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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WYOMING • WIND RIVER RANGE
WEATHER MODIFICATION PROGRAM

14
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Wind River

Mountain Range

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Cloud Seeding Operations in the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming 2014-2015 Season

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

prepared by

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BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

Atmospheric water transformed to precipitation is one of the primary sources of fresh water in the world. However, a large amount of water present in clouds is never converted into precipitation that makes it to the ground. This has prompted scientists and water managers to explore the possibility of augmenting water supplies by means of cloud seeding.

From 2006 through the spring of 2014, cloud seeding operations in the Wind River Range were conducted within the context of the Wyoming Weather Modification Pilot Project (WWMPP). Eight of the ten ground-based cloud seeding generators used in that project were funded by the Wyoming State Legislature through the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC). The two additional generators were funded by the Lower Colorado River Basin States.

When the WWMPP concluded in the spring of 2014, local and regional interest in continuing operations remained. In recognizing this interest, the WWDC obtained legislative support and the funding for a 2014-2015 operational cloud seeding program in the Wind River Range. The funding provided by the 2014 Wyoming State Legislature required that the State of Wyoming, through the Wyoming Water Development Office (WWDO), provide 25% of the operational cost. Additional funding would have to come from other sources, detailed further later in this executive summary.

The Science

Clouds in the lower troposphere form when, in cooling air, water vapor condenses upon cloud condensation nuclei (CCN), forming cloud droplets. The size of the droplets produced depends on the amount of water vapor present, and the character of the CCN. If the CCN are large or have properties that attract water (such as salt), the resulting droplets will be of increased size. All this happens on a very small scale. About one million (10^6) typical cloud droplets are required to produce a single, 1 millimeter (mm) raindrop.

Figure 1. The ice nucleus generator sited at Big Sandy Opening on the southwest flank of the Wind River Range (WMI photograph). For the locations of all the generators, see Figure 2.

The path to winter (cold cloud) precipitation development is through the formation of ice, and it is this process that plays a significant role in winter clouds in Wyoming. For ice to form, the cloud must be colder than 32°F (0°C). However, ice does not form spontaneously at temperatures colder than 32°F (0°C). In the absence of ice nuclei, water can become "supercooled"; meaning the water in the cloud remains in liquid form at temperatures well below zero Celsius. To most persons this is surprising, as we are accustomed to seeing water (at the surface) freeze whenever temperatures fall "below freezing." Freezing happens at the surface because there are lots of substrates (substances or materials) present that encourage nucleation of the ice phase (freezing), and these substrates are largely absent in the free atmosphere. Nature's solution to the lack of substrates available aloft comes in in the form of tiny particles called *ice nuclei.* Ice nuclei provide microscopic "templates" for supercooled liquid water (SLW) to follow, and become the hard crystalline form we call ice.

Once ice forms in a cloud, the crystals grow quickly. Initially, growth occurs through water vapor deposition directly on the nascent ice crystal, producing six-sided crystals. Within five minutes, these tiny ice crystals grow large enough to begin to fall. As they fall, growth by deposition continues, but because the ice crystals are heavier than the nearby SLW droplets they collect them as they fall. Upon contact with the ice crystals, the SLW droplets freeze. As they grow ever larger, the ice crystals may encounter each other and become tangled, forming aggregates known as snowflakes.

When clouds grow colder than about -5°C, but do not immediately form ice crystals, the introduction of silver iodide ice nuclei will immediately initiate ice crystal formation, thus starting the ice-phase precipitation process. Ground-based seeding is commonly used in orographic applications, especially when the prevailing wind flow is perpendicular to the mountain range, so that seeding agent is lofted immediately upward into the targeted clouds. This orographic seeding technique was the prime strategy used to seed winter clouds throughout the WWMPP, and continued to be the main approach utilized in the Wind River Range. The effectiveness of seeding operations depends upon three things:

- The clouds of interest must contain liquid water.
- The cloud temperature at the level where liquid water is present, typically in the neighborhood of 10,000 feet MSL, must be colder than +23°F. Natural ice nuclei, such as crystalline soil particles, do not act to form ice crystals until the cloud is much colder (at least as cold as +5°F). The AgI seeding agent, by virtue of its crystalline shape being very close to that of ice, begins to form ice crystals much sooner, at about +23°F. As a result, precipitation formation within the cloud starts sooner, allowing more time for the ice crystals to grow and transform into snow.
- The wind direction and speed must be such that the seeding agent released from the ground-based generators will be transported up the mountain slope and into the target clouds.

In operational cloud seeding the temperature criterion can be met in slightly warmer conditions as long as some of the ice nuclei still produce ice crystals. This being said, it must be noted that the magnitude of the seeding effectiveness will diminish as temperatures warm. Seeding should not occur when temperatures aloft are warmer than +23°F (-5°C). Widening the temperature window for seeding increases the number of seeding opportunities. Most operational (vs. research) seeding programs use this warmer temperature criterion.

2014-2015 Funding

Funding for cloud seeding operations in the Wind River Range for the winter of 2014-2015 was provided in part by the Wyoming State Legislature's "Omnibus Water Bill – Construction" approved by the 2014 Wyoming State Legislature. Per the legislation, the appropriate funds could only be expended once formal cost sharing agreements were in place with other Colorado River Basin water users. Wyoming's cost share was capped at 25% to reflect the benefits expected to be accrued to the State. In addition to the funding provided by the State of Wyoming, funding was also provided by the following organizations/agencies.

Southern Nevada Water Authority. The Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) is a cooperative agency formed in 1991 to address Southern Nevada's unique water needs on a regional basis. SNWA officials are charged with managing the region's water resources and providing for Las Vegas Valley residents' and businesses' present and future water needs. With Colorado River water currently representing 90% of SNWA's water supply, the SNWA partners with other Colorado River Basin states to optimize and enhance Colorado River water supplies.

The Central Arizona Project. The Central Arizona Project (CAP) delivers Colorado River water via a 335-aqueduct system to customers in Maricopa, Pinal, and Pima Counties in Arizona, home to 80% of Arizona's population. The CAP diverts more than 1.6 million acre-feet annually, providing water to cities, towns, irrigation districts, Native American communities, and stores water underground for future use during times of drought or shortage. The CAP manages its Colorado River resources for current and future residents in central Arizona, and continuously seeks collaborative approaches with partners in the Colorado River Basin to protect and augment the water supplies in the Colorado River System.

Colorado River Board of California - Six Agency Committee. The Six Agency Committee was created in 1950 through an agreement among Palo Verde Irrigation District, Coachella Valley Water District, San Diego County Water Authority, Imperial Irrigation District, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. The Six Agency Committee provides funding to support actions to safeguard the members' rights and interests in the Colorado River system and for the Colorado River Board of California.

The Arizona Department of Water Resources, and the ***Utah Department of Natural Resources***. These two state agencies also contributed to operations in the Wind River Range for the 2014-2015 season to help further the goals of a larger Colorado River Basin flow augmentation strategy, and improve system conditions.

STAFF AND FACILITIES

Personnel

Two meteorologists and four technicians participated in the 2014-2015 operational season. Meteorologist, Daniel Gilbert was located on site in Pinedale, WY throughout the project. The second meteorologist, Jason Goehring, worked off-site from his home using weather resources available via the Internet. During the course of the WWMPP research, it had become apparent that quality forecasting and weather monitoring was possible through the Internet. Both Gilbert and Goehring are Weather Modification Association Certified Operators, and between the two of them, completed all the daily forecasting, weather monitoring, and implementation of seeding operations. Technical work was conducted by Michael Paul, Jeremy Silvey, Rich Keely, and Ryan Richter.

Siting of Seeding Equipment

The same ten ground-based ice nucleus generators (ground generators) that were employed during the preceding Wyoming Weather Modification Pilot Program (WWMPP) were deployed for the 2014-2015 season (Figure 2). Nine generators were sited on the west, southwest, and southern flanks of the range. The tenth was sited on the southeastern flank, southwest of Lander.

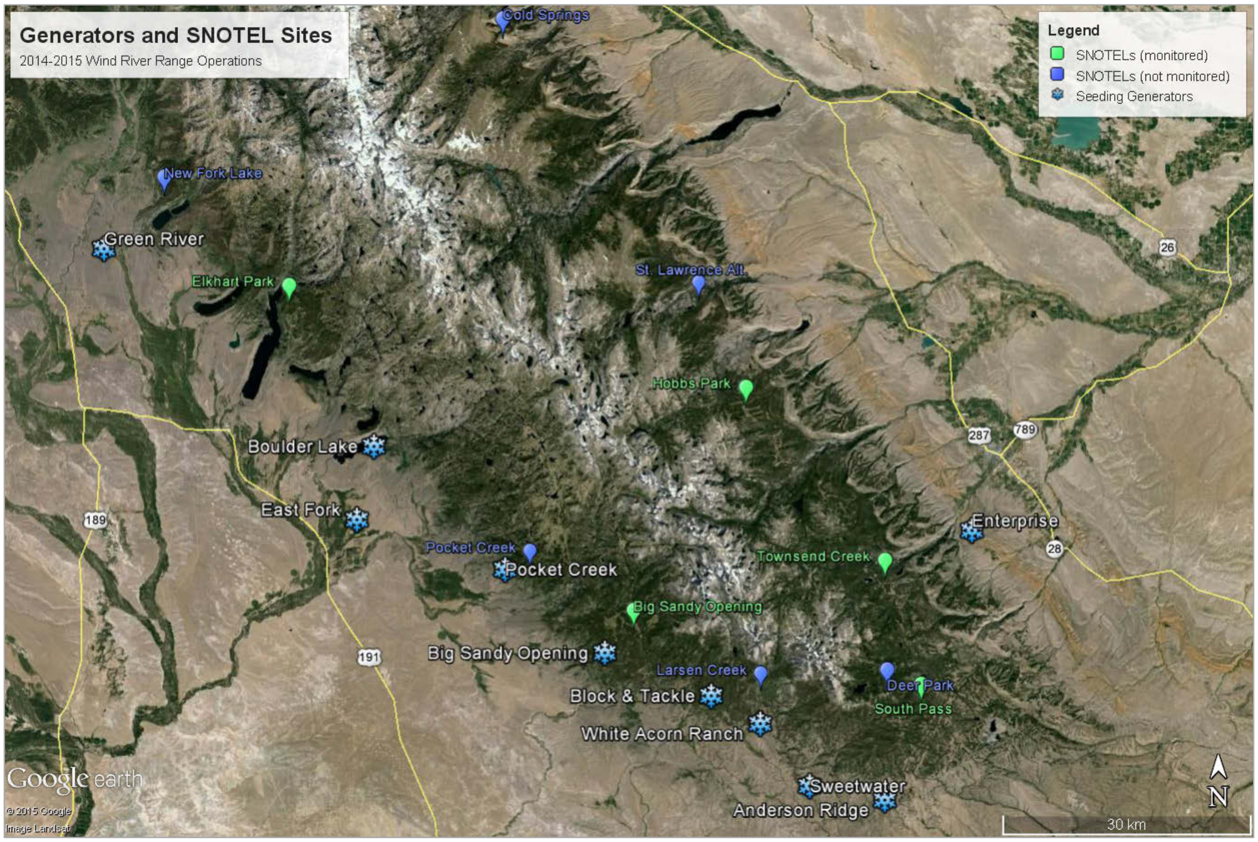

Figure 2. The locations of the ground-based ice nucleus generators are indicated by the snow crystal symbols. The green "balloons" indicate the locations of Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS) snow telemetry (SNOTEL) sites used in monitoring snowpack during the 2014-2015 season. The blue balloons show the locations of additional SNOTELs that were not used because of proximity to sites that were used, or a short period of record (they were relatively new sites).

The generator placement was such that individual generators could be activated according to wind direction, and as storms passed and conditions changed. As would be expected based on the ground generator locations, the majority of seeding was conducted when winds were from the west or southwest. A number of seeding events also occurred when winds were easterly, supporting the activation of the single ground generator near Lander. During the season, operations were conducted twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. There were a total of 21 seeding events during the season, which varied widely from month-to-month. All sites were on State-owned or private lands. Permissions were established through the Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments or private memoranda of understanding, accordingly.

Ice Nucleus Generators

The ice nucleus generators were designed and fabricated by WMI. The primary components are shown in Figure 3.

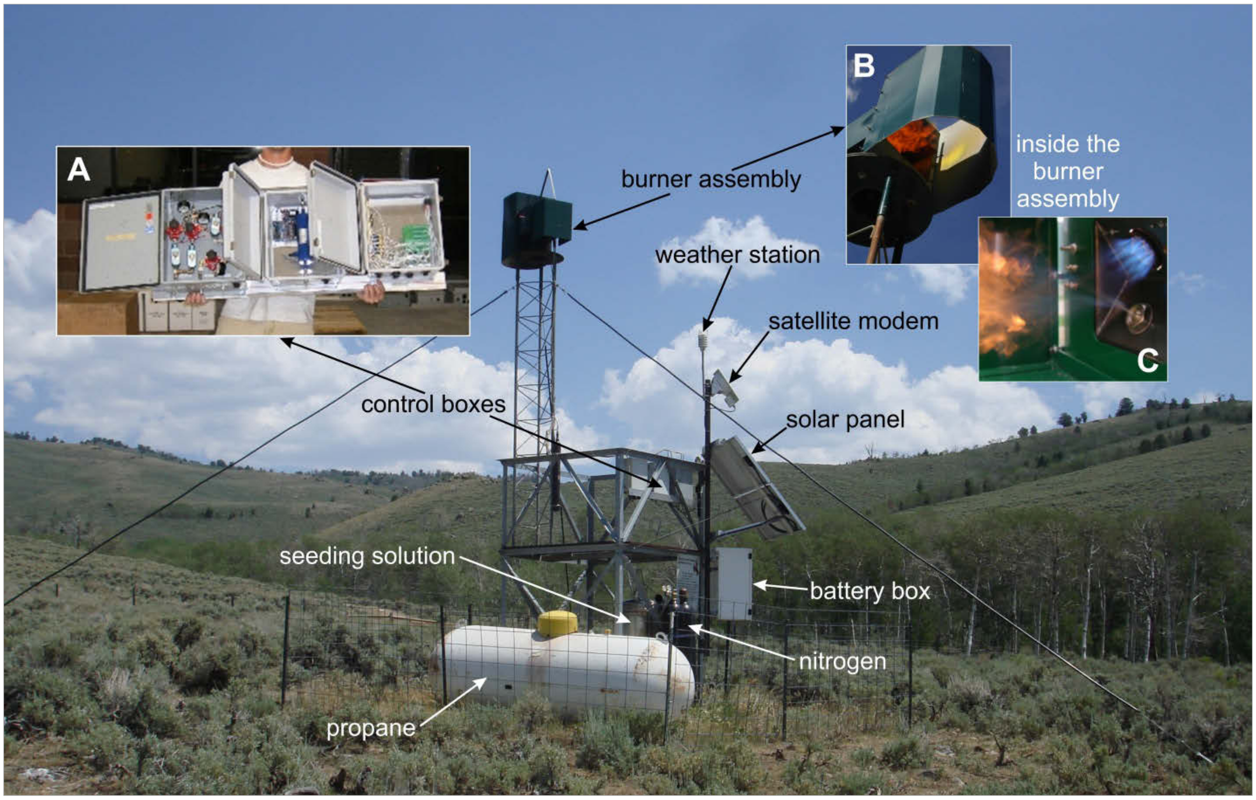

Figure 3. The primary components of the WMI remotely controlled ground-based ice nucleus generator are illustrated. Inset A, shows the contents of the control boxes. From left to right, these are: relays (electronic valves) to turn flows on and off, seeding solution flow rate regulation and measurement, and computer interface with the satellite modem. Inset B, provides a view up and into an ignited generator, and Inset C, shows how the seeding solution is atomized through a nozzle (silver disk, lower right) and into the burning propane (blue flame) and ignited (bright orange flame).

The Wind River Range generators are fully independent, controlled via satellite, and powered by batteries charged by solar power. This provides the ability to site generators at higher elevations, significantly improving delivery of seeding agent to the clouds. Being remotely-controlled means that the generators can be activated and deactivated as weather conditions warrant. All of the generator lines and fittings are made of corrosion-resistant stainless steel, necessary when high-performance seeding solutions, which contain oxidizers, are used. The generators are robust; designed to function in extreme temperatures, winds and precipitation.

Seeding Solution

The high performance seeding solution itself was tested at the Colorado State University Cloud Simulation and Aerosol Laboratory by DeMott (1997). The results of those tests determined that colder cloud temperatures produce a bigger yield of active ice nuclei per gram of AgI burned. At -6°C, 3 x 10^{11} (300 trillion!) nuclei are active per gram. The yield increases markedly from -6°C (+21.2°F) to -8°C (+17.6F), and even more at -10°C (+14°F). However, operational programs in the western United States commonly commence seeding operations at -5 or -6°C. In the 2014-2015 Wind River operations, -6°C at 700 hPa was the threshold cloud temperature used. The seeding rate was about 25 grams of silver iodide per generator, per hour. The number of generators used varied from event-to-event due to situations when the wind direction was such that only some of the generators would seed effectively.

Atmospheric Soundings (Weather Balloons/Rawinsondes)

Weather balloons were released from the WMI shop, in Pinedale, WY to help determine whether or not weather conditions (e.g., temperature, humidity, & pressure) were suitable for seeding. The atmospheric sounding data were recorded and compared to the operating criteria to verify that observed weather conditions were sufficient to initiate cloud seeding procedures. Upon completion, the sounding data were immediately shared via e-mail with the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR), the National Weather Service Offices in Riverton and Cheyenne, and the State of Wyoming's Water Resources Data System (WRDS). All of the soundings were archived, and are available for any post-analysis efforts that might be undertaken.

Weather Stations

Five of the ten generator sites were equipped with Vaisala WXT-510 weather stations. These compact, tower-mounted instruments measured temperature, humidity, pressure, and wind speed and direction.

Shop and Site Servicing

Throughout the season WMI maintained a shop in Pinedale that provided project vehicle and equipment storage and served as a staging area for generator service and the preparation and release of weather balloons.

FORECASTING AND OPERATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

Meteorological Data Sources

The bulk of the weather information used for forecasting and weather monitoring was obtained from the Internet. Among these sites were those of RAP Real-Time Weather, the National Center for Environmental Prediction (NCEP), the College of DuPage, European Community satellite imagery, Northern Illinois University, and Unisys. The requisite temperature and wind criteria necessary to initiate seeding operations were primarily satisfied through the release of weather balloons. A total of 20 weather balloons were released during the season. The presence of a water cloud was established by a real-time data feed from a radiometer sited near Boulder, WY (Figure 4). In addition to the observed measurements, forecasters utilized a high-resolution numerical weather model operated by NCAR to help determine whether or not atmospheric conditions were suitable for seeding. The radiometer and the numerical weather model runs, funded through an agreement between the US Bureau of Reclamation and NCAR, were made available to WMI forecasters on a daily basis.

Figure 4. The radiometer sited near Boulder, WY. The instrument does not transmit, but passively measures the atmospheric liquid water and water vapor. (NCAR photograph by Daniel Breed.)

Timetables and Routines

If seeding was not underway at dawn, the following daily routine ensued.

WMI furnished a daily "first glance" update that provided an outlook into the probability of seeding operations taking place that day. This very simple form, sent to all project personnel, provided an early look at the weather expected each day Four time periods were specified, from issuance until noon, from noon until sunset, from sunset until midnight, and from midnight until dawn the next day. The probability of seeding operations occurring in each of these time periods was rated by the forecaster as *no chance*, *unlikely*, *possible*, or *probable*. Technicians used this outlook to help inform equipment operation and maintenance decisions. In instances when seeding operations were already active in the morning, the "first glance" outlook would still be issued, reflecting the status of current operations.

The early update was followed by a much more detailed forecast and weather briefing, typically disseminated to the WWDC and all funding partners by late morning via email. These daily briefings included a summary of the preceding day's weather and seeding activities, a summary of the current synoptic-scale weather pattern, and conditions likely to exist for the next 24 hours in the Wind River Range. The Daily Wyoming Wintertime Scale (DWWS), shown in Table 1, numerically categorized the probability of seeding operations occurring.

TABLE 1. The Daily Wyoming Wintertime Scale

DWWS	SEEDING?	METEOROLOGICAL DESCRIPTION
-3	*No*	Clear skies, or clear with isolated upper-level cloudiness.
-2	*No*	Occasionally clear, with cirrus, cirrostratus; or altostratus with bases above mountains.
-1	*No*	Limited coverage or short-lived orographic clouds, not enough temporal or spatial extent to warrant seeding activities.
0	*Possible*	Some orographic clouds or stratiform cloud deck(s) over mountain tops. SLW likely insufficient for seeding operations or winds clearly unfavorable.
+1	*Yes*	Orographic clouds and/or stratiform cloud deck(s) enshrouding mountain tops, winds favorable and SLW likely sufficient for seeding operations.
+2	*Yes*	Persistent orographic clouds and/or stratiform cloud deck(s) enshrouding mountain tops, SLW probable, winds favorable. Lengthy operations possible.

When conditions were satisfied, seeding was initiated by the meteorologist and the generator technician. The meteorologist communicated to the technician which generators would be activated, when, and for how long. The length of time a generator was activated depended upon how long weather conditions were expected to remain favorable.

Once seeding was initiated, the meteorologist tracked the real-time weather conditions. If wind direction changed, some generators could be deactivated while others could be turned on. When favorable weather conditions ended, the technician was directed to shut down all remaining active generators.

OPERATIONS

Seeding operations were conducted on twenty-one occasions, as enumerated in Table 2. November had two seeding opportunities, one at project start-up, and another at the end of the month. December had seven opportunities, but three of the seven were in easterly flow, with the Enterprise generator operated solo.

January had just two events, but both were quality opportunities, the first being 13 hours in duration, and the second over 11 hours. After the second event on 16 January, no additional seeding opportunities materialized until almost a month later on 15 February, when there were five upslope opportunities in a row that could use only the Enterprise generator. These five events resulted in a total of 36.8 generator hours. Compare this to March, which had just three events, but all three in southwesterly flow that allowed use of nine generators (all except Enterprise), and thus resulted in 226.8 generator hours, the most of any month. April was more like February, both events again being in upslope flow, utilizing the Enterprise generator.

TABLE 2. Wyoming Weather Modification Wind River Mountains, 2014-2015 Seeding Summary

Date	*Number of Generators Utilized*	*Length of Seeding in hours*	*AgI Released This Date (kg)*	*AgI Monthly Total (kg)*	*AgI Season Total (kg)*
15-Nov-14	7	5.6	0.964		0.96
30-Nov-14	7	5.0	0.878	1.8416	1.84
1-Dec-14	7	14.4	2.375		4.22
14-Dec-14	1*	17.8	0.217		4.43
19-Dec-14	5	8.0	0.896		5.33
20-Dec-14	7	17.8	2.279		7.61
25-Dec-14	9	11.7	2.538		10.15
25-Dec-14	1*	14.2	0.216		10.36
29-Dec-14	1*	0.9	0.002	8.5237	10.37
5-Jan-15	4	13.0	1.289		11.65
16-Jan-15	7	11.1	1.841	3.1296	13.49
15-Feb-15	1*	2.6	0.062		13.56
16-Feb-15	1*	6.2	0.153		13.71
21-Feb-15	1*	15.0	0.320		14.03
25-Feb-15	1*	9.3	0.186		14.22
26-Feb-15	1*	3.7	0.065	0.7867	14.28
3-Mar-15	9	4.5	1.060		15.34
3-Mar-15	9	10.4	2.334		17.68
24-Mar-15	9	10.3	2.320	5.7147	20.00
2-Apr-15	1*	16.1	0.451		20.45
15-Apr-15	1*	28.1	0.803	1.2539	21.25
Totals	-	225.7	-	-	-

*seeding event with easterly flow, utilizing only the Enterprise generator

Note that from 16 January until 3 March, weather conditions suitable for seeding from westerly flow did not occur. It is not uncommon for winters to have a mix of stormy and calm periods, but it's considered atypical to have a period of seven weeks pass by, in which only a few brief episodes of easterly flow could be seeded.

OUTREACH

Whenever possible WMI likes to be receptive to requests to educate those showing an interest in our field efforts. During the 2014-2015 season such interest was made known through the Sublette County Conservation District (SCCD), which arranged for local students to visit the shop and learn about upper air soundings, and even to participate in the release of a weather balloon (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Pinedale high school students and staff learn how to release weather balloons at the WMI shop during a 2014-2015 public outreach event. Sounding data were provided for further examination in class. The instrumentation is contained in the little white package being held in the right hand, while the balloon is held in the left (SCCD photograph by Kathy Raper).

Additional outreach was achieved through the presentation of project activities at Wyoming weather modification Technical Advisory Team (TAT) meetings. The technical advisory team, initially organized by the WWDO for the WWMPP, is comprised of representatives of interested State and Federal agencies. Wyoming agencies include the State Engineer's Office, the Department of Environmental Quality, the Department of Transportation, the University Office of Water Programs, and the Game and Fish Department. Federal agency representation includes several different forests (Bridger-Teton, Shoshone, and Medicine Bow), the U.S. Geological Service, the NWS Riverton and Cheyenne offices, the Bureau of Land Management, and the NRCS. The TAT met twice in 2015, the first time, in Cheyenne on 29 January, and again on 21 July in Pinedale. WMI presented the 2014-2015 Wind River operational seeding efforts to the TAT at both of these meetings.

SUMMARY

The 2014-2015 cloud seeding effort in the Wind River Range began on 15 November 2014, and concluded on 30 April 2015, a duration of 5.5 months. Twenty-one seeding events were conducted. Eleven events involved four or more generators, seeding in westerly or southwesterly flow. The other ten were solo events using the Enterprise generator, in easterly upslope flow. A total of 21.25 Kg of silver iodide was released.

The ice nucleus generators operated reliably, seeding as intended almost 94% of the time. Generator failures occurred infrequently, in fact, only one generator, Pocket Creek, experienced two operational issues during the course of the season.

The winter as a whole was lacking in seeding opportunities. This was not limited to Wyoming, as programs in neighboring Idaho and Utah reported similar lack of opportunities. In the Wind River Range flow from the northwest is parallel to the range axis rather than across it, so seeding wasn't possible under those conditions, which occurred frequently. Temperatures warm in the spring, so in April meeting the temperature criterion can be problematic. The last seeding opportunity occurred on 15 April 2015. Overall, the 2014-2015 winter offered fewer storms and fewer opportunities for seeding than would normally be expected. This was primarily due to a prevailing long-wave weather pattern that kept storm tracks largely north of the range, and also resulted in warmer-than-normal atmospheric temperatures, which made some storms too warm to seed effectively.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Weather Modification, Inc., is pleased to acknowledge the following persons and entities who made the 2014-2015 operations possible.

The Wyoming Water Development Office (WWDO) coordinated the entire effort and contributed 25% of the costs. The WWDO also acquired additional funding from the Colorado River Board of California – Six Agency Committee, the Central Arizona Project, the Southern Nevada Water Authority, the Utah Department of Natural Resources, and the Arizona Department of Water Resources.

The Research Applications Laboratory of the National Center for Atmospheric Research assisted operations by allowing real-time on-line access to their radiometer data and numerical weather model output, which aided forecasting and seeding decision-making.

Ms. Kathy Raper of the Sublette County Conservation District arranged for local students to visit the WMI facilities in Pinedale to learn about the program and observe weather balloon launches. WMI greatly appreciates the opportunity to continue providing educational training and community outreach.

WMI also acknowledges all the WMI staff who contributed to the success of the program, specifically meteorologists Dan Gilbert and Jason Goehring, technicians Michael Paul, Jeremy Silvey, Rich Keely, and Ryan Richter, and all the administrative support provided by Erin Fischer, along with the other Fargo-based WMI support staff.