

SUMMARY NOTES

HARNEY BASIN WETLANDS INITIATIVE MEETING: ALL PARTNERS

WEDNESDAY MAY 30, 2018 9 AM-3 PM

Location: Harney County Education Service District 25 Fairview Heights, Burns OR

Action Items:

- Convene communications meeting to draft of how to approach the topic of introducing the ‘drain the lake’ alternative. Is this time sensitive? (Bruce Taylor volunteered to spearhead convening the meeting)
- Add Peter Pearsall to communications committee
- Put together funding proposal / items for discussion for September meeting (Chris, Esther, Ken, Brenda)
- Send email to OWEB to follow up on monitoring funds, let them know interest. Esther, Jason/James, Bob/Theresa, find out timeline & organize meeting depending on timeline.
- Send announcement for letters of interest for SONEC easements (from Ed Contreras)

Introductions, partner updates, etc.

The meeting opened with a round of introductions of all that were present and general updates from partners.

Water Planning update

Brenda Smith and Chris Colson gave background information and updates on the Community Based Water Planning effort underway in Harney County. Discussion included areas of impact, different working groups contributing to the plan, ways that the water planning effort could potentially impact the work HBWI is doing.

Chad Karges mentioned a potential hindrance to the HBWI's work in the event that the water planning effort results in landowners/public disengaging from ‘collaborative’ efforts if things get controversial and people stop participating.

OWEB Board Tour Recap

Brenda Smith gave a description of OWEB's board meeting tour where HBWI partners gave presentations on the status of HBWI work and the Agricultural Research Station / OSU gave a presentation about work being done regarding Sage Grouse including CCAA's. Tour was well received. It was noted that this success story is a good example of our communications work starting to show results.

Bird Festival Stakeholder Engagement Recap

Provided an overview of outreach efforts associated with the Migratory Bird Festival which included restoration birding tours (one of which was available for locals only), Audubon society activities, Friends of the Malheur Refuge booth, etc. Several activities were targeted toward youth including the Fair in the Field event (middle school classes), Decoy painting, and egg hunt.

Introducing new Audubon staff member

Teresa Wicks was recently hired as the Eastern Oregon Field Representative to help bridge the urban/rural divide and have a more permanent presence (by Audubon) in the area.

High Desert Partnership Communications Coordinator turnover and new position (Ecological Coordinator)

The announcement that Melissa Speeg has accepted another position was made. The position has already been interviewed for and filled in hopes of making a seamless transition. The High Desert Partnership is also looking to create a new ‘ecological coordinator’ position to work across all the ongoing ecological initiatives in Harney County.

Announcement: Ed Contreras is sending a request for letters of interest for conservation easements in the SONEC region. HDP will send out announcement to all partners to share with interested parties.

Financial Report and Status of FIP Grants – Midpoint of Biennium 2 and FIP (year 3 of 6)

- 6 grants in biennium 1 (there was carryover due to the conservation easement allocation)
- Current grants include diversion dam replacements, stakeholder engagement (mostly capacity, but Audubon and Wetland Conservancy contributing), Predictive light model for Malheur lake, additional technicians for current work.
- In Sept. of 2017 the aquatic health subcommittee/Malheur Lake working group met to discuss updated project needs based on new information learned. (Things that were cut included: egg electroshocking study, immigration/emigration study involving PIT tag arrays in the Silvies River/Malheur Lake (25K), others?)
- **To be noted:** There has been a systematic approach to cutting and adding projects based on what we have learned since the original FIP application.

There was discussion of on-farm water delivery improvement funds (the \$ could be spent, but should wait for NRCS to be present to discuss reallocating any of these funds)

In summary we have about **\$100,000 left that is unallocated** to a project currently in Bi-2 (excluding the conservation easement funding, which will require a decision on how to best utilize those funds soon)

Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Updates – Dave Banks

The decision by ODFW regarding fish passage requirement for diversion structure replacements on the Silvies River was to require that passage be included in the replacement of the structure with a mechanism for excluding passage currently (to prevent carp movement), but the ability to allow passage in the event carp are controlled.

Chad K.(Q): Was there discussion about building dams that you could go back and add a fish ladder at a later date?

Chris C.(A): Yes, that was discussed but it was not well received both in Salem (ODFW) or by the Ducks Unlimited engineers. It would be difficult to add a fish ladder after the fact – easiest to include on original dam installation (would need to build more robust concrete to re-excavating everything later to add fish ladder – drives up cost)

Redband Trout Plan – update and rationale for releasing plan

Dave provided background information about why ODFW is releasing the plan with an explanation of the laws/rules/vision for the department. (to provide resources for current and future utilization, etc.) ODFW's native fish policy is made of different plans prioritized by threatened/sensitive species (redband trout being state sensitive) The plan has been in development for many years now.

Requirements of a plan include these elements:

Identify a Species Management Unit (SMU), description of desired status and current status of populations, identify limiting factors and methods to reduce them.

It should be noted that everything is voluntary in the plan. It identifies potential limiting factors to redband trout but doesn't mandate anything. The plan identifies the need for ODFW to partner with willing participants to reduce limiting factors.

There is work being done to do a population persistence analysis for redband trout in eastern Oregon which includes the likelihood of drought impacts on redband trout – identifies different populations and assesses their risks.

Plan is not currently being proposed to be adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, waiting for a later date after discussing further with stakeholders about concerns, etc.

Communications Update

There are 2 kinds of communications: stakeholder engagement (outreach) AND internal communication (such as basecamp.)

Update on Wet Meadows Work – Esther Lev & Tony Svejcar

Research Update:

Jess Wenick started this work (state & transition model) to help see change over time with varying conditions (vegetation management and water fluctuation). Jess' work was too complicated and needed simplified to something landowners / managers would use.

Esther read Dustin Johnson's research abstract: goal 4 (enhance and maintain terrestrial habitats to benefit migratory birds & diverse assemblage of other wildlife species, etc...)

Basic idea that this is a managed system - how is the best way to manage the resources to get the desired outcome. Rakebunch haying & grazing vs. bailing vs. standing grazing, etc. & how those different options affect habitat conditions & desired status. Trying to figure out the best way to manage the land in varying water conditions.

Peter(Q): Will the studies that are underway be able to answer the questions you were looking to answer?

Esther(A): Some of them will be answered, but there have been new questions & ideas that we should investigate.

Where they are in the process:

They have data entered & are now starting to analyze. Looking to do cluster analysis to start to identify plant species composition and make that into a simplified model to bring to landowners

Theresa(Q): Is there any post nesting monitoring (more birds doesn't necessarily mean more breeding success) could this be a sink?

Gary Ivy(A): There is some data on nesting (there is lots of data in the refuge system that may not be fully analyzed) – but not much on post-nesting success.

There is a dataset on nesting done in late 70's (Harney Basin Study) when a reservoir was being proposed.

Bob: One of the things we need to think about is to sync this up with the CCP efforts and how this works with that.

Chad: We need to remember that HBWI is bigger and includes additional aspects than CCP.

Tony: When doing the lit review, it was interesting to find that sometime between '78 and '93 there was a total shift from native meadow to meadow foxtail. All the literature was done on native meadow, no work done on current species on the landscape.

Landowner stakeholder engagement

Peter(Q): How does this tie into easements?

Esther(A): There is not a land trust that exists here, etc.

We've brought together landowners & discussed their values and how they discuss wet meadow management.

Has been doing some 1on1 conversations with landowners: Outcomes were,

- No one was ready to sign up right now
- Landowners viscerally connected to the wet meadows – deep ties to the land
- Didn't know much about easements but might be willing to learn more about it.
- Thinking about doing some work with ARS with Financial planners to have easement discussions (how do we support these conversations about easements)
- Some landowners may be interested in alternative management options, but maybe it's not a traditional easement
- TNC, Willamette partnership, put in grant to explore other options than easements to do something similar.

Tony: Landowners may be willing to do shorter term commitments – but not traditional easement in perpetuity.

Group Discussion:

Ed Contreras: we will know by July what projects we will be funding through RCPP (if we have one in Harney County)

Bruce T.: We are a little out of sync with the social side and with the funding piece as far as easements go. We need to be producing something of value at the end of the FIP and how we get there might not be with a traditional easement.

Peter H.: Is there any anxiety with OWEB about setting aside the easement money?

Brenda S., Chris C., & Esther L.: There is flexibility and they've been understanding, but I think the longer we wait the more uncomfortable the funder will get...

Eric: We will try to continue to be as flexible as possible. We want to ensure that if there is a project that comes through it meets the constitutional requirements for lottery \$. If we do want to reallocate some of the \$ earmarked for acquisition it would be a relatively simple process...

Esther: I think that later in the year (December) we should put together a proposal that states what we've learned, and where we think we should go from here based on that.

Gary Iy: Brought up outreach idea to expand carp derby day at refuge to a week-long community event to get more involvement and expand our audience. Volunteered Peter Pearsall to assist with this if its something we want to pursue.

Status on Grants – HBWI Project Implementation Efforts

Update on LiDAR – Need to hear from Zola Ryan w/ NRCS on Silver Creek Lidar updates (Lidar funded through the FIP) Lidar data from Silvies watershed and Malheur Refuge currently being utilized for FIP projects (James' Model,

Malheur Lake Restoration - Science integration and support for lake restoration – *Jason Dunham (slides from presentation can be found on basecamp)*

- Changed from focusing entirely on carp to restoring aquatic health
- There has been a change in ideology of restoration from restoring back to historical conditions to restoring for values and goods/services that are socially desirable.

What does success look like in terms of?

- Ecosystem services, Ecosystem vitality, Governance & Stakeholders

Evaluation of alternatives

- Carp control, lake management, economics, social conditions (social & economic conditions)
 - Outcomes:
 - Carp/limnology model = 'boundary object'
 - Model structure, data, assumptions

- o Adaptable based on monitoring
- o Defines success
- Social & economic analysis
 - o Bridges/barriers to progress
 - o Defines success in human terms
 - o Quantifies trade-offs among alternatives (economic inputs vs. realized outputs)

Shown graph of increasing cost with increasing complexity (more complex & uncertain the more expensive) - good to know more before pulling the trigger on an alternative

Things we need to know more about:

- Ecological – carp age/growth & capture methods specific to Malheur
- Limnological – turbidity/wind samples, nutrients in lake
- Social – public surveys, agent-based modeling
- Economic – Assessment of alternatives, non-market survey (cost-benefit trade-offs of different alternatives)

Update on ecosystem model work – James Pearson

- Will include climate change consideration (how it may change in the future)
- Adding lake fluctuation to carp model
- Finding hydro variables: (building hydro model)
- climate data (precipitation, snow, variability, etc.) – **2 variables came out on top to predicting lake size:** last years lake size & Blitzen river discharge (heavily influenced by snow pack on Steens)

Use it to identify thresholds and predict lake size a few months in advance. (hopefully this will help mobilize efforts in advance of ideal conditions for certain actions)

James touched on Tammy's work and the erosion chamber experiment upcoming (to answer how fast sediment falls out of water column), nutrient analysis, additional spatial sampling, etc.

Peter(Q): Recognizing that we have shifted our projects from the initial FIP application to what we are doing now based on new information learned. What do we need to do now to move forward?

Malheur Summit – report out – Chris Colson

Chris gave general updates about the Summit and the work that DU has been doing since then regarding feasibility investigations. All the information about the Summit can be found on basecamp including the work DU has been doing on feasibility.

Structure replacements – Chris Colson

Due to addition of fish passage to diversion replacements, we will be implementing one of the two that we planned for this fall and will be pushing back the 2nd one to next year. We will implement Tyler 1 diversion fall of 2018 and will push back the Sweek Dam to next year.

Lake Substrate Results – Chris Colson

Lake was not as homogenous as we expected, and we didn't find an impermeable clay lens (may suggest some amount of groundwater interaction, but more work needs to be done to confirm/deny this)

Next steps are to hone in on that.

Ken B.(Q): What would it take to get detailed mapping of lake substrate (sediment mapping)

Chris C.(A): He spent 1 day out there, so I think it would take 1 week of labor to get a better idea of the substrate.

Lake Transfer / Restoring Historical Hydrological Conditions / Lake Draining Alternative Discussion

Gary I.: I can see an option where you flip flop years between the center of Malheur Lake and Mud Lake to keep the shallow water longer & provide (hopefully) plant germination / habitat for birds.

Gary I.: Perhaps with all the diversions and groundwater pumping there is less frequent spillover from Malheur to Harney Lake and this would restore it to more historic conditions.

Chad K.: there's a sequencing of these things, where 1st you must understand if it's possible, 2nd what are the ecological effects, 3rd what is the social/economic outcome.

Teresa W.(Q): Any thought looking into how we would model a system dependent on human management?

Bob S.: I think we need to have a communication strategy about how we message this to people. How do we get this out there without having people freak out?

Chris C.: terminology is important: Drain the lake isn't the best verbiage.

Bob S.: I don't know if that's the best approach, because these are the topics that people will be interested in. Trying to cover up what it is with fancy words may backfire. Seem like we're trying to be misleading.

Bob S.: I think we could use this as an outreach opportunity – this will attract attention and could serve as a launching point for discussion to the public.

Gary I.: Framing this in a way that showcases the benefit to Harney Lake, restoring natural (historic) hydrology

Esther: Important to know what the audience and the intent is?

2:00 -2:45 Planning for future funding – Brenda Smith

- What are the funding needs?

Split this into TWO:

1. FIP Money

What to do with the extra 100K we have? What's the plan for the easement money?

Bruce: to add to complication, the easement \$'s were allocated assuming that we would have had a 1:1 federal match. So, we will need to take that into account when the time comes. Where will the match come from without those federal dollars?

Additional Funding Needs to be Considered:

- 1.Lake Soils (substrate characterization): This doesn't need additional \$ for biennium 2
- 2.Additional Social / Economic analysis. Economic cost/benefit analysis (David Kling's work).
- 3.Jason: Nutrient analysis could be a priority
- 4.Chris: Intended on taking money from the EQUIP line item (\$265,990) to fund fish ladder
- 5.Bob: Communications funding, if we get some additional programs going we may need more funding, so something to keep in mind. (project-oriented funding in the 25K range)
- 6.Esther: Potential funding for wildlife stuff (information / survey gathering) wildlife integration into vegetation work group

2. POST-FIP funding needs

- o What are the available funding opportunities going forward, including:
 - o FIP phase two – *Eric Hartstein*
 - o Haven't ruled out current FIP's from applying for future FIP funding, but the OWEB board hasn't officially taken a stance on it yet. But currently option is still on the table.
 - o Will likely be very competitive (10-11 applications for 2 FIP grants)

- o NAWCA – *Chris Colson*
 - What is holding us up is having 3 non-federal match partners of 100K+, we investigated this some last year and couldn't come up with the partners needed to be competitive.
- o Congressional
- Put together funding proposal / items for discussion for September meeting (Chris, Esther, Ken, Brenda)
- Send email to OWEB to follow up on monitoring funds, let them know interest (Ben). Esther, Jason/James, Bob/Theresa, find out timeline & organize meeting depending on timeline.
- It would be a good idea to include Robert/Ryan in this discussion.