

WAG: erosion control needed

Advisory group
focuses on river's
problem areas

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SMELTERVILLE

— Controlling erosion and fostering collaboration arose as priorities for board members during the Watershed Advisory Group meeting Wednesday.

The mixed group made up of citizens and government officials is led by Department of Environmental Quality officials.

"DEQ has their objectives," said Kajsa Stromberg, watershed coordinator for DEQ. But board members' priorities matter too, she said.

Subsequent talk of erosion yielded plans for a field trip later this month to examine worrisome areas.

One area of a North Fork river bank lost eight feet this year, said Jeff Legg, Shoshone County's Planning and Zoning administrator. Land erodes "slow(ly) and then all of a sudden wham, it'll jump," he said.

Prichard and Beaver Creeks present immediate erosion threats, Legg added.

As consequence, county roads are flooding where they never have before, pools of water occasionally lying in what Legg said are routes of escaping emergencies.

Shoshone County Commissioner Jon Cantamessa urged action.

"We know what problems are there and they're getting worse, I believe, through inaction... Let's not just talk because that's what we do."

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Vegetation is one way of slowing erosion. Vegetation also creates shade and lowers temperature. Determining limits for metals and temperatures for the North Fork sub-basin is WAG's primary purpose.

Erosion is related though. Soil receding into the water raises temperature and metal loads. They're all biologically related, said Stromberg.

For private property owners, receiving permits for river work like dredging or filling can be problematic. Rancher and WAG member Delbert Kerr said it was "almost impossible for the private landowner."

Kerr spoke of a log jam in the river and the subsequent confusion figuring out whose job it was to cut the logs.

"It almost winds up you don't know where to go," Kerr said.

Stromberg said she'd volunteer to help ease those problems.

Meeting

The next WAG meeting is Nov. 28. An erosion field trip will fill the morning, with the regular meeting scheduled later that afternoon.

"Permits have come up a few times. I put that in capital letters," she said.

Stromberg also addressed collaboration between WAG and the agencies that will have a final say in WAG's strategies. Stromberg said she'd "make another round of contacts" with Idaho Department of Water Resources and Fish and Game officials to facilitate that.

The question of funding arose, with grants the immediate answer for board members.

"It's going to take a while," Stromberg said. "It may mean putting some Band-Aids here and putting some Band-Aids there."

Cantamessa said Band-Aids might be the only way. "You're never going to get a grand plan to make the stream flow how you want for the next 1,000 years. These small projects are what we need to do."