

Water Resources Commission
Workshop on Basin Stewardship and Water Supply Issues
July 2, 1998
Salem

Members

Jim Nakano
Ron Nelson
Dan Thorndike

Others

Roger Bachman
Dan Bradley
Scott Ashcom
Kevin Hanway
Sarah A. Myers
Ray Kelly
Doug Myers
Rex Barber
Jill Zarnowitz
Debbie Gorham
Jerry Schmidt
Jan Lee
Richard Kosesan
Roberta Jortner
Joni Low
Cheyenne Chapman
Reed Benson
Pat Zwick

Staff

Martha Pagel
Geoff Huntington
Tom Paul
Fred Lissner
Bob Main
Charlotte Haynes
Rebecca Geisen
Greg Nelson
Vern Church
Tom Byler
Dwight French
Dick Bailey

This workshop was a continuation of discussions initiated at the Commission's meeting in Silver Falls in September 1997. Two things noted in discussions since Silver Falls provided the framework for last week's meeting:

1. As the Oregon Plan moves the state toward more systematic and integrated ways of managing natural resources, the Department's current attempts at basin planning are not providing comprehensive and up-to-date information which is useful to either the Department's or other entities' work to address water supply and stewardship opportunities.
2. While the Department's water resources data collection and automation methods have improved greatly in recent years, new ways of compiling and translating information for

broader audiences must be developed to satisfy the growing range of users of that data (watershed councils, other natural resources agencies, local governments, interest groups and water users).

At the beginning of the meeting, Department staff set the stage for discussion by posing two questions to the group: How can Oregon respond effectively to the environmental needs of our river basins while assuring sustainable growth in our economy; and do we need to design a framework for a more pro-active, systematic and integrated approach to both our stewardship and water supply management needs.

Generally, participants expressed a high degree of agreement that collecting and packaging key data on a basin-scale would be useful to a wide range of interests. There was a consensus that making more of the Department's information available to more users is a good idea. In some cases this may mean translating existing data differently and packaging it in a way that is more accessible and useful to a greater number of people. In other cases this may mean that we identify gaps in data and develop a strategy for improving our information base.

Surface water availability was characterized. Ground water management was discussed, including the designation of critical ground water areas, ground water management areas and ground water studies. The group also discussed the importance of the surface water/ground water interconnection and the option of storing water underground (aquifer storage and recovery).

The Deschutes Basin Conservancy was discussed as an example of a basin-wide approach for water management. The Conservancy is a locally based organization that aims to cut across jurisdictions to "enhance the water quality and quantity of the Deschutes River."

Senate Bill 962, proposed by the Oregon Association of Nurserymen in the 1997 Legislative Session, was discussed. The bill was not passed into law, but served as a framework for discussing the underlying concept. The bill would have directed the Water Resources Department to compile and make available existing information on viable upstream and off-stream storage sites. This information would be used to enhance planning for both water shortages and floods.

The group discussed concerns about the efficiency of agricultural water use and the issue of "waste." The group discussed nature of "waste" and recognized that there is great variability and much anecdotal information surrounding this concept.

The question was raised regarding how water use measurement and reporting may fit with the initiative. The point was made that without information on current water use (reporting) any basin initiative will be incomplete.

The group discussed the difficult but necessary task of predicting future water demands for both the average year and for the critical year. The need to find methods for forecasting future flow needs for fish and for water quality was also discussed.

Discussed also was the variability of data existing in basins around the state. Some areas such as the Deschutes basin have a sophisticated measurement and monitoring system in place; many other basins do not. Part of what a basin initiative could accomplish would be to identify where we have data gaps.

There was a concern raised about the Department "tampering with" basin planning. Concern stemmed from problems with how basin planning has been carried out in the past. Concern was voiced about the integration of land use issues with water management.

A number of potential resources were named that might be useful to the basin initiative—existing basin reports, drinking water master plans, municipal and agricultural conservation plans, county comprehensive plans, USGS water supply information, and cooperative efforts with OSU extension.

The suggestion was made to develop a template for "state of the basin reports" to be developed for the state's river basins. This template would drive data collection and analysis efforts, helping the Department to recognize data gaps and help build support for filling these gaps.

It was suggested that the Department take on the role of a "clearinghouse" of opportunities available for funding conservation projects.

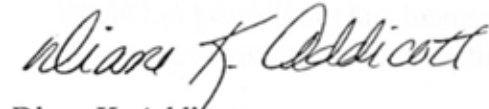
Based on what was heard from workshop participants, staff proposed the development of a budget option package that would provide the funding necessary to produce a series of comprehensive basin assessments. The assessments would provide a new, up-to-date template of water resources information to assist in building a greater public understanding of the resources on a basin-scale.

There is a need to continue discussions with workshop participants to better define the elements, framework, and goal for such assessments. These might include an assessment/inventory of surface water, ground water and water availability; information on the ecological conditions of the basin; land use and land cover; population growth

projections, general demographic trends; water demand forecasting; information on water use and water rights by sector; and existing information on potential storage sites.

Staff proposed reconvening the group in July and August in order to better define the potential initiative, and the appropriate funding level to support it. The concept could then be more fully discussed at the Commission's September meeting in Baker City.

Respectfully submitted

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diane K. Addicott".

Diane K. Addicott
Commission Assistant