

Columbia River Policy Advisory Group

Meeting Notes

June 25, 2008

Projects Review

Bill Eller of the Conservation Commission and Dan Haller of Ecology briefed the CRPAG on the Columbia River account competitive grant funding cycle. 17 applications were ranked by the Technical Advisory Committee (TAG) based on five categories: (1) project costs, (2) net water savings, (3) project support, (4) fish and water quality benefits, and (5) current and long term support. Each category had a weighting factor which in sum provided a total potential score of 100 points. The highest ranking project scored 64.2 points and the lowest scored 19.3 points.

Once the projects were rated by the TAG, they were submitted to the Columbia River Implementation Team (CRIT), a committee that screened the projects for additional factors other than the five categories used by the TAG. These were: project diversity, geographic diversity, balance between feasibility and construction, and the balance between instream benefit and out-of-stream benefit. The CRIT also added 8 more projects to the list that did not go through the TAG process. In total, 25 projects were presented. Eighteen of them were recommended for funding and seven were not. Eleven TAG-ranked projects were recommended for funding out of the 17 TAG-ranked projects, and seven of the eight non-TAG projects were recommended for funding.

Bill also briefed the CRPAG on the accelerated timeline for approval. Under the new plan, contract negotiations for the current grant cycle would begin in September 2008 rather than June 2009. A proposal from the CRIT for the next grant cycle would begin the cycle in January of 2009, rather than October-November 2008

Bill then presented a summary of each of the twenty-five projects and members asked clarifying questions.

CRPAG Perspectives

CRPAG members did not offer opinions on the individual projects. Instead, they offered a host of comments and questions about the package of projects and the ranking process:

- It would be useful to see the full project ranking, with the weighted and unweighted scores rather than just the summaries. [The full ranking will be available on the website.]
- The process and project review for the eight non-TAG projects is confusing. [There are several reasons why these didn't go through the TAG: some were not sufficiently developed for TAG review, some were large projects and not suitable for TAG review, some already had a group working on the technical review and the TAG input was unnecessary.]

- It is misleading to associate savings with feasibility studies. While the summary chart suggests there might be 3.4 million acre feet of saved water, this is simply not credible. The projects with actual construction would only provide about 9,000 af.
- It would be useful to have a table of more data displaying: (1) saved water vs. permitted water, (2) new water vs. mitigated water, and (3) a schedule for water delivery (when the water would be available.)
- In final approval of the projects, we need a filter to make sure that the instream (one-third) and out-of-stream (two-thirds) values are both achieved. We need to be able to show to our respective interested parties that their values were evident in these projects.
- We need to remember that this is just the first round. People have been watching to see if this process works so they should bring additional projects forward. We need to keep a long-term view, within the sideboards of the legislation.
- Total project costs are important, not just the Columbia River account monies. It would be useful to see what other monies are being brought to bear in these projects.
- For purposes of accountability, it will be important for the CRPAG to see the results of the contract negotiations: what was the professed intent of the project and what was actually achieved by the contracts?
- Given that the Columbia River account is slated for 10 years, we should be cautious about shifting monies from the two-thirds New Storage portion of the account to the one-third Conservation/Acquisition/Existing Storage portion of the account.
- I am surprised by the CRIT process. It seems to introduce a subjective overview rather than the objective review provided by the TAG.
- Some of these projects don't seem like they have enough information to be recommended for funding or denied funding. They should be treated differently. For example, the Yakama funding list doesn't even have a funding figure associated with it.
- I am curious about how these projects fit into the mix of other spending we have had to date, in terms of the balance between conservation and storage.
- What about the Conservation Districts' proposal that we heard of last meeting? There might be a role for the CD in assisting Ecology's internal discussions.
- We should be attentive to how funding is provided for the feasibility studies and construction projects. Is there a limit on the money for feasibility studies? How do they fit into the future decisions? Could projects compete in the future that didn't start here with these feasibility studies?
- There should be a premium on construction projects. They should get a greater weighting.

- I am concerned about some of these feasibility studies. We may be skipping a step of scrutiny. Spending a million dollars on a feasibility study puts a lot of money at risk when something might never be built.
- There is an issue of the openness of the CRIT process. It is confusing to mix the TAG and CRIT processes together.
- I would like to thank all of the review people for their work.
- We should not be trying to get instream and out-of-stream benefits from each project, but the entire package should reflect the balance of benefits.
- We need to know if Ecology intends to continue having two different processes.
- I am concerned that half of the one-third of the account (for Conservation/Acquisition/Existing Storage) is being used up in 2 projects. Furthermore, these two projects came through the Ecology CRIT process rather than the TAG process.
- Ecology needs to be careful on how it codes some of these projects. There are conservation projects that have benefits for fish that also have out-of-stream benefits. Reliability is an important out-of-stream benefit.
- We need to carefully articulate benefits in a flow chart.
- How does the Columbia River account fit into other projects such as the Salmon Recovery Funding Board projects?
- I have a concern that the State is being looked at as a first resort rather than an option down the line. One of the criteria for conservation projects should be: would it likely have occurred anyway without this funding?
- Next year the CRIT process should be evident. Its proxy needs to be in the room. We need to de-mystify the CRIT.
- We should be attentive to the burn rate of the money, taking into consideration the proposed Conservation District funding for next year.
- I like the diversity of projects. This is a broad and diverse basin, and we need a broad and diverse approach to it.
- Is there a way to capture the urgency of the problem, e.g., the raw fish score, or when is water coming?
- For the eight non-TAG projects, we don't have information on water. We need more of a context for those projects before making a judgment.
- We should look at the total cost of projects. How is the Columbia River money leveraging other money?

- There is an important imbedded issue in the discussion of freeing up water in the Yakima River for use in the Columbia Basin. This provokes a policy question: will the 1905 unmet water right prevail or will a new Yakima River right be issued? How to move freed up water passed the users with the 1905 right?
- When this cycle is completed, we should renew our discussion of the criteria used to rank the projects and how they are applied.
- Thanks to all of the people in Ecology, the Conservation Districts, and others who spent their time on the pre-screening of these projects. It was a significant amount of work.

Consideration of the package

The CRPAG decided to take up review and discussion of the proposed package at the August 13 meeting. This will allow Ecology time to provide additional information, and to display information in a different fashion. [Ecology committed to do this in two weeks.] This also allows CRPAG members to reflect on all that they have seen and heard, consult with their colleagues, and come prepared to the August meeting ready to discuss and ultimately to recommend a package to Ecology.

Ecology will also put the complete set of applications on its website.

Attendees:

CRPAG members and alternates

Dale Bambrick, National Marine Fisheries Service
 Brenda Bateman, Oregon Department of Water Resources
 Max Benitz, Benton County Commission
 Jon Culp, Washington State Conservation Commission
 Bob Hammond, City of Kennewick
 Mike Leita, Yakima County Commission
 Joe Lukas, Grant County PUD
 Michael Garrity, American Rivers
 Michael Meyer, Washington Environmental Council
 Peggy Miller, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
 Jim Milton, Yakima Basin Water Resource Agency
 Darryll Olsen, Columbia Snake River Irrigators
 Merrill Ott, Stevens County Commission
 Gary Passmore, Confederated Tribes of the Colville
 Lisa Pelly, Washington Rivers Conservancy
 Rudy Plager, Adams County Commission
 Phil Rigdon, Yakama Nation
 Mike Schwisow, Columbia Basin Development League, Irrigation Districts
 Craig Simpson, East Columbia Basin Irrigation District
 John Stuhlmiller, Washington Farm Bureau
 Rob Swedo, Bonneville Power Administration

Others in attendance:

Neil Aaland, Washington State Association of Counties
Susan Adams, Washington Water Trust
Nancy Aldrich, City of Richland
Justin Bader, North Yakima Conservation District
Denis Bly, Lincoln County Commission
Dan Boettger, Okanogan PUD
Jeff Bornholdt, Center for Environmental Law and Policy
Dave Burdick, Department of Ecology
Carolyn Comeau, Department of Ecology
Ian Cairns, American Rivers
Stuart Crane, Yakama Nation
Michael Crowder, Barker Ranch
Steve Dauma, Department of Fish and Wildlife
Bill Eller, Washington State Conservation Commission
Ben Floyd, HDR Engineering
Joel Freudenthal, Yakima County
Dick Haapala, CH2MHill
Dan Haller, Department of Ecology
Justin Harter, Naches-Selah Irrigation District
Tim Hill, Department of Ecology
Al Josephy, Department of Ecology
Charles Klarich, Yakima Basin Storage Alliance
Dave McClure, WRIAs 30 and 31
Jason McCormick, Department of Ecology
Mark Nielson, Franklin County Conservation District
Gerry O'Keefe, Department of Ecology
Tom Ring, Yakama Nation
Rick Roeder, Department of Ecology
Derek Sandison, Department of Ecology
Dave Sauter, Klickitat County Commission
Dan Silver, facilitator
Cathy Schaeffer, Walla Walla County/WRIA 32
Harry Seely, Westwater Research
Gene St. Godard, WRIA 43
Paul Stoker, Groundwater Management Area
Tom Tebb, Department of Ecology
Chad Unland, Department of Natural Resources