

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

ATTENDANCE

Chris Braun (Trout Unlimited), Jed Hassinger, Colton Rasmussen, Curt Howell, Jim MacDonald, Peter Donovan (USWCD consultant), Rob Hilldale (BOR, Denver), Matt Insko, Jim Webster (USWCD), Joe Lemanski (ODF&W), Alexandria Scott (OWRD), Janna Stevens (ODF&W), Tim Wallender, Tyler Rockhill, Donna Beverage, Dana Kurtz.

Welcome [Meeting Recording](#)

Brief introductions took place and meeting guidelines were posted.

Organizational Updates

[UGRR Partnership Plan Implementation Update, 11.2023](#)

Trout Unlimited: they have been purchasing and leasing water for in-stream purposes. Their focus has been on Catherine Creek and Little Creek, and they are working on developing a permanent transfer on Clark Creek.

Strategy Group Updates/Action Items

Project Management

\$500,000 grant available through the Environmental Equity Program
OWRD Funding & Legislative updates ([Updates from OWRD, 12.2023](#))

Infrastructure

Joe stated that they are working with BOR to get funding for an avian predation study that would more directly evaluate areas of high predation, flooding, and where damage has been observed to producers and the ag community. Significant data suggests that avian predation is a non-negligible component to mortality of focal species listed in the strategic action plan. They will try to work with this group to come to a consensus in a process moving forward.

BOR hydraulic study update: Rob has been working on a large comprehensive model of the lower valley to replicate discharges; it includes flow inputs from Catherine Creek, the State Ditch, Ladd Creek, Willow Creek, Eckersley Creek and Mill Creek. They want to see if there are any hydraulic concerns within the structures (17 bridges and 6 culverts) and if they are exasperating any of the flooding. Primary goals are to limit flooding in the lower valley and see if they can get fish out of the valley more quickly than they are able to leave now; this model provides the opportunity to explore lots of different alternatives. This will be an ongoing effort to work with the partners to see what can be done about flooding and fish mortality.

Tim thought it was very important that the model include Ladd Marsh. He explained that this main channel was rerouted and is a tributary to Catherine Creek and the Grande Ronde River. It has a large number of acres managed by the State, which controls the flow through those wetlands that they created. It is a State asset that needs to be managed in order to help with the solution to an ongoing natural resource problem. Joe responded that it was not overlooked, it was just that there was insufficient lidar information for it to be included in the initial model. Rob further explained that other parties had expressed interest in including Ladd Marsh, but at this time, they do not have its bathymetry. However, that data could be collected and added to the model. Now that the model is calibrated and running, they can look at possible solutions to determine what makes it better, what makes it worse, or has no change at all. Over the next year, he will expand the model as directed, and then a year from now they will have a better idea of which project to pursue in greater detail down the road.

Data

UGRR IFIM study update ([Instream Flow Incremental Methods Study presentation, 12.2023](#))

Tyler said that they are looking at 31 river miles from Five Points Creek to EF Grande Ronde. The purpose is to develop instream target flows using IFIM for listed Chinook and summer steelhead: juvenile rearing, spawning, migration; and additional target flows: annual peak flushing and habitat-forming. Tasks include hydrologic analysis, field data collection and habitat suitability analysis. The very highest of the flood flows are not what this model is the most suited to simulate; it is focused on the velocity and depth conditions throughout the majority of the year. They looked at it in terms of flow duration percentage throughout the year and can simulate higher flow values (i.e. years with flooding) by utilizing extrapolated data based on what they understand for the model hydraulic properties in those calibrated conditions. Dana said they were trying to keep the Catherine Creek and Grande Ronde studies as uniform and comparable as they could and to at least cover the same species, curve types, and time period. Tyler explained that both the Catherine Creek and UGRR studies are using the IFIM broadly, with slight technical differences in the spatial representation of the data collected.

Catherine Creek IFIM study update: all data has been collected, they anticipate completing data entry sometime this winter, and are currently in the analysis/report stage.

Dana said that there were some data not a part of the initial study that they may want to consider adding; she said that Spencer's priority was including redband trout data and that ODFW would also like redband trout data and data to compare different curves. They need to decide if all the missing data are essential for this study to be complete, or if it would just be nice to have. Does the group want to expand the study to add all the data, or just some of it? There is no current funding earmarked for those additions, which would cost \$7-8k. Does the group want to move funds from other work already planned or seek out new funding options?

Donna asked if all the studies were pertinent to implementing something upstream, and if this was duplicating other studies already completed. Dana said these were new studies and that they all wondered whether this additional work would change a project or idea. Janna said their ultimate goal of IFIM on Catherine Creek was to file an Instream Water Right application. Jim said they hoped the study would provide them with a scientific-based number of the different life stages of the fish to set specific minim stream flows; that data would benefit the county for any project it wants to do. Curt thought that the group should fund the additional work because it would check the boxes now instead of finding out later that an agency wants it anyway.

Built Storage ([Upper Catherine Creek Subsurface Storage Project Reboot, 9.7.23](#))

Dana reported that the Catherine Creek underground study is moving along and more updates are expected in March. A site visit with OSU is planned for January; GRMW will continue other water quality testing; they are trying to track down BPA well videos with OWRD; sampling events are planned; and they will have an agency meeting to engage all interested agency partners. Donna stressed the importance of these studies and having everyone at the table now to avoid barriers down the road.

There are talks about a reboot of the GSI's 2011 feasibility study that was shelved due to funding and questions about requiring water quality testing. Since storage has been a priority for this group, this was revisited and documents showed that it was planned for OSU to manage the study; Dana said the new station manager was very interested and wanted to know more. The project's goal would be to capture high flow winter runoff, put it into an underground confined aquifer, and then release later in the season. A reboot of the study would help determine whether there is space, if it would stay, and how it would be treated. The 2011 study found a location on Catherine Creek where up to 10cfs could be stored and there are no fatal flaws in that spot; this is one of three locations that the State designated for water storage, making it an easier process than a place where it doesn't have reservation. GSI is interested in moving it downstream where it could hold more, but it would be outside of the State's designated water storage reservation area and there would be less benefit for

releasing it because it wouldn't be in the stream as long. OWRD have said that they could not evaluate whether they would make changes until they get a full application, and it's unclear if the group should pursue that until some basic questions are answered.

There was some discussion about how water storage might impact flooding and whether having a little bit of water would even help fish; is there a huge benefit or should they work on other things? There were questions about whether there would be any capacity for water storage at all. Tim stressed the importance of aboveground storage, collaboration between state owned properties, maintaining water quality, and benefitting all wildlife, not just fish. He would like data showing how much withheld flow is needed to prevent flooding. Dana agreed that it had not been calculated and that it was listed as a priority data gap in their reports; Rob is working on that through his modeling efforts. To benefit as many users as possible, the partnership decided during the planning process that the focus of potential aboveground storage projects would be on those located high in the watershed. Concern was shared that it was very frustrating to have the best potentials taken off the table by agencies, leaving the group with virtually nothing that works in the terms of flood mitigation.

Outreach

The City of La Grande is offering well testing; landowners pay for the cost and the City sends it off.

Habitat

OWEB SAP Review will be provided at the next meeting.

Agricultural Land

Last year's floodplain restoration tour did not include frequently flooded areas and Curt proposed a tour of three locations on the north end of the valley, potentially in late April. The tour would give participants the opportunity to observe problems created by flooding and hear testimonials from affected landowners about their experiences and costs incurred from flooding. The hope is that the Road Department would also participate and share how flooding has affected the County's infrastructure, workload and budget.

Conclusion

Next Quarterly meeting tentatively scheduled for March 20, 2024 in the Misener Room (4-6pm).

The meeting adjourned.