

Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Partnership
Place-Based Integrated Water Resource Planning
Stakeholder Meeting

Meeting Minutes

February 26, 2020, 4-6PM

Misener Conference Room

La Grande, OR

ATTENDANCE: Bill Gamble, Anton Chiono, Jed Hassinger, Tom Bowman, Kurt Bowman, Cheryl Murchison, Rodger Huffman, Marisa Mayer, Lyle Umpleby, Sarah Fesenmyer, Kim Ogren, Aaron Bliesner, Dave Johnson, Jesse Steele, Deric Carson, Jim Webster, Tony Malmberg, Steve Parrett, Tim Bailey, Larry Larson, Kyle Carpenter, Adrienne Averett, Curt Howell, Matt Insko, Brett Moore, Donna Beverage, and via phone: Margaret Matter, Tim Wallender, Jen Woody, and Phil Macy.

I. Welcome

- a. Introductions: Donna called the meeting to order and brief introductions took place.
- b. Recap of January 8, 2020 Stakeholder meeting: Discussed target issues, conducted listening exercises, feedback determined that presentations were needed on underground storage and on-channel storage. Decided that we need to refine goals and objectives.
- c. Purpose of tonight's meeting: Gain a better understanding of underground storage and on-channel storage; clarify and agree to goals and objectives.
- d. Meeting Guidelines: Respect all ideas, one speaker at a time, offer solutions.

II. Presentations

- a. ESA Permitting Process (Sarah Fesenmyer, National Marine Fisheries Service)

Once a biological opinion is provided, the consultation process can take a few months, depending on the complexity of the project, and in some cases it can take years.

A point was made that there is no evidence of fish population recovery even after decades of this approach; it continues to decrease and if we keep doing the same thing then fish will disappear. If there is no evidence to show that cooperation results in fish recovery, then there is something wrong with how we are approaching this. Sara noted that it will take some time for this approach to work and they are hopeful that there will be some recovery in the fish population as a result.

There was some discussion about potential reservoirs and opportunities to see local successful examples. If endangered species aren't present in reservoirs, then NMFS is not involved. A few points raised included:

- Improve as a whole, generalizing for species.
- In reference to Beaver Creek, the City of La Grande took a proactive approach in response to ORS that mandated the provision of fish passage with human created barriers.
- Three dams were before passage; a lot of reservoirs predate ESA.
- Can also be temperature issue, not flow issue
- NEPA is shortening timelines instead of spending years at separate agencies.
- ODF&W shares information and data, but it is not generated by NMFS

- NMFS would take lead in resolving concerns with federal agencies, but would not do that with outside project sponsors; the funding federal agency that funded the project would work with them.

Sara said conflicts can almost always be resolved between agencies but if not, then it is noted in the biological opinion and they work towards a reasonable alternative. The document is the result of long discussion between the two agencies and becomes the final word. There were some comments from others expressing concerns about vague timelines and an extended amount of time for the two agencies to come to an agreement but Sara said that timelines depend on agencies and specific projects.

b. Underground Storage (Anton Chiono, Water Resources Program, CTUIR
Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) stores water during winter and provides flexibility to use that water throughout summer. Uses existing water right, requires permit to inject and store that water right, injection water must meet water quality guidelines, and percentage recovery of stored water depends on groundwater hydrology.

Artificial Groundwater Recharge (AR) diverts water from one source to be used for groundwater recharge. Requires a permit to divert the water, a groundwater permit to use that water from the recharge project, can address losses to groundwater recharge resulting from irrigation efficiency projects, and can partially mimic natural winter recharge events.

Jen explained that ASR has a limited license valid for five years; sometimes it takes longer than five years to get it up and running so a lot of people will renew that license and then it is a permanent authorization. Kim added that Oregon Water Resources funds the investigation of feasibility and implementation up to \$500,000 and the applicant provides the match.

In response to Tony's questions about ASR, AR, and water quality, Brett explained that they are not seeing any blending or diluting after years of monitoring the oldest example in Baker City.

Larry said that water would turn brown for anyone with a shallow well around the Grande Ronde ditch at Riverside because the water would go down through cobble. Irrigation would be different, but that is the real issue with a lot of wells, so the question is if spring water would have to be cleaned before storing it.

Jed asked about the rate from the pumping site at the Walla Walla AR project and if multiple wells would be needed. Brett said yes, and Anton added that they can take out 5-6cfs, but he is not sure about the rate of injection. Brett said it is very close to that rate, and it's limited just around that well site. Anton also added that they have a treatment system instead of being injected directly from the stream, and water quality is assured through work with DEQ and OHA. Costs of projects are site specific, Brett said, and Anton added that it takes energy dollars to pump it in and out; this specific project was funded by the City of Walla Walla and the Bonneville Power Administration.

III. Goals, Objectives, and Strategies Discussion

- a. Go over handout: Brett explained that the purpose is to review language and document identified changes that are needed. Once the group is comfortable with those changes and understands the issues and how they will be addressed, then decisions regarding priorities can be made later.
- b. Discuss goals and objectives – (consensus vote to approve goals and objectives if the group is ready). Discussion points included:
 - Should instream deficits be separated from ag deficits?
 - How will water remain in system to cover deficits from July to November?
 - Should goals be best case scenario and long-term, and/or should they reflect what we know is realistic and attainable?
 - Maybe phrasing should include working towards long-term goals without promising 100% achievement.
 - Are we shooting too low with goals, or are setting ourselves for failure?
 - This is a living document and allows for changes in the future.
 - Goal objectives should be quantitative and charted.
 - The integrative plan should include identifying sources and demands of water; groundwater studies are important.
 - It would be helpful to reflect that instream and ag demands are not the same, and how they relate to each other.

IV. Next Steps

- a. Next meeting we will discuss geographic locations that strategies apply to and have a consensus vote on our prioritized list of strategies (if the group is ready)
- b. Next we will finalize our step 4 report (will contain action plans)
- c. Then we will begin on Step 5 – which summarizes steps 1-4 and creates an implementation plan. Step 5 guidance will be sent out after this meeting. We will generally focus on top strategies, with opportunistic work occurring for all strategies.

V. Conclusion

- a. Next meetings are March 18, 2020 and April 22, 2020 in the Misener Room.
- b. Other Comments
 - i. Bill shared that an Open House will be hosted tomorrow at 5:00PM at the District Ranger's office to talk about sheep creek collaborative.
 - ii. Tony shared that a meeting will be held tomorrow, Eastern Oregon University, Badgley Hall, Room 146 at 4:00PM, to discuss the river as a floodplain the restoration process.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cinda Johnston
Union County Planning Department Specialist