

Meeting Summary

Subject: Deschutes Watershed Stakeholder Workgroup Meeting

Date/Time: Dec. 11, 2015, 1-3PM

Location: Thurston Regional Planning Council office
2424 Heritage Court SW, Suite A
Olympia, Wash. 98502

Attending: *Michael Burnham, Michael Ambroggi and Veena Tabbutt — Thurston Regional Planning Council; Charissa Waters — Thurston County; Chuck Lorenz, Sarah Moorehead; Amy Hatch-Winecka; Robin Buckingham; Scott Steltzner; Katrina Van Every; Adrienne Blackburn; Kristi Tausch; Greg Schundler; Lisa Dennis-Perez; Jaime Glasgow; Martin McCallum; Daniel Lihach; Wally Brown; John Pettit; Gretta “Lou” Guethlein.*

Waters kicked off the meeting by having each person around the table say his or her name and organization. She then provided a brief overview of the meeting agenda and other materials (binders, presentations, etc.).

The first item on the agenda was a presentation by Waters, which covered the project’s process, research, and plans for developing scenarios and recommendations.

Highlights of the presentation included the project team’s methodology for establishing current conditions in the watershed; the team used the state Department of Ecology’s watershed characterization methodology to establish current conditions and select the study area—which spans from the confluence of the Deschutes River and Spurgeon Creek southward to the border of Thurston and Lewis counties. Waters’ presentation also discussed the relationship between impervious surfaces and stream health. *See presentation in binders for additional details.*

Pettit asked whether the data presented pertain to the whole watershed or just the study area; Tabbutt noted that the data are for the whole watershed and will reflect the study area as the project moves toward analysis of scenarios. Pettit also asked whether the project team took into account LOTT’s reclaimed water study, which is now in the field work stage. He expressed wariness that the LOTT study would lead to aquifer injection of reclaimed water laden with pharmaceuticals and nitrogen. LOTT’s Dennis-Perez said this would not be the case; she agreed to provide the workgroup more information about the project.

Steltzner, who represents the Squaxin Island Tribe, followed Waters with a presentation about current and future scenarios for the Deschutes River Watershed (*see binder for full presentation*).

The presentation covered conditions needed for salmon survival, including habitat, water temperature and flows. The presentation included analysis of factors impacting flows (changes in seasonality and volume over time due to climate, development, agriculture), such as water withdrawals from wells.

Summary findings include:

- Development in our watersheds has negative consequences on fish species and other aquatic life
- The severity depends on which watershed and where it occurs
- Water withdrawals can directly remove water from stream that is needed during critical low flow periods.
- Increasing impervious surface:
 - Increases winter flows by intercepting ground recharge
 - Decreases summer flows by decreasing the amount of ground water available

Steltzner concluded his presentations with a list of actions that he contended would help mitigate the water/fish challenges he discussed:

- Some basins can't support more development- identify them
- Some reaches can't support more development- identify them
- Some basins can't support more water withdrawal- identify them
- Some reaches can't support more water withdrawal- identify them
- Do not drill wells in aquifers directly connected to streams
- Quantify the actual amount of water from exempt wells
- Ensure that all wells are metered
- Examine the issue of cluster development using exempt wells
- All impacts must be identified and appropriately mitigated
- True and meaningful cumulative impact analysis must be conducted for each project. Even "exempt" wells
- Gauging stations are needed on all streams of interest to accurately record conditions
- Ground water models are needed to truly analyze impacts

The next item on the agenda was a brief presentation about the survey TRPC and Thurston County conducted in June 2015. The survey asked watershed residents and property owners their views about water quality and quantity. To stay on schedule, however, stakeholders opted to skip the presentation and refer directly to the written survey analysis in their project binder.

Tabbutt then provided the workgroup an opportunity to discuss their initial hopes for and concerns about the project. Below is a list of questions asked and responses read aloud.

Question 1: What would a successful study look like to you? What do you hope is accomplished through this study?

Responses read aloud:

- Wants a project and recommendations that are “transparent,” “fair,” “realistic,” “enforceable,” and “practical”
- Wants something “visionary” that will mitigate challenges and improve water quality
- Wants engagement of diverse stakeholders and analysis of impacts of recommendations on the economy, public safety and the environment
- Wants inclusion of input from more residents amid the upper Deschutes
- Wants acknowledgement of the costs of recommended actions
- Wants recommendations that “might be politically difficult but achievable” (e.g., metering of exempt wells)
- Wants project to educate residents/users of the watershed about the environmental impact of their actions/choices
- Wants fact-based recommendations, not “pre-determined” ones ... Growth “will happen,” so the project should figure out how to accommodate it while protecting water quality
- Wants the workgroup to recommend County regulations that are “fair” to landowners
- Wants to incorporate “participatory GIS” that enables residents to map assets, challenges, opportunities
- Concerned about development and stormwater impacts
- Wants to use this as an opportunity to add value to the Deschutes TMDL
- Wants a “scientifically defensible” and “comprehensive” study.

Question 2: What are your concerns about this study?

Responses read aloud:

- Concerned there will be too much focus on wells and septic systems
- Concerned whether the study and recommendations will result in improved water quality and adequate water quantity for users (fish, folks, etc.)
- Concerned about our ability to improve water quality while there is growth
- Wants the project integrated with other planning efforts – concerned project will “sit on a shelf”
- Water “is not free” ... we need to protect our resources
- Wants this to tie into the TMDL
- This is a very complicated system. Growth and water consumption affect many users in many ways (cited the Steltzner presentation’s analysis of the increasing number of

permit-exempt wells in the County over the past half-century.) The project/workgroup needs to educate residents about the impacts of growth/importance of protecting water quality/quantity.

- Wary of this project eroding landowners' rights. There's room for some constructive actions, however, that allows for continued growth.
- Concerned whether we have the tools to make progress, given existing regulatory constraints/requirements (TMDL).
- Asked whether we are "brave enough" to make actions in the face of "non-science-based" pressure.
- Concerned whether small communities such as Rainier can afford to implement recommendations, whatever they may be. Small city, small budget.

Question 3: Anything else you would add?

- Wants inclusion of voluntary opportunities to work with landowners; such opportunities could utilize existing non-regulatory tools.
- Wants continued flexibility for landowners to manage their land and mitigate environmental impacts (instead of the regulators)

Tabbutt and Waters then queried the workgroup about what day/time would work best for a January workgroup meeting; noon-2PM on a Friday received support from most people. Waters will send out a Doodle poll with more options in hopes of choosing a date/time that works for all.

Tabbutt wrapped up the meeting by discussing the project's next steps:

January 2016: Second Workgroup Meeting. Workgroup members will give staff team direction on "possible futures" or scenarios.

March 2016: Third Workgroup Meeting. Workgroup members will give staff team direction on preliminary scenario results, and direction on what to move forward for the first public meeting.

Input will likely lead to new scenarios.

April 2016. First Public Meeting. Will include project overview and results of the scenarios.

Input will likely lead to refined scenarios.

May 2016: Fourth (Final) Workgroup Meeting. Workgroup members will give input on scenarios.

Workgroup may recommend a preferred scenario.

June 2016: Second Public Meeting. Will include presentation of final scenario results.

May lead to recommendation of a preferred scenario.

June 2016: Briefing to the Board of County Commissioners.

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