

Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Partnership
Place-Based Integrated Water Resource Planning
Stakeholder Meeting No. 33

Meeting Minutes
October 14, 2020
Conference Call

ATTENDANCE:

Cheryl Murchison, Jim Webster, Tim Wallender, Steve Parrett, Dana Kurtz, Donna Beverage, Curt Howell, Matt Insko, Anton Chiono, Rodger Huffman, Larry Larson, Gretchen, Brett Moore, Kyle Carpenter, Jason Melady, Jed Hassinger, Curt Ricker, and Adrienne Averett.

I. WELCOME

a. Introductions

Donna opened the meeting at 5:05pm. Roll call took place with each participant sharing what they felt is most important when considering water storage feasibility. Of those mentioned, location was the most common. Also noted: collaboration, cooperation with all agencies, water availability, sustainable water source, functionality, overall benefit to all stakeholders, impacts, matching water needs that keep conservation as options, cost/economics, funding probability, geological suitability, permitting, knowing the amount and location of water needs, and being aware of (and resolving) hurdles that could impede or stop project progress.

b. Meeting Guidelines

It is helpful for everyone to speak up, state your name when speaking, and use the chat function for comments and ideas while others are speaking. As a hybrid virtual meeting, some participants attended in person, and others via phone/computer.

c. Recap of June 24, 2020 Stakeholder meeting

The last meeting was virtual; Step 4 comments were integrated and sent to everyone via email. There continues to be significant concerns from a few people, so we need to spend additional time on it before voting.

II. Step 4 Report Revisions (45 minutes)

a. Schedule

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|---------------|--|
| Oct. 14, 2020 | No vote |
| Nov. 18, 2020 | Review draft Step 5 (and vote on Step 4) |
| Dec. 9, 2020 | Revisions to Step 5 report |
| Jan. 2021 | Revisions to Step 5 |
| Feb. 2021 | Adopt DRAFT Step 5 |
| Mar. 1, 2021 | Need to submit plan to allow 30-60 days for agency review (ODA, ODFW, OWRD, DEQ) |
| Apr. 2021 | Wait/work implementation |
| May 2021 | Wait/work implementation (presentation of final plan to the OWRD commission) |
| Jun. 2021 | Grant extension expires |

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Donna stated that they would like to know beforehand if someone plans to vote no, and why, so those concerns can be resolved before the vote.

b. Review and discussion of stakeholder comments

Brett said that the steering committee wants the language to be something everyone can support. It was proposed to remove the statement that groundwater is declining because more information is needed about sustainability; we don't know how sustainable the water supply is for the future. It was also proposed to delete statements identifying that the partnership provide fish passage screening; it was felt that it is not on us for the purpose of sustainability.

Tim W. asked that at some time Donna would share information with the group about fish passage that he sent to her.

Dana apologized for it seeming like Administrative Actions was moved to a higher ranking above other priorities in past meetings. The ranking has not changed since the partnership's vote, and the document will not change unless it has been voted on. She is hopeful that all intended changes are reflected in the Step 4 report and will be voted on at the next meeting.

III. Step 5 Action Plan (45 Minutes)

a. Catherine Creek Underground Storage Discussion

Brett shared that an application is being submitted to OWRD that would investigate possible aboveground storage options. The recent Catherine Creek project went fairly well, but more information was requested from NFS that slowed it down so the project did not get the support it needed to continue. There are plans to pick up that project and move forward asking for concrete reasons why it would not be considered viable.

b. Feasibility Study discussion and review

Brett summarized the multi-step process of a feasibility study, beginning with the identification of location and geography. Once funded, contour maps help us understand where water needs are in certain areas. At that point, we consider where we can feasibly complete the project. It will probably include smaller projects and in places where we can build, instead of one big project. In a nutshell: identify geography, geology, physical feasibility, administrative issues that have to be addressed, and impacts to environmental and fish riparian areas.

Steve asked Brett to expand on what happens once projects are chosen. Brett said that if land ownership is an issue, those legal issues will need to be resolved first. Agreements on siting and water storage rights must be worked through. Once rights to land and water is acquired, then layout size and cost estimates are determined. With cost benefits and other economics known, environmental impacts are addressed. And finally, design and permitting takes place and the project is built.

Steve asked Brett to explain the length of time the process takes.

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Brett said that if funding arrives in the next several months, the feasibility study would take place over the next year, after which discussions about land acquisitions would take place. We are about one-and-a-half to two years out to start those conversations, and then at least another year for negotiations. If Federal land is involved, NEPA and environmental studies could stretch it out another three to four years. Potentially, we are looking at six years from today. During that time we would secure funding and engage the government to get the project on the list for money. Once that funding is secured, we are looking at two years for design and permits and then another couple years for the build. His best guess is that it could be ten years from today.

Donna reminded everyone not to be discouraged, we have to start somewhere. She has talked to other counties in our region and this is not uncommon. Wallowa County worked for five decades for their project. This is not for us, but for our children and getting the feasibility study is the first step.

Brett added that with the Wallowa Lake dam project, negotiations were lengthy because it was on privately owned land. The cost for improvements couldn't pay for the project so it had to be supported by a collaborative effort and for public benefit. It was a struggle to go from maintaining it as private to where they are now. The benefit the UGRRW Partnership has is that it is already a developed group/team, and starting with that before project proposal is an advantage.

Dana said that it is important to remember that we may be working on more than one project. Those projects may not solve the whole problem, but bigger goals will benefit.

Dana asked Anton to describe our approach to meet requirements to attain instream funding. Anton said that in Oregon we can increase water storage capacity from winter runoff when it is not as useful as other times of the year. We want to be sure that the diverting and storage of winter runoff, and related projects, do not adversely impact fisheries. Also, in regards to instream demand: we noted in the Step 3 report that there isn't very good information in the UGRR basin generally. Highlighting those data gaps will parallel nicely in our feasibility study. Hopefully we will get best funding from the State because we would be addressing instream demands and needs in the feasibility study while not adversely impacting fisheries.

Adrienne added that a new suite of tools is available. Over the past year, through the water policy program at ODFW, staff have been taking data sets for USGS and putting them into one usable tool in terms of fish benefits. That staff will also try to refine some of the work that was done in the past. Instream studies are time consuming and really expensive, so this tool will be helpful. We are talking about how we can use that tool in the UGRR basin and how we might be able to layer it in our feasibility study. Dana added that it is still unclear what that will look like, but we hope that having more answers about flows and quality will allow good ideas like the Catherine Creek project to move forward.

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Jed asked Brett if funding would say how specific or broadly it could be used geographically, such as expanding to other opportunities along the same cross section area. Brett said there is some real potential where Catherine Creek comes into the valley and city that could prove beneficial for underground storage. Those were identified in the report, and spatially there are some other areas.

Dana added that we originally planned to advance the Catherine Creek project to the next level and ask what agencies wanted. However, feedback received indicated that it was two different things. It was then removed and we will instead use our own funding. Brett said that would allow us to test the aquifer and provide answers about fisheries that weren't available earlier. Dana said that it would also help us learn who was concerned about the project and why.

c. Working Groups Assigned

Dana reminded everyone that by signing up for a working group, no one has to be in charge of the whole section. There are smaller lists inside big strategies. It is undetermined how groups will meet, but to start with they would not have to be separate meetings. Once the plan is approved, people would not necessarily have to communicate all the time. Quarterly meetings are planned during implementation. Donna added that the action plans from these working groups will help complete Step 5 so we can apply for OWRD funding before the deadline. Steve said that there is a lot of information written in other steps already, this process would be recrafting what we have and building on it, such as translating bullet points into a narrative.

Dana said that once the plan is approved, people can be assigned to take action or suggest the next step. Donna said she saw it differently: she sees Grande Ronde Model Watershed or Soil and Water Conservation District doing it for us; that's what they do and they are paid to do it. Dana said she likes the idea of keeping volunteers involved and not limiting it to paid people. It ensures that both sides are represented and it is looked at in a balanced way; she hopes we will have volunteers and paid staff.

1. Built Storage (Aboveground Storage, and Underground Storage)
Rodger Huffman, Curt Howell, Jed Hassinger (underground only), Brett Moore, Scott Hartell (underground only, Donna volunteered), ODA (Margaret)
2. Land Management – Agricultural Land
NRCS (Mike Burton/Brice), Curt Ricker, Matt Insko
3. Data Collection, Monitoring, and Research
Steve Parrett, Margaret Matter/Bill, Anton Chiono (someone requested that Larry Larson help this group; he is not interested at this time)
4. Non-Structural Water Storage and Habitat Management
Jim Webster, Rodger Huffman, Curt Ricker, ODFW (Adrienne Averett)
5. Land Management – Public Land
Bill Gamble, Union County (Donna Beverage)

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6. Infrastructure/Land Modification

Curt Howell, Jed Hassinger, Jim Webster

7. Administrative Actions

Tony Malmberg, Steve Parrett, Anton Chiono

8. Land Management

Kyle Carpenter, Leonard Flint, Dave Johnson

9. Outreach & Education

Kyle Carpenter

IV. Conclusion (5 minutes)

a. Next meeting is November 18, 2020 (5-7pm) Misener Room/Conference Call

b. Other Comments

Steve acknowledged Dana's hard work that has helped the partnership move through the process. We have been at this awhile, it's time to pull together and finish it.

Dana said she felt like they had a good pre-application meeting, but if OWRD funding is not approved, the partnership has enough money to implement some of the projects.

Tim Wallender added the following comment via the chat function earlier in the meeting:

"In past meetings I suggested to raise the dam height of the Beaver Reservoir, owned by the City of La Grande, like they are doing in Wallowa County. Adding hydroelectric power generation, state park, increased tourism, and consistent stream flows can be attained. Building upon the work that Steve Lindley did for the fish passage a few years back makes it even more attractive."

Donna adjourned the meeting at 6:35 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cinda Johnston
Union County Planning Department Specialist