½ of the 1883 water. Everybody worked with each other which made my job easier. There were times when the river was dropping and dropping and I knew a cut was coming, but I could hold it off for a few days because several ditches voluntarily cut down. I thank you guys and appreciate the cooperation.

I know there are several of you, if not all, that hope I am unemployed this year. Actually I am an irrigator too and I drink water from a well. So the more water we have in this valley the better for me also. If I don't have a job that is fine, but I may have to pass a hat around this fall. Call me anytime you want to talk about anything, my number is 580-5555. Thank you, George Alberda

## Legal Committee Update

The AGAI legal committee has been busy on behalf of our membership. Our efforts have fallen into two broad categories: Local and State.

**Local:** AGAI has worked with the Gallatin County planning office to provide documents explaining basic Montana water law for development interests and to create a signature form for developers to use in contacting Ditch or Canal companies when land use change occurs. The signature form will provide proof of contact and notice to the irrigation right holders and is expected to become a form to be completed before preliminary plat approval can be requested from the County Commission. Hopefully, this effort will result in improved information and communication between the development and agricultural industries. AGAI has also been working with the County's ad hoc group to place the state water permit in a different position at the time of preliminary plat from first to last. In order to gain AGAI's acceptance of the change, the development industry representatives agreed to provide augmentation for exempt (less than 35 gal/min) wells. Disposition of these matters is anticipated for early May.

**State:** The big news is the Trout Unlimited vs. DNRC decision from the Montana Supreme Court. The judges, in a 5-2 vote, ruled strongly in favor of the senior water right holders declaring the "pre-stream capture of tributary ground water" and the processing of applications to do so illegal. Trout Unlimited has done a great service to all senior irrigation right holders as the water arriving from the aquifer to the surface flow, our post run off water, will no longer be prevented from becoming surface flow. The decision has, however, left some uncertainty on just how DNRC will implement the decision. That implementation and a continuation of the work at the ground water/surface water work group which has been meeting since July of 2005 will occur on May 2 after the printing deadline for The Ripple. AGAI will continue to seek legal authority for augmentation and cooperate with the 40 parties to the work group as we strive to develop solutions for the state's water use, always bearing in mind whom we represent.

## Thoughts from our new Vice President: Al Lien

Montana State College, Montana Agricultural Experiment Station was established and chartered late in the year 1893. The institution was a result of the Land Grant Act of 1862, to establish agricultural learning and research centers in the States. To quote Montana Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin #6, year 1895: "By 1895 irrigating waterways becoming limited, for this reason it becomes necessary to measure water applied carefully. Over irrigation has already destroyed some lands. Detailed drawings of weir and recording tables available." Montana Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin #11, year 1896: "With the growing demand for irrigating water and the limited supply, A.M. Ryon (the College and Experiment Station first President and Director) irrigation engineer has pictured and described several devices to accurately measure water."

Very little has changed in 110 years except the populace understanding or maybe the care to understand the three key elements in the two bulletins: accurately measure, limited supply, and growing demand. The Snow Survey Division of the Natural Resources Conservation Service is another service with which your Montana Agricultural Experiment Station was involved. Development continued during the 1930s through the 1950s with the over snow vehicle and snow measuring tube, so designed to measure the depth of the snow by weight converted directly to inches of water. These data are the basis for the report on the predicted melt and runoff. The depth of the snow pack and the length of the thaw and runoff contribute to the success of the irrigating season, as well as all the other demands for clean water in the visible surface flows and underground.

Conservation and efficiency on the part of production agricultural has or probably will reach its peak soon. A complete change of use from agricultural irrigation to other consumptive uses is and will change the landscape, drying up many of the amenities that many seem to take for granted but are the result of agricultural production and irrigation. Members of AGAI and others must continue to remind ourselves and educate our friends and neighbors in urban society to understand moderation in the demand for water.

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