Eugene Open House Discussion – June 10, 2010

Integrated Water Resources Strategy Spring 2010 Open House Events
Eugene Downtown Library, 100 West 10th Avenue, Eugene, OR 97401
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This document reflects public input gathered during the open house event held in Eugene. 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. When we make statements that water for fish is not as healthy as it used to be, what are we comparing? Where do you get your facts?

2. There are no water problems with exempt wells; however, the Water Resources Department wants to put water meters on wells to bill people for their water. Exempt wells are not a problem.

3. In the South Salem Hills, people are drilling deeper and deeper to get water from their exempt wells.

4. County ordinance meetings are very political, and the county and state cannot work together on some of these issues.

5. We have differing laws between land use planning and water planning.

6. Over-appropriated areas are not shown on any of our maps. Challenge is how to deal with overdraft of aquifers and streams that affects fish and wildlife.

7. Integrating the state's water allocation laws with federal obligations, such as the Clean Water Act or Endangered Species Act. The water availability model does not consider these federal needs. The Klamath Basin is a case example.

8. Our process of setting aside instream water rights does not protect public trust obligations. They should not be junior to other water rights. There should be a separate obligation to protect public trust property.

9. Not looking at the relative benefit of beneficial uses. Beneficial uses should be prioritized.

10. We have not been preparing for water issues in Oregon.

11. Decisions are being made based on fish, not on all beneficial uses.

12. Water infrastructure costs are high.

13. This process removes the authority of the Water Resources Department and gives more authority to the other agencies.

14. Finding a balance between instream and out-of-stream uses.

15. Not having the process become politicized.

16. Lack of funding for agencies.

17. Adequate data to work with and access to data.

18. Municipalities currently have an incentive to claim more water usage than needed. This is due to the municipal permit requirements.

19. The water supply impacts resulting from climate change.

Solutions and Opportunities

1. More collaboration on land use planning and more science based planning.

2. Need a better understanding of water quantity needs and how that affects land use planning. We need data to help us target certain types of land use. How is water quantity relative to land use?

3. Only one agency, the Water Resources Department, should be responsible for water in Oregon.

4. Provide incentives to return water to instream uses without penalizing those with prior appropriations.

5. Water conservation is the highest priority.

6. Educate county decision-makers on the connection between surface water and groundwater.

7. The State could take over land use planning.

8. Build more reservoir capacity in the right place.

9. Balance between instream and out-of-stream needs.

10. Small communities need more resources for water infrastructure.

11. More strategic storage capacity is needed. Not just dams and reservoirs.

12. Look at groundwater recharge opportunities.

13. Change water law to incentivize water conservation and change land use requirements.

14. Efficiencies in graywater use should be incentivized.

15. Protect instream uses.

16. More local funding help—tax revenue for people with wells, small water storage (cisterns on small properties), and large storage projects.

17. Municipalities should be able leave the unused water in the stream without losing the right to it.

18. The network of watershed councils.

19. Creative storage projects should consider climate change.

20. Effective water markets.

21. Public policies need to acknowledge that water is limited.

22. Two conversations—public resource versus a private resource. Strategy needs to address the issue, conflict, and intersect between the two.

23. Respect the culture we have inherited.

24. Food supply relies on irrigated agriculture. The water demand will not go away unless we start getting food from other countries. Balancing our needs should be looked at very carefully.

25. Need to emphasize water quality. The water we have should be clean.

26. The prior appropriation law is completely outdated. Water should be allocated to the highest and best uses and evaluated regularly, such as a periodic review of water uses every 10-20 years. Agriculture needs to be more efficient in water uses. The law needs to change.

Education and Outreach

1. A better understanding of the prior appropriation framework, especially if we are not going to change it.

2. Better information for people regarding wells, well drilling, and other water issues.

3. Increased storage would increase economics of Oregon. The public needs education on this, particularly in urban areas.

4. Water is a public resource and should be treated as such. It cannot be private property.

5. Fresh water is a declining resource, people should know that. Oceans are becoming more saline and groundwater is becoming scarce. The limits of water, in general, should be shared. It is a public resource.

Vision

1. Consider the beneficial use of water and positive economic impact on the state's economy.

2. Water rights are private property rights and need to be considered as such.

3. The authority on water should stay with the Water Resources Department.

4. Sustainable healthy agriculture, clean drinking water, lots of fish—a balance of all uses.

5. One water agency that has expertise and represents all interests.

6. Rules of beneficial use should be equal in both rural and urban settings. People should stop watering the sidewalks.

5:30 Session

Challenges

1. Landscape architecture—stormwater quality.

2. The existing nonpoint source pollution requirements do not work. Best management practices do not always work.

3. Not clear on what it means to live or own property in a flood plain—who is in charge? What are the restrictions? How do you find information?

4. The restrictions on pesticide use in a floodplain are unclear.

5. Unknown impacts of fish hatcheries—what is fed to the fish, cleanliness, escapism of fish into rivers, and impacts on water quality.

6. Forestry regulations related to herbicides and pesticide use near small streams---there are no setback requirements.

7. Heavy metal contamination from nonpoint sources and point sources. Use of lead sinkers in areas with low water flow.

8. Many farms that are adjacent to streams are not using organic practices.

9. Lack of information on water refugees.

10. People outside of Oregon want to buy our water. Do not sell it.

11. Global warming refugees are already in Oregon. The census prediction for 2030 might be too low. This could result in a dustbowl migration of people coming from the south to the north.

12. Conflicts between agencies regarding water.

Solutions and Opportunities

1. We can be doing more to capture stormwater.

2. Make sure that instream rights for fish are determined to be very important.

3. Better regulation of nonpoint source pollution.

4. Anytime there is a land transfer or purchase, help the new owner understand the importance of riparian vegetation.

5. Review federal dams, or dams that do not generate electricity, to make sure they are still doing what they were intended to do. Need a process and a way to determine if they are needed and ok.

6. Look at drinking water supplies for municipalities and rural supplies. There is no agency looking at the quality of drinking water in rural areas.

7. Ensure predators are protected —helps ecosystems remain balanced.

8. Increase water storage to make sure there is enough water in the spring and summer when it is needed.

9. More funding for watershed councils and watershed projects.

10. Signs that say what each small watershed is (look at Portland).

11. Agency Commissions should meet regularly to share what they are working on.

12. DEQ's graywater regulations should look at differences needed across the state. More lenient in some areas, stringent in others.

13. Partner with the Real Estate Board to have courses on Oregon's natural resource laws for homeowners.

Education and Outreach

1. Educate all landowners along rivers on the importance of riparian areas and trees.

2. Educate landowners about requirements in floodplains.

3. Educate rural residents on the importance of testing their drinking water wells.

4. Educate on the impacts of using fishing sinkers with heavy metals (lead) in certain streams that do not have a lot of flow.

5. Educate farmers working along streams on organic practices.

6. Educate people on the impacts of flushing pharmaceuticals down the toilet.

7. Real estate agents need to know what all of the laws are.

Vision

1. Integrate management to preserve populations of native fish.