



Oregon

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Water Resources Department

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Water Resources Commission

FROM: Barry Norris, State Engineer

SUBJECT: Agenda Item B, November 15, 2012
Water Resources Commission Meeting

Update on the Columbia River-Umatilla Solutions Task Force

I. Introduction

During summer 2012, the Governor asked Steve Greenwood of the Oregon Solutions Team to organize a Umatilla Solutions Task Force. The purpose of the Task Force is the find ways that Columbia River water can be diverted and used for economic development while continuing to support salmon recovery in the Columbia River and Umatilla River Basins. The taskforce had its first meeting in June and has been working to identify various options. This report provides an update on that activity.

II. Background

Over the last decade, agriculture in the Umatilla Basin has continued to do well. In 2011, Umatilla and Morrow Counties combined provided 19 percent of the total Oregon Farm and Ranch Sales, \$980 million. Umatilla County is third in producing wine grapes, behind Yamhill and Polk Counties, and Umatilla and Morrow Counties are the highest wheat and potato producing areas in Oregon. There is new land that can be developed if water is available, and irrigators are anxious to expand. However, sources for new water in the Umatilla Basin are severely limited. Nearly all of the Umatilla River is allocated, new groundwater is not easily available, and other surface water sources such as Willow Creek and Butter Creek will not support new development on anything but a very small scale.

For many in the basin who are looking for ways to expand agriculture, the Columbia River is the alternative of choice. The Columbia is the fourth largest watershed in the U.S, producing ten times the volume of the Colorado River with an annual run-off of 198 million acre-feet. It has a mean range of about 100,000 cfs in the fall to about 400,000 cfs in the spring, with water available for appropriation several months out of the year. Irrigators continue to look for ways to divert water from the Columbia, and there have been several bills proposed over the last few legislative sessions that would have reserved

water for their use. However, there are a number of significant restrictions that limit new appropriations of Columbia River water.

Division 33 Rules, adopted in the early 1990's, provide requirements for new appropriations, including the exclusion of new "live-flow" appropriations in the time period April 15 to September 30. Additional restrictions include Columbia River listed species, and all of the management requirements that exist for the Columbia River dams including navigation, power production, flood protection and environmental needs.

Last June the Governor tasked the Oregon Solutions program to develop alternatives for new water supplies that will support continued salmon recovery efforts in the Columbia River mainstem and Umatilla River basin, and fuel economic growth in the Umatilla Basin. Steve Greenwood, Deputy Director for Oregon Programs National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State University, was asked to organize a "Columbia River-Umatilla Solutions Task Force." The Task Force chaired by Dennis Doherty, Umatilla County Commissioner, and Richard Whitman, the Governor's Natural Resource Advisor.

The members of the Columbia River – Umatilla Solutions Taskforce, subscribe to the following objectives:

1. Identify options to increase utilization of Columbia River water for in-stream and out-of-stream uses in the Umatilla Basin without negatively impacting instream flows needed for fish species. The options considered should include Oregon-only actions, as well as those requiring joint agreements or actions with the State of Washington and/or other states or tribes. The options considered should also include a range of short-term (less than three years to implementation) as well as longer-term options.
2. Develop and evaluate these options according to a set of criteria adopted by the Solutions Taskforce. Options should be as geographically specific as possible, and developed with an eye toward optimizing:
 - a. technical feasibility,
 - b. economic feasibility,
 - c. legal feasibility, and
 - d. political feasibility
3. After evaluating options, develop an action plan that includes:
 - a. Options for which there is consensus to move forward;
 - b. Options for which there is not consensus but enough promise to warrant further work and discussion; and
 - c. Statutory, administrative rule, or institutional action, if any are needed, to implement the recommended options.
4. The package of consensus options will, as a whole, result in both economic and environmental benefits, including aquifer restoration, tributary streamflow enhancement, and/or mainstem flow enhancement.

5. The package of consensus options should support, rather than impede, other water-related planning efforts such as:
 - a. The Tribal Water Rights Settlement,
 - b. The Basin 2050 Water Plan,
 - c. Columbia River Salmon and Steelhead Recovery plans
 - d. The State's Integrated Water Strategy.
6. The package of consensus options will be provided to the Governor, The Oregon Legislature, and the Washington Department of Ecology Office of the Columbia River by early December 2012 to support informed policy decisions and project development.

The Task Force has 20 members including basin irrigators, state agencies, and conservation groups. They have met several times in Hermiston where they have discussed goals and objectives, operating requirements and existing flow conditions for the Columbia River, and options for supplying additional water to the basin.

III. Discussion

There are two subcommittees that support the Task Force: Interstate Options and Oregon Options. These two groups are tasked with developing concepts for water development, providing narratives in a standard format, and presenting them to the Task Force for further evaluation.

Interstate Options

Derek Sandison is the Director of the Office of Columbia River in the Washington Department of Ecology, and is a member of the Task Force. The Columbia River Office of Columbia River is funded by a \$200 million bond program that created the Columbia River Office and tasked it with finding water for economic development in the portion of the Columbia River Basin that resides in Washington. Additionally, he is providing information about the projects they are considering and how Oregon might partner with them. The Oregon Solutions Team has started discussions with Washington's Columbia River Policy Advisory Group (CRPAG) to find ways the two states might cooperate on water development projects.

Opportunities for cooperative efforts with Washington include construction of new storage facilities, investing in conservation projects, purchase of water from existing storage projects, purchase of Washington water rights as mitigation credits, and looking for opportunities that may be available in managing Columbia River flow.

Oregon Options

There are a number of options the Oregon Option subcommittee is discussing, including expansion of the existing Umatilla Basin Aquifer Recovery Project (both alluvial and basalt below-ground storage), increasing storage space in existing surface water storage projects, construction of new surface water storage projects, consideration of new diversions from the Columbia River if there is agreement that there are times when flow is available in the Columbia River, and the potential for development of a Umatilla Basin water bank.

The Oregon Solutions Team is expected to have final recommendations by the end of 2012.

IV. Conclusion

This is a discussion item. No WRC action is requested.

Attachment 1 - Columbia River-Umatilla Solutions Task Force Members

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COLUMBIA RIVER-UMATILLA SOLUTIONS TASKFORCE MEMBERS

Richard Whitman, Co-Convener
Governor's Natural Resource Advisor

Eric Quaempts, Natural Resources Director
Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla

Dennis Doherty, Co-Convener
Umatilla County Commissioner

Craig Reeder, CEO
Hale Companies

Crystal Ball, Oregon Rep.
Bonneville Power Administration

Derek Sandison, Director
WA Columbia River Water Program

Bill Boggess, Associate Dean
College of Agricultural Sciences
Oregon State University

Stephanie Page
Oregon Department of Agriculture

J.R. Cook, Executive Director
Umatilla Basin Water Commission

Brett Swift
American Rivers

John Devoe, Executive Director
Waterwatch

John Turner, President
Blue Mountain Community College

Steve Eldrige, General Manager and CEO
Umatilla Electric Co-op

Phil Ward, Director
Oregon Water Resources Dept.

Roy Elicker, Director
Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife

Karl Weist, Fish and Wildlife Policy
Northwest Power and Conservation Council

Dawn Wiedmeier, Asst. Area Manager
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Joe Whitworth, Director
The Freshwater Trust

Bob Levy, owner
Windy River Farms

Gary Neal, General Manager
Port of Morrow