



Oregon

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Water Resources Commission

FROM: Brenda Bateman, Technical Services Division Administrator
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SUBJECT: Agenda Item L, August 22, 2014
Water Resources Commission

Informational Update on Developing Guidelines for Place-Based IWRS: Workshops and Public Comment Results

I. Introduction

Oregon's Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRS) recommends helping local communities undertake place-based, integrated water resources planning (Recommended Action 9.A). During this agenda item, staff will share the results of workshops held this past spring, and public comments submitted to the IWRS Project Team on this topic.

II. Background

Oregon's natural resource agencies have committed to developing guidance, technical assistance, and financial resources to help further "place-based" approaches to water resources management, planning, and implementation.

In March, a [Discussion Paper](#) was released through the IWRS Listserv and posted to the project website. In the paper, the Department reviewed regional or locally-initiated water planning programs in three other states – Washington, California, and Texas. The Department posed a series of questions to the public in order to design a process where local communities can voluntarily work together to meet current and future instream and out-of-stream water needs, including water quantity, water quality, and ecosystem needs. Stakeholders and partners were encouraged to host a workshop discussion with Department staff. In addition, the public or interested parties could submit written comments to the Department by June 30, 2014.

III. Workshops

Since March, the Department has conducted several workshops and presentations. Partner organizations offered to host these discussions, adding it to their regular monthly meeting or extending an invitation to others within their community. Altogether, 19 workshops were held, reaching more than 200 participants.

In addition to workshops, the Department provided briefings to the Water Resources Commission's Groundwater Advisory Committee, Oregon Association of Clean Water Agencies, State-Tribal Natural Resources Cluster Group, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's Permitting Section, and during the WISE ("Water for Irrigation, Streams, & the Economy") Project Tour in May. The Association of Oregon Counties included a panel presentation and discussion on this topic during its Spring Conference in Hood River. The American Water Works Association's (AWWA) Water Resources Committee organized a webinar, providing Department staff an opportunity to share background information with AWWA members on the Strategy, with an overview of place-based planning.

As was the case during our May 29 workshop with the Water Resources Commission, workshops typically ran for two hours, beginning with an overview of the Integrated Water Resources Strategy and a side-by-side comparison of key elements from other regional or local water planning programs highlighted in the March 10 Discussion Paper. Department staff spent time focusing the discussion on the following:

- How should the state set the geographic planning boundaries?
- What should the guidelines specify for stakeholder and public involvement?
- What is the role of state agencies in a place-based planning process?
- What type of technical or financial resources would be needed?

Participants inquired as to whether local, regional or watershed-based planning efforts occurring in other states have been successful. The Washington Department of Ecology described their success as varied across the state. Watershed planning groups in Washington tended to be more successful, in terms of project development and keeping participants at the table, when state agency staff played a strong facilitative role. In Washington, state agencies, usually the Washington Department of Ecology, participate as members of watershed planning groups at the request of local planning partners.

Attachment 1 of this staff report provides a summary of what was heard during these workshops, as well as public comments that were sent directly to the Department. Included below is a summary of common themes heard during the workshops and via public comment:

Geographic Boundaries

Many of the Department's drainage basins are too large for place-based conversations, although watershed-based boundaries are preferred over political boundaries. Participants placed an emphasis on using existing boundaries, where possible, knowing water-related information would be easier to access. Allowing place-based groups to select the scale of planning seemed favorable, so long as some formal review or consultation occurs with the state. Such a process would need to include a mechanism to evaluate the inclusiveness of the planning group members as well.

Governance, Stakeholder & Public Involvement

The process needs to be as inclusive as possible. There are a host of organizations working at the local level, such as watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, and city and county advisory committees that should be involved. Participants recommended coordinating development of the place-based guidelines with the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's "Long Term Investment Strategy," and "Focused Investment" process.

Voluntary versus Mandatory

Several comments were made regarding whether local entities are already required to complete this type of water planning (e.g., water system master plans, water quality management area plans). Development of a place-based IWRS is completely voluntary; the state is not requiring any one community to undertake such a planning process. During workshops, the Department also re-iterated that developing a place-based IWRS will not jeopardize existing water rights. Developing a place-based IWRS provides a state-supported forum or mechanism for resolving long-standing water resources issues.

Existing Basin Plans

Concerns were raised regarding the possibility of modifying the Department's basin programs and associated administrative rules. Participants felt a place-based IWRS should not focus solely on updating or revising the state's basin programs. Participants did acknowledge the lack of information in some basin programs (e.g., some lack groundwater classifications). A place-based process could provide needed information in such instances. A place-based IWRS could make recommendations regarding changes to an existing rule or statute; however, the plan itself cannot alter existing rules or state authorities.

Role of State Agencies

State agencies should play a role, participating in the discussion. Some felt technical assistance should be the primary role. Others felt that the State needs to play a strong leadership role to help guide and encourage entities to participate in place-based planning efforts. Workshop participants also suggested that the guidelines should call for a convener and facilitator, defining the characteristics of both, rather than specifying who should play these roles.

Funding

Participants suggested that the state should strongly encourage a place-based IWRS group to develop a self-funding mechanism. The State should not be responsible for paying all of the costs associated with locally-led planning efforts. The State and local partners should show how funds will be available at each stage of the process (conducting studies, developing a plan, project implementation). Individual or small projects should not get lost as part of developing a place-based IWRS. The ability to bundle projects (water quantity, water quality, and ecosystem projects) was advocated by some participants.

IV. Public Comments

The Department also provided an opportunity for the public to submit comments directly to the IWRS Project Team. Comments were requested by June 30, 2014. Public comments are included as Attachment 2 of this staff report.

The Oregon Cattlemen's Association, Oregon Farm Bureau, and Water for Life requested an extension of the public comment period, knowing a workshop was being tentative scheduled in July. A workshop was held on July 21 in Baker City, hosted by the Oregon Cattlemen's Association. Participants in the workshop were given an opportunity to submit formal public comment for another week. No additional comments were received. Comments made during that workshop are included in the attachment.

V. Conclusion

Over the next several months, the Department will work with its partner agencies to revise the guidelines, and begin preparing any information or data that could support development of a place-based IWRS. Department staff plan to provide revised guidelines to the Commission during the Fall 2014 meeting.

The Department has developed a budget proposal for the 2015-17 biennium to support development of place-based IWRSs. The package includes grant funds of \$750,000 and two positions to serve as part of the Governor's Regional Solutions team. If funded, these positions will help facilitate and coordinate the development of place-based IWRSs.

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Attachment 1: What We Heard: Summary of Workshop Input and Public Comments
Attachment 2: Public Comments submitted to the IWRS Project Team