

Medford Open House Discussion – May 11, 2010



Integrated Water Resources Strategy Spring 2010 Open House Events

Medford Library, 205 South Central Avenue, Medford, OR 97501

Facilitation provided by Professor Eric Dittmer - Southern Oregon University, and Hydrologist Robert Coffan - Katalyst, Inc.

This document reflects public input gathered during the open house event held in Medford. Participants were asked to identify the water resource challenges facing their community as well as any policies, projects, or approaches that they would like to see as part of the Integrated Water Resources Strategy. The event facilitators also asked audience members to share their vision, hopes, and goals for the state and to provide any education or outreach ideas that would help the public gain a better understanding of water resource issues facing Oregon. The discussion that took place reflects a true brainstorming session where no efforts were made by agency staff to rebut, debate, or prioritize any of the ideas, suggestions, or comments shared during the event.

4:00 Session

Challenges

1. Understanding the changes in graywater use.
2. Maintaining healthy irrigation ditches and canals. They are old with deteriorating infrastructure and landslides problems.
3. How to provide a future water supply in the face of recent dam removals.
4. Contamination in private drinking wells coupled with a lack of support, education, and guidance for rural Oregonians.
5. Land use challenges associated with groundwater quality.
6. How to retain a strong agricultural sector that provides agricultural products and open spaces.
7. How to balance instream, agricultural, and municipal uses.
8. Water management issues that affect property rights.
9. Conflicts with land use rules about riparian areas.
10. Lack of knowing how much water is available in a specific region. We need a baseline on how much water is available and then identify the uses.

Solutions and Opportunities

1. Limit development when water is not available.
2. Increase water capture opportunities.
3. Review public health standards related to water reuse (compare to other western states).
4. Incentivize power rates based on use (look at California). Investigate how to use that concept for water so that overall water usage decreases.
5. Need to be fair to agricultural activities with regard to rate structures since they use a lot of water.
6. Create a “cost” of water for those on wells, creating an incentive to conserve.
7. Market-based solutions for all (agriculture, municipal, etc) that does not hurt agriculture, but does keep water in streams for fish.
8. Encourage conservation by paying the costs of water.
9. Have an education assistance or incentive program for clean, low-water landscaping. Use the xeriscaping approach.
10. The current amount allowed in law for exempt well uses is too high. The number should be revised downward.
11. Require water measurement for all uses.
12. Develop or set efficiency standards for water usage by sector.
13. Develop better technology for water usage tracking.
14. The use of water should be paid by everyone. Include different rates for water disposal depending upon the quality of water after the “use.”
15. Track consumptive vs. non-consumptive uses.
16. Identify ways that society can help agriculture and industry conserve and protect water.
17. Need tools or incentives for water banking that stay in the name of the person with the water right. The “use it or lose it” method is not good and does not work.
18. These conversations should be framed under the “property rights” discussion. People need to understand between water rights and private property rights.

19. Water banking should be looked at in the same way as carbon trading. This may include local or regional banks.
20. Need incentives for landowners to protect riparian areas.
21. The Conservation Reserve Program under the USDA is an incentive that can be used as a model to do riparian restoration.
22. We need to detail the water demand for new industries, such as solar manufacturing, before the project is developed. We need a clear understanding of their needs.
23. Need information on water availability.
24. Growth should be limited to water availability in local areas.
25. Overregulation causes problems. Ensure the strategy does not result in overregulation.

Education and Outreach

1. Need to know where all the water comes from that communities use and how that number is divided among the uses (fish, agriculture, drinking water, etc).
2. Help people understand how municipalities structure water rates and why.
3. There is a misperception that agricultural does not pay for water. Everyone in Oregon pays for the water delivery systems. Agriculture does pay for irrigation systems. Provide education to everyone about this topic.
4. Sometimes enforcement of standards becomes a big problem. Starting education (water curriculum) at an early age would help. Include girl scouts and boy scouts in any water conservation education.
5. Educate public about water conservation inside and outside the home.
6. Education about how important riparian areas are.

Vision

1. Reduce per capita water consumption by 25% over 5 years (2012-2017). Need to establish a baseline of where we are today.
2. Modernize irrigation infrastructure.
3. More water reuse.

5:30 Session

Challenges

1. TMDLs are based on models, not science.
2. It is so difficult resolve legal and financial challenges associated with water on agricultural lands.
3. Rainwater harvesting is not used very much here, but should be.
4. Single-species management has unintended consequences—need to consider this before projects are done. A holistic approach is needed.
5. There are no replacement farmers in the Rogue Basin as most farmers are 50+ years old. There is a lot of land and water that needs to be passed on.
6. Funding of projects that help conserve water is nonexistent.
7. Channel incision occurring from increased water runoff—increasing erosion in urban areas.
8. Lack of recognizing the social and economic consequences of decisions made.
9. The impacts of climate change on our water resources.
10. Social hesitance or resistance to change related to water usage. For example, the “need” for green lawns.
11. Determining how Oregon’s aquifers are affected by other states.

Solutions and Opportunities

1. Set enforceable flow targets in TMDLs.
2. Oregon water law needs to be modernized.
3. TMDLs need to be based on reproducible science (not computer generated).
4. Revisit TMDLs that have already been done.
5. Design for rainwater harvesting (commercial, in home, irrigation, fire suppression, etc). Include roof catchment systems.

6. More water efficiency tools.
7. Technology of “relationships” is needed based on beauty. It brings people to the table.
8. Require developers to use xeriscapes to conserve water. This should be a law that is enforced.
9. Create incentives or policies for water efficiency and water conservation (like green buildings).
10. Provide funding for water conservation actions.
11. Set realistic goals and requirements that provide flexibility.
12. The definition of peak and ecological flows should not prohibit development of water storage projects.
13. The Water Resources Department should do a delineation of aquifers throughout the state. Geology needs to be used. Identify the groundwater resource throughout the state by basin and watershed.
14. Investments in phytotechnology to help clean water.
15. Integrate the water resource strategies into the OSU’s 2000 strategic directions for counties (SPROUT Program).
16. Focus on more small scale, high elevation water storage projects throughout the state.
17. When decisions are made, use lessons learned from the Klamath Basin.
18. Change Oregon water law where appropriate. For example, water right transfers that change uses should be reviewed differently. They should be treated as a new water right.
19. Conservation needs to be used.
20. Money is needed to do water conservation projects (WISE project).
21. Create low impact development ordinances.
22. Soil storage (high elevation)—use forest thinning areas.
23. Need to have new ways to enhance storage projects.

24. Expansion of water storage projects.

Education and Outreach

1. Agencies should develop an awareness campaign regarding water and water conservation. Make it become a personal responsibility and commitment for people.
2. Look at education tools in California and Arizona.
3. Need education and outreach regarding how much water is used in agricultural areas.
4. Need to educate more engineers and technical people.
5. Education of newcomers to the area regarding water.

Vision

1. Increased tax incentives for water conservation actions.
2. Hands on control, use, and management of water
3. We need to ask and answer the question: "What do we want our watersheds to look like in 50-100 years from now?" In doing so, we need to include all of the uses for water.
4. We can work together to develop a plan to use water wisely for all uses.
5. Look regionally at all uses (municipal, irrigation, instream) to develop a plan where everyone has what is needed. There will be actions that we all need to take.
6. Farmers that have working capital for infrastructure projects.
7. Connection between people who grow food and people who eat food.
8. The original intent of the Clean Water Act: water should be fishable and swimmable.
9. Usable groundwater data for decision-making