

Wood River Water Collaborative

Meeting summary: July 21, 2015

Big Wood Canal Company Office, Shoshone

Present: Kevin Lakey, Sharon Lee, Pete VanderMeulen, Pat McMahon, Mark Davidson, John Molyneux, Kristy Molyneux, John Stevenson, Lynn Harmon, Donna Pence, Carl Pendleton, Keri York, Dayna Gross, Michelle Stennett and Patti Lousen

Phone Callers who couldn't call in: Wendy Pabich, Doug McGargle, Marie Kellner, Peter Anderson, Karl Nichols, Barry Beavers, Jim Jacquet, Pat Purdy, Mariel Platt and Terry Ring.

The first topic discussed was a brief overview of the negotiated Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer settlement Term Sheet between the Surface Water Coalition and the Ground Water Districts. This is pertinent since the State (IDWR) has indicated that a similar settlement process will be initiated to resolve the water issues facing the WR Basin this winter. It has been estimated that the cost associated with the ultimate resolution of the water calls/appeals related to the ESPA are between \$62-65 million.

There was consensus among those present at the meeting that a term sheet modeled after the Surface Water Coalition and Ground Water Districts Term Sheet is worth pursuing as it involved broad representation from all water users in the process. Lawyers were excluded from many of the meetings on this term sheet and an arbitrator was involved. Does this term sheet need legislative approval? Michelle Stennett said that the recharge piece of the Term Sheet needs to be approved by the state although money has already been appropriated. The State has an annual budget for recharge projects that they use each year.

We discussed what objectives people would like to see incorporated into a potential Term Sheet for the Big and Little Wood River watersheds. There was consensus from those present to incorporate as much as possible the objectives from the ESPA Term Sheet with the following alterations:

- Changing names/geographic regions to reflect our needs
- Including time frames for what will be achieved and when
- Objective F: Reverse the trends of aquifer decline
- Include target or normative flows for Big and Little Wood River
- Resolve the over-allocation of water in the region and the expanded footprint of water use
- Solve the systemic problem of over-allocation

It was proposed that some of the above are qualities of a vision statement more than objectives. A vision statement will be written later and distributed for edits. This could include the following: predictability, water security (or equity) range of values embraced, economic and environmental security, meaningful solution to problem. Our group will need to continue to refine the objectives as we discuss the various water user groups throughout the watershed.

Who are the key stakeholders to include? The group identified broad categories and specified distinct groupings under each as outlined:

- Municipalities – the cities of Bellevue, Hailey, Ketchum, and Sun Valley were the main topic of discussion but we also talked about whether it was necessary to include all of the cities within the basin from Carey to Shoshone.
- Agriculture (GW and SW) – BWCC (above and below Milner/Gooding Canal), LW/Silver Creek, Bellevue Triangle, mid/upper Big Wood River valley, Camas Prairie
- Aesthetic users – Home Owners Associations, Sun Valley Company
- Recreation users – Golf Courses, Skiing, Fishing, Tourism
- Conservation/Wildlife/Fisheries
- Small Water user – Less than 20 Acre Ground Water users
- Ground Water Districts (GWD): South Valley GWD and Galena GWD.

What is the demand to meet agricultural water needs of the Agricultural Users?

BWCC (above Milner) was discussed by Carl/Lynn: BWCC needs 220,000 Acre Feet (AF) above Magic Reservoir (reservoir capacity is 191,000 AF) so it needs more than the full capacity. Previously for a 150 day full irrigation season BWCC needed 240,000 – not there anymore. With irrigation efficiencies and a shortened season of 15 days less they have decreased this amount to 220,000 AF. The reality of these past 20 years has been delivering 140-150,000 AF. They experience a shortened season fifty percent of the time.

Water use described below are estimates determined by Kevin Lakey – Agricultural water use only:

Bellevue Triangle: 30,000 acres with no transportation loss included. If using 3.5 AF application rate this area needs ~90,000 AF total. This includes ground and surface water use from the southern Bellevue City boundary to Big Wood above Magic and to Silver Creek above the Little Wood. This is the amount needed with ground water covering the surface water losses.

Little Wood Association: call was for 4,300 acres at 3 AF application rate = LW Association needs 13,000 AF. This would be a comprehensive number, not just for this call.

Bellevue to North Fork: estimated at 6,000 AF with total use of about 14,000 AF

Camas has 13,000 AF of GW use. Don't know about SW.

Below from AFD#2 and Snake River: 38,000 acres for total of about 80,000 AF

What are ways to reduce water demand related to the Agricultural water users?

- Improve efficiency of irrigation delivery to the farm.
- Explore timing of water delivery and management changes.
- Work with golf courses and others to find ways to alter timing of early season irrigation as a way to meet downstream ag needs.
- Water Conservation on the farm (ask Dayna Gross for best management practices)
- Decrease irrigated footprint by purchasing water leases or other types of water management agreements
- Consider changes to less thirsty crops
- Crop rotation/fallowing agreements which could be seasonal, triggered by date or flow.
- Increase water delivery from the Snake River into the Milner/Gooding Canal.

What are Incentives for the Agricultural Community?

- Mitigation credits
- Funding/monetary incentives for managed recharge. Users recharge (does not include incidental recharge) and have an application approved by the State. It can be done in winter although there are icing costs associated. Prior to 1962 winter recharge was common. Triangle winter recharge would need accommodation. Tax credits for recharge not currently possible.
- Compensation (cash or mitigation money) for water agreements to reduce demand on water delivery (possibly cutting the ag season short, seasonal or annual fallowing, etc).
- Money for irrigation infrastructure efficiencies and upgrades.
- Settlement agreement that provides safe harbor for water use if conditions of the term sheet are met.
- Staying out of the courtroom 😊.

Miscellaneous

-Michelle Stennett is wondering how we can use recharge and monies in the offseason to replenish aquifer? The state has monies for recharge projects. In the release of 54,000 AF out of Magic in November, 2014 almost 36,000 showed up at Malad. A lot of recharge happened then. Last time they spilled water was 2011/2012. Where can we sink it into the aquifer? Carl thinks there is potential in the laterals and canal system. Another area = Gravel beds below Idaho Sand and Gravel which lie laterally to the river.

-Pete/Lynn: ran 1600 cfs out of Milner (peaked out) this year. We need to decrease water use and also bring water into the system. We should be looking at Snake Water through Milner with pumping in limited places. Use Trust water or use the raise at Island Park (current project is raising Island Park reservoir storage three feet with a bladder). Brian Patton said we should be applying for this water with IDWR support.

-Discussed the size of the group (40) and the opportunity in the future to divide into subcommittees and have a representative per subcommittee. This is a very diverse group and Pete thinks the group is fine. Ideas will come from this diversity.

-Lincoln and Blaine county commissioners will be updated individually. Carl Pendleton will keep the Lincoln County commissioners updated and we will identify someone for the Blaine County commissioners.

Next meeting: Thursday, August 27: 10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. at TNC

Location: The Nature Conservancy office Hailey, Idaho, 116 1st Avenue North
Call in number: 866-385-9623 code 6239780454

For the next meeting we will continue to identify projected needs, opportunities and incentives for all the interest groups. **Representation from Aesthetic users, Municipalities, Recreation users, Conservation, Ground Water Districts, and Small water users** (less than 20 acres) is needed at the August 27th meeting. We will also discuss the information gaps that all groups need.