

MILTON-FREEWATER LEVEE PROJECT TEAM MINUTES

June 30, 2010

The Milton-Freewater Levee Project Team met Wednesday, June 30, 2010 at 1:00 p.m. in the Albee Room of the Milton-Freewater Library.

The following project team members were present: Convener Senator David Nelson, Project Manager Dick Townsend(Oregon Solutions), Larry Givens(Umatilla County Commissioner), Lewis Key(Mayor, City of Milton-Freewater), Linda Hall(City Manager, City of Milton-Freewater), Cheryl York(M-F Chamber of Commerce), Bill Duke(ODFW), Herb Bessey(U.S. Army Corps of Engineers), Mike Garton(M-F Community Member), Jed Volkman(Umatilla Confederated Tribes), Brian Wolcott(WWBWC), Vern Rodighiero(MF Water Control District), Manford Anliker(MF Water Control District), Ron Brown(M-F Community Member), Scott Fairley(Governor's Office), Diane Driscoll(National Marine Fisheries), John Zerba(Hudson Bay Irrigation District) and Sam Hopkins-Hubbard(MF Water Control District).

Others in attendance were: Christine Kelly(U.S. Environmental Protection Agency), Kathleen Cathey(Senator Wyden's Field Rep.), Steven Patten(WWBWC), Hulette Johnson(Umatilla County Economic Development), Jonathan Thompson(Umatilla Confederated Tribes), Vicki Lee(MF Water Control District), Art Hill(V.P. Blue Mountain Community College), Deborah Lee(A.V.P. Blue Mountain Community College), Jon Brough(Hudson Bay Irrigation District), Melanie Hall(Valley Herald Newspaper), Samantha Tipler(East Oregonian Newspaper), Wade Foster(Congressman Walden's Field Rep.), Elizabeth Scheeler(Senator Merkley's Field Rep.), Paul Seaquist(Century 21, M-F Citizen) and Leanne Steadman(City of Milton-Freewater).

Senator David Nelson called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. He welcomed everyone to the Milton-Freewater Levee Project Team meeting. Those present introduced themselves. He asked if anyone had any changes to the May 18, 2010 meeting minutes. There were no comments therefore the minutes were approved as submitted.

Senator Nelson turned the meeting over to Herb Bessey who gave an update of the levee inspection report. Anderson Perry performed an inspection of the levee on March 30th and 31st, 2010. They have submitted the draft report to the Corps of Engineers for review. Herb felt the report would be released and available for review by the end of July. A presentation of the preliminary findings was given at the last Oregon Solutions meeting.

Greg Graham of the Corps of Engineers was not in attendance so Herb Bessey gave an update on the Reconnaissance Study. He reported the Corps of Engineers had received a letter from the Milton-Freewater Water Control Board requesting to pursue the Reconnaissance Study. The request will be considered in the next budget cycle which will be 2012. Herb reiterated that the process beginning with this study, followed by a feasibility study which might lead to project engineering and construction, could take approximately ten years to complete.

Ron Brown announced he had spent time with Greg Graham on the Columbia River Water Exchange project. The cost of the project is estimated at 500 million dollars. He felt the two projects: Columbia River Water Exchange and the levee repair project should be looked at together since they both involve fish passage. He also felt the Marie Dorian Dam removal and the fish ladder were not engineered correctly.

Linda Hall felt that Ron Brown and the Corps of Engineers were on the same page. The Corps is looking at the levee and is willing to separate out the maintenance deficiencies from the design deficiencies. They have also agreed to separate the design deficiencies from the maintenance issues when looking at levee certification.

Herb Bessey said he would take the suggestion back to Greg Graham about combining the two projects together.

Larry Givens shared that Umatilla County had applied for a Community Development Block Grant for a new school for the Migrant Head Start. The grant was approved until it was discovered that the property was in the floodplain. The County is now looking outside the floodplain for property and may have to exercise condemnation.

Sam Hopkins-Hubbard said the “S” system was the entire west side of the levee from Couse Creek to Tum-a-lum Bridge. If that system was repaired with an engineer’s approval then possibly the Corps of Engineers could approve that system and FEMA would re-certify that portion of the levee.

Kathleen Cathey expressed her appreciation of the Corps of Engineers separating the operating and maintenance deficiencies from the design deficiencies.

Diane Driscoll said she did not have a problem with vegetation removal on System “S” if that is the area which will be the focus for repairs. However, Diane said she would be more active in discussing areas of the river out of town where there is more room for compromise. She also said she would talk to John Stevenson and pass along her observations.

Brian Wolcott reported on the vegetation issue. He said there was a suggestion of placing goats out on the banks of the levee to help maintain the vegetation. This idea has been done in other counties with success.

There has been information received on the vegetation variance that Sacramento, California has received. Herb reported that Sacramento came up with a vegetation variance plan. The plan was reviewed and accepted at the local level as well as the headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Herb said the Corps was willing to work with the Water Control Board on a vegetation variance as long as it didn’t compromise public safety.

Diane Driscoll said a variance can be developed for a certain area and it didn’t have to be a “one plan fits all”.

Jon Brough asked if the Environmental Protection Agency had any issues with the goat idea.

Christine Kelly explained there had been grants funded for this type of solution. Using goats reduces the amount of pesticides and herbicides that get applied to the ground. She also felt what was being proposed would not be in conflict of the Clean Water Act.

Brian Wolcott announced that the General of the Corps of Engineers was meeting with the National Marine Fisheries in Seattle, Washington on Thursday, July 1, 2010.

Manford Anliker said the Water Control Board was waiting on the final report to be release from the Corps of Engineers in order to come up with a bond measure amount. Once they receive the report, then they can get some cost estimates from their Engineer, Anderson Perry. They will have to have their bond measure submitted to Umatilla County by September 12th to be included on the November 2nd voting ballot. In light of the M- WCD's need for the Corps to release the levee inspection report, which will assist in establishing the November bond issue amount, Herb Bessey said he would work on the report being released ASAP.

Brian Wolcott announced he was successful in obtaining the EPA 319 grant in the amount of \$106,000. The grant can be used for several things including lidar flights, grade control structures, channel cross sections and hydraulic modeling. An additional \$40,000 in grant funds can be applied for next year. Some of that resource could be used to gather information that might assist with submittal of a vegetation variance application to the Corps. Brian said some of the culverts could be worked on right away. He has contacted ODOT regarding the gates behind Frazier Farmstead to see if it is acceptable to abandon two out of three gates.

Herb asked if they would be shut down temporarily. Brian said per Roger Cosner they would be filled in and not used again. Herb said a plan must be submitted to the Corps of Engineers to do that.

Jed Volkman talked about the grade control structure and fish passage problems. CTUIR will provide the cost share for this project, but are cautiously studying the situation to be sure the project meets fish passage goals and will accomplish an adequate long term solution which will not need another repair in a short period of time. Either Hudson Bay Irrigation District or the M-F Water Control District will sponsor the project. BPA and/or the Tribes may contribute maintenance and operation funding.

Linda Hall gave an overview of what has been happening regarding the flood insurance. She explained the city made an appeal to FEMA on behalf of the citizens. FEMA has proposed a new floodplain designation on most of the city limits to an AO-1 zone. The city has been accepted into the Preferred Risk Policy program, which will allow citizens to be grandfathered into a less expensive insurance rate for a minimum of two years. The city provided a FEMA certified flood insurance agent to town to train local bankers, realtors and insurance agents on the flood insurance process. Around 1,600 letters were sent out to citizens regarding flood insurance and the upcoming event set for July 15, 16 and 17, 2010 being held at the Community Building. The event is for citizens to gain information about flood insurance and get quotes from those insurance agents that will be participating. Linda will also be making presentations in front of civic groups to help get the word out.

Wade Foster gave an update on a bill going before congress. The proposed bill, HR-5114, would delay the requirement of the purchase of flood insurance for five years although the floodplain maps would still be required to be adopted. He will keep the project team updated as new information unfolds.

Manford Anliker asked what would happen if citizens have already purchased flood insurance and the HR-5114 bill passes. Would citizens get a refund?

It was discussed that citizens should ask their insurance agents if they would be entitled to a refund.

Dick Townsend presented the Declaration of Cooperation document. He reviewed the Project Elements list which included the tasks needed to accomplish the main goal of repairing the levee and obtaining reaccreditation. There were some recommendations to add to the list which he will revise and bring back to the next meeting in August. He then reviewed each entities page and requested comments on whether or not there were any changes. His goal is to have a Declaration of Cooperation signing ceremony at the next meeting and obtain all signatures from those that have not already signed off. He will be drafting a page for the Environmental Protection Agency to sign. Senator Nelson's page includes that he will continue to convene the project team on a quarterly basis. Dick asked for everyone to please take a look at their Declaration of Cooperation and if there were changes needed to please contact him so the changes could be made.

Dick Townsend reminded the project team to fill out the "in-kind" contribution forms and turn them into Brian Wolcott.

Larry Givens announced that Umatilla County had contracted with Anderson Perry to perform a NEPA study on the Tum-a-lum Bridge which received a very low inspection rate. A TIGER II Discretionary Grant has been applied for to help replace the bridge which has been estimated at 5 to 7 million dollars to replace.

Christine Kelly (EPA) said they have been looking at adding a work shop site regarding vegetation maintenance on levees in the Northwest. She thought it might possibly be in Boise, Idaho. She will pass information onto the project team when the class is scheduled.

Senator Nelson announced the next Oregon Solutions meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday, August 18, 2010 at 1:00 p.m. in the Albee Room of the Milton-Freewater Library.

There being no other business, Senator Nelson adjourned the meeting at 2:53 p.m.

Previous team meeting dates;
September 14, 2009
October 20, 2009
December 8, 2009
January 26, 2010
March 30, 2010
May 18, 2010