

**Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Partnership  
Place-Based Integrated Water Resources Planning  
Quarterly Implementation Meeting  
December 14, 2022; 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.  
Conference Call/Misener Room**

**ATTENDANCE**

Jesse Steele, Jed Hassinger, Matt Insko, Curt Howell, Larry Larson, Jim Webster, Dana Kurtz, Donna Beverage, Anton Chiono, Cole Hendricksen, Dave Johnson, Alexandria Scott, Janna Stevens, Tim Wallender

**I. WELCOME**

Introductions took place. DEQ and ODF&W have Integrated Water Resources Strategies specialists working with this group. OWRD has added a new position focused more on engagement specific to place based planning.

**II. ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES**

Jesse provided GRMW updates. Jim shared that there are a handful of restoration type projects moving into design phase. Donna reported that she has been working on HB5006 (funding PBP) alongside Columbia County and state agencies.

**III. STRATEGY GROUP UPDATES/ACTION ITEMS**

a. Project Management –

i. ARPA Grant application revision summary

1. Task 1 – Funding for IWR planning & plan implementation (quarterly meetings, strategy group meetings, scoping, revising IS demand calculations, field trip to USFS sites for floodplain restoration projects, water conservation materials, review of future group governments for oversight of planning and implementation)
2. Task 2 – Funding to support the development of a hydraulic model with BOR for the purpose of better understanding flows and floodplains, focusing on Catherine Creek from HWY 203 to Grande Ronde confluence, as well as Grande Ronde to Rhinehart Gap. This will tie into the group's interest in potential mitigation of severe flooding.
3. Task 3 – Funding for an aquifer storage recovery project on Catherine Creek, resulting from a 2010 feasibility study by GRMW and GSI.
4. Task 4 – Provided capital investment and funding to operate/maintain gauging equipment at Lookingglass.

ii. Legislative update: 106 relates to water planning funding, support and data; 107 relates to feasibility studies, water projects and wells; 115 supports resolution of complex issues. Authority for PBP sunsets July 1, 2023; OWRD will run Legislation to improve upon the program and make it permanent.

b. Outreach – Implementation poster developed

c. Municipal – n/a

d. Administrative – n/a

e. Infrastructure – BOR hydraulic study update (see task 2 above)

f. Public Land – Beginning field trip discussions, potentially early May. Interim USFS Ranger is Aric Johnson until hired staff begins. Goal is to understand the work that is being done on our Federal lands, like restoration projects and floodplain connectivity.

g. Habitat – Reviewed Natural Storage sites in aboveground feasibility studies. Worked on OWEB SAP development; will need to meet again to generate a new plan since it will not include a partnership with GRMW.

h. Data –

- i. IFIM study update: Looking at bigger stretch of Grande Ronde than we expected, maximizing funds to fill data gaps; using hydrologic model that will take place of field and data collection.
  - ii. DEQ (Oregon Water Data) portal: Goal is to develop an acceptable single access point of geospatial data, tabular data, satellite data, and other necessary data needed to make long-term strategic water infrastructure decisions. The main beneficiaries of this portal will be future PBP groups. A 17-agency partnership, primarily led by DEQ with OWRD and OWEB, was established to create the data portal. The team is currently developing a report to present during the 2023 Legislative session that defines scoping, design, next steps and project resources needed to advance this work. If the Legislature chooses to continue funding, then additional feedback will be sought from stakeholders. Dana and Donna shared their experiences participating in the feedback/development process thus far.
- i. Agricultural Land – Will meet again in the spring; working on 2023 crop tour materials
  - j. Built Storage –
    - i. OWRD meeting summary – Divisions provided feedback on the design for built storage. Permitting pathways are different if they are in an existing storage reservation versus a new storage reservation. Division 33 review would depend on whether the project has significant public benefits.
    - ii. DEQ meeting summary – Sara recommended a Kaizen meeting; DEQ would organize it and invite agencies that would eventually approve or regulate the project. They provide feedback while still in the concept phase about how they would approach and regulate it, bringing potential roadblocks to light. DEQ is moving away from permitting any type of on-channel storage; some designs could be modified to move them off channel and divert water.

### Discussion

Larry shared concerns that after three years of work showing excess spring flows and a late summer shortfall, there are no projects addressing those problems; someone should be asking how many reservoirs are needed to mitigate them but there aren't any reservoirs that will do any of that. Donna explained that at the last meeting, the group narrowed down sites to those that would not be a waste of time and those that were higher up in the watershed to benefit more people. Larry wanted a strategy for managing flows and determining how many reservoirs are practically needed to resolve big problems like pollution, fish issues, recreation, and agriculture. Otherwise, we will be sitting here next year saying we ran out of water in the summer again. A lot of money is being put into restoration projects but that's not going to manage those flows or address those issues. Dana noted that they already have the total volume needed to fit the deficits; the BOR study should help them with floodwater data gaps. Siting a reservoir based on the 2019 flooding would have been in the wrong spot for the 2020 flooding. Larry suggested estimating how much water is coming down based on past years' flood events and what range they came out of; that can be a guide in determining how many reservoirs are needed. Calculating how long the water in those reservoirs would last, released at certain rates - he does not see how that's going to make that big of an impact.

Jim pointed out that water storage has more uses that are beneficial other than just reservoirs and there's a conflict between dreaming up where/how many reservoirs are needed and actually doing that. You can't just put them in channel on streams that feed into (inaudible), definitely not with essential habitat. Larry asked how the problem would ever be solved if no reservoir could be sited on any channel. There should at least be a plan estimating the size of the reservoirs needed with drainages to help mitigate the problem; that's not what's happening because this is being driven by sites that would be easier to get permitted because they're already in the permitting process. Dana said that the group narrowed sites down to some that are higher up in the watershed to prevent some flood situations and it was leaning towards locations that would have a chance of success. Not to say they are the only ones that would be done, but the idea was to start with a manageable project. Some of the bigger main stem sites were eliminated and focus was more on sites that are at least 1,000 acre feet.

Larry said the group would be farther ahead with a plan showing the need to resolve the problems by managing the water, instead of just saying we want this reservoir. There are questions about what the end game is supposed to look like, what restore really means, and how much water you would get from these restoration projects. 40 years ago, he didn't think salmon would be running up all these streams and the Grande Ronde system was just the way it is today. The right kind of sub streams for wetland restoration that everyone thinks they can have aren't there; the potential is a whole lot less than what people talk about. Jim disagreed; looking at 1937 aerial photos, from then to now the simple implications of all the valleys, anything that was flat, simplification of all the channels and systems that had braided or multiple channels ...all simplified down. Larry asked Jim if he thought that they would get more water in August by draining May floodwaters and putting extra channels out there. Jim thought it absolutely would extend the water and there are studies that show that; by raising the channel bed by a foot, 100 feet wide, you can increase that much storage in that meadow.

Larry guessed that before this is all done, the group will be left with a 1,000 acre reservoir (Wolfe Creek is only 10,000) and be saying, "at least we got to have one," and it won't solve anything. Working with bureaucracies over the years on these issues, all he hears is that "you can't do that, because..." Donna acknowledged that the options are not perfect and emphasized that doing some kind of storage project would be better than what is being done right now. It is a slow process and it won't be easy, but it's the best they can do. The right people are at the table to work together and move forward now that they've put the work in. She added that some sites were on private land and, when presented with the idea of doing a storage project on their property, landowners said no so it's not just the agencies saying no. Dana pointed out that the reason the options are called "strategies" and not "solutions" is because there are nine strategy groups, each with different strategies; they're tools in a toolbox and no one of them is going to reduce the water deficit to zero. The goal is to progress a bunch along and pick away at it. She acknowledged the desire to get a really big project through, and also pointed out the value of incrementalism, which is what this group has been accomplishing.

Larry said he is arguing for a plan that says they are managing the flows and taking care of the problem, but he just doesn't see that in these options. Curt added that the frustration level is over the top for a lot of them because there's a lot of work and discussion until some agency says, "no, you can't do that," and then everything is off the table. If you don't have things on the table, you're not going to get anywhere. The four sites don't do a lot for flood control so you could fund/build them all and in the end, it would be practically meaningless when everything else is off the table. He has concerns about agencies being in the way of a lot of progress that is beneficial to multiple uses and there's fear that, at the end of all this, there might only be two or three projects done that are just minuscule in the big picture. Land management might need more exploring in terms of upstream restoration, biomass, trees and shrubs that shade ground, hold snow, and keep things from melting all at once.

Jed asked if the goal of storage was defined in the feasibility study and if it included flood mitigation or surface water deficit because the way it is managed will have an effect on the outcomes. Donna said that goals were specific to each project; those that would help fish could not harm agriculture, and if a project helps mitigate flooding, it could not harm fish in the process. Jed asked if there was any potential for flood mitigation if the sites have to be on channel - how much water could be pumped in? Donna agreed that that was always an issue for the projects she has seen. Jed suggested that a reasonable expectation would be if water had to be off channel only when it exceeds 300 CFC. Dana said she could ask the engineers about the design of the pump. Flooding is one part of this, but surface water deficit is the number one critical issue out of four so that has been the main driver throughout this process. The plan lays out how much water is needed in the different sub watersheds; it does not completely address the flooding question but the BOR study will address that more. The feasibility study is more about locational feasibility, and that's

the starting point. The focus has been where one could be constructed and benefit multiple user groups, not necessarily where one could hold all the water. The sites that were much lower than 1,000 acre feet were ruled out by the group. Curt said that by knowing the CFS down through the Grande Ronde River when there is a flooding problem, they could look upstream and determine what is needed to hold back and control that flow. He has serious doubts that these four proposals accomplish any of that.

Dana said that another outcome of this study could be that there are no feasible sites, or none that the group wants to move forward. A lot of the things talked about would require changes to how laws are implemented and actual laws themselves; the group could go on to the next phase by spending time advocating for law changes, or just return the money. Larry said he doesn't want to say that none of them are undesirable, all he is asking for is a better strategy showing the benefits and resolving shortfalls and capturing the early flows. If at the end of this, nothing is done for flood control and late summer flows then we failed and in his mind, they are on the edge of that.

Janna said that their representatives participated early in the process, showing up to meetings and sharing their concerns. They want to help this group be successful. She emphasized the importance of the Kaizen process and that it not be downplayed because it is critical at this stage. There are significant roadblocks, public benefit being a pretty significant one, and that is going to be difficult to overcome. Multiple benefits across the full areas of interest have to be shown and she could say with certainty that there would be zero benefit for fish, and they have said that from the beginning. She hoped that this group would put its focus on the Kaizen process from now on.

Cole echoed Janna's sentiments; DEQ has been involved in the process and was part of the plan review team. The next best move would be the Kaizen meeting where the group could ask the Army Corp of Engineers, DSL, and other agencies what permits would be needed and how much would it cost to put in a 3,000 acre storage reservoir in this area. The BOR report already said it would not be cost benefit positive. It would be great to talk through the application process with OWRD. Ultimately, this is still a water right so ODA needs to be a part of the conversation, too. He would love to continue helping this group flourish and figure out the best solutions that can be paired with one another to make things happen. From DEQ's point of view, there are concerns; there is a total maximum daily load on this river and promoting storage could ultimately impact water quality further. DEQ wants to ensure that money is used wisely, that strategies are applicable and attainable, and that the group feels supported moving forward with honest opinions.

Dana read chat comments:

- Cole asked for literature supporting the statement that storage projects would solve water pollution and fish issues.
- Tim asked for the total acre feet of storage if all four sites were completed; Dana said it would be 15,000 acre feet. Tim asked how FEMA flood stage late season flows benefit wildlife, recreation, tourism, and agriculture. Dana responded that projects would be designed for multiple user benefits and that this group did not plan to go into a detailed analysis of how it would do that.
- Cole asked about the concern around flooding and the impacted parties. Tim responded that it would impact county and state roads, private property, and streambank erosion from turbid waters.

Donna said that agencies need to be flexible - other states and counties have storage projects so we know it can be done with minimal damage to the fish. If this group can't be successful after six years of work because the agencies shut down whatever comes up, then nobody will be successful and it's really a waste of taxpayer money for any other groups to do the planning. OWRD is asking for money from the Legislature for other groups in the state to do place-based water planning, but part of that language says that OWRD would convene the local meetings - that's not place-based planning. Cole responded that he appreciates that and knows that this is tough to hear. This is only one strategy and the goal is not to dive deep into this

one strategy and hope to solve all the issues. Having moved from Hawaii where there is a lot of localized place-based planning, he is for place-based planning efforts. It should be driven by the people and community that live there, but at the same time, the State's ultimate interest is to protect state water.

Tim said that at a previous meeting he asked someone to bring their specific wildlife concerns to the group so they could be addressed and move the process forward. From what he is hearing now, there isn't a single project that they can get behind so now they're going to stalemate the whole process. DEQ is saying they have concerns about TMDLs. The group needs to go in the right direction to know how much water storage is needed at high elevations. We don't have that number so are we getting the cart ahead of the horse by throwing some projects out there? Locally we have invested six years now, how are we going to move forward? Donna suggested that the group move forward by prioritizing projects that are important to the local group. We have State Representatives that want to help us and are listening.

iii. Top four sites for group discussion –

Jed asked who determines the benefits for the Division 33 rule. Dana said that the group in its application would explain why foreseen benefits are significant public benefits for a variety of categories, which then goes to OWRD who makes the determination. Their feedback to the group was to focus on developing those benefits for the potential sites. Adding recreation to Birdtrack Springs with its current gray restoration work would be a significant public benefit. The Cove hydropower site has potential to remove the fish passage barrier and provide additional flow and hydropower for the community. Jed pointed out that they wouldn't be able to divert water after April 15 when most of the snowmelt runoff happens and most of the flood flows. Dana agreed, noting there is an exception when there is a significant public hazard. Jed asked if the storage reservations were they created before the Division 33 rule because that could be a big factor in prioritizing. Dana didn't know, they were renewed only a few years ago, but thought that the rule was applied in the storage reservation areas; she will ask again since she hasn't heard back from Katie.

Dana said that none of the top sites were within the storage reservation areas, but some were ruled out because they were blocking the main stem of the river and agencies were concerned, plus a couple of them were on private property. Most of these projects are on Federal land and when they met with the USFS, they said a project like this would be difficult because the NEPA process would be more extensive than on private land. USFS told them that a smart option might be Pelican Creek, or a 1,000 acre foot reservoir. The engineer who reviewed that said it looked like a high point on the topography map; he thought about putting it where it would be even more off channel. They're still looking for an optimal spot for the Cove project, potentially off channel. It would be on private property from someone who has not said no yet, or on Federal land. The sites are all kind of small, with 1,500 acre feet being the largest.

One speaker asked how anyone could anyone get behind a 1,000 acre foot reservoir; those projects are so small that they would not pencil out financially. For all the work that has been put into this, more people have to meet in the middle. If one side is giving everything like having 1,000 acre feet reservoirs that are not only off channel, but off the sub channels, then that's not meeting in the middle. Nobody in their right mind thinks that a 1,000 acre reservoir is why we have been sitting here for six years. Donna agreed, there needs to be more giving; that's where it's probably going to come down to our Representatives at the State. She pointed out that although Cove is a fairly small site, the hydropower above Cove would help the town and irrigators in that area and they could make sure there's fish passage.

Dana said the biggest remaining site is a 10,000 acre reservoir that had a lot of concerns from the agencies. The really big sites are blocking main stem river channels, which moves us toward Federal land for this project because sites on private land had owners who were not interested.

Tim asked for clarification of why Beaver Creek was taken off the list when they're doing the same thing at Wallowa Lake. Another speaker wondered if the group could petition for it to be raised since it is an existing reservoir; raising it a foot would gain a lot in a hurry. Dana said that, according to the cursory water availability system, there is no water available and the engineer has been emphasizing that you wouldn't be able to fill it more. Tim said that if the water is reserved, it's not going to show up as being available and that changes your availability to fill a reservoir; the group might need to look in a different place because it's already been earmarked as reserved. Dana will look into it more to see if there's another avenue, but she doesn't want to give false hope because she doesn't think there is water that high up in the watershed that would be available for storage without impacting all the flows.

Dana said that the group could pick some promising sites and start the next phase of analysis, or the group could ask OWRD for an amendment to remove that next phase and just spend more time looking at the sites. Donna noted that it is going to cost money to get more detail on the sites so she would like to hold a vote before they prioritize and move forward with more work.

#### Vote/ Next Steps

A vote was taken to move projects to the next step (potentially a Kaizen meeting); there was no opposition to Five Points Creek, Cove Hydropower, Grande Ronde Storage Reservation, and Birdtrack Springs. Pelican Creek was dropped so that efforts can be spent looking at the storage reservation area. Site 212 will be explored again since the private landowner did not respond. Beaver Creek will be looked at again in a different way, and Donna will contact Mike about the GR storage reservation site.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

- a. Next meeting: February 22, 2023 @4-6pm, Misener Room and Teams
- b. Field trip/tour potentially in May, considering Birdtrack Springs and Beaver Creek

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.