



Walla Walla Watershed Management Partnership

For Fish. For Farms. For Everyone.

Water Resource Panel Meeting Minutes

Date: December 12, 2011

Time: 9:00AM-12:00PM

Location: WWCC Water and Environmental Center, 500 Tausick Way, Walla Walla, WA

Panel Members Present: Rick Henry, Paul LaRiviere, Greg Kinsinger, Victoria Leuba (by phone), Gary James (by phone), and Jerry Anhorn.

Staff Present: Cathy Schaeffer and Chris Hyland.

Others Present: Bill Neve, Chris Marks (by phone), Greg Farrens, Judith Johnson, Kay Mead.

Introductions around the table occurred, and the Water Resource Panel (WRP) meeting sign-in sheet was passed.

Updates: Chris Hyland provided an update to the group on the status of stream gauges that were being funded by the Washington Department of Ecology, and the possibility of reducing their support for these gauges. Further discussion will be held on this with the local groups that are interested in keeping these stream gauges operating. This will be discussed at the next RTT meeting in Dayton, December 20.

Action Items: None.

Discussion Items: Extensive discussion was held regarding The Drought Response Plan. First it was determined that it should be called "Critical Low Flow" Plan. This will reflect that it will only deal with extremely low flow situations where there is the actual threat of ESA listed fish being killed. WRP members felt there was not enough time or money to deal with just lower flow levels, unless it was an extremely urgent situation. The term "Critical Low Flow" will be used to provide the local entities the flexibility to provide a declaration independent of what the state entities would do. As state entities always use the term "drought" in their terminology, this will prevent confusion between what is a local declaration versus that emanating from the state (Oregon or Washington). Rick Henry will develop the existing data to give the percentage of how often these "Critical Low Flows" occur (based upon the criteria developed by the three fisheries co-managers), so a water user will have an idea of the likelihood of these scenarios occurring. As to whether a Critical Low Flow designation could be for just part or for all of the entire basin, it was determined by the WRP that it will be for the entire basin. And this would trigger all actions prescribed across the whole basin, not in a particular sub-basin of the watershed.

As to who actually decides when a local critical low flow declaration is made, this will happen first with the three fisheries co-managers (Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation). They will also use field reports from their staff to supplement the data on flows and snowpack to make that determination. Then they will bring a recommendation to the WRP. The WRP will seek a delegation of authority from the Walla Walla Watershed Management Partnership (Partnership) Board so they can make this declaration on their own in an efficient timeframe, without actually having to seek Board approval.

As to whom will actually negotiate the transactions with water users, it was determined that the Partnership should do so for the Washington portion of the basin, and The Freshwater Trust would be approached to serve this role in Oregon. And these same entities will make these contacts when the actual water is needed during a declared Critical Low Flow period.

After making these decisions, the WRP then considered how to approach the irrigation community on crafting these agreements. It will be critical to get their feedback on how to frame these negotiations. Three lists were developed at this point in the meeting: Which irrigators to invite to the next WRP meeting to gain their feedback, a list of tools to use for actions during a Critical Low Flow period, and questions to place in front of the irrigation community.

The next meeting of the WRP will take place January 17-20. The meeting adjourned at 11:55 AM.