

Ontario Open House

Clarion Inn
June 14, 2016
Meeting Notes

Q1 & Q2: How has the recent drought affected you? In what ways did the drought affect your community?

- Drought is a slow process, certainly not like a flood event. Even though we had enough water this year, it'll take many years to get back to normal due to rotation, idling, and aquifer declines.
- Water allocation is very rigid. Need flexibility in our tools and more tools. Dams are our ace in the hole. Help us even when snowmelt happens early like this year. Dams keep recreation, fisheries, etc. alive.
- Agriculture has spent millions of dollars out of their own pocket on their own farms to conserve water. We need to document and get credit for that.
- We saw \$93 million is lost crop revenue in 2015. We've been operating off the bottom of the Owyhee Reservoir for the last 4 years. That leaves us with uncertainty from year to year. Owyhee is supposed to store 2 years' worth of water in normal years.
- The piping we put down in the last four years enables us to stretch our water supply longer in the irrigation season.
- We joke that we are always 10 days away from a drought. We have the water, but there's a distribution problem. Individual growers have modern technology, but the distribution system is 100 years old.
- You can't predict when you're going to have a drought. Don't take our water rights away; that will not help us in a drought.
- Let's not get too focused on a hotter drier future climate. In my lifetime, scientists predicted expanding ice caps and were planning changing crops to deal with that. 150 years ago the whole western region was flush with water. You never know what the future holds.
- We need to plan effectively to be resilient and adapt.
- Wetland and riparian areas may suffer by piping canals and laterals. We've noticed domestic wells 80 feet deep have started to decline.

Q3: How did you respond to drought? Please share any successes or strategies.

- Districts are competitive, they compete for same funding resources, but drought brought us all together, now we're working together in new ways.
- Our watermaster was very helpful during the drought. Ron Jacobs participated in public meetings and let us know what tools people can use. Irrigation districts can often be seen as the enemy because we enforce the allocations.
- Putting pipe in the ground in good year, before the drought hits.
- I hate to think where we would have been last year without the piping and center pivots we recently put in. These technology tools give water managers more options. We have people calling us weekly for piping and center pivot tools. We need to coordinate with OWRD, ODA, NRCS, and SWCDs to target funding for these technological tools. Current climate cycle makes this even more essential.
- Drought transfers were used quite a lot during the drought. The drought situation also drove the community to better understand their water rights. Can we lose our water rights?

Q4: What actions should be pursued to better prepare for future droughts?

- More staff at OWRD. Are secondary water rights and drought emergency wells being used in good water years when they are not supposed to be?
- Funding.
- We need to emphasize the multi-use benefit of storage to encourage construction of storage. Storage structures allow for instream flows for fish and wildlife. We need to get away from contention with environmental community and agree that storage benefits all interests. Better water quality equals more water.
- The concept of place-based planning is huge. There isn't a better source of wisdom or needs than the local community. I see place-based planning as a real opportunity.
- Place-based planning has only been funding for a limited time-frame, from 2015-2017. Expanding this program would need legislative approval and support from Oregon communities.
- Increase storage.
- We need to define conservation. To us, it means recapturing and reusing water 4 or 5 times.
- Bully Creek reservoir was built for flood control in Vale. Remember when Vale was flooded out before Bully Creek reservoir was built. Storage is needed to ensure safety of our communities in high water years.
- We put in 5-6 miles of pipeline every year. But we've picked the low hanging fruit. We got funding for LiDAR and now use LiDAR every day. We want to do an efficiency inventory to see where we flood and where we sprinkle to strategically target upgrades.

Q5: What most concerns you about the future with regard to water?

- Concerned about protecting our existing water rights.

Q6: Any other thoughts or comments you would like to share with the IWRS Project Team?

- Water quality is nipping at our heels. We're very focused on supply. New food safety standards prevent us from using some water that's delivered.
- State of Oregon does not have a compact with Nevada. Duck Valley Indian reservation has money and wants to revamp its irrigation system. We want a study to see how that will affect us. BIA and DOI settled out of court. We had to get a FOIA to find out the settlement.
- Nevada is also thinking about using water from Owyhee system to be sent to Reno.
- IWRS is not about altering water rights. It will keep system intact.
- 2010 open houses brought a lot of people because of the Klamath crisis. But we are different here, in that most of our water rights are adjudicated.
- How to get more people to the open houses? Free meals. Target the November through January timeframe.