



**Place-Based Integrated Water Resources Planning
Written Testimony to Oregon Water Resources Commission
March 17, 2022**

Overview

- The Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed (UGRRW) Partnership is composed of more than 25 organizations/ individuals living or working in the UGRRW with interests in water planning from municipal, agricultural, and instream interest groups.

Lessons Learned

- Side meetings between those who disagreed were efficient in resolving differences.
- Value of a diverse steering committee.
- Strength of diverse interests working together on a common vision (it is possible to have a positive experience when those with competing interests work together).
- Value of completing work through technical working groups.
- Using local talent to come to conclusions for local basin.
- Local individuals with competing interests have stronger relationships that help work through difficult issues.
- Each interest group had to compromise and learn about other water issues to come to consensus.
- Consistent leadership: convener, facilitators, and stakeholder/agency representatives.
- Hybrid meetings are helpful for attendance.
- Need more accessibility to agency-level data and staff resources.
- Having planning guidance available to future planning groups at the outset will be tremendously helpful.
- To maintain engagement with local stakeholders and be responsive to local needs, planning must be place-based and locally led. Place-based planning is most effective when all entities (local, regional, state, tribal, and federal) all work together as partners.
- Need for more input/state-level interest in each step, rather than at the end. Agencies were all represented at the local level throughout the process; some conflicting input was received from state and local staff.
- Transparency on review team and first review should include the local planning group to answer questions. Clarity on final agency review expectations and communication from the review team throughout the process will greatly streamline the review of future plans.

Needs

- State investment in more and better data on groundwater and surface water quality and quantity.
- Local coordination/involvement with every state agency; emphasis on state investment in agency capacity, availability, and support for local process.
- Help to engage federal partners (especially for larger studies, permitting, and funding assistance).
- Prioritize state funding for projects in basins that have undergone a collaborative, place-based planning process and adopted that plan.
- Build on the success of our effort and expand state funding for place-based planning beyond just the four pilot basins.
- Find ways to integrate place-based planning efforts into the Oregon Water Resources Department's budget process, 100-year Water Vision, and the state's utilization of federal infrastructure funding.

Critical Issues

- Surface water supply is limited in summer through late fall (approximately July through November) when the combined demands for water instream and for irrigated agriculture and municipal uses are the highest.
- There is significant uncertainty with groundwater supply. The UGRRW Partnership needs to evaluate groundwater supply sustainability and inform strategic groundwater resource management as well as better understand the impact of the Scenic Waterway flows on new allocations.

- Water quality is below statewide standards in all eight subwatersheds. The water quality issues are predominantly related to high temperatures, low dissolved oxygen, and insufficient flows.
- Natural hazards like flooding, fire, and drought impact the UGRRW, and the UGRRW Partnership needs an integrated plan to mitigate and respond to these events to protect water supply sources and enhance water source resiliency.

Strategy Summary

No.	Strategy (Implementation Lead) [Primary Beneficiaries] {IWRs corresponding strategy}	Description/Purpose	Selected Milestones
1	Built Storage - Aboveground Storage and Underground Storage (Union County) [Agriculture, Instream] {10.B Improve access to built storage}	Address specific instream and out-of-stream water supply deficits in each subwatershed through advancing possible built storage projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct aboveground storage and instream flow study (applied for state funds). • Develop next steps for Catherine Creek underground storage (to benefit instream flows).
2	Land Management - Agricultural Land (Natural Resources Conservation Service) [Agriculture, Instream] {10.A Improve water-use efficiency and water conservation}	Conduct research and provide subsequent educational outreach to support water management actions that maintain water quality and increase water use efficiency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene a pilot group of landowners for on-farm conservation activities. • Create a shared resources list. • Strategize funding for irrigation water management projects.
3	Data Collection, Monitoring, and Research (Grande Ronde Model Watershed [GRMW]) [Agriculture, Instream] {1.A Improve water resource data collection and monitoring}	Coordinate data collection to fill data gaps, support working groups, and inform water management in the UGRRW.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize data gaps. • Study groundwater. • Study water quality. • Update assessment of instream flow needs.
4	Non-structural Water Storage and Habitat Management (Union Soil and Water Conservation District) [Instream] {11.A Improve watershed health, resiliency, and capacity for natural storage}	Raise awareness of work being done and how this work addresses goals of the UGRRW Partnership; prioritize and pursue nonstructural storage projects in strategic locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan field tour. • Prioritize areas and projects (using the Ecological Atlas geomorphic potential information [GRMW, 2021]).
5	Land Management - Public Land (U.S. Forest Service [USFS]) [Instream] {9.C Partner with federal agencies, tribes, and neighbor states in long-term water resources management}	Information sharing and communication between public land management agencies and stakeholders to identify potential areas of mutual support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update UGRRW Partnership on USFS projects. • Plan field tours.
6	Infrastructure - Land Modification (Union County) [Municipal, Agriculture, Instream] {6.A Improve integration of water information into land use planning}	Reduce the frequency and severity of damage due to flooding now and in the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review U.S. Bureau of Reclamation hydraulics study. • Study sedimentation. • Hold ditch-opening meeting. • Draft hazards mitigation plan.
7	Administrative Actions (CTUIR) [Instream] {10.D Reach environmental outcomes with non-regulatory alternatives}	Increase awareness of how administrative actions can improve water quality and quantity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create outreach material for landowners and legislators. • Survey interest in administrative actions.
8	Land Management - Municipal Land (City of La Grande) [Municipal] {7.A Develop and upgrade water and wastewater infrastructure}	Improve city-to-city coordination to respond to natural hazards, increase water conservation, and support water infrastructure efficiency improvements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop shared resources agreement. • Update/develop hazard mitigation plans.
9	Outreach and Education (Union County) [Municipal] {8.C Promote community education and training opportunities}	Inform the public about water quality issues and UGRRW Partnership activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute water quality and lawn care outreach materials. • Complete digital storytelling project. • Update outreach plan.

IWRs = Integrated Water Resources Strategies