Tillamook Open House Discussion – April 28, 2010

Integrated Water Resources Strategy Spring 2010 Open House Events
Tillamook County Library, 1716 3rd Street, Tillamook, OR 97141
Facilitation provided by John Dean, RARE Program (Resource Assistance for Rural Environments)

This document reflects public input gathered during the open house event held in Tillamook. 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 facilitator 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. Any water storage in the Trask or Wilson Rivers receives resistance from state agencies.

2. We spend too much money doing riparian work, when we should be focused on storage.

3. There is no stormwater master plan for development.

4. The misperception that as the state's population grows over the next 30 years, that growth will not come at the expense of agriculture. Ensure that there is water available for new developments and do not build if there is not water available.

5. The key issue here is we have short, steep watersheds with not a lot of storage. People are dependent on groundwater resources for exempt-use domestic wells. Urge the developers of the plan to gently tackle the issue of exempt wells. Help people on private drinking water systems manage their systems and ensure high water quality. There is a lack of information, resources, and incentives to change to a different system.

6. In Seaside, many tourist events draw in people who use water, but they do not pay for the infrastructure. This is both a fire and public safety issue.

7. Many cities are concerned that approved water right permits will be re-reviewed and will include new requirements for Water Management and Conservation Plans.

8. No more grants out there. Low interest loans will be crucial. Bonding will help some.

9. Our ability to maintain water rights as industries move out of the area.

10. We are comprised of a dozen water systems that are required to take daily water samples. These systems need to be able to change their charter and combine into one entity.

11. There are many small mom & pop water systems all over the coast without the capacity to handle water quality and quantity issues. They cannot keep up in the climate change discussion.

12. Because of cost factors, make sure public and private systems are not held to the same standards. There may be a benefit to combining systems, but they should be allowed to retain their individual identity.

13. The Department of Geology and Mineral Industries has been talking about the threat of Cascadia Subduction zone. We need to work on how the state will provide water during an earthquake situation.

14. The Public Utility Commission defines three domiciles as a public water system. They need to raise the bar on that definition.

15. Small coastal systems are limited to spring water and are at risk from climate change and earthquakes. We have very little options for alternative sources of water.

16. There is as lack of regulatory flexibility to build a small diversion today that includes the option of enlarging in the future. For financing purposes, such an option would be useful.

17. Do not allow water to be privatized.

18. Water that is taken out of the Tillamook Basin during a time when our own rivers and farms are running dry.

19. Although agriculture uses 80% of the water diverted, we are providing food for the world. There's not recognition of the contribution made by agriculture.

20. The Water Resources Department says Nehalem would never be able to perfect its rights on the creek due to the interties and agreements it has in place today.

21. Nehalem now tests for 116 contaminants. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is taking over federal mandates and now we will have to start over with our testing protocols, etc. The state has provided some flexibility, for those who have not tested positive; however, they keep adding more and more regulations to smaller communities who do not have the resources to comply.

22. Municipal use in this state is less than 10 percent of the total use. Providers need to treat water to drinking water standards, when there is non-point source pollution all over the place. Even naturally, occurring contaminants like arsenic are very costly to deal with.

23. Challenging to obtain groundwater rights.

24. The Clatsop Consortium worked together on regional solutions. We could have helped each other on cost. We didn't get very far because the individual cities were hesitant to collaborate. We are getting ready to try again because it's so important.

Solutions and Opportunities

1. Storage as a way to cool water.

2. Ranchers on the east side with little water have been very creative about how they use and store water. We need to build upon their ideas. They are so frugal! Create a grant or water budget that allows you to draw upon water in the future for water you have conserved today. Look at incentives for conservation measures. We can get further by letting people use their imaginations in a pilot project and then sharing this with other communities.

3. We have floods during the winter and shortages during the summer. Build reservoirs on the Wilson and Trask Rivers to support agriculture and industries and to prevent flooding conditions.

4. The City of Tillamook needs a stormwater plan to install and pay for appropriate infrastructure.

5. Create an award, incentive, and/or credit for those who do conserve water.

6. If Klamath Basin does not receive water, Tillamook farmers do not receive hay. We need to make sure that agriculture gets its water even though folks want "fish to get water first."

7. Successful project example: The City's of Nehalem's distribution system was replaced a few years ago after receiving a Safe Drinking Water Revolving Loan Fund (1% interest for 30 years) and federal funding to replace 72 percent of its pipes. Because we were able to fix leaks, we are now averaging about 100,000 GPD in water savings. With 300% population growth, our water use is back down to what it was in 1968.

8. Need to tie cities together into regional water systems (inter-ties). This provides reliability and back-up. However, without grants, its cost prohibitive.

9. Do not punish small systems that share water pipes with the same standards, rules, and regulations as large cities like Portland who have ratepayers that can afford it. This is too much of a burden on small systems.

10. Provide credits to municipalities and farmers who cannot use their water anymore; let them preserve water rights until they are needed again.

11. Create water banks – give the larger user the option to give water when they need it and take it when they need it.

12. Look at the recent California example where the water bank became privatized. Avocado farmers bought the water and then turned off their avocado competitors. Privatized water banks lead to greater rates. Keep water banks or markets as public entities.

13. Municipalities could enter into short-term contracts, with periodic reviews. Look into the Tualatin Valley Water District and McMinnville contracts as examples.

14. Extracting groundwater as a lease. Take care of groundwater quality, quantity, well construction issues, and more. Called "unitization" and widely used in the oil industry.

15. Many cities have excess water rights, but are terrified to put them back into the public domain because of future growth or emergency. Could we put them into a regionally administered bucket for short-term water use? These excess rights could then provide water to farmers, the environment, and others who need water today.

16. Concern that regional solutions would force entities to appropriate water in order to serve neighboring cities that are inter-tied, at the expense of developing their own water supply.

17. Deal with these issues locally because the state does not understand local issues.

18. The state of Minnesota does all of the water quality testing for all systems. They travel around and conduct all of the tests. Their laboratory does the same test for everyone and specializes in the work and calculates the price based on population.

19. There are many good ideas and solutions to our water issues. These ideas could come together if we could just get the blessing of the state (Rocky Creek Project, Siletz River winter water, Valsetz River dam, constructing a regional water system with the unused portion of water rights).

20. We need better stormwater management at the site level, such as vegetation and ecosystem services, reducing impervious surfaces, and other options. This all depends on capacity of the community.

21. Need better incentives to reuse water. Other folks around the state should be looking into this as we are. It is too expensive to buy this same water from the city.

22. We need to talk about stormwater management in coastal communities as it is very different from the Willamette Valley. It is going to go into the ocean or into the bay. Solutions in the valley are not going to work here. As the state looks at controlling stormwater, they need to look at the different mechanics. Bioswales may not work here, where there is less room. We cannot meet the same standards as cities in the valley.

23. The Nehalem Sewer Agency found that it is illegal for a wastewater treatment plant to treat stormwater, which does not make sense. Provide more flexibility.

24. We cannot do bio-retention in Astoria because of steep slopes. We could possibly construct bio-retention wetlands. There are natural options.

25. Treating sewage and stormwater should probably be separate anyway.

26. Work with the state to meet water needs for recovery during a huge natural disaster.

Education and Outreach

1. Need more education on conserving or saving water.

2. Need better framing of the discussion. It is not just public versus private or the fish versus the farm. Any education and outreach effort should address all parties and concerns and not pit one against the other.

Vision

1. Want to see a true balance in the strategy between ecosystem needs and agricultural needs. Place a value on the economic contributions of agriculture to the state.

5:30 Session

Challenges

1. Integrating water resource planning with land use. Because of development, we are seeing some saltwater intrusion in Rockaway Beach. Almost 80% of the population lives and wants to live in the coastal areas. The challenge is dealing with growth without jeopardizing our water supplies.

2. Seasonal population makes it difficult to plan.

3. Stormwater is easier to address at the municipal level than the county level. It becomes more of a site by site approach with very limited success. A lot of it just drains into the bay, estuary, or wherever you live. Determine how to take a more regional approach to

solving stormwater problems. Garibaldi is a mess - the water goes into the creek or the bay. The money and political will to address this seems astronomical.

4. Most land is zoned as industrial use. We had the potential to bring biomass projects here that use a tremendous amount of water. The challenge is determining whether the Port of Tillamook Bay can provide the needed water.

5. How to define the "regional boundary."

6. Resist the privatization of water (i.e. Nestle taking Cascade Locks water for profit).

7. Communicating the water quality projects out there that are working.

8. Do not lose those programs that are already working and doing good things. We do not want to see these go away because of the strategy.

9. Lack of money to fix septic tanks. We currently do not have incentives to help them. Clatsop County relies almost entirely on septic systems. Generally, there is funding for environmental solutions. Smith Lake has problems with old septic systems and they have been working on a solution for years with no results yet. They were reluctant to engage in the problem in the first place because they know it is going to cost a lot of money, especially for fixed income, elderly residents.

10. When it rains for 3 days straight in this area, waste systems back up in your showers, tubs, etc.

11. Septic systems that affect the neighboring water supply.

12. Political will at the local level and getting the buy in from the ground up is going to be a challenge (both good and bad).

Solutions and Opportunities

1. Alternative low impact solutions to deal with your own stormwater at a local level (within your backyard type of thing).

2. Use regional plans and integrate that into the statewide plan.

3. Incentives for resource protection – how can we do more? We should keep pursuing this.

4. Manure digesters that use an anaerobic process and goes back out to the fields.

5. Water conservation automatically happens when you talk about other things (vegetation understanding, planting education, etc.). You do not have to push the issue of

conservation with these people, it happens naturally. How you treat your grasses and your plants will result in conservation naturally.

6. Incentives or funds for failing septic systems.

7. We have a large number of water districts and watersheds within Tillamook County that can reach a large number of people naturally for education and outreach. We can use these groups, educated on water, to spread the water message.

8. We need to be thinking about soils in terms of solutions. Not just talking about "water."

9. The good and the bad of reconnecting breached dikes to promote wetlands, but also seeing tide gates put on because of development. Various solutions for different purposes for different outcomes.

10. Collaboration between counties is difficult because of varying interests.

11. Frequency and intensity of flooding.

12. Highway flooding in Seaside.

13. Nehalem River flooding that affects Jewell and a few other cities.

14. Consideration or changes in science - this happens often. Science changes, we must consider that when developing a strategy to be able to adapt over time.

15. Build in mechanisms to make your plan resilient. Let the local and regional staff provide the information to the state. Start at the Tillamook and Clatsop county level, or watershed level, and build in ways to help the state shepherd the process, but not micromanage it so much. Make the connectivity among these groups strong. The more bureaucratic the process, the more difficult it is to adapt.

Education and Outreach

1. Educating folks on how to protect habitat and the value of it.

2. Provide tours of local solutions.

3. In South County, I preached conservation in my community and physically showed them that they can cut grass, not use pesticides, from the example of my own property, using native vegetation that does not need a lot of water, if treated right. We talk about all aspects of conservation to explain the benefits. In Pacific City, stuff just runs right into the river. The less water we use conserves our wells. Outreach includes organized events and

one-on-one. Advertise in paper, in shopper. The one-on-one approach is the most important.

4. Clean Water Festival - start young to integrate into education.

5. Down by the Riverside event here in town.

6. The Tillamook Estuaries Partnership has curriculum developed for all of the schools, so that by the time the event comes to fruition, the kids have a good understanding of water quality, water quantity, etc.

Vision

1. Enhance hydrologic connectivity, connecting streams and forests, etc. Watershed councils are an amazing group that works with landowners to find those critical blockages, etc.