

**Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Partnership
Place-Based Integrated Water Resource Planning
Stakeholder Meeting No. 41**

Meeting Minutes

April 20, 2021

Conference Call / Misener Room

ATTENDANCE:

Anton Chiono, Matt Insko, Rodger Huffman, Jed Hassinger, Curt Ricker, Joe Lemanski, Jesse Steele, Jim Webster, Steve Parrett, Gretchen Sausen, Curt Howell, Tim Wallender, Kyle Carpenter, Cheryl Murchison, Dana Kurtz, Donna Beverage

I. WELCOME

a. Introductions

Donna opened the meeting at 5:05 p.m. and thanked everyone for working together and providing feedback.

II. Step 5 Plan – Vote

Dana reported that two report revision requests were received. They are good clarifications and do not seem to substantially change the report.

On page 3-3 the sentence *“Three designated state scenic waterways (SWW) exist in the UGRRW, with one having some effect on water use in the UGRRW planning area. The Grande Ronde River from its confluence with the Wallowa River downstream to the Oregon-Washington border allows for an allocation of water in stream for the SWW.”* is changed to: **“The Grande Ronde River from its confluence with the Wallowa River downstream to the Oregon-Washington border is designated as a state scenic waterway, which makes new allocations in the planning area contingent on the maintenance of scenic waterway flows”**

On page 5-3 after *“Begin feasibility study to look into aboveground storage (both built and non-structural) and conduct Physical Habitat Simulation System instream flow studies to both support storage efforts and assist with filling data gaps for instream demands.”* Sentence added: **“Study to evaluate new storage locations as well as evaluating deepening existing reservoirs (such as Beaver Creek and Phillips Reservoir).”**

Rodger noted that Phillips Reservoir is not within the planning area.

Tim agreed and added that he had called attention to that before and it should be removed; a study about fish numbers before and after the building of the Mason Dam probably already exists. He would like the plan to specifically include increasing the height of storage capacity. **Dana incorporated that revision and added the Bureau of Reclamation and ODFW as contacts for fish information.**

Dana reiterated that the Governance Agreement stipulates that consensus is reached when all Stakeholder Committee members present at the meeting agree to one of the following statements 1) I agree with the decision and will publically support it, 2) I agree with the decision but will refrain from publically supporting it, and 3) I can live with the decision (and will not disparage it in public). Agencies may provide a provisional vote.

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Steve asked if the meeting would provide an opportunity to discuss the draft and get clarifications before the vote. Dana indicated that everyone could make comments when they vote.

Dana facilitated a vote to approve the plan:

Anton Chiono – yes; happy to support it, no comments. Thank you for all your work.

Cheryl Murchison – yes; no comments.

Curt Ricker – yes; would publicly support it.

Donna Beverage – yes; it is a good product to move forward with.

Jed Hassinger – yes; happy to support it. Thank you to all, especially Dana.

Jesse Steele – yes; no additional comments.

Jim Webster – yes; will publicly support it. Thank you to everyone who put in all the work, especially the collection of new background data; that had not been combined before.

Kyle Carpenter – yes; happy to support it. No comments at this time

Matt Insko – yes; could publicly support it.

Rodger Huffman – yes; no further comments.

Steve Parrett – yes; the plan contains a lot of good information. It demonstrates a lot of learning the group did and it gained an understanding of the water resource situation in the planning area. It shows a lot of people working together and represents your vision of where you want to go.

Joe Lemanski – yes; this is a provisional vote from an agency that is part of the review process. He recognized the work that went into it. With a little more effort, it will be a good product. Some of the hard work done in the steps leading up to this point need to be pulled through. The agency's outstanding comments need to be addressed, that will come through in the review process and we can continue to work on that.

Tim Wallender – yes; but will not support it publicly. I noticed that the burden of work lies at the feet of agriculture once again. While I appreciate the effort everyone has done to pitch in to make this collaborative work, when the boots hit the ground it falls at the feet of agriculture. Looking at the report, the Ag section has the most to implement, more than any other group. It's not surprising but it's a little disappointing when there is a large public land mass; there are lot of public lands and things that can be done with Federal or State dollars. That should be explored or researched. Beaver Creek is one specific example of an existing structure that could be implemented and put into place. About nine months ago, ODFW said they had concerns about the the plan and I have asked several times what those were so we could address them as a group. We never heard what those issues were; there was no explanation and we could not address them as a group collectively and collaboratively. When I asked for specifics, it was dead silent on the other end.

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Dana noted that there are concerns in general with storage ideas, and the hope is that the feasibility study will help illustrate options available instead of having big concepts, and then we can talk about specific things.

Curt Howell – yes; with reservations. I agree with Tim; the landowners with property along river channels are more impacted. It seems like priorities don't totally agree. I am voting yes in hopes that things progress. *Curt submitted additional comments via the chat function, but they could not be recorded.*

Dana stated that the vote was unanimous, with some reservations.

Steve shared the agency review process as outlined in the 2015 draft guidelines. Ultimately, the plan would be considered by the Water Resources Commission for State recognition and the hope is that it will carry some weight in venues that have been through that process. This is a locally adopted draft plan. The plan review team includes Oregon Water Resources, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Environmental Quality, Oregon Department of Agriculture and Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board; it will have a combination of Salem/Portland staff and local field staff. Criteria outlined in Step 5 guidance will be used to see that the plan contains all required contents and that it meets the criteria that goes along with that. I will be facilitating the plan review team, but will not be a member of the team. We did this because I've been so close to the process for five years. We thought it would be best to have my colleague, Harmony Burright, be the coordinator for our agency in the review process. When the group adopts the draft plan (which you just did) and submits it for agency review, we will complete the review within 60 days. One set of consolidated comments and feedback will be returned to you and will be in four categories:

1. Strengths
2. Required Improvements (areas where the agencies feels the criteria wasn't met for the required plan content)
3. Suggested Improvements
4. Considerations for implementation (for instance, an agency sees how a strategy you're hoping to implement works well with one of their programs. How we might help with implementation or things you might want to keep in mind as you work towards implementation).

You can decide how to incorporate that into the final plan. The final plan is the version that, if approved, the agencies would recommend to the Water Resources Commission for State recognition. We anticipate that some of you might come to the Commission to present the plan and strategies, and share where you see the help of the State would be most important and useful in helping you implement the plan. The Commission will consider your presentation, read the plan, consider public comments about the plan and make a decision about whether they want to recognize it as a State-recognized plan. They will memorialize that through a motion by the Commission. You may need to make some modifications and then give us time to get it front of the Commission. It's possible that you could get on agenda for the meeting on August 25; the next meeting after that is November. Adopting the draft plan meets the requirements of the grant agreement between Union County and OWR. The Planning group has the option of going before the agency review for state recognition. It sounds like all four planning groups see value in that and intend to seek State recognition. It's a little above and beyond requirements of the grant agreement.

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Rodger asked who decides if the group wants that State recognition – is it the group or convener? Steve said he would pose that question to Donna.

Donna asked what would happen if the group did not get State recognition.

Steve said the consequence would be that you're right back to this point: you have a locally adopted plan that you want to implement. It wouldn't look very good for a planning group or the agencies to have a failed effort in getting State recognition.

Anton asked if the agencies and State would be more likely to fund our projects if they recognized the plan.

Steve said there is that hope; there is not a specific authority to provide specific money to the planning groups, but State-recognized plans are going to carry some weight with various funders and the Legislature directly. It could help give added value if you go to foundations and the Federal government. That credibility would help. I hope the group will look at the State review process as a positive step. It's an opportunity for a fresh set of eyes; it would put the plan through the criteria and look for opportunities to help the planning group. There might be places in the plan where it could be improved for implementation, and you can decide that. It makes all the agencies very aware at a high level of what is in your plan and where you're going. It will elevate the vision of the plan within the agencies and force them to think about how they can help the planning group move forward.

Anton asked that since anything we do would require approval for our agency partners anyway, wouldn't it help to step in that direction. Steve said he thought so, but not everything would require approval from agencies.

Rodger said it's ironic that the local plan was put together with affected parties and a lot of the non-agency people are the voters, but the potential process is that if it goes to agencies in Salem, people who are not related to it in any way are looking to step over and give us ideas of what would work and they don't live here. It puts you in a funny place. Maybe that's where some of these comments and concerns are coming from, they're going to address them in the review process, not argue about them here in this group. They're going to look at the plan at a higher level and say they don't like it. There are risks in having it reviewed, and risks in not doing it.

Donna stated that there is also the potential to move forward in a way that hasn't been done before. We are being trusting that we can move forward and have a plan that is good for our county.

Dana agreed and added that the agency review has strict parameters of what meets or does not meet criteria. My understanding is that, for example, there is no opportunity for agencies to review it in a way that would allow them analyze Step 3 and advise us to consider redoing it using 2020 values.

Steve said the review criteria is pretty focused. The questions are: did the group follow guidelines in how planning should be done, meet the plan and include the required

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contents and meet the criteria associated with those, and did the planning process follow the planning principles outlined in the State Integrated Water Resource Strategy? Generally speaking, that is how you've been approaching your planning. What if this planning process hadn't happened and agency folks from Salem gave you a directive to do all these things; how enthused would you be about that? The beauty is that this is your plan; you care about it, and you want to see it implemented. That makes it different from the process in the past. It has been locally lead and initiated in partnership with the State. Our agency review will be in the spirit of trying to help and implement the plan as a partner.

Anton said the strength of this process has been seeing that we are stronger together than our own interest groups would be separately. In another area, they are fighting about the Klamath water crisis, there's no hope in sight and nobody wants to spend money on that. Contrast that with the Yakima Basin Integrated project, the Federal government is spending billions of dollars to help them and the reason is because there are irrigators, tribes, environmentalists, and agencies all at the same table talking about the strength of working together for something. Our agency partners are here to help us along, that's what the whole Place-Based Planning process is all about, not to do it in isolation. Everyone has put in blood sweat and tears: the agriculture community, agency friends, and environmental groups. I am looking at a grant application for this group tonight so I've put in some work, too. We need to keep that in perspective. We all have a lot to gain from it, while it's not the perfect plan for any of us. Wallowa Lake is lined up for \$ 14million in funds because the Nez Perce Tribe, Water Irrigation District, ODFW and Umatilla Tribes came together to say this is important, not for one stakeholder group, but for all of them. We can gain so much but we have to stick together.

Donna said the grant for the feasibility study has been preapproved, but it is in the public comment phase. The plan for now is to take a break for the summer and begin meeting again in the fall, starting with a tour of sites for potential projects, as well as some that have been done already. The Union Soil and Water Conservation District UGR Ag Water Quality Management Plan dated March 7, 2019 says a study has already been conducted by the Bureau of Reclamation, identifying 40 potential dam sites on tributaries and headwaters of the two rivers. It is estimated at least 20 small dams are needed to control the 10-year flood event. There are a lot of studies done already that we can tap into.

Dana stated that quarterly meetings would be held during the feasibility study and the plan's implementation phase. A lot of implementation work will be done in smaller group implementation meetings.

Donna said it would be good to have reports from other water groups that are already working in the county, such as Grande Ronde Model Watershed, Union SWCD, and Natural Resources Conservation Service. We don't always know what's going on, but it is really important to continue communication as we start projects.

Tim requested that the plan Donna referenced be sent to the group. Jim said it was first put together in 1998 through HB1010 and was led by ODA; it is updated every two years

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and available online. A local advisory committee oversees the revisions and a new version is coming. It is a living document based on meeting water quality goals in the basin on agriculture land. Committee members include agriculture producers in the Grande Ronde Valley, CTUIR, and others. This plan is a staple of what the district does in the basin through direction by ODA, and is also one leg of the total maximum daily load process. It would be better to go to the BOR's study that was done in 1981.

Steve said he wanted to make sure there is clarity around submitting the draft plan for the agency's review.

Dana thought the group was always planning to, and asked if anyone thought it should not be submitted for agency review. Rodger said he thought it was a requirement of the grant and didn't feel like it was an option. Dana said she was not sure she realized that until later on; she asked if he was okay with submitting it. Rodger said the thought process all along was that Water Resources, because they are the granting agency, would get the plan and we would work with them. He said he didn't know all the other agencies were going to get a crack at it too; it's nice to learn this tonight. Donna said the agencies are calling it a provisional vote, but the fact that they voted for the plan makes her feel like it is a good thing moving forward.

Dana said a lot of them are probably nervous about submitting it for agency review; she asked if anyone wanted to oppose submitting it. Rodger said no, but from a process standpoint if they come back and recommend a bunch of stuff we just can't live with, where are we at then? Dana said for the local process, if a bunch of comments came back, they would be sent to the whole group. If they're little things, they could take a shot at incorporating them. If they're significant changes, they would make a plan through a meeting with the whole group. She thought it will be somewhere in the middle, with some comments on some parts. The group would then approve the revised document and resubmit it.

Anton asked Steve if they would go before the Water Resources Commission to present the plan. Steve said yes; after agency review, this group adopts a final plan (the vote tonight is for a draft plan), then that final plan goes in front of the Water Resources Commission. That plan would no longer be subject to revisions.

Donna said she has gone before the WRC in the past and they were well received at those stages.

Anton added that this is a great opportunity to have a captive audience to lobby for our projects. We did a great job and we get to tell them what they can do for us.

Steve agreed and said that the WRC has been following the local process very closely; they are very enthusiastic about the planning efforts and the State-local partnership. It will be a friendly audience; they are very supportive of what you're doing. The 2019 draft guidelines lay out this process. This is the pilot phase and the first time the State has tried this approach. We may find that there is some problem with agency review and going to the WRC, and that's ok. They are learning right along with you. You have a good plan to work from and you should feel good about where you are.

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Rodger asked if the plan would be adopted as Administrative Rule? Steve said no, a motion of the commission carries the weight of the commissioners but is not administrative rule.

III. Conclusion

Other Comments

Steve informed the group that the next virtual conversation is confirmed for May 11 at noon. They will hear from folks in Colorado about how they transitioned from planning to implementation. A link to the meeting will be sent via email.

Donna adjourned the meeting at 6:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cinda Johnston
Union County Planning Department Specialist