

Baker City Session Overview – May 7, 2012

Note: the following information is offered for the Board to consider as it develops its Long Term Investment Strategy.

Long-Term Investment Strategy Comments

Most of the Baker City participants encouraged OWEB to take a whole watershed approach for on-the ground restoration efforts and to develop priorities based on local needs. Investments in this region should have ecological, social and economic components and should focus on water quality improvements (more than specific fish species). OWEB's investments should emphasize actual restoration projects that lead to: measurably cleaner rivers, lakes, and estuaries; enhanced agricultural management strategies; and improved wildlife habitat (including uplands and weed control). Baker City participants noted that being responsive to what local landowners and ranchers need and providing incentives to them with will be the only way for OWEB to be successful regionally with its investments. Another critical piece for Baker City was enhancing OWEB's monitoring both pre and post restoration efforts. They noted that such efforts are needed for measuring progress, adaptively managing, and holding grantees accountable to OWEB funding. A corollary to this is then using the information gained through monitoring to tell the stories of OWEB funded successes to educate landowners, recreationists, tourists, legislators and the broader population.

Many suggested that OWEB could strengthen its role of coordinating other state and federal agencies to be certain that OWEB's investments are better protected by these agencies. Weeds, for example, are an issue that pervades the region and needs joint efforts by all agencies. Baker City participants also stressed the importance of OWEB supporting creative and innovative approaches with its investments—not just in restoration but also for re-energizing participation and partnerships in the region. Some also recommended that OWEB invest in building and maintaining capacity for watershed councils, SWCDs and other local organizations to enable them to handle a range of watershed issues consistent with OWEB's mission—and to help with the education and monitoring efforts. OWEB assistance setting up networks for sharing technical expertise and other key services is also needed.

Additional Advice

Several commenters asked OWEB to continue to provide consistent, reliable funding for diverse restoration projects. Enhancements to the application and review process could be made by overtly recognizing the important roles that economic and social aspects of projects play in the region. There were diverse responses to using OWEB dollars on public lands as opposed to using them for private lands and some push back against OWEB acquiring lands.

Wrap-Up

OWEB Director Tom Byler and board member Alan Henning ended by noting that Baker City participants' saw more focus at the landscape scale is needed, but that the small grants program is also important in the region. Using incentives as a way to increase landowner participation, strengthening work with other agencies and establishing a good monitoring program are all important messages. They also heard the clear message that different parts of the state are different: OWEB needs to recognize and value those differences as 'one size will not fit all parts of the state'.