



# AGAI Ripple

Association of Gallatin  
Agricultural Irrigators

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## Fall Update

### A Word from Walt

Fall is a great and beautiful time of the year; it's one of my favorite seasons. This time of year has great views of our landscapes and temperatures that remind you of what's coming ahead in the next season. We are busy trying to get fall work done, getting ready for winter and finishing up with projects before the ground freezes up. Sometimes we don't finish all those projects, but it seems they're always there when the ground thaws in springtime. Hopefully we were far enough down our list before winter came that our winter workload won't be affected.

I would like to add a few items on your list for this fall; it shouldn't take long to complete, but will be well worth the effort you give to it.

- The first task is getting informed on the candidates that are running for office, and then voting for the candidate that you feel will best represent you.
- The second task would be getting informed with the land use regulation changes proposed by the county and attend the meetings that are held for public input.
- The last task is to keep AGAI informed with your input on the direction we are going and the work we are involved with in the upcoming session in Helena. There will be many introduced bills that will have impacts on our water use; we need to follow those closely.

Just like prioritizing our fall work list, hoping to lessen the impacts of winter, we need to share some of our time towards staying involved with these upcoming events and hope to make less work now then fixing the outcome later.

I am looking forward to visiting with you during the upcoming water meetings, and like always if you have questions or concerns give me or one of our directors a call.

### Notes from the Northwest Water Policy & Land Use Symposium

Walt Sales, Mick Seeburg and Al Lien attended the Northwest Water Policy & Land Use Law Symposium held at MSU on September 18-20, 2006. The Sponsors were Inland Northwest Research Alliance, the Montana Water Center, the Burton K. Wheeler Center, and the Cinnabar Foundation.

Of the three panels, three group participation panels, and three banquet speakers, all but one mentioned agriculture and irrigation multiple times. Topics discussed were:

- Irrigation and the health of the aquifer.
- The domestic food chain: production in regards to quantity, quality and security.
- The effect of or lack of land use planning and water use on the community, economy, and food production.

The continuing decline of the family farm. Agriculture still ranks first in economic rating in Oregon and second or third in Colorado.

The overall theme of the symposium: Educating the public of the pending problems resulting from lack of land use & water use planning. Careful management and thoughtful planning of the diminishing water resource (surface & ground water) is key. The country's water storage, diversion and delivery systems (irrigation & domestic supply) are aging and in need of constant maintenance and repair. This is reflected in our own valley and canal systems.

The symposium was highly academic with plenty of agreement on the problems, but little immediate attention to solutions that are needed now. The 2007 Montana legislature will be presented with several water issues and hopefully, will arrive at some equitable solutions.

**Reminders:** Autumn Water Meeting • October 25 • 7pm • Gallatin County Courthouse

AGAI's Annual Membership Meeting • November 15 • 7pm • Gallatin Gateway Community

#### 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.

#### Inside this issue:

<b>A Word from Walt</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Northwest Water Policy &amp; Land Use Symposium</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>West Gallatin River Commissioner Report</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Legal Comm. Update</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>News Across the West</b>	<b>2</b>

#### AGAI Directors

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 Spencer Smith, Treasurer  
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 Susan Duncan  
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## West Gallatin River Commissioner Report

As I write this article it is white with snow outside. Hopefully that won't last too long; I have too many things to do before winter sets in.

I would like to thank everyone for their cooperation again this past summer. I can testify that many water users return water to the river when they no longer have use for it. It makes my job easier in that I don't have to cut as deep and I can return water to junior users sooner. It's good to see everyone work together. I believe that as time goes on and things change our unity will become more and more important.

For as many days in a row that were over 90 degrees I think the river held out pretty good this year. I went to work on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July and cut up to the 1890 water that same day. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of July I had to start cutting into the 1890 water. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of the same month the 89, 88, and 1887 waters were cut. Then we could go until August 30 before the 86, 85, and 1884 waters were cut. Only a few days later more water was returned to the river and I could give some of the latest cuts back. From that point on I could keep giving water back to the ditches. My last step was water to the Highline on 2<sup>nd</sup> of October.

I have some thoughts about when a commissioner should be put on the Gallatin River. Come to the meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October and let's talk about it. Also I would like to tell you about my flow measurement equipment and how that has helped. Thanks again and see you on the 25<sup>th</sup>. George Alberda

## Legal Committee Update

The AGAI legal affairs committee continues its efforts to protect senior water right holders.

On the county level, AGAI and the county planning office are finalizing paper work to provide notice to canals and ditch companies when a land use change on ground through which a ditch or canal has an easement is proposed. The Gallatin County Commissioners are expected to petition the DNRC for a rule change that will require mitigation of adverse affect (reduction of surface flows) in major subdivisions even if exempt (35 gpm, not to exceed 10 ac/ft) wells are utilized.

The DNRC's Helena work group has completed its task resulting in two agency requested bills for enactment by the 2007 legislature. One would enable and require augmentation to mitigate adverse affect in closed basins and the other would change exempt wells' permitted quantity from ten acre feet to one acre foot statewide. We have spoken with some of the developers planning new water uses and have generally experienced positive feedback on mitigating adverse affect within the valley. One proposal includes an aquifer storage and recovery site that will "mound" water into the aquifer before removing it for domestic consumption, a very encouraging event.

Your legal affairs committee remains vigilant.

## News Across the West

### Water & Lawns

"Last year, researcher Cristina Milesi at the University of Montana reported that turfgrass – on lawns, parks, ballfields, and elsewhere – is the largest irrigated 'crop' in the United States, occupying three times more land than irrigated cornfields." Each year suburban homeowners spend \$40 billion on lawn maintenance. The biggest price to keep it green is paid in water. "In Phoenix, Salt Lake City, Las Vegas and other cities...(watering lawns) accounts for a whopping two-thirds or more of residents total water consumption." In response to water shortages and an increasing awareness, a group of individuals began the Xeriscape movement. The seven basic principals of Xeriscaping are:

**Plan & design** the landscape for water conservation and beauty from the start.

**Create practical turf areas** of manageable sizes, shapes and appropriate grasses.

**Select low-water plants** and group plants of similar water needs together.

**Use soil amendments** like compost or manure as needed by the site and the type of plants.

**Use mulches** such as woodchips to reduce evaporation and keep the soil cool.

**Irrigate efficiently** with properly designed systems and by applying the right amount of water at the right time.

**Maintain the landscape** by mowing, weeding, pruning and fertilizing properly. Tips source: XERISCAPE COLORADO, [www.xeriscape.org](http://www.xeriscape.org)

To read more about America's obsession with lawns, pick up the August 21, 2006 issue of High Country News. [www.hcn.org](http://www.hcn.org)

### The Effects of Dust on Snow

Researchers at the National Snow and Ice Data Center in Boulder, Colorado are studying how dust accumulating on snow at high elevations affects the spring melt. Scientists know that white snow reflects light, absorbing little energy which results in a slow melt event. However, dirty snow reflects less light and therefore melts more quickly. Researches have found that "a single dust event could cause snow to melt away 18 days earlier than it would if there were no dust at all". The implications of this are great: with more dust events, the snowmelt would "happen faster and finish sooner, leading to bigger and earlier peak flows in streams and rivers". So where does the dust come from? On the short list are human activities such as grazing, development, and off-road vehicle use. No one action is the culprit, more likely is the combination of events combined with overall increased human activity in the region for the past 150 years. Researchers hypothesize "that if dust events do continue to increase, mountain snow will melt earlier in the spring, and the summer droughts that may ensue could lead to ...more dust, further eroding the mountains' ability to store water". To read more about this issue pick up the May 29, 2006 issue of High Country News. [www.hcn.org](http://www.hcn.org)