



Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Place-Based Integrated Water Resources Planning

Fact Sheet 2016-2018

Presented by
Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Partnership

Introduction

The Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed is a vital ecosystem that supports ranchers, farmers, and urban residents as well as an array of fish and wildlife species. Union County is convening a place-based integrated water resources planning effort to evaluate all demands on water resources within the watershed compared to available water resources.

This will be a collaborative effort among a balanced representation of local stakeholders that have a vested interest in the area's water resources, and the public. While there is a significant body of research on water quality, quantity, and ecological demands in the watershed, there is a lack of seasonal-level analysis to evaluate whether the demands are aligned with available water quality and quantity.

This effort will analyze water quality and quantity versus demand for each week of the year to determine when water quantity and quality exceed demand and when demand exceeds available supply. Analyzed data will be used to develop strategies to balance water demand with supply. This may include improvements in water storage, conveyance, treatment, reuse, and conservation. The planning effort will evaluate, on a watershed scale, possible water resources management strategies to meet the demands and possible improvements to maximize water use efficiencies. The objective is to have a complete document outlining available water resources in the watershed, compared to the demands on each resource, that will serve as a "roadmap" to best align the demands with the available resources for an integrated and sustainable system.



Background

Helping communities plan for their water future through place-based integrated water resources planning is a recommended action in Oregon's 2012 Integrated Water Resources Strategy.

Place-based planning provides a framework for communities to understand current and future water needs for people, the economy, and the environment. Through a voluntary, locally led effort, communities will partner with the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) to identify and prioritize strategic solutions to meet those needs. The project will follow a set of draft planning guidelines, which begins by forming an open and collaborative process. Place-based integrated water resources plans can provide a means to gather the support and resources needed to implement local solutions.



The OWRD awarded four grants totaling \$657,000 to help communities address local water challenges through collaborative water planning. These four awards are part of a pilot program authorized by the 2015 Legislature. The recipients of the grants are Union County in the Upper Grande Ronde Subbasin, the John Day Partnership in the Lower John Day Subbasin, the City of Newport in the Mid-Coast Basin, and the Harney County Watershed Council in the Malheur Lake Basin. Union County received \$197,000 in approved funding to convene this process.

The Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Partnership, led by Union County, will follow a five-step planning approach over the next two years. These steps include building a broad consensus-based partnership, characterizing the watershed, identifying vulnerabilities, developing solutions, and creating an action plan.

Questions

1. What is place-based planning? Place-based integrated water resources planning provides a framework for communities to collaboratively identify their in-stream and out-of-stream water resources needs, and then identify solutions and projects that will help them meet those needs now and into the future. It is a voluntary, non-regulatory, locally-initiated and led planning effort that brings together a broad representation of interests to work in partnership with OWRD. The process includes five steps described in the Draft 2015 Place-Based Planning Guidelines. Communities will accomplish place-based planning by:

- Building a collaborative and inclusive process.
- Gathering information to understand current water resources and identify gaps in knowledge.
- Examining current and future water needs for people, the economy, and the environment.
- Developing and prioritizing strategic and integrated solutions to meet water needs.
- Creating a local integrated water resources plan.

2. Why place-based planning? Place-based planning will help foster cooperative relationships between individuals and groups that value water differently. Through a collaborative process they will build upon existing knowledge, coordinate efforts, identify and fill information gaps, and explore innovative solutions to meet multiple needs. Place-based planning can help communities develop a shared understanding and vision, prioritize actions, and gather the support and resources they need to implement those actions.



3. Do place-based plans replace previous planning efforts? No, place-based plans should build upon and integrate existing information and plans whenever possible and should strive not to duplicate efforts. The planning process can help fill in gaps where needed, provide focus and coordination between partners, and help a community clearly communicate needs and solutions.

4. Can place-based planning change existing water rights or state water policy? No, place-based plans cannot infringe on or jeopardize existing water rights. Place-based plans can identify policy barriers and where policy changes may be needed to successfully implement broadly supported actions, but they do not have the force of law and cannot change policy.

5. Why is Union County convening this process? The geographic boundaries of Union County very closely align with the boundaries of the Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed. This allows Union County to serve as a natural leader in this process to ensure all water interests are fairly heard and given a chance to participate and assist in this planning effort. The Partnership hopes that through this intensive two-year planning process our community of stakeholders will come to a consensus about the vulnerabilities and needs in our watershed and how to address these concerns. It is anticipated that this plan will be used to secure funding for future projects that benefit our watershed now and into the future.

6. Who can participate in the process? Union County is actively working to spread the word about this planning project and encourages all interested stakeholders to contact us and get involved. If you live or work in the county or are interested in working to improve the watershed, please let us know.

Currently, our developing Partnership has members from vital stakeholder groups including the Union County Farm Bureau, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, City of La Grande, and many others. We are working hard to continue to build and strengthen our Partnership



7. This brochure is helpful, but where can I go for more information? Our first meeting is planned for Tuesday, October 4, 2016, at 5:30 p.m. at the Union County Public Transit Building Conference Room, 2204 East Penn Avenue, La Grande, Oregon 97850.

We will share future meeting dates on the website, via our email list, and through local print media. Please visit these websites for more information:

www.oregon.gov/OWRD/pages/Place_based_Planning.aspx

<http://union-county.org/placebasedplanning>

For more information (or to subscribe to our email list), please call Scott Hartell, Union County Planning Director, at 541-963-1014.