



Oregon's Drought Readiness Council February 15, 2018 Meeting Notes

Attendees in the Room:

Brenda Bateman, Oregon Water Resources Department, Drought Readiness Council (DRC) Co-Chair
Justin Iverson, Oregon Water Resources Department (WRD)
Jim Johnson, Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA)
Kara Morris, Oregon Water Resources Department
Samantha Phillips, Oregon Water Resources Department
Ken Stahr, Oregon Water Resources Department, Water Supply Availability Committee (WSAC) Chair

By Phone:

Sonya Andron, Oregon Office of Emergency Management, Drought Readiness Council Co-Chair
Bruce Gilles, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
Rick Lusk, Oregon Water Resources Department
Smita Mehta, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Wade Peerman, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Eric Rau, Oregon Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
Kari Salis, Oregon Health Authority, Drinking Water Program (OHA)
Anna P. Stevenson, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)
Nick Yonker, Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF)
Emily York, Oregon Health Authority, Oregon Climate and Health Program

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1. Welcome and Introductions

Sonya Andron chaired the meeting, welcoming everyone. Participants introduced themselves.

2. Agenda Check

No additions proposed.

3. Approval of January 2018 Meeting Notes

No changes proposed.

4. Water Conditions

Ken Stahr presented a summary of current water year conditions from the Water Supply Availability Committee to the Drought Readiness Council. See materials packet. Highlights and recap include:

- Snowpack is 39 percent of normal throughout the state.
- Snow belt is tracking to the north and east of Oregon.
- Looking at historic snow plots in locations throughout Oregon—the 2018 line in some places is below low records. At Snotel sites, the snow-water equivalent is less than normal for this time of year.
- It would take a lot of precipitation to get us back to normal.
- Temperature for the past two weeks has been much higher than normal (up to six degrees), particularly in the eastern two-thirds of Oregon.
- Streamflows – January improved over December streamflows. Statewide in January we were at 90 percent of streamflow for this time of year. It was highest in the Umatilla. This probably represents run-off events, which means the snow is melting early and may not be available for run-off later in the spring. By contrast, Umpqua was at 53 percent, the lowest in the state.
- February hydrographs are lower than normal, but not the lows of record.

- It is fortunate we had good carry-over from storage last year. Those with access to stored water or contracts for stored water will be in decent shape this year.
- Rick Lusk, watermaster from Baker County (District 8) noted that higher flows from a couple of weeks ago came from snowmelt from 6,000 ft and below. Snowpack at higher elevations has stayed. Half of the watermaster district has stored water. The District Manager for Baker Valley Irrigation District has noted plans to allocate only 1.5 acre ft/acre for the season, but we still have another month to fill reservoirs.
- WSAC Chair. Current conditions support drought declarations in Klamath, Baker, and across the southern part of the state. Including east region counties. That's now. In three weeks we can re-visit.
- If drought declarations come in from Klamath and Baker Counties, we'll probably just conduct a quick check in by email to see if everyone agrees that Governor's drought declaration is appropriate.
- Federal Drought Monitor – They've expanded areas of D1 and D0 in Oregon, although more slowly than some would like! There are no federal / secretarial drought declarations for Oregon counties yet.

5. Drought and Groundwater

- Brenda Bateman reviewed the process for a Governor's drought declaration with the Council, pointing out new one-pagers and templates that have been posted to WRD's drought web page. See handout, which describes the process as well as the tools that become available under a Governor's declaration. Dr. Bateman noted that those holding a supplemental groundwater permit can use it at any time, if they can show that water under their primary right is not available.
- Justin Iverson, WRD's Groundwater Manager, walked council members through the groundwater-related tools available during a Governor's drought declaration, and then focused on groundwater level trends in the Klamath Basin to demonstrate some examples. See accompanying powerpoint presentation.
- Drought permits may be issued in event of a governor-declared drought, which helps those without already-existing supplemental rights.
- Drought permits have to cover same land (or less) than primary right. Irrigation of new lands is not allowed. Totalizing flow meters must be installed before pumping. In the Klamath Project area where we've seen declines year after year, the Department will only approve applications in locations that have seen declines of more than 20 feet since 2001 (maps available from the Department). Still, there are a lot of supplemental permits out there that folks plan to use.
- Provisions in WRD's Division 19 Rules allow permit reviewers to take into account additional considerations during drought. Reviewers use a standard public interest process and then the Director can also allow use because of need and because of the short-duration of use. Because of Scenic Waterway restrictions in the Klamath Basin, WRD wouldn't approve any new long-term groundwater use permits.
- Groundwater users may drill a new well with these permits. When drought is over, use is not permitted unless it's "exempt" (domestic, stock, etc.). This is definitely a large investment. They are then well positioned to apply for emergency water-use permits in subsequent governor-declared droughts.
- Are folks using these wells inappropriately, (i.e., continuing to pump when the drought is over)? Yes, we've found some cases, through WRD's water-use monitoring program in the Klamath. See attached 2017 Bureau of Reclamation report on Klamath groundwater use.
- When the basin is fully allocated and these wells continue to go in, do you see any problems? Yes, although there are not a lot of groundwater interference complaints related to drought-related permits. However, there are documented groundwater declines of 10-30 feet from 2001 to present day in the Klamath. The U.S. Geological Survey has done studies regarding groundwater pumping in the Tule Lake Area. Problems pointed back to the drains. 94 percent of pumping impacts in the last decade were at the expense of groundwater storage and drainflow at the wildlife refuge.
- There are episodic droughts and episodic recharge in the Klamath; the recharge is not adequate. These areas lack resiliency and droughts are becoming the norm.
- Many communities are using drought declarations to message conservation and storage to their residents.
- Drought permits approve 1.5 acre feet of water per acre, compared to the state's standard allocation of 3 acre ft/acre. What can you do with that? Irrigators will change crops or use lands that are closer to the water. Will there be a long term change in crops? No, irrigators will just put less acres into production.

- Ranchers and farmers already have their planting schedules before cut-backs are announced. Sometimes they will get lucky with timely rains in spring and summer. Potatoes, wheat, alfalfa—keep that rotation.

6. Roundtable

- Let's have contributors to the Water Supply Availability Committee (WSAC) visit with the Drought Readiness Council. Our most predictive tool is the snow survey. Invite Scott Oviatt from USDA/NRCS.
- WRD is holding public meetings in the Klamath Basin about water conditions, streamflow, regulation, and drought permits. Last week held the Department held three in the upper basin, next week will be with project irrigators. Have had winter calls that didn't affect too many because they're not irrigating yet.
- OEM will host a local emergency managers' call on Tuesday so that WRD can update them about water conditions and the drought declaration process.
- OEM will also host the OERS Council next week, for directors and responders from 33 state agencies.
- Briefed Governor's Natural Resources Cabinet yesterday regarding drought.
- The 2017 Integrated Water Resources Strategy is now on-line and it's beautiful. See page 78+ for discussion of drought and extreme events.
- Expect a drought request from Baker County very soon.
- The AgriMet memo went to our agency directors; working with Western States Water Council (WSWC) to garner support.
- Any signed Harmful Algal Bloom (HABs) Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are due back to Aaron Borisenko at month's end.
- ODFW notes that Rogue and Umpqua instream flow studies are underway.

7. Next Meeting

March 14, 2018 at WRD in Salem from 10:00 to noon.

8. Adjourned at 11:30