

Columbia River Policy Advisory Group
Meeting Notes
October 24, 2007

Priority Stream Reaches

Teresa Scott briefed the CRPAG on the rankings of tributaries of eight critical basins in Eastern Washington. The Department of Fish and Wildlife created this ranking system to make better informed decisions. The ranking system will be one component used in the recommendations from the Technical Advisory Committee (TAG) on project proposals to Ecology. The ranking should help lead to more cost effective choices.

CRPAG members had these questions and comments:

- Will this information be used for decision-making in water rights? [Dan Haller explained that the \$1 million Ecology had set aside for acquisition in the tributaries is not going to be reviewable by the TAG.]
- This information should be kept in front of agencies. We should not be diverting funding just for fish; we also need to get new water supply.
- This information should not be used just for fish recovery, but it does show how to get the best bang for the buck in terms investing in water supply which also protects water for fish in a bucket-for-bucket arrangement.
- It would help to get a measurable report on the outcomes of using this tool.
- In terms of watershed plans, it's important that acquisition get looked at by planning groups within the watersheds where Ecology intends to acquire water rights.
- Information in the Walla Walla needs to be updated. Conditions are now dramatically different than reflected in the watershed maps.

Gerry O'Keefe observed that a take-away message for Ecology is the notion of accountability. Both the \$1 million acquisition funds and the scoring of projects should be done in a highly transparent fashion with no surprises.

Walla Walla

The CRPAG reviewed a video on a collaborative effort in the Walla Walla basin, and then received a briefing by a set of people were active in this effort. Cathy Schaeffer of Walla Walla County, Ron Brown, a farmer from Milton-Freewater, Kevin Schribner, an area environmentalist, and Rick George of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation described a partnership they had developed to deal with water supply and fish recovery issues.

Ron is a grape and apple farmer whose family has been on its land for four generations and who wants a stable, cooperative environment for future farmers. Farmers are accustomed to adapting to change (e.g. policies toward DDT, Alar, immigration, and Endangered Species Act). The Walla Walla River had been fully appropriated. He judged that it was best for parties in the area to educate each other and find a cooperative, balanced solution. His family contributed significant financial resources and water to help with the problem.

Kevin Schriber shared the “Seven Pillars of Wisdom” that he gained from the Walla Walla process: (1) Should be citizen driven; (2) To the extent possible, decision making should be by consensus; (3) It should be vision led; (4) Tribes must be at the table; 5) A gift culture helps – the generosity by irrigators was a huge act of good faith that paid dividends; 6) Committed to science; and 7) Act when it’s the right time, but actions have unintended consequences. At the core of success is a spirit of agreement that is not attainable solely through the law.

Cathy noted that the watershed is close to agreement on an instream flow. The river is over appropriated at present. Ecology’s water master in the Walla Walla should help manage the over appropriation. One of the biggest contributions at present is the Oregon-Washington relationship. The challenge is not simply compliance with the ESA; instead, it is how to find a better way to manage ground and surface water. Aquifer storage and water exchanges hold promise for the future.

Rick noted that progress in the Walla Walla was similar to the bucket-for-bucket agreement in the Umatilla, using a pump exchange. The tribe is committed to protecting everyone’s water right and the economic well-being of the area. Full restoration will take a significant investment over the next ten years or so. What has happened in Walla Walla is definitely a model for elsewhere in the region. This model requires leadership, a commitment to full restoration of fish runs, and tangible benefits of significant water supplies.

CRPAG members had these questions and comments:

- What measures were used to acquire the additional cfs? [more efficient irrigation heads, canal linings, shifting the time of withdrawal, shift to drip irrigation]
- The tribal focus isn’t necessarily NMFS’ focus.
- The “Walla Walla Way” means very frank and honest discussions among the parties. The CRPAG isn’t to that point yet.

Ecology’s Biennial Workplan

Tom Tebb, Ecology’s regional supervisor for water resources, described the new structure and resources Ecology is using in the Columbia River Management Program. Since the legislation has passed Ecology has:

- developed 8,000 water maps and an information platform to access them
- produced an EIS
- completed two large legislative reports
- leveraged the existing system to get more resources focused on the Columbia River
- has funding for three new permit writers and has hired one of them

An observation was made that a critical milestone for the program, in addition to getting project funding out, is to get water on the ground next April.

Discussion of an Idea

Gerry O’Keefe and Joe Lukas then asked the group to react to an idea for changing reservoir operations that could potentially supply additional water in the near term. Joe stressed that he was offering the idea not as a Grant County PUD proposal, but as an idea with potential merit.

Previous proposals for changing reservoir operations had been controversial. He did not wish to explore the idea if it was an immediate non-starter with people.

The idea is that the maximum operating elevation for Wanapum Dam could be increased to 575 feet from October through April and again in June, to provide up to 3.5 feet of incremental storage capacity. This could potentially provide 70-80,000 acre feet in July and August. Such a change in operations has implications for fish passage, recreation, cultural resources and power operations.

CRPAG members identified a number of issues that would need to be explored, but everyone thought it was an idea worth considering. Members wanted an opportunity to talk with their technical staff to see if there was a “fatal flaw” in the idea. Members will let Gerry O’Keefe know by November 7 if they have identified such a fatal flaw. If not, Gerry and Joe will draft a clear description of the proposal and host a technical group to explore the idea in more detail. This group would be comprised of representatives of WDFW, the tribes, BPA, the COE, NMFS, American Rivers, counties, and the Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission.

Discussion of Demand

Gerry O’Keefe passed out a handout on future demand Ecology has estimated for the region. He posed a set of questions to the group to seeking reactions about the rough data that Ecology has put together. Where are the soft spots in its thinking to date? Are the estimates on the high side or low side? Have we missed some demand variable?

CRPAG and audience members made a number of observations:

- It would be useful to get a briefing from the policy subgroups on climate change, when they have completed their work.
- Are there changes in crop that would be smart to do? It would be useful to get a range of assumptions on crop duty.
- Ecology should add the mainstream instream flow to the demand need.
- The Odessa Subarea needs to get a tighter water duty, given the massive public investment there.
- Lake Roosevelt is more a source than a demand.
- Is 30,000 af counted in the Lake Roosevelt numbers? [yes, but this is overlapped with drought demand]
- Does the projection for municipal growth include a conservation assumption?
- Kennewick, among others, is being responsive to the Dept of Health’s guidance documents regarding future per capita use.
- There is a lot of acreage in dry land wheat. This is a huge latent demand if this acreage shifts from its current dry land use, as precipitation patterns change.
- Modeling isn’t going to tell us what climate change will do. More flexibility or incentives with relinquishment could provide us additional supply options.
- Due to the diversity of interests, it is essential that Ecology show more active leadership in a regional discussion on demand.
- Perhaps the CRPAG rather than Ecology is a better mechanism to lead this discussion.

- Demand should not be a visionary thing. We should be hard-nosed pragmatists, influenced by economics, politics, and the regulatory reality. Irrigators have defacto reduced crop duty.
- We are skeptical that we need 1 million af in new storage, given the highly uncertain data on demand.
- Ecology should help articulate a range of policy choices on demand.

October Public Meetings and Project Funding

Dan Haller and Jon Culp described their outreach to potential supply project sponsors. Two open houses have been held and two more are imminent. The pre-application period will be from October 1 to November 30. The proposed projects will be reviewed for consistency with watershed planning. Ecology's investigation of pre-applications will run from December to February. Ecology will invite successful pre-application project applicants to apply for funding in March. To this point, applicants have identified four or five projects, with more expected toward the end of the pre-application period.

Dan reported that users were highly responsive to Ecology's recent metering outreach. Voluntary compliance was in excess of 90%. Only four orders needed to be issued.

Other Issues of Interest

Members noted the following matters as potential areas of interest at future meetings:

- The work products from the climate change groups.
- An update on the Odessa Subarea study.
- How to be more pro-active in getting good projects, for example, developing a tool for conservation districts to take out to their members. Or identifying how to bring consensus projects forward more efficiently.
- It is important to evaluate the entire funding cycle, a comprehensive view, not just the conservation districts.
- A review of the bi-op remand.
- By December, a process check on Lake Roosevelt drawdown, the supplemental feed route, and Crab Creek/Frenchman Hills.

The meeting adjourned shortly after 3:00

The next meeting will be December 12 in Yakima.

Attendees:

CRPAG:

Dale Bambrick, National Marine Fisheries Service
 Jon Culp, Washington State Conservation Commission
 Jim Fredericks, Corps of Engineers
 Michael Garrity, American Rivers
 Rick George, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation

Bill Gray, Bureau of Reclamation
Bob Hammond, City of Kennewick
Joe Lukas, Grant County PUD
Michael Mayer, Washington Environmental Council
Merrill Ott, Stevens County Commission
Gary Passmore, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation
Lisa Pelly, Washington Rivers Conservancy
Phil Rigdon, Yakama Nation
Mike Schwisow, Columbia Basin Development League, Irrigation Districts
Teresa Scott, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Richard Stevens, Grant County Commission
John Stuhlmiller, Washington Farm Bureau
Rob Swedo, Bonneville Power Administration

Others in attendance:

Neil Aaland, Washington State Association of Counties
Nancy Aldrich, City of Richland
Ron Brown, Farmer from Milton-Freewater
Carolyn Comeau, Department of Ecology
Amanda Cronin, Washington Water Trust
John Charba, HRC
Stuart Crane, Yakama Indian Nation
Christi Davis-Moore, Bureau of Reclamation
Bill Eller, Washington State Conservation Commission
Joel Freundenthal, Yakima County
Jennifer Hackett, Central Washington University student
Dan Haller, Department of Ecology
Paul LaRiviere, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Dave McClure, Klickitat County WRIAs 30 and 31
Peggy Miller, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Steve Nelson, RH2
Darryll Olsen, Columbia Snake River Irrigators
Gerry O'Keefe, Department of Ecology
Tom Ring, Yakama Nation
Derek Sandison, Department of Ecology
Cathy Schaeffer, Walla Walla County, WRIA 32
Kevin Scribner, Walla Walla Watershed Alliance
Dan Silver, facilitator
Paul Stoker, Groundwater Management Area
Tom Tebb, Department of Ecology
Chad Unland, Washington Department of Natural Resources
Mimi Wainwright, Department of Ecology
Patrick Williams, Center for Law and Environmental Policy