

COLUMBIA RIVER-UMATILLA SOLUTIONS TASKFORCE

Meeting Notes

September 21, 2012 – Port of Morrow Riverfront Center, Boardman

Taskforce Members attending:

Richard Whitman	Brett Swift	Crystal Ball
Dennis Doherty	Steve Eldrige	John Turner
Bob Levy	Phil Ward	Dawn Wiedmeier
Kimberley Priestly	Rick Kepler for Roy Elicker	David Pilz for Joe Whitworth
Eric Quaempts	JR Cook	Craig Reeder
Karl Weist	Stephanie Page	

Opening comments from Conveners

Richard Whitman opened the meeting by stating that this meeting begins a new phase for the Oregon Solutions Columbia River-Umatilla Taskforce, as they begin substantive discussions and work on the potential options. Whitman challenged the group to the unique opportunity for this group to develop “real proposals” and make the business case for recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.

Co-Convenor Dennis Doherty said that the solutions group had a charge from the Governor to change the paradigm of how we deal with water issues, and he challenged the Solutions Taskforce to meet that broader charge.

Report on Options and Group Discussion

Washington Storage Options

Dawn Wiedmeier of the Bureau of Reclamation presented the work on three Washington potential storage sites: Crab Creek, 9-Mile Canyon, and Goose Lake. The following points were made about the three sites:

- All of the potential storage sites are scalable in size, from approximately 1-3 million acre-feet, with Crab Creek being the most scalable.
- The State of Washington has expressed strong interest in a potential partnership with the State of Oregon in development of one or more of these sites.
- Both 9-mile Canyon and Goose Lake sites are estimated to be significantly higher in cost to build than Crab Creek, and likely too costly to build. Crab Creek, at \$960 per acre-foot (capital costs only) was deemed the only site potentially economically feasible.

- There are some significant environmental issues associated with Crab Creek that would have to be addressed. The working group was instructed to return with more information on those issues.
- Both 9-mile and Goose Lake are on the Colville Reservation, and would need strong interest on the part of the Colville tribes.
- Under Washington law, development of any of the proposed Washington storage sites would bring a State law requirement of 1/3 instream benefit. This means that there could be potentially 250,000 additional acre-feet or more release for instream/fish benefit during spring or summer.
- The decision-point for our process is whether or not to partner with the State of Washington in asking Congress for authorization to complete a feasibility study at a cost estimated at \$8-12 million. This cost would be paid for through a 50% match from the Bureau of Reclamation, and whatever State share was borne by the State of Washington. It is likely that any Oregon investment in the feasibility analysis would be leveraged three times over by Washington and the federal government.
- Steve Eldrige said that even though costs seemed high, even for Crab Creek, that the group should “keep its headlights out 50 years or more” in terms of thinking about water needs and economics. Eldrige also noted that even storage of winter water, while not impacting fish, has a public power cost associated with it.

Oregon Storage Options

Barry Norris of OWRD led this workgroup, but had to attend a family wedding, so Steve Greenwood presented his material, along with Phil Ward.

Two potential Oregon Storage sites were identified: Sand Hollow in Morrow County (79,000 acre-feet) and Juniper Canyon in Umatilla County (49,000 acre-feet). Both sites had been reviewed by the Oregon Water Resources Department within the last decade.

Juniper Canyon is a fairly narrow, deep canyon and would involve a high(300-ft) dam, built near the Columbia River. The reservoir would be relatively long and narrow. Sand Hollow is much further from the Columbia River, potentially larger, although much shallower as well (potential evaporation issues). In addition, geologic issues – specifically concerns about sandy soils and leakage – would need to be addressed at Sand Hollow. Both have current cost estimates that are within the potential range of economic feasibility.

The next action step for both steps would be a feasibility analysis with a currently undetermined cost. Original estimates were for \$250,000 per feasibility study, but the work group will take another look at that figure.

In addition, the workgroup identified a number of existing sites in Oregon that could be expanded to provide additional water for the Umatilla Basin. Steve Greenwood focused on three of these:

- *Carty Dam in Morrow County*, owned by PGE. Estimates are that this reservoir could be expanded to provide 50,000 to 90,000 additional acre-feet of storage. In this case the infrastructure already exists to convey water from the Columbia River to this facility. Water could be pumped back to the John Day pool during irrigation/fish passage season enabling

others to pump out of the Columbia in exchange. The soils and shallow nature of the Carty Reservoir site would need to be reviewed and addressed.

- *Wallowa Dam*, privately owned in Wallowa County. Estimates are that this reservoir could be expanded 4,000 feet without impacting lakeside recreational and residential uses. A number of comments were received that expanding this reservoir would have other additional benefits, including fish benefits from increasing summer flow in the Wallowa River, a tributary of the Grande Ronde.
- *Willow Creek (Owyhee) Dam*. This facility is currently the subject of some study by the OWRD, as it has a leakage problem that needs to be addressed. Expansion could provide up to 18,000 additional acre-feet. This facility is also privately owned, and a co-investment with the Umatilla Basin may be a way to help Malheur County water users as well.

All three of these options were deemed economically feasible after initial review. Some members of the Solutions Task Force asked the workgroup to continue looking at Cold Springs reservoir in addition to these three. There was acknowledgement that Cold Springs expansion would have some interface with the CTUIR Water Rights Settlement discussion, however the workgroup was asked to explore this with CTUIR.

For any of these sites, a more detailed feasibility analysis would need to be developed and the workgroup will estimate the costs for that work prior to the next meeting. In addition, there would need to be discussions with Washington and Idaho on several of these sites, to ensure that water released would not be simply taken by water rights holders in these states.

Umatilla Aquifer Recovery Project

J.R. Cook provided an overview of what the potential costs and benefits would be of additional investment to maximize the Umatilla Aquifer Recovery project, which has already received \$2.5 million in State of Oregon investment. Cook said what was needed was a “significant test phase” to enable full build out of the project, which could net more than 10,000 additional acre-feet of storage.

- \$500,000 match to finance a groundwater flow model
- Two additional recovery wells (\$700,000) – a need to “pock-mark” the aquifer rather than trying to recover water through one major location.
- Revisiting some of the HB 3369 requirements around net environmental benefit. (e.g. the requirement that any public investment changes the NEB ratio)

Flow Management Options

Steve Greenwood presented a summary from the Flow Management options workgroup. Crystal Ball said that BPA is still working on modeling the impacts of moving an additional 100,000 acre-feet of water in the system, and that modeling will be completed for the workgroup within 2 weeks.

The key conclusion from the workgroup so far, however, is that the Columbia River is already a very tightly managed river with very few opportunities to change the management without impacting current uses such as flood control, fish passage, power generation, or recreation. Neither Lake Roosevelt drawdown or additional storage in run-of-the-river reservoirs appears viable at this time. These options are also affected by the current discussions related to the Canada Treaty, but those will not be concluded for some time.

Excess Flow

Rick Kepler from Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife reported on discussions related to the potential use of “excess flow” above NOAA flow targets. He said that two issues have emerged so far in those discussions: (1) What flow levels should be considered “excess”, and (2) How to ensure that water rights based upon excess flow do not become “uninterruptible” over time. One way discussed by the workgroup was to grant only supplemental rights.

The approach to this option discussed by the group so far has been within the constraints of current Oregon Administrative Rules (Div 33) for Water Resources. This allows for an exception to the prohibition on additional Columbia River withdrawals for storage.

Ritchie Graves, the Chief of the Columbia River Power System Branch for NOAA Fisheries, gave some background on the NOAA flow targets established for the Biological Opinion on the Federal Columbia River Power System.

During the spring and summer, those flow targets range from 200 to 260 KCFS (thousand cubic feet per second), as research has shown “below that level, you get poor returns”. The river does not currently meet these seasonal flow targets during the spring and summer months, with July and August being the months when they are met the least.

He explained that there is a balancing act between flood control needs and fish needs, as NOAA wants the reservoirs filled by May to provide enough water for spring and summer releases for fish. He also cautioned the group that reservoirs in Idaho and elsewhere are asked to release substantial amounts of water for fish passage downstream (to help meet the NOAA flow targets) and they might be less than happy to find out that those additional releases were being used by Oregon irrigators instead.

The NOAA PowerPoint slides are available on the project website:

<http://orsolutions.org/osproject/crustaskforce>

Conservation Options

Tom Demianew from the Umatilla County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) described an effort by a number of conservation interests (Freshwater Trust, NOAA Fisheries, DEQ, SWCD, CTUIR, ODFW, and WaterWatch) to identify priority streams or stream segments in the basin for conservation purposes.

The group has not completed their work yet, but the intent is to help the overall effort by providing a unified sense of priorities, for in-stream uses of additional water. Tom emphasized the point that very small changes in the tributary stream flows (compared to mainstem flows) can make a big difference in terms of fish habitat and survival.

Transaction Program and Water bank

David Pilz from Freshwater Trust made a brief report on the workgroup that had been convened by Joe Furia of Freshwater Trust, and included representatives from Umatilla Basin Commission as well as Oregon Water Resources Department. He said that the workgroup had not completed its work but was

looking at ways to improve the ease of water transactions both within existing laws and rules, and with potential changes to the law.

Economics of Irrigation

Over lunch, Craig Reeder of Hale Farms presented information on the economics of irrigation. (His PowerPoint presentation will be available on the project website: <http://orsolutions.org/osproject/crustaskforce>)

He began by talking about the value of water to cropland in the Umatilla Basin:

Dryland wheat (no irrigation)	\$100 per acre
Wheat with 1 acre-foot irrigation	\$500 per acre
Crops with 2 acre-feet irrigation	\$1500 per acre
High value/3 acre-feet irrigation	\$5,000 per acre

He noted that the type of crop is rotated so that the high value crops cannot be grown every year, even with irrigation.

Irrigation is based upon need and is not uniform throughout the season. End of May to Early August is peak irrigation season.

Power costs of pumping are a significant cost of irrigation for farmers. Average is \$72 per acre-foot of pumped water.

Reeder emphasized that from a business standpoint, the ownership of land is separated from the actual farming. He said that the current value of irrigated land is \$9,600 to 11,000 per acre. He also emphasized the strong multiplier effect in the community from harvested crops to processed food, to packaged products. He noted the large number of suppliers and other business who are part of the local farming economy in the basin.

Dennis Doherty also handed out a map and chart of the various auxillary businesses supplying agriculture in the Umatilla basin.

Project Purpose and How We Will Work Together

There was a summary of the changes that had been made since the last meeting, and the group attempted to come to consensus on the language. However, after a short discussion the Conveners asked Steve Greenwood to work with a few people individually, and try to get consensus on the wording, possibly through email or on-line rather than take up the topic again at the next meeting.

Screening Criteria and Next Steps

The next meeting of the Columbia River-Umatilla Solutions Taskforce will be **October 26**.

At that meeting, the group will review and discuss the initial screening of the various options by the Oregon and Interstate Sub-committees. The sub-committees are charged with using the screening criteria that were reviewed at this meeting by the full Solutions Taskforce. They include:

- (1) Economic development impacts
- (2) Ecological impacts
- (3) Technical/Legal/Political Feasibility (i.e. How difficult is this to actually construct or make happen?)
- (4) Financial Feasibility (ability of candidate paying entities to take on required costs)

On October 26 the Solutions Taskforce will attempt to identify those options for which there is:

- a) consensus to move forward,
- b) additional work needed to achieve that consensus, and
- c) agreement that consensus to move forward is highly unlikely at this time.

Convener Richard Whitman noted that the Governor's budget and process will require some direction from the Solutions Taskforce at the October 26 meeting, prior to the Declaration of Cooperation. (If there are budget proposals needed to support some of the options.)

The date for the November meeting of the Solutions Taskforce will need to be changed, and that notice will go out next week.