

Wood River Water Collaborative Meeting Minutes
Thursday, December 10th

Attendance (virtual, so sorry if you are missing): Keri York, Ryan Santo, David Stephenson, Sarah Lien, Greg Loomis, Grant Loomis, Cal Pendleton, Bob Simpson, Brad Dawson, Pat McMahon, Peter Anderson, Frank Suwanrit, Gaston Zuain, Cooper Brossy, John Wright, Larry Schoen, Chris Johnson, Pete VanDerMuelen, Pat Purdy, Kendra Kaiser, Kira Finkler, Brian Yaeger

Wood River Water Collaborative Structure (see attached presentation) – Peter Anderson

- Peter reviewed the general layout of water rights and uses in the Big Wood, with old irrigation water rights in the lower part of the basin, newer municipal and domestic rights in the upper part, and newer groundwater uses in the middle; all of these are important uses
- Senior surface water priority dates are in the 1881 and 1883 timeframe; the earliest groundwater dates are in the 1960s
- These are common issues in the West, and often gradients of money and priority dates can lead to positive solutions

- In 2014, the WRWC was envisioned as a water exchange, or a water bank to try to resolve ground and surface water issues
- Early on, it was recognized that groundwater users need districts so that initial conversations among stakeholders could continue

- In 2015, the WRWC agreed on a mission statement, objectives, and strategies, some of which are also being addressed by the new Groundwater Management Area Advisory Committee ('the advisory committee')
- The mission statement was 'to preserve core community values which include: 1. Safe, clean drinking water to meet the needs of the watershed, 2. Sustainable water use for farming and ranching, and 3. Healthy riparian habitat for fish and wildlife that rely on the Big Wood, Little Wood, and Silver Creek and their tributaries.'
- This mission statement and other activities were used in two early applications for the Bureau of Reclamation Cooperative Water Management Program Phase 1 Grants. One of those grants was transferred to the Galena Groundwater District for funding of flow monitoring telemetry stations in the Bellevue triangle. The other grant was not funded.
- In 2018, Trout Unlimited re-applied for a BOR CWMP Phase 1 grant to continue developing the watershed group through meetings and planning, and hire hydrologists, consultants, etc. to further the goals of the WRWC. One of the milestones in that grant is to explore incorporations for the WRWC.

- There are three primary options for the WRWC to consider as its structure:
1. Incorporation into a 501(c)3
 - The Boise River Enhancement Network, another water collaborative, incorporated in order to become eligible for BOR Phase 2 funding, which can fund implementation of projects per a management plan
 - Now, fiscal sponsors of water collaboratives are eligible to apply for Phase 2 funding; the NGOs think that the WRWC should consider Phase 2 funding at some point to implement projects
 - If the WRWC wanted to incorporate, would also need a formalized mission, member list, rules for decision-making, etc.

2. State-sanctioned watershed council

- The Henry's Fork Watershed Council is an example and was sanctioned by a state resolution through the legislature; one benefit is that it encourages state participation
- The Henry's Fork Watershed Council is jointly managed by the Henry's Fork Foundation and the Henry-Madison irrigation district
- It doesn't implement projects, but endorses projects

3. Collaborative structure

- Various collaboratives in Idaho, different structures and leadership
 - Often have legislative support or a convener
 - Commonly have a membership list, rules for decision-making, and a plan or identification of issues to work on
- To date, Wood River Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and Trout Unlimited have facilitated the WRWC. We agree that a more diverse representation on the 'steering committee' or 'facilitation committee' could better meet the needs of the group. This could be comprised of stakeholder representation within the WRWC.
- The NGOs also agree that a steering committee could recommend rules for decision-making, meeting agendas, and a watershed plan to direct projects. The NGOs would be members of the steering committee and continue to provide administrative support to the WRWC.

Discussion

- Larry feels like the WRWC has functioned well so far, and the role of the WRWC going forward may become more clear if and when a plan is adopted by the advisory committee. Through advisory committee meetings, we will have a better idea of how the basin functions and how water will be conjunctively administered. We currently don't have a determination of an area of common groundwater supply. **Suggested that we try to find a representative of economic development in the WRWC.**
- Cooper agreed that the role of the WRWC could change per a management plan adopted by the advisory committee. There is a target date of April 1, 2021 for a resolution.
- Sarah offered that a diverse steering committee could be helpful for the WRWC going forward
- Chris agreed that a diverse platform was beneficial to the watershed

Groundwater Management Area Advisory Committee Update – Pat McMahon, Cooper Brossy, Carl Pendleton (30 min)

- Pat stated that the advisory committee is moving very fast and that the WRWC surface water prediction tool will help administer a management plan
- Cooper added that the technical experts had made a lot of headway and the group is moving forward with that information. One of the Director's criteria to become an advisory committee member was the willingness to participate on the proposed schedule.
- Carl stated that the committee needs to start thinking about solutions past the information and education phase, which has been the primary focus of meetings so far. The stakeholders are in a place to communicate. In a couple of meetings, the discussion should focus on injury and solutions.

D45 Diversion Project Update – John Wright, Justin Stevenson (15 min)

- John reviewed the issue with fish passage at the D45 headgate – the concrete structure originally constructed to divert water into the headgate has collected gravel behind and creates a 5 – 8 ft drop during most of fall and winter.
- This summer, they also noticed that the concrete structure was failing and a safety issue; water delivery has been consistent because of other instream work each year
- A group of folks from D45, Trout Unlimited and the City of Bellevue has been researching alternatives to the concrete structure
- They are looking at options for fish passage, which may include replacing the structure
- Structure removal is an option as long as water delivery is still met; maybe a series of drop structures
- Biota and JUB engineers are looking at solutions
- John called the NRCS to inquire about support and funding; the NRCS would want to look at the entire D45 system, inefficiencies, and ways to improve delivery
- Another related item is the consideration of ditch lining along the Bypass canal – need to figure out where it would be beneficial to line
- One hurdle with the D45 headgate is the two different irrigation districts (Triangle and D45)
- Greg suggested that studies on ditch loss and recharge in Silver Creek could be beneficial to identify places for canal lining and recharge

Next Meeting: January 8, 2021, 10 am – Predictive Flow Model Presentation by Kendra Kaiser, BSU