Harney County Watershed Council

450 N Buena Vista #4
Burns, OR 97720

Phone: 541-573-8199
Fax: 541-573-8370
Karen.Moon@oregonstate.edu

Applicant Identification

The Harney County Watershed Council (HCWC) Is a non-profit 501 (c)3 organization that was formed in 1998. Our Mission statement states that "Local economic and ecological prosperity depends on watershed health and the availability and quality of ground and surface water. Therefore, the Harney County Watershed Council provides a framework of outreach, coordination and cooperation between private landowners and all interested parties to promote watershed conditions that benefit people and the environment. Contact for the HCWC, Karen Moon, Coordinator. Address: 450 N Buena Vista Ave, #4, Burns, OR 97720. Phone: (541) 573-8199. Email: Karen.moon@oregonstate.edu.

Location

The location that the Council is interested in for Placed Based Planning includes the subregion 1712 [Oregon Closed Basins (Malheur)], which consists of 17,300 square miles or 6.3 million acres. Cities within the basin include Burns, Hines, Crane, Buchanan, Princeton, Diamond, Frenchglen and Riley.

Key Partners

Partners include: Harney County Court, Harney SWCD, High Desert Partnership, Oregon Water Resources Department, Harney County Health Department, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Burns District BLM, NRCS, DEQ, Oregon Cattlemen's Association, Oregon Farm Bureau, Harney County Farm Bureau, Harney County Stockgrowers, local landowners, agricultural water users and service providers.

Executive Summary

In the arid high desert of Harney County, hay and cattle are our largest industries and the lifeblood of the county's economic health. Recent drought years have contributed to declining groundwater levels in several areas of the basin, enough to cause Water Resources Department to propose a new groundwater limited area.

Fear and uncertainty are becoming endemic among land users and owners and employees of associated businesses and suggests that they not only need to better understand the nature and causes of this apparent trend, but participate in discussing actions that may be needed in the short- and long-term to ensure water sustainability and economic vitality.

Sharing their collective wisdom about water fluctuations in the areas where they live and work in a neutral, collaborative, place-based process, can help provide the innovative solutions to help bring demand more in line with supply, solutions that no one individual or agency could have conceived unilaterally. The process can provide a better understanding of how water resources can be effectively managed, not just in periods of decline, but forward into the future.

The process will provide a good opportunity for OWRD to become a partner in solving the challenging issues land users and their business networks face, as opposed to just regulating them. The community's participation in a collaborative process is the ideal arena to foster trust and cooperation among those affected by water fluctuations and help support DWR's efforts. The recent formation of the Resource Advisory Committee to help OWRD update basin rules is evidence of a desire for community involvement to foster better communication between the agency, the community and those with environmental concerns.

b. Description of Convener

- ***How you or your group/organization has been involved in water planning efforts in your area (past and present):***
  Members of the Watershed Council have been concerned with groundwater starting in 2004. A steering committee and plans for a preliminary groundwater investigation was developed. In 2009 HCWC applied for and received an outreach grant from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. Informational booths and community meetings were a start. In 2010 HCWC received a second grant from OWEB to gather all existing public data regarding wells in Harney County. A third Technical Assistance grant was submitted to the OWEB in April of 2011. This grant provided dollars to have a third-party hydro-geologist review all of the data collected and assemble it into a geo-database. This model is not a finished product, but a beginning point. The analysis helped us to better understand data gaps and identify potential focus areas for future data gathering and planning efforts. This document is the AquaVeo Harney Basin Groundwater Study. OWRD received a copy of this study.
- ***How you or your group/organization intend to be involved in future water planning efforts in your area:***
  HCWC plans to act as the convener for place-based planning and will continue in coordination of information gathering, planning and implementation through engaging stakeholders, preparing information, grant writing, outreach and fiscal sponsorship.
- ***Your target population and geographic area (specific basins or watersheds you plan to address through place-based planning):***
  The land area of Harney County covers 6.3 million acres (17,300 square miles) across 7 sub-basins. The Closed basin area of Oregon is larger than the state of Maryland. Although a large land area, we have a small population of approximately 7,000 people. These seven sub-basins include: Harney/Malheur Lakes Sub-basin HUC 17120001, Silvies Sub-basin HUC 17120002, Donner und Blitzen Sub-basin HUC 17120003, Silver Creek Sub-basin HUC 174120004, Guano Sub-basin HUC 17120009, Alvord Lakes Sub-basin HUC 17120009, and the Thousand Virgin Sub-basin HUC 16040205. It is also noteworthy that 74% of our county is publicly owned. Our target population will include mainly agricultural water users, along with municipal use and associated businesses and organizations that have a symbiotic relationship.
- ***Why you and/or your group/organization are appropriate conveners of a place-based planning effort***:
  HCWC council members and advisory members represent a cross section of the ranching community in all sub basins, as well as county and community planners and small business owners. Some are scientists that hold positions with entities such as the Bureau of Land Management and Oregon State University. Several board members have participated and are participating in county-wide collaborative efforts. Their paid and unpaid efforts to help solve Harney County challenges have gained them the community's respect and trust. HCWC has no dominant agenda, no axe to grind, other than those stated in its mission. Thus, the HCWC, with its history of completed projects, education and outreach, has gained a community-wide reputation for neutrality. The HCWC is an appropriate, and perhaps ideal, convener to help build understanding of

watershed issues. We work diligently to provide a framework for all parties to come to the table to express concerns and work towards consensus for the benefit of the environment and the economic prosperity of the people who live here. For the past seven years HCWC has been involved in preliminary efforts to study the geology of the Harney Basin, and to begin some groundwater modeling. At the request of OWRD we have slowed the modeling efforts to spend time gathering current water level data through monitoring programs, by both HCWC and OWRD. Our goal is to restore, improve or maintain healthy watersheds within our basin.

- ***What resources and skills you or your group/organization will bring to the place-based planning effort:***
  The HCWC has participated collaboratively in numerous important and controversial subjects as described below and in Attachment A. We have obtained grant funding to begin research, conduct outreach and monitoring of groundwater in the Harney Basin. We have experience in grant administration and fiscal management.

c. Integration, Partnerships & Stakeholder Engagement

- ***The partners you work with and what resources/skills they will bring to the effort:***
  Partners may include the Harney SWCD, High Desert Partnership, Harney County Court, Harney County Health Department, Oregon Farm Bureau, Harney County Farm Bureau, Harney County Stockgrowers, Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Center and Burns District BLM, NRCS and DEQ. Many partners hold board positions with the Council, but also are Natural Resources Land managers, scientists and biologists who are familiar with problem solving and land management. The Harney County Court is willing to co-convene. The HDP has expertise in facilitation and collaboration management. Please see the framework document for a description of key partners in the proposed initiative. In addition, the process will provide a good opportunity for OWRD to become a partner in solving the challenging issues land users and their business networks face, as opposed to just regulating them. The community's participation in a collaborative process is the ideal arena to foster trust and cooperation among those affected by water fluctuations and help support OWRD efforts. The recent formation of the RAC to help OWRD update basin rules is evidence of a desire for community involvement to foster better communication between the agency, the community and those with environmental concerns.
- ***How this effort will integrate with and build on other plans, projects and processes:***
  Place Based Planning would facilitate the Council's efforts in working to understand the groundwater resources of the Harney Basin. Better understanding of the geology and aquifers will give managers better data to base future decisions with regard to use of the resources. This funding will also help to enable much needed analysis of current water use and help to create a water budget for the region.
  This effort will integrate with and expand on the efforts of the Harney Basin Wetlands Initiative (HBWI) whose purpose is to restore Malheur Lake, which suffers from an overabundance of carp that is compromising the Basin's aquatic health and degrading critical migratory bird habitat. One of the goals of HBWI is to maintain the flood irrigated wet meadows, both on the MNWR and surrounding private land for the

benefits of migratory birds along the Pacific Flyway. Irrigation efficiency is a component of this effort which influences both surface and groundwater use in a large portion of the proposed Groundwater Limited Area. Place-based planning could also integrate with the Harney County Health Department's arsenic identification projects with regard to helping domestic well users identify and mitigate arsenic in their drinking water. The local NRCS office also lists groundwater on its priority work list and is considering creating a funding pool for irrigation efficiency as projects are identified.

- ***How you plan to meaningfully engage and collaborate with a balanced representation of water interests***
  We plan to follow the guidelines provided by OWRD, we will make sure to invite all who wish to have a voice in helping to better understand the resources in our basin, local communities, the local tribe, agricultural users, agencies, utility providers and landowners. Use of a facilitated consensus process will insure that all who wish to participate will have a chance to voice concerns and be a part of the future solution to the problems that we are facing.
- ***How you will insure a transparent and open process***
  One of the keys to any collaborative process is finding the right facilitator who will ensure that all concerns are heard and documented, has the skills and experience to navigate tricky, potentially intractable points in the process toward productive outcomes. Oregon Consensus is an organization that specializes in collaboration and was very successful with the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge Conservation Planning process. Results of meetings will be shared on the HCWC website and with press releases to newspapers. A mailing list will be developed for attendees at meetings and a newsletter will be developed. Press will be invited to all meetings.
- ***An example of how you have worked with varied partners and conducted public outreach successfully in the past***
  The HCWC has participated in four collaborative efforts over the past ten years. These collaborative efforts include The Harney County Restoration Collaborative led by HDP working to improve conditions on the Malheur National Forest, the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge CCP (15 year conservation plan), the Candidate for Conservation Agreement with Assurances to improve Sage Grouse Habitat led by the Harney SWCD, and the Harney Basin Wetlands Initiative, working to restore wetlands in the Harney Basin. Members of the Watershed Council also participated with the Steen's Mountain Cooperative Management & Protection Area Plan.

Attachments:
Timeline of water planning activities and projects you have been involved with
List of partner organizations that will likely participate with signatures or letters of support

d. Statement of Need

The current and anticipated water issues or challenges in your area of interest, touching specifically on water quantity, water quality and ecological health:

For the past several years ranchers in Harney County have been reporting signs of declining groundwater levels in several areas of the Basin. Last Spring, OWRD has placed a moratorium on new and pending groundwater applications within a major portion of our basins and stated they will not issue new permits until a groundwater basin study is completed—one that could take up to five years to complete. Further awareness that Harney County may be facing future water shortages resulted from Governor Kate Brown's declaration that an exceptional drought emergency exists in Harney County.

How these challenges are currently being addressed.

Water quality and quantity are at the heart of every business that involves production agriculture in Harney County, a major focus of HCWC, since inception. Since 2014, we have had a monitoring grant to conduct a limited water level monitoring program with OWEB and other programs to improve the health of our watershed. Previously we obtained several grants that led to our making recommendations to address data gaps that were in the way of producing a groundwater model that took in the geology of the area, verified the existence of existing wells, etc. At the same time, other agencies here in Harney County were also conducting similar programs to address watershed health, including the Harney County Health Department with their arsenic testing program, and also the Crane Union High School biology class working on monitoring dissolved solids and temperature. Although there was some awareness of water shortages, the measures taken by OWRD to curtail new well permits until completion of a new, major groundwater study, took the community by surprise.

HCWC tried to fill some knowledge gaps by holding a meeting for water users and asking OWRD to please show what evidence they had collected to substantiate their measures. That meeting, and more recent ones by the OWRD RAC committee, showed that Harney County has a major need for the community as a whole to begin focused conversations among each other to address increasing concerns about water quantity and its effects, not just on ranchers, but all those businesses that work with them on economic vitality and on some of the organizations we proposed partnering with. The community needs to share the ideas that come out of these conversations with OWRD and together develop solutions that everyone can buy into and potentially lead to cooperation in managing the water resources of our county.

This will not be an easy task. Place Based Planning can be a roadmap to coordination efforts within the Harney Basin. Individual water users will create a shared vision and know that they have a voice in their water future. Place Based Planning can help to identify community supported projects and will help coordinate resources to implement projects to benefit all in the Harney Basin.

Attachments:

Table summarizing existing or past data collection efforts used to understand water needs

e. Proposed Approach

- ***How your planned approach will be consistent with the principles described in the integrated Water Resources Strategy and the Place-based Planning Guidelines***
  We plan to use the Place-based guidelines as our project outline. Please see the "Harney Co. Place-Based Integrated Water Resource Planning" framework below.

Harney Co. Place-Based Integrated Water Resources Planning

Drivers	Knowledge limited problem	Uncertainty in status of permit applications and how new rules will be implemented	Positive history of collaboration in Harney Co.	Available information indicates incidence of declining water levels	Sustainability of local livability and economy
Partners	Harney Co. WC Harney SWCD HDP NRCS	Agencies Dept. of Water Resources Malheur NW Refuge BLM, USFS	Producer Groups Hay Growers Cattlemen's Assoc. Farm Bureau	Private landowners Ag water users Domestic water users Ag water service providers	Harney County Court RAC Conservation community Academia
Planning & Implementation Goals	**Collaborative information gathering** • For an agreed upon scientific understanding of groundwater resources • For a collective understanding of the causes of current declines that have been identified	**Collaborative planning** • To serve as a warehouse for the data • Develop integrated plan based on shared vision of water management • Identify tangible short and long term strategies for addressing problems	**Collaborative implementation** • Coordinated, well-supported implementation of a science-based, adaptive water management plan that contributes to long-term water security		
Actions	- Engage stakeholders - Establish agreed upon principles of how collaborative will operate - Gain collective understanding and agreement on nature of problems and knowledge gaps - Develop/implement model of shared responsibility for information gathering and communication	-Summarize information in preparation for decision making -Identify short and long term options for addressing identified problems -Identify metrics for success -Identify funding strategies -Maintain stakeholder engagement by implementing identified short term efficiencies	- Grant writing/fundraising - Irrigation efficiency programs/ projects - Infrastructure improvements - Recharge enhancement projects - Voluntary monitoring - Periodic review and communication of progress and adjustment in strategy when necessary		
How it happens	- **Stakeholder engagement** - **Facilitation** - **Coordination and support process**	- **Continued stakeholder engagement** - **Outreach and education to community** - **Collaborative planning**	- **Continued stakeholder engagement** - **Assistance & incentive programs** - **Landowner implementation**		
Leveraged benefits	• Transparency with information • Model could be replicated in other regions to address complex water management issues	• Agency buy-in and potential access to additional funding • Integrated resources planning and management	• More efficient water management, lower cost production • Improved water security • Enhanced watershed function		
Outcomes	• Collective science- based knowledge of water resources and shared understanding of the problem(s) • Foundation from which to initiate collaborative planning	• Collective, agreed upon direction and tangible strategies for integrated water management • Actionable, fundable, well-supported integrated water resources plan for the Harney Basin	• Sustainable water resources • Model for local communities and regulatory agencies to problem solve resulting in mutual acceptable outcomes with measure of success • Minimized negative impacts to community		

E_12_10_MalheurLake_OWRDPBPLOI_120715

- ***The major activities you plan to undertake to meet the goals laid out in the Guidelines:***
  The major activity that is planned is to organize and convene the collaborative process, to work towards consensus on what the problems are, and to create a plan for filling data gaps, gathering data and exploring solutions for both the short-term and long-term health of the water resources in our basin. Please see the attached framework "Harney Co. Place-Based Integrated Water Resource Planning document (above), and the Proposed HCWC Groundwater Initiative Action Items document (attachments).
- ***The rough timeline for accomplishing the planning steps laid out in the Guidelines***
  Please see attached Timeline.
  As mentioned above, several members on the HCWC have played significant roles in engaging in, and in some cases, facilitating collaborative planning efforts to develop well-supported approaches for addressing complex natural resource management problems in southeast Oregon. These efforts take time, particularly in building relationships before all the partners and stakeholders officially engage in the collaborative. With many issues, the group often must go slow in the beginning in order to go fast later. In addition, each collaborative is unique in the issues that need addressed and in terms of where the partners are starting from relative to one another (i.e., the level of divergence in thinking regarding the nature of the problem(s) and appropriateness of possible solutions), particularly with knowledge-limited problems like declining groundwater levels that we are proposing to tackle. In our experience, these are multi-year processes that often take three or more years to gain agreement on the problems and consensus on associated well-supported strategies and needed actions for addressing those problems. With that said, timeframes are difficult to estimate prior to the initiation of the process because the speed at which the collaborative makes progress is dependent on many factors related to the issue and the group that are not fully known until the process is initiated.

f. ***Anticipated Results***

- ***How place-based planning will help to solve water challenges in your area of interest***
  Our vision is that placed based planning will result:
  - In a collaborative information gathering effort that will facilitate an agreed upon scientific understanding of water resources in the Harney Basin and a collective understanding of the causes of current declines in groundwater resources.
  - In a collaborative planning effort that leverages the data gathered and, perhaps more importantly, the relationships and trust built during information gathering to develop an integrated plan that identifies tangible short and long term strategies for addressing identified problems, all based on a shared vision of water management.
  - The HCWC believes that our place-based planning efforts will expand beyond our area of interest and become a model for local communities and regulatory agencies to problem solve with mutually acceptable outcomes.

- ***The anticipated short-term and long-term outcomes or benefits to your community that are expected to results from the proposed process:***
    - Short term outcomes that will benefit the community are a shared understanding of the problems by using collective science-based knowledge of the water resources our communities depend upon. We also believe in the short term the process will be a foundation from which to build the collaborative effort.
    - In the long term we expect to develop actionable, fundable and well-supported integrated water resources plan in the Harney Basin. Through this plan we hope to have sustainable water resources so that we can maintain the vital agricultural sector of our community.

g. ***Request for Department Resources***

The amount of funding requested for a three year period totals $205,500.00. Funding will be used for capacity, a project manager to help manage the initiative, facilitation services from a group such as Oregon Consensus, meeting room rentals and meals. Funds will also be used to facilitate outreach to the local community and offer education on groundwater problems, and water resource solutions for the future that include water quality, irrigation efficiency and surface water, not just groundwater. Funds will also be dedicated to the Crane Union High School biology class to fund their monitoring program. Additional funding will be sought through other sources as the planning process progresses.

HCWC is confident that with broad participation from the community, OWRD, and stakeholders that we can achieve the 25% match that is needed. For example having 25 people participate at up to 15 meetings per year, for 4 hours per meeting at a rate of $30.00 per hour to $50.00 per hour would come to between $45,000.00 and $75,000.00 per year. HCWC also has an OWEB Groundwater monitoring grant for $13,363.00 that can be used as match. NRCS dollars could be available for match with a groundwater/irrigation efficiency pool.
HCWC prep time to prepare the "letter of interest" comes to approximately 49 hours with a total of $1320.00.
We would request that OWRD partner with us not only in an advisory capacity, but as a full partner in the process.

Attachments:
Proposed budget
Timeline
List of Collaborative efforts
HCWC groundwater projects
Proposed partners
List of Council members
Proposed Groundwater Initiative Action Items
Strategic Action Plan