



Oregon

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Water Resources Commission

FROM: Barry F. Norris, State Engineer

SUBJECT: Agenda Item D, February 7, 2013
Water Resources Commission Meeting

Umatilla Basin Water Supply Update

I. Introduction

During summer 2012, the Governor tasked the Oregon Solutions program to develop alternatives for new water supplies that support continued salmon recovery efforts in the Columbia River mainstem and Umatilla River basin, and fuel economic growth in the Umatilla Basin. The name of the taskforce is the Columbia River-Umatilla Solutions Taskforce or CRUST. Last November staff provided the Commission a report on CRUST activities. This report provides an update on CRUST activities since the last Commission meeting.

II. Background

In June 2012, 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 goal of the Task Force is to find new water supplies that support salmon recovery in the Columbia River and fuel economic growth in the Umatilla Basin. The Task Force is co-chaired by Dennis Doherty, Umatilla County Commissioner, and Richard Whitman, the Governor's Natural Resource Advisor. The CRUST has 20 members, including basin irrigators, state agencies, and conservation groups.

As reported last November there are a number of significant restrictions that limit new appropriations of Columbia River water. Division 33 Rules, adopted in the early 1990s, 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.

CRUST has been meeting monthly in an effort to assemble a list of alternative projects that meet the goal of finding new water supplies. Their final meeting was scheduled for early February 2013.

III. Discussion

The CRUST considered nearly 30 separate options, screening these options against four criteria: a) economic development impacts, b) ecological impacts, c) technical, legal, and political feasibility, and d) economic feasibility. The options fall under three basic strategies:

Developing additional water storage capacity. CRUST looked at options that can be considered both short-term and long-term projects. Both aquifer storage and above-ground storage projects were considered. Most projects are located in Oregon.

Improving water management. This strategy includes greater water investment in conservation practices, potential transfers of developed water rights, and improved water transaction mechanisms to move water between users and uses.

Developing a stronger interstate approach to Columbia River water. Opportunities exist for joint-investments with other states for construction of new storage and conserved water projects. Additionally, other options depend upon interstate agreements about protecting newly stored or conserved water as it flows through those states. It is also important to coordinate with discussions related to the Columbia River Treaty Review.

CRUST was able to develop consensus for some of the options, while other options remain on the table for further discussion at some future date. Following is a list of options where: 1) consensus was reached, 2) they are identified as high potential, and 3) they are recommended for implementation.

Consensus Options for Developing Additional Storage Capacity -

1. Testing and Completion of the Stage I Umatilla Basin Aquifer Recovery Project – This is a short-term option attainable within two to three years. Completion should provide approximately 25,000 acre-feet of water for economic development and environmental benefits. Additional aquifer storage projects in the region may be available on a longer-term basis. These should be investigated.

2. Wallowa Lake Dam Repair – This is a short-term option possibly attainable within five years. Completion should provide a minimum of 4,200 acre-feet. This option will provide water for both economic growth and environmental benefits.
3. Construction of Juniper Canyon Storage Reservoir – This is a long-term option, 10 years. Completion could provide as much as 49,000 acre-feet.

Consensus Options for Improving Water Management

4. Leasing Unused Developed Washington Water Rights – Short-term option, within one year. Includes several rights held in trust by the Washington Trust Water Rights Program.
5. Pilot Transaction for a Proposed Umatilla Basin Water Bank and Brokerage – This is a short-term option, within one year.
6. Water Conservation Investments in Wallowa Basin – This is a short-term option, one to three years. Agreements with Washington state are needed to protect conserved water.

Consensus Options for Developing a Stronger Interstate Approach to Columbia River Water

7. Agreements with State of Washington (and/or Idaho) to Protect Water Conserved or Stored in Oregon – Short-term option, possibly two years.
8. Interstate Discussions on Potential Joint Investments in Large Storage Sites – Long-term projects, possibly 10 to 20 years.
9. Develop Oregon institutional capacity and staffing to pursue regional agreements and potential interstate investments in water development projects – In the short-term, position a senior staff person in the Water Resources Department to implement a water development program. This work would be closely coordinated with the Governor's Natural Resources Office, other state and federal agencies, as well as the appropriate Regional Solutions team. The effort also will need an advisory board made up of appropriate stakeholders.

Consensus from the Task Force was not achieved for the remainder of options on the initial list. They are listed below, but the Task Force recommendation is to not pursue them at this time.

Other Options Considered by the Columbia River-Umatilla Solutions Taskforce

- Providing access to Columbia River water in spring and summer but only when flows exceed biological target flows for fish.
- Construction of new reservoir on South Fork Umatilla River
- Construction of new reservoir on Bear Creek
- Expansion of Cold Springs Reservoir
- Expansion of McKay Dam and Reservoir
- Managing Columbia River to increase flow in the Spring and Summer
- Additional draw-down of Lake Roosevelt
- Revised Management of Run-of-River Reservoirs, including additional withdrawals in spring and summer
- Evaluate operation of John Day Pool at Minimum Operating Pool, or reduced levels in order to increase velocity of water flow in Spring and Summer
- Washington State large storage site candidates: Crab Creek (at currently proposed footprint), Ninemile Flat, and Goose Lake.
- Washington investment in Oregon Storage Options
- Washington conservation projects
- Washington aquifer storage

CRUST discussed how to move ahead with the projects that were identified as high potential and recommended that Oregon establish a senior-level position in the Oregon Water Resources Department budget for overall Columbia River planning, instream and out-of-stream water development, and interstate agreements to focus on the Umatilla Basin. The position will work closely with the Governor's Natural Resources office and Regional Solutions office, and would be a focal point for implementing the recommendations of the Columbia River-Umatilla Solutions Taskforce.

Finally, CRUST may be convened as needed during the 2013 Legislative Session. It will also meet subsequent to the 2013 Legislative Session in the early fall of 2013, to review progress on the workplan and consensus options, and revise any agreements as necessary. Once Executive or Legislative action is taken on the recommendations for long-term institutional capacity, it is envisioned the CRUST will be replaced by an advisory group.

IV. Conclusion

This is a discussion item only. No Commission action is requested.

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