

Gresham Open House Discussion – March 31, 2010



Integrated Water Resources Strategy Spring 2010 Open House Events

Gresham City Hall, 1333 NW Eastman Parkway, Gresham, OR 97030

Facilitation provided by Terry Bucholz - Integrated Water Solutions, LLC, and Terry Black - Portland Water Bureau.

This document reflects public input gathered during the open house event held in Gresham. 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 outreach and education 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. The planning that is being done for the future is well and good, however in the last couple of years the federal government has interfered in two locations regarding the Endangered Species Act (Klamath and San Joaquin). How does the state plan to protect the waters of the state for the citizens?
2. There was more discussion on the use of water at the 2008 OSU roundtable discussions and I do not see that going on at this venue. This is an economic issue in Oregon and we need to keep talking about this.
3. The difficulty to remain (or be) bi-partisan.
4. The Conserved Water Allocation Program is very difficult and cumbersome to use.
5. Challenge is how to protect more water instream before we allocate more to out-of-stream uses.
6. Stormwater management is a huge issue. We are shooting a lot of that stormwater out of the area instead of keeping it in the system.
7. The state approved graywater use last year but said they were two years out before someone could use graywater. We need to move on the permitting process more quickly.

Solutions and Opportunities

1. I want to see living wage jobs for my kids in the future. In Columbia County, most of our jobs are resource based. There is a movement to protect more rivers as scenic waterways. We still can make wise use of our streams and rivers. Do not want to lock people out.
2. The Conserved Water Allocation Program could be an important tool; however, we need to make it easier to use.
3. Take a regional approach to water. Make it an issue of commons. We all own water. It should not be about profitability (bottled water). We deserve clean, clear, sustainable water. It does not stop at the Columbia River. Make it “a resource held in commons.”
4. Put protections in place, if they currently do not exist, to protect against outside entities from coming in and taking our water.
5. Create a “state environmental protection act.” We need it for many reasons. It may help us from outside entities taking water (Cascade Locks).
6. Stick together and work together. Working together gives us a stronger platform. Example: Veterans went statewide and into all counties. There were 39 bills brought forward by our veterans, bringing forth bi-partisan issues. We need to stick together.
7. The state needs to do a much better job of measuring and monitoring to make sure people are using within the allowed season and amount.
8. We need to improve efficiency and reduce the waste of water that is taken out for use. We should think about how to get water to the highest and best uses as opposed to who came first. The system now is first in time-first in right, and I do not know if that makes sense.
9. In multiple areas around the state, you have a regional water provider serving one large area. These providers need to do a better job coordinating with other providers to determine the best location for appropriating water with the least amount of impact.
10. The draining of aquifers is a big problem in terms of long term sustainability in many places. Place a limit on how much water can come out of an aquifer and know how much water goes into the aquifer. Do not overdraft the resource.
11. I would like to see more monitoring for global climate change. For NEON (National Ecological Observation Network), 10 sites were to be installed all over the country. We will need more information and more sites in the state. It should cover multiple states (regions) – i.e. include Washington – take a regional approach.
12. Ban bottled water, except for emergency events.

Education and Outreach

1. Identify good ways to educate the public at large about conservation and water use in general.
2. I would like to see these meetings gathered in some sort of case study for our classroom and more of these activities bundled in K-12 education.
3. Create incentives for conservation. When I bought a new refrigerator, they were throwing money at me. There should be water conservation funding programs.

Vision

1. The water demand has been changing quite a bit over time. First, the fish had all of the water because we weren't here and the use was in the stream. Then, agriculture developed in this state. Then the dams came in, leading to power. The last big surge has been from city growth, followed by urban growth. The growth of our urban areas has come on strongly in the last 50 years. The vision should be inclusive of all the uses. With conservation, I believe all of the uses can be maintained.
2. Water becomes prioritized for individuals, instead of for corporations.
3. Maude Barlow's vision was framed around "ethics" and water is an ethical issue. It is critical around every bit of life. We have an incredible abundance of water. I think that we need to expand the frame of what we are doing to see this as a sustainability issue. Water is a source of life and everyone has a right to clean water, for food and drinking. Many people around the world are dying and do not have access to clean water. There is exponential waste and pollution and we need to recognize this problem by looking at exponential solutions. Shifting our paradigm from mechanical physics to living systems is key. How do we implement technology that helps people? How do we change a whole conscientiousness? We need to expand beyond the economic boundaries when thinking about this issue.

5:30 Session

Challenges

1. Antiquated water laws - first in time, first in right. If a city, for example, is a junior water user behind someone else who has been there since the 1880's, there will be challenging issues to face.
2. Rivers that are actually running dry but are supposed to be protected as a designated state scenic waterway (challenge). We need to establish minimum instream flows and find a way to meet them (solution).

3. The inability of people to get access to water rights in the future.
4. Regional water shortages.
5. Long range funding is a challenge. We need to find ways to fund it during good times, but also during bad times.
6. How to provide for instream use (for the fish) in the face of climate change.
7. Protect peak and ecological flows before allowing new storage projects to develop. This is a solution, as well as a challenge.
8. Mapping of aquifers is not complete. As a result, there is not an understanding of what water consumption will do to various aquifers. There is no scientific evidence to show whether the use will harm the aquifer or not. I know mapping these aquifers is expensive, but before you can allocate something, you need to inventory it first.
9. Determining the link between the benefits of using water and the actual cost. Who pays the cost for the recreationist when there is no water for us in the summer? The farmer is getting the benefits of the crop. Contamination removal/cleanup is extremely expensive; we all bare the cost, but not those that are contributing to the contamination. With carbon emissions, we bare the cost to our health. A cap and trade system that establishes a price for protecting water, an ecosystem market for example, could be a valuable tool to make that link - I'll clean your water, for a price.
10. How to institute full measurement and metering of all water rights.
11. The implication of in-channel ponds.

Solutions and Opportunities

1. Encourage closed looped systems, thus increasing re-use. If every homeowner had to treat their own water, things would change very fast. Decentralize the treatment of water, so people feel closer to their impact. Increased use of phytotechnology to treat water. Phytotechnology tools integrate all of the issues.
2. Restrict the means to access water in terms of how they draw water from its source. This would be a way to quantify the use and to regulate how they get the water.
3. State statutes need to be clarified about how water is taken out of the watersheds. It is illegal to take water out of watersheds. Although, sometimes it is shipped outside of the state (becomes a product instead of a resource). The statutes need to be strengthened and clarified for using water outside of the watershed.

4. Allowing greater public access to public records by providing them electronically.
5. The state should designate new groundwater limited areas.
6. Require water-use efficiency standards for irrigation and municipal use. I spend so much time on the John Day and they shut off irrigation on October 1, but farmers are still irrigating and the Watermaster just says I'll go tell them to turn off the pump. We are paying the cost of that, and so are the fish. Increase water rights enforcement, especially in eastern Oregon, where there currently is not any enforcement.
7. Start monitoring emerging contaminants (personal care products, etc).
8. Legalize graywater reuse.
9. Revise water law to ensure that water is used primarily for the common good. Right now, our water law has no concept of the common good. Water must be seen as a right, not as a commodity. The challenge is that regionally, we are going to have tremendous pressures from outside entities. If water is a commodity, it is going to be sent out of the state because the south is drying up and they want the water.
10. Provide incentives to property owners to keep the water from leaving the property. You can make huge impacts with your own property.
11. Protect peak and ecological flows before allowing new storage projects to develop. This is a solution, as well as a challenge
12. Any strategy needs to include the Willamette Superfund site and the Hanford Superfund site. Both of those may not have solutions in terms of cleanup. Hanford will affect Oregon's water at some point, so we need to address solutions. I do not see either Superfund site mentioned in the plans.
13. Create an amendment to the constitution, according to which, corporations could retain their charters only if they demonstrate social and environmental responsibility.
14. Plan for our water needs for the next seven generations, or at least two.
15. Include some flexibility in our water use.
16. Invest in water projects, including those with an environmental benefit.
17. Create a "dry day fund" for the state to invest in, localities, or some rich person sitting here in the room.

18. Create a mandatory tax or fee of any new water use. A mandatory tax or fee that would go to the dry day fund. It would be required at every transaction for the dry day fund.
19. Identify the unintended consequences of the various sets of rules related to water.
Example: graywater rules that are now forming.
20. Would it be possible to make water consumption rates publicly available? Make everyone disclose water consumption. A large hotel is going to use a lot, but they use it efficiently, so maybe we also need to consider some other factors. Quantity alone may not be a means. Compares hotels in the region, per guest, compare the same types of industry. If an orchard is using drip, vs. a different system, determine how much water is wasted by just using channels.
21. Add a tax on current water right users, such as an annual fee.
22. If you use the word commodity, it shifts the discussion as opposed to any beneficial use, vs. non-use. There should be a hierarchy of uses. In Europe, they are looking at leasing, instead of creating a permanent use. Research alternative water right models, particularly the lease model.
23. Gain a better understanding of the extent of water management. Look at countries like Australia and the extreme of what they have to go through to ask their citizens what to do.
24. Put more research into other technologies as a means to provide a suite of options (desalination).
25. Build in incremental solutions to make sure we are using the water to its highest use.
26. Require the state to do a public interest review on all transfer applications as a way to re-evaluate the old permits to make sure they meet current standards.
27. Encourage conservation by making it a contest. People are more inclined to participate if it is a competition (“the biggest water loser”).
28. Provide accountability for the way agriculture uses water, both good and bad. Include accountability for industries, cities, and municipalities as well. Publicly show how people are using the water for good. Use stories of wise consumers, give local examples, local people, farms, anything to illustrate water practices.
29. Provide information to the public on the Columbia diversion – Umatilla Aquifer Project. For example, is there an Environmental Impact Statement?

30. Encourage rainwater collection for non-potable uses, but when doing so, make sure to include research that determines the effects on plant consumption and whether this practice is safe overall.

Education and Outreach

1. Most of the time we are thinking about awareness, but we also need to think about workforce training. Green roofs are a great idea – however, are there any companies out there that know how to build them?
2. Water is a great education opportunity because it is obvious to see the connection. It is a natural model; we have a direct impact on water in everything we do. Everyone sees the effects as it goes through the cycle and we are all affected by it.
3. We need education on emerging contaminants.
4. Make the water cycle a part of the mandatory curriculum and that the next seven generations are getting the information as early and as often as possible. Include the urban water cycle, too.
5. Increase education about water use and value of water. The citizens need to understand that water is a valuable resource.
6. Education for urban dwellers on water conservation options.

Vision

1. We need to recognize that the world is constantly changing and we need to be willing to evolve and re-evaluate because things are different now from when those water rights were first granted. Be willing to re-evaluate everything, even beyond water rights.
2. Have a discussion now about whether we identify water as a commodity or as a common resource. The current statute lumps everything together. Are we going to identify a hierarchy? I think we should assume that water is going to become a precious commodity. We as good citizens should share our water with Arizona and those that need it. Although, maybe we do need to refer to it as a common resource.