

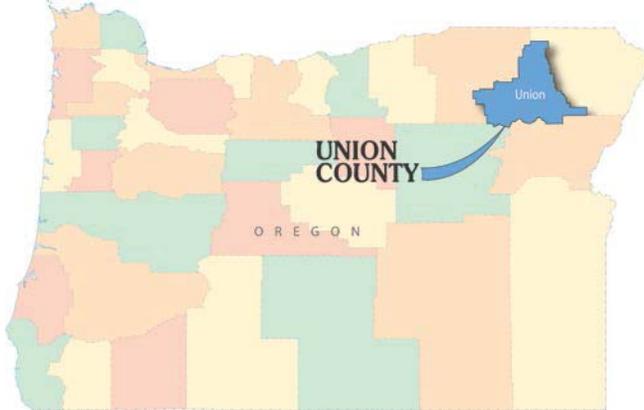


A. Cover Page

Applicant Information

Convener

Name: Mark Davidson
Position: Union County Commissioner
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Phone: (541) 963-1001
Email: mdavidson@union-county.org



Location

The planning area is the Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed located in northeast Oregon. The watershed boundary closely aligns with the boundary of Union County.



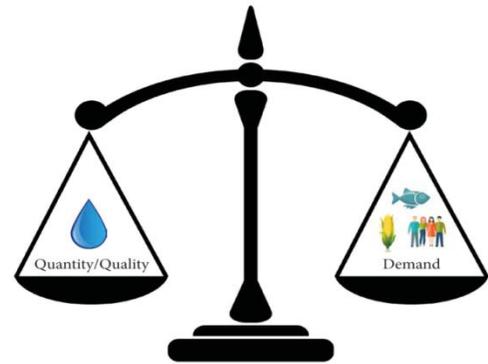
Key Project Partners

Key partners in this project will include Union County, the convener, as well as partners from each of the three major water resource demand groups: agricultural, municipal, and ecological. Please see Section C of this letter of interest for more information about the roles and responsibilities of each project partner. Project partners are excited about the

opportunity to engage in a holistic planning effort for this watershed.

Executive Summary

The Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed is a vital ecosystem that supports ranchers, farmers, and urban residents as well as an array of fish and wildlife species. Union County is convening a place-based integrated water resources planning effort to evaluate all demands on water resources within the watershed compared to available water resources.



This will be a collaborative effort among a balanced representation of local organizations that have a vested interest in the area’s water resources.

While there is a significant body of research on water quality, quantity, and ecological demands in the watershed, there is a lack of seasonal-level analysis to evaluate whether the demands are aligned with available water quality and quantity.

This effort will analyze water quality and quantity versus demand for each week of the year to determine when water quantity and quality exceed demand and when demand exceeds available supply. Analyzed data will be used to develop strategies to balance water demand with supply. This may include improvements in water storage, conveyance, treatment, and reuse. The planning effort will evaluate, on a watershed scale, possible water resources management strategies to meet the demands, and possible improvements to maximize water use efficiencies. The objective is to have a complete document outlining available water resources in the watershed compared to the demands on each resource that will serve as a “roadmap” to best align the demands with the available resources for an integrated and sustainable system.



B. Description of the Convener

Convener



Union County Commissioner Mark Davidson will serve as the convener for this planning effort. He has a demonstrated ability to bring diverse groups together to solve problems. Mark brings decades of experience in community planning, collaborative decision making, and balancing water needs.

Mark has called Union County home since 1971. He is a former La Grande mayor and city councilor and has served on the La Grande Planning Commission and the Urban Renewal Advisory Commission. He presently serves on the Wallowa Union Railroad Authority Board of Directors and is the president of the Union County Economic Development Corporation. Mark is active in the Association of Oregon Counties, serving on the Legislative Committee as co-chair of the Public Lands & Natural Resources Steering Committee and as second vice president. He was first elected as a commissioner in 2008 and is serving his second term on the Board of Commissioners. Mark has also served on the board of the Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW), an important stakeholder for this effort.

Mark and other Union County commissioners are trusted and respected in the County. They have a holistic interest in the watershed and are intimately involved in water planning and resource management efforts, always seeking to balance in-stream and out-of-stream needs. Most recently, the commissioners have been involved in the rehabilitation of Gekeler Slough (a Catherine Creek tributary) to reduce flooding and fish stranding through a Surface Water Management Plan.

As an elected official, Mark is and will continue to be responsive to the needs of those across the Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed. He is excited about this opportunity to bring together competing resource interests to develop a collaborative approach for sustainable watershed planning.

Convener Resources

When work efforts extend beyond the capacity of Union County's staff, the County regularly contracts with local consultants. To facilitate this planning effort, the convener is proposing to utilize Anderson Perry & Associates, Inc. (AP), located in Union County, as well as other professional resources as needed.

AP is a full-service civil engineering, surveying, and natural resources firm that has provided services to Union County, municipalities, agricultural users, and resource agencies since 1975. AP's La Grande office has a diversified staff of 45 engineers, biologists, resource scientists, graphic designers, and communication professionals who reside in Union County.

AP has completed dozens of water-related projects for every community in Union County, including water system plans, water/wastewater system improvement projects, drinking water projects, storage reservoirs, well drilling, and aquifer storage and recovery.

AP has built a network of relationships in the Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed's water management community. AP has developed excellent working relationships with the local soil and water conservation district (SWCD), the watershed council, Indian tribes, and irrigators. AP has provided planning, facilitating, surveying, permitting, design, and construction engineering services on 45 water resources projects in the Grande Ronde River Subbasin, including stream restoration, habitat enhancement, bank stabilization, culvert replacements, levee removals, and fish passage improvements. AP regularly works with landowners to improve fish passage, conserve water, restore riparian habitat, and improve the efficiency and long-term viability of irrigation and livestock watering systems. AP has a history of finding solutions that are mutually beneficial to the environment and the landowner.

The leaders of this planning effort are tied to this watershed and are vested in the outcome of this process, which will improve planning facilitation. Individuals assisting Mark Davidson with facilitation include Brett Moore, P.E. (AP), Scott Hartell (Union County), and Randy Jones (Northeast Oregon Regional Solutions Center). See Attachment C for Convener Resource Skills.



C. Integration, Partnerships, and Stakeholder Engagement

Mark Davidson will engage partners and stakeholders in this process using the strong existing relationships he has with these entities. See Attachment A: Data Collection and Basin Planning History.

The list of invitees to the place-based planning process was determined based on the need to bring all major partners (i.e., water rights holders) together with major influencers (stakeholders with water resources expertise). The list below represents organizations with very diverse interests. The engagement of these entities is critical in obtaining data-driven results in this planning process. This is not an exhaustive list; other stakeholders are anticipated to come to the table as new issues emerge during the planning process. Attachment B includes contact information for each of our partners as well as letters of support.

Public support is critical for a successful planning effort. A public outreach program will be pursued. See Attachment D: Outreach Strategy.

Place-Based Partners

Place-based partners include water users with water rights in the basin. This will be considered the decision-making group. These groups and their anticipated roles are listed below:

- **Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).** Agency hydrologists and biologists will share data on in-stream flow conditions and ecological health needs.
- **Cities of La Grande, Union, Cove, Elgin, Imbler, Summerville, and Island City.** Cities will assist with collecting data on municipal water needs and timing.
- **Union County Farm Bureau.** The Bureau represents individual landowners with water rights in the basin. They will work to determine water needs and assess areas for efficiency improvements.

Place-Based Stakeholders

Place-based stakeholders include those with interest and expertise in water resources management in the

basin. They will provide input and assist with decision-making. These groups and their anticipated roles are listed below:

- **GRMW.** The GRMW will supply data on in-stream conditions and prioritized restoration needs in the basin.
- **Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.** Scientists will contribute climate change data and assist with ecological needs evaluation.
- **Union SWCD.** The SWCD will assist with obtaining landowner information.
- **Legislative Representatives (U.S. Congressman Walden and U.S. Senator Wyden).** Political representatives will be engaged as necessary through this process.
- **Northeast Oregon Regional Solutions Center.** The Regional Solutions Center will assist in developing collaborative support for the planning process.
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).** Biologists will provide existing information on ecological needs and assist ODFW with in-stream analysis.
- **National Marine Fisheries Service.** Biologists will provide existing information on ecological needs and assist ODFW with in-stream analysis.
- **U.S. Forest Service.** Rangers will share forest plan research including watershed-level data.
- **Oregon Cattleman's Association.** The association will assist with engaging ranchers to assess water needs.
- **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).** The NRCS will provide information on in-stream and agricultural needs.
- **Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Office.** OSU will provide information and assist with developing agricultural efficiency options.
- **Union County Economic Development Corporation (UCEDC).** UCEDC will assist with resource characterization and solution planning phases of the process.
- **Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD).** OWRD will provide water resources data and guidance/technical assistance during the planning process.



D. Statement of Need

Water Issues and Concerns

The Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed is part of the Grande Ronde River Subbasin in northeast Oregon. This system includes the Grande Ronde River, Catherine Creek, and their numerous tributaries, which eventually drain to the Columbia River Basin.

Water supply shortages for in-stream and out-of-stream uses currently exist and will be intensified by climate change and increases in future demand. The watershed is home to numerous Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed species including Chinook, steelhead, and bull trout. The watershed is also home to farmers, ranchers, and municipal water users. Sixty percent of the watershed is private and federal forestland, while forty percent is agricultural; 794 farms and ranches are located in the watershed.

The planning effort will evaluate, on a basin-wide scale, possible water resources management strategies to meet the demands, and possible improvements to maximize water use efficiencies.

A Successful Pilot Project

The Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed would provide an excellent pilot project, because it has successfully served in this capacity in the past. In 1992, the Grande Ronde River Subbasin was selected by the Northwest Power Planning Council as the model watershed project in Oregon. Since then, the GRMW has conducted award-winning community consensus building and habitat restoration work.

The planning scale is appropriate for a pilot project, because the watershed boundaries are inclusive of water demands and supply throughout the planning area. Many residents of the Grande Ronde Valley have family histories here that trace back multiple generations; residents are vested in working toward sustainable water use practices.

Our integrated water resources strategy would focus on two basic areas. The first is in-stream needs and ecological health components of the watershed. A significant body of research is available for analysis because of the diligent efforts of the GRMW and

ODFW. This research includes data collection efforts, restoration projects, and monitoring of results. Water quality, surface water flow, and in-stream ecological health are factors with established restoration goals.

The second area is out-of-stream needs. Although significant information is available on seasonal water use and water availability, there has not been a basin-wide study completed to quantify periods of excess and shortages and what basin-wide strategies could be developed to use excess water or fill gaps.

We are excited for the opportunity to receive funding to bring all the existing studies together into a balanced plan. We anticipate that, during the compilation of this data, other issues may surface that will need to be addressed in this planning process.

Existing in-stream/ecological data and out-of-stream data will be evaluated in this planning effort using a water balance model to understand the periods when water supply and quality exceed demands and when these components fall short of demands. Water management strategies will be evaluated to try to balance the equation. This planning process will assess:

Groundwater

Aquifer recharge is a documented problem, as numerous communities, including the City of La Grande, have switched from using surface water to groundwater. Agricultural wells have declining water levels.

Surface Water

Seasonal variation in the quantity and quality of surface water flows will be modeled.

Water Quality

Most water quality concerns in the basin are related to water quantity and habitat modification. Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) completed in the basin will provide additional water quality information. These concerns would be documented seasonally.

User Needs

Farms and ranches depend on water availability to irrigate crops. Municipalities must provide clean drinking water for residents. Streams must contain sufficient water quantity and quality to sustain a healthy ecosystem. Determining the balance of water needs and availability is vital.



E. Proposed Approach

The approach uses the five steps of place-based planning.

Step 1: Build a Collaborative and Integrated Process (Months 0 to 6)



Using this letter of interest as a framework, the convener will facilitate the team drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) clarifying roles and responsibilities of partners. This MOU will include a work plan and schedule. Meetings will be held for the partners, including OWRD, to finalize the work plan and schedule for the planning process outlined in this letter of interest.

Deliverable: MOU, Work Plan, and Schedule

Step 2: Characterize Water Resources, Water Quality, and Basin Conditions (Months 6 to 12)



Supply Analysis: Existing data will be collected to document surface water flows, ecological conditions, and groundwater/aquifer availability on a weekly basis. The team will work closely with the Oregon

Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to collect existing water quality data and determine its validity. On a weekly basis, the quantity and quality of water available in the basin will be identified. Existing data on ecological and anthropogenic conditions will also be collected. Preliminary challenges and opportunities in each area will be described. The stakeholders will meet to discuss the draft report prior to finalization.

Deliverable: Existing Conditions Report

Step 3: Quantify Existing and Future Needs/Demands (Months 9 to 15)



Demand Analysis: Information will be gathered from each partner to determine current water needs by season and volume.

Agricultural demands will be reviewed using water rights and using a determination of crop consumptive use on all irrigated lands.

Municipal demands, along with future demand forecasts, will be obtained from the cities.

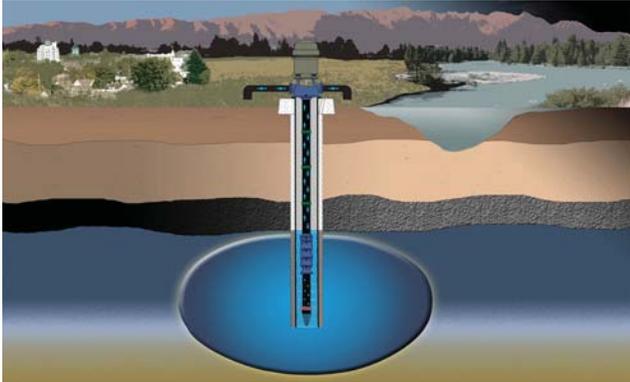
Ecological demands will be obtained from ODFW and other resource agencies.

This information will be used to create a model of weekly demand (quantity and quality) for water in each of these areas. The stakeholders will meet to discuss the draft report prior to finalization.

Deliverable: Water Resources Needs Summary Report



Step 4: Develop Integrated Solutions for Meeting Long-Term Water Needs (Months 15 to 21)



This step will include developing, evaluating, and selecting management strategy alternatives for aligning the available resource with the demands. We anticipate there will be many varying opinions about solutions to water resource issues. We believe that this will foster a diversity of ideas beneficial to the planning process. The viability of ideas will be assessed using a pre-agreed-upon benefits matrix.

The team has a history of developing innovative solutions to difficult issues. Representative strategies that build upon existing research may include:

Water Reuse: An example strategy to meet ecological water demands for the Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area involved using treated wastewater effluent from the City of La Grande instead of surface water. This allowed the surface water rights for those properties to be left in stream. This could serve as a model strategy for other areas within the watershed.

Water Exchange: In certain areas, agriculture uses cool, clean groundwater to fulfill a demand that could utilize warm, nutrient-rich water. It would be more beneficial to salmonids to have access to the cool, clean water during certain times of the year while providing warm water for agricultural uses.

Water Storage: Farmers and ranchers contend with floods in the spring and droughts in the summer, while fish have abundant cool water in the spring, yet experience low water quantity and quality in the summer. Innovative storage solutions, including

aquifer recharge, aquifer storage and recovery, and off-channel storage, could be considered.

This integrated solutions report is anticipated to be a living document that is representative of our vision, but also contains the flexibility to change as new needs emerge from the stakeholder groups.

The stakeholders will meet to discuss the draft report prior to finalization.

Deliverable: Integrated Solutions Report (see Attachment E: Report Outline)

Step 5: Plan Adoption and Implementation (Months 21 to 24)



Each partner will agree to the strategy and take responsibility for specific actions and tasks as noted in the Integrated Solutions Report. The final meeting will allow for all partners to approve and adopt the plan.

The ultimate goal of this step is to achieve general concurrence from all watershed stakeholders of the approaches and strategies identified in the final plan.

Deliverable: Final Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Integrated Water Resources Strategy with an action plan for implementing improvements



F. Anticipated Results

Place-based planning will enable the Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed planning group to identify the times of the year when water availability exceeds the demand and other times of the year when demand exceeds the available resources. The plan will also develop strategies for aligning the available resources with demand and develop support from municipal, agricultural, and ecological water users for pursuing these strategies harmoniously.



The following major results are anticipated:

- Action items list for completing improvements that will help align available water resources with the demands on each resource
- Ability to use the Integrated Solutions Report to apply for funding for future projects
- Increased collaboration efforts in the basin through obtaining buy-in from all stakeholders on a plan to improve water use in the basin
- Clear path toward meeting water challenges
- Short-term benefits of summarizing all water resources information in one report
- Long-term benefits of accomplishing activities to reduce water supply and quality concerns in the watershed



Specifically, the following deliverables are anticipated:

- MOU, Work Plan, and Schedule
- Existing Conditions Report
- Water Resources Needs Summary Report
- Integrated Solutions Report
- Final Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Integrated Water Resources Strategy with an action plan for implementing improvements





G. Request for Department Resources

Step 1: Build a Collaborative and Integrated Process (Months 0 to 6)

- Review of the MOU, work plan, and schedule by the OWRD team
- One OWRD staff member to attend working group and stakeholder meetings
- Funding:
 - Secured Match: \$6,000
 - OWRD Request: \$10,000
 - Total: \$16,000

Step 2: Characterize Water Resources, Water Quality, and Basin Conditions (Months 6 to 12)

- Assistance facilitating data collection with DEQ, ODFW, and others
- Preliminary review of draft Existing Conditions Report
- One OWRD staff member to attend select working group and stakeholder meetings
- Funding:
 - Secured Match: \$21,000
 - OWRD Request: \$40,000
 - Total: \$61,000

Step 3: Quantify Existing and Future Needs/Demands (Months 9 to 15)

- Assist with gathering water rights information
- Assist with developing impacts associated with climate change on future demands
- Review Water Resources Needs Summary Report
- Review water budget model
- One OWRD staff member to attend select working group and stakeholder meetings
- Funding:
 - Secured Match: \$21,000
 - OWRD Request: \$55,000
 - Total: \$76,000

Step 4: Develop Integrated Solutions for Meeting Long-Term Water Needs (Months 15 to 21)

- Review options
- One OWRD staff member to attend select working group and stakeholder meetings
- Review draft Integrated Solutions Report
- Funding:
 - Secured Match: \$22,000
 - OWRD Request: \$85,000
 - Total: \$107,000

Step 5: Plan Adoption and Implementation (Months 21 to 24)

- Review Final Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Integrated Water Resources Strategy
- One OWRD staff member to attend select working group and stakeholder meetings
- Funding:
 - Secured Match: \$5,000
 - OWRD Request: \$7,000
 - Total: \$12,000

Total Secured Match: \$75,000
Total OWRD Request: \$197,000
Total Funding Request: \$272,000

See Attachment F: Budget