

**Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Partnership
Place-Based Integrated Water Resources Planning
Quarterly Implementation Meeting
September 6, 2023; 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Conference Call/Misener Room**

ATTENDANCE

Cole Hendricksen (DEQ), Jim Webster (USWCD), Joe Lemanski (ODF&W), Jed Hassinger (UCFB), Lili Prah, Peter Donovan (USWCD consultant), Walt Burt (GSI), Darrin Wallenta (OSU Ext.), Donna Beverage, Dana Kurtz.

I. Welcome

Brief introductions took place and meeting guidelines were posted.

II. Organizational Updates

USWCD Jim reported that they are continuing their search to fill a Watershed Conservationist position that would serve as a project assistant manager. They are applying for OWEB funding this fall to fill the Natural Resource Conservationist position that is being restructured as a Crop Tech / Firewise Coordinator position to provide community outreach. They hope to fill this position in late September/October and get the person certified in conservation planning through NRCS; this person will bring several tools to the table in talking to landowners about reducing fire risks, improving water quality, and pulling in OWEB grants for overall restoration projects. Donna offered to post the positions on the County website. Peter reported that he is contracting with the USWCD to provide soil health outreach and data work; this is a big part of effective water cycles in mitigating floods and droughts, water quality, air quality and has some relation to fire risk. He suggested that OWRD provide hydrographs in one place like USGS to make data accessible; this would be easy to do for Union County, would not need to be statewide, but would be relevant to agencies' decision making.

OSU Ext. Service Darrin reported a good turnout at the Crop Tour; some focus was on a relatively new oilseed crop grown for the fuel industry that requires less water, and NRCS did some water infiltration demonstrations.

ODF&W Joe reported that his focus has been working with Jed and Jim and communicating with the BOR regarding their work on valley hydrology.

III. Strategy Group Updates/Action Items

Project Management Dana reported that the Board of Commissioners approved the ARPA grant request; an agreement was signed with the USWCD for flood modeling and an agreement was signed with CTUIR to acquire that flood gauge. Lili reported that OWRD has a funding opportunity for feasibility studies. Interested parties should request a pre-application conference by the end of September; the application deadline is October 18. Cole shared that the Private Forest Accord has a mitigation grant available for riparian restoration projects; OWEB has grant funds to help cover staff, which could be helpful to the USWCD position. Jim indicated that they have or will apply for that grant.

Legislative Update Lili reported that the OWRD Legislative summary is available online. \$2million Place-Based Planning Fund was passed for this next biennium, building off lessons learned and work this group completed in the pilot. Staff positions were added to DEQ and ODA to support this and the IWRS. Work is underway updating the IWRS. Legislation made key adjustments to how that will proceed in the future: updates have been lengthened from five years to at least every eight years; several new process updates regarding work plan development; and engagement with environmental justice communities, and Tribal, State, and Federal partnerships. \$60million in lottery funds were appropriated for water projects, grants and

loans, with \$50million specifically for irrigation modernization projects. Funding cycle will be increased from once to twice per year. Two new funding opportunities are available from OWEB (\$1million community drinking water and enhancement and protection fund) and Business Oregon (\$3million aquifer recharge due diligence grant). OWRD received funding to update water availability data. Donna added that Rep. Owens' report also shows the creation of an Ag Management Water Technical Assistance Program at OSU; \$2.6million funding to assess and address small community water systems; \$18million to address fish and wildlife passage; and the dropping of the Water Data Portal Website Project.

Built Storage Walt, GSI Water Solutions hydrogeologist, shared that he was involved in initial feasibility study work on upper Catherine Creek twelve years ago to explore the idea of storing winter water and using it in the summer. Now that this partnership is showing interest in taking another look at it, he would like to engage with stakeholders to see if the basis of that work is still valid and determine if we are heading in the right direction. Dana added that one of the premises of that study was that it wouldn't be worth it without minimum CFS. Lili reported that they are continuing work on the OWRD storage requirement white paper with plans for completion early next year. Dana had a meeting with OWRD Technical Staff to consider how to calculate flow demands and best determine which of the top four sites would be feasible. Grant requirements were met and approved. The above ground storage feasibility study is close to wrapping up and a draft report will be sent to the group.

Data Dana met with ODF&W, who provided a good path forward. The instream demand calculation has not been updated yet but is in the works.

IFIM study Jim reported that they met with Rob; he is putting together details about levees and crossings. They plan to have a crew by late October/early November generating scenarios of how hydraulics change, which will then be plugged in this winter and results available in February showing potential solutions. The \$45,000 ARPA funding could then be applied, perhaps to additional data needs and collection. This could highlight where landowners are affected during high flows and possibly point to structural changes that could affect how water moves through the system. Dana will invite Rob to present existing condition model information at the next meeting.

Outreach Donna reported that the water tour at the Eastern Oregon Economic Development Summit had so much interest that they had to turn people away due to bus limitations. It included the golf course, Catherine Creek fish passage project, Cove hydroelectric plant, the Grande Ronde River, and Birdtrack Springs; all user groups/interest areas were covered Jed provided a great presentation. Legislators learned a lot and were able to see that one size does not fit all. Good connections were made and new support was found. Donna also shared that the Farmer Merchant Banquet is coming up on November 9; tickets are free to farmers, foresters and ranchers.

Municipal no report.

Administrative no report.

Infrastructure Jim provided the BOR hydraulic study update earlier.

Public Land Bill Gamble retired last year; Dana will reach out to new USFS Ranger.

Habitat Dana reported that this partnership will focus on flood mitigation/habitat improvement in the valley while GRMW pursues OWEB funding for improvements in the higher priority areas of our basin; the hope is to generate more participation from valley landowners and managers.

Agricultural Land A tour of frequently flooded areas could take place next year when it's more visible and conditions allow, showing potential strategies or ways it has been addressed.

IV. Conclusion

Donna would like groups/agencies to provide brief written update summaries so that they can be emailed to the group before the next quarterly meeting and sooner than meeting minutes are available.

ASR meeting tomorrow in Anderson Perry library at 3pm.

Next Quarterly meeting tentatively scheduled for December 6, 2023 in the Misener Room (4-6pm).

The meeting adjourned at 5:36 p.m.