Attachment 4 Considerations for Plan Implementation

This attachment provides some considerations for plan implementation identified by the plan review team agencies. Over the next several months, the planning group and state agencies can discuss how best to partner during plan implementation.

Implementation Generally

- ODFW can provide examples of effective and detailed Implementation Plans for reference.
- Consider developing qualitative and quantitative benchmarks to measure and monitor progress.
- The planning groups should consider how the plan is helping to make progress on the State IWRS, or how it will help advance and integrate other existing natural resources plans (Grande Ronde Model Watershed Assessments and Plans, ODA Agriculture Water Quality Management Plan, DEQ TMDL and Water Quality Management Plan, Northwest Power and Conservation Council Sub-basin Plan).

Implementation Coordination

- The five priority actions provide focus for the diverse community groups and engages their interests. The plan does not provide any information on who, besides the lead, is on each team. Is the team lead committed to facilitating and coordinating the team? Does coordination all fall on Union County or will the steering committee continue to meet after plan adoption? How will the partnership keep momentum without deadlines and funding for coordination? These details should be made clear to help achieve effective implementation.
- Continue to monitor and maintain a balance of interests in the full Partnership and implementation teams.
- Consider whether the Governance Agreement needs to be updated or modified to better assist the group during implementation.
- Consider developing a method or tool to help the group respond to shifting needs and opportunities and assess relative priorities.

Outreach

- Table ES-2 provides a nice summary of future actions. Many of the identified actions are already and have been in progress for a long time. This is good and the addition of this process could add emphasis and motivation to a larger number of participants in Union County.
- The intended audience for this plan as written appears to be the members of the Partnership. Consider developing a slimmer version of the plan that would be more accessible to decision-makers, funders, and the public, complete with more photos of the basin and different water interests, information rich graphics, highlights of the good work happening on the ground and the impact you are already seeing or hoping to see through implementation of recommended actions.
- During implementation or any plan updates, the group should consider developing specific activities to reach out to and hear from the broader public. For any proposed action or project, identify who will be impacted by the actions. Consider outreach to those water interests not involved in the plan development process (e.g., rural residents with domestic wells, local businesses/industries, recreation interests, etc.). Ensure that any impacted communities,

including environmental justice communities (environmental justice communities include minority and low-income communities, tribal communities, and other communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes), have opportunities for meaningful involvement in issue identification, alternatives analysis, project scoping, and execution – be open to issues that may not have been identified in the original planning process.

Pursuit of Recommended Actions

- It appears that the Partnership has plans to pursue IFIM studies to support the Built Storage option (Strategy 1). ODFW strongly advises that the correct approach for a fully integrated plan is to identify basin-wide instream flow needs (for the conservation, maintenance, and enhancement of aquatic and fish life, wildlife, and fish and wildlife habitat) and indicate how this information helps in implementing actions from all strategies before conducting IFIM studies associated only with potential reservoir sites.
- Storage project take a long time to identify, assess, design, permit, implement, and potentially mitigate for, especially within Essential Salmonid Habitat. If there is a federal nexus, then a National Environmental Policy Act review will be required as well. ODFW requests that the Partnership work to address critical data gaps first, or at least concurrently, with pursuing a storage option.
- Consider the Allocation of Conserved Water program to incentivize and reward conservation. This program can be used to expand irrigated agriculture as well as restore streamflows.
- Consider supporting actions by municipal providers that can increase conservation, such as: an annual water audit, leak detection programs, metering connections, meter testing and maintenance, automated metering infrastructure, a rate structure that encourages conservation, public education programs, assistance to customers to implement conservation measures, water reuse, recycling, and non-potable water opportunities.
- The Water Rights Section of the Oregon Water Resources Department is available for pre-application consultations to help the group understand the water rights permitting process as it may relate to potential projects.
- Off-channel storage and linear storage (expanding ditches) may create unintended negative consequences. For instance, enlarging a ditch may reduce its effectiveness to deliver irrigation water. Make sure to look at natural processes alongside engineered solutions. Recommend finding ways to slow down and naturally store water in the upper part of the watershed.
- Changing the channel (reintroducing meanders, restoring floodplains) may increase flows from the creek to the subsurface for a time. These projects are beneficial, but during implementation the group should be aware that it may alter flows and have a short-term impact on instream flows.
- Determining the location and feasibility of aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) will require a lot of additional research. The group should be consider how ASR may alter water availability and use for junior users and how to account for that.
- The group should make sure their Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan meets any federal FEMA requirements so they can take advantage of FEMA programs. We suggest that you reach out to FEMA or OEM to understand what the benefits may be and what would need to be included to reach those benefits.

Technical Work and Filling Data Gaps

- ODFW can provide updated guidance so that the UGR Partnership can successfully complete an assessment of instream water needs. The Partnership should incorporate BIR-based recommendations into the assessment (if they were not previously included), rather than existing ISWRs. ISWRs may have been reduced from the amounts in the applications and therefore may not fully represent instream needs. ODFW can supply the appropriate BIR recommendations. In addition to the BIR-based targets, use of modeled flow data (e.g., StreamStats) would provide a starting point for understanding current and future basin-wide needs in many of the smaller tributaries lacking flow targets. This preliminary analysis would help direct the UGR Partnership as they develop a more focused suite of tools to determine instream flow needs.
- Consult with OWRD once plan implementation begins, in order to target efforts to collect useful and actionable groundwater data.
- Long term data collection to fill data gaps in targeted areas is important to identify systems that may behave differently than the majority of wells (alluvial in this case) for which there are already established representative records.

Considerations for Specific Work Groups

- Data group - For those projects that involve stream gages, please work with the OWRD watermaster, and they can bring in other agency staff as needed. Decisions around OWRD support for stream gages happen between field staff and hydrographics staff (data processing), and will require discussion.
- Data group – for projects focused on water use monitoring, this group may want to explore statewide ET project that OWRD is pursuing (results are still a few years out). OWRD would still recommend increased measurement of water use at points of diversion/appropriation, but new tools such as Open ET could help increase accuracy of basin-wide ET estimates. Collecting measurement data for irrigation water use from surface water diversions and groundwater pumpage will assist in the accurate accounting of water use. Gathering this information can assist with any future studies, such as the groundwater study. This information can also assist both development of accurately sized water supply projects as well as accounting for water transaction based solutions.
- Habitat group – OWRD encourages the group to perform technical studies or monitoring, possibly in partnerships with researchers that can document the water supply benefit of non-structural storage. This is an area of research that has shown mixed results in terms of actual increased benefits to water supplies for downstream uses, despite having other critical benefits, and quantification of the likely results would assist with seeking funding from water supply sources (as opposed to habitat quality and wet meadow restoration benefits).
- Infrastructure group – OWRD may have some historic studies on hydraulics of the Ditch – if interested, contact your planning coordinator and we can work with the Dam Safety group to explore this.
- Administrative group – The group may consider adding drought preparation and coordination to future work.