

September 11, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

FROM: Ken Bierly, Deputy Director

**SUBJECT: Agenda Item M: Other Business
Lower John Day Working Group
September 15-16, 2009 OWEB Board Meeting**

I. Introduction

This staff report describes the recommendation of the Board's Partnership Subcommittee concerning the Lower John Day Working Group. The report identifies a funding approach that uses previously allocated funds for salmon recovery to assist the Working Group in their efforts to organize and develop a science based approach to addressing the water resources of the lower basin.

II. Background and Summary

The Lower John Day Working Group has been meeting for approximately two years. The Working Group includes local governments, ranchers, environmental interest groups and others to identify common goals for the region. The Working Group has appeared before the Board on three separate occasions to report their progress. The Working Group has developed a proposal for consideration as a Special Investment Partnership (SIP).

The proposal and the status of the Lower John Day Working Group was discussed by the Partnership Subcommittee on August 26, 2009. The Subcommittee felt that the group was addressing a critical area (John Day Basin) and working on critical issues (stream flow, water quality and hydrology). The Subcommittee wished to assist the Working Group, but did not feel that the list of projects provided with the proposal addressed the water resources of the lower basin in a comprehensive manner. The Subcommittee felt that assistance with coordination and development of a science based water resource management plan for the lower basin that focused on the critical limiting factors for steelhead would prepare them to develop appropriate partnership investment projects.

III. Lower John Day and the Working Group

The Lower John Day River is a large portion of the drainage that comprises the region that drains to the mainstem. The John Day River is in a canyon through much of the lower basin. Smaller drainages (Butte Creek, Rock Creek, Bridge Creek, Ferry Canyon, Hay Creek, Pine Creek, and Thirtymile Creek, etc.) come off the Columbia Plateau and were historically important steelhead production reaches. The primary limiting factors to production in the area is low summer flows, high water temperatures, and obstructions.

The region is sparsely populated and strongly dependent on agriculture. The communities of the three counties (Gilliam, Wheeler and Moro) are significantly isolated from more populated portions of Oregon. The listing of steelhead under the Endangered Species Act and listing of streams under the Clean Water Act have raised concerns and frustration among many local residents. The organization of the Working Group to explore alternative ways to communicate and address the future is an important locally grown effort to address these issues.

IV. Next Steps

Based on feedback from the Subcommittee, staff intend to use a portion of the remaining funds previously allocated by the Board for local salmon recovery planning efforts to fund continued facilitation of the Lower John Day Working Group and to fund development of a science based water resource work plan for the Lower John Day Basin. These local recovery planning funds have been used to facilitate “coffee klatch” gatherings in the Nehalem and Tillamook basins with the outcome being identification of coastal coho salmon recovery projects. Use of the funds previously allocated for planning for coho salmon recovery could be allocated for steelhead recovery planning in the John Day and be consistent with the allocation of funds by the Board in September of 2007.

V. Recommendation

This is an informational item. No Board action is requested at this time.