

Columbia Basin Sustainable Water Coalition Stakeholder Meeting
Wednesday August 18, 2022
10am-12pm
Moses Lake City Council Chamber and Zoom

The Columbia Basin Sustainable Water Coalition, a group of water purveyors and other municipal and small community water system stakeholders, was formed in 2018 to address Columbia Basin domestic groundwater supply issues and create locally-driven recommendations that influence water delivery methods and policy that will direct resources for long-term groundwater solutions.

The Coalition's stakeholder meeting convened at 10:02am.

Sara Higgins, contracted facilitator for the Columbia Basin Sustainable Water Coalition introduced why we are here, the Columbia Basin Development League's role as facilitator and Geoengineers and Landau Associates role as technical consultants. The agenda was reviewed.

Presentation: GWMA Findings

Kevin Lindsey of GeoEngineers gave a presentation on the Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) Findings, and the history of groundwater monitoring in the Basin.

Groundwater monitoring first big effort began in 1998 and focused on nitrates in groundwater. The monitoring refined understanding of nitrates in relation to well construction and depth. It also revealed that only roughly 50% of well owners had construction information for their wells.

Beginning in 2008 water level data was compiled to create hydrostratigraphic maps of the aquifer. Results showed, among other things, that Lake Roosevelt was largely encased in basalt and did not substantially feed the Columbia Basin aquifers. These maps also helped scientists better understand the role of folds, faults, and dikes in the aquifer systems.

GWMA work looked at total pumping in the Adams, Franklin, and Grant counties and included irrigation and municipal use. In 2012 a canal report was issued that interviewed irrigation well operators in order to understand well performance for wells close to the East Low Canal. Results showed that deep case and sealed wells close to the canal still pumped old water, while shallow wells close to canal drew newer water, potentially water running off fields.

GWMA used water system planning and demand growth projections to predict future demand.

There was discussion about GWMA data - How the data being used, who has it, and how might the coalition use it:

All GWMA data went to Franklin County Conservation District; Lincoln County Conservation District; Franklin, Adams, Grant and Lincoln County Commissioners; and WSU. Kevin at GeoEngineers has it also.

Data is not downloadable, but requests can be made of those who have it. Another barrier to the data's use is that it has not been formatted to be accessible for communities that would like to use it to plan or

locate new wells. Othello uses the data but notes the data is very complicated and hard to use without the right expertise.

Columbia Basin Conservation District has talked to Mark Neilson about making a webpage that could house this data. The conservation district is willing to push for this if Coalition is interested.

Coalition will use the data to:

- Continue communicating issue of groundwater depletion, and the particular issue facing municipal systems in that water needed must be potable and is concentrated to one area.
- Coalition will build on the data with additional monitoring sites.
- Ben Lee of Landau Associates noted the data will also be used to seek funding.
- Chad Strevy noted the data can also be used to inform mandatory conservation rules and communicate to users.

Additional data: Potato commission updated a report using much of this data. Sara Higgins will share it.

Round Table

This portion of the meeting was intended to for stakeholders to share information, successes and challenges about projects they may be working on.

Richard Law of Moses Lake shared that the City continues to chase water deeper but it's not sustainable. They are trying to get access to shallow water and blend water. They are considering treating lake water and partnering with the rehabilitation center to provide irrigation offset which appears to be cost prohibitive. They are interested to see how ASR is going in Othello to see how feasible that is. They are interested in Quincy's relationship with Microsoft and their water usage. They want to attract business to the area but the businesses interested would require a lot of water. Obstacles to these alternatives include:

- Large area is in a superfund site, restricts area where they can use water
- Huge variance in demand between summer/winter
- Very expensive to transfer shallow water rights, if they're available, and would include legal costs which make the real cost unknown
- Cost of new infrastructure to deliver water would also be expensive and feel they would have a hard time convincing customers to pay for new infrastructure
- Communicating to users how big of an issue this will be

Dean white of Lincoln County Conservation District shared that his personal well ran out of water, but wanted to know his chances of hitting water. He used GWMA data to see if water was available. He asked if new wells being drilled would be able to use the data to see if water is available?

Scott Tarbutton of Ecology's Office of the Columbia River (OCR) is trying to collect data and wants to make data available but still exploring options. OCR is committed to funding efforts for understanding water availability.

Contractor Update—Technical

This portion of the meeting was intended for contractors to provide updates on grant project scope of work. The current WaterSMART grant is for technical work and planning.

Ben Lee reported on what Landau Associates has done so far and what they're doing for the Coalition. Their work will help the Coalition begin a groundwater monitoring network and will be a roadmap for how to collect and build a monitoring network. He reviewed current monitoring efforts that the Coalition will add to. He is interested in connecting with purveyors with municipal wells that are not being pumped. Consultants are going through the current efforts to identify gaps and recruit wells to add to monitoring network. Landau and GeoEngineers will give a series of technical presentations about project alternatives for water systems, discussing benefits and obstacles.

There was discussion:

Scott Tarbutton asked if the expectation is to have municipalities bring projects to this group to brainstorm and secure funding for, or are municipalities on their own for that? T
The Coalition may look at projects that could affect a large area like passive rehydration, AND look at projects that would be system specific. OCR's integrated plans may be a good consideration to help individual projects funded and supported, backed by letters of support.

Shawn Obrien asked if the 4-6 new wells the Coalition plans to monitor will be in one area or spread among the different aquifer stratums? It is unknown at this time. It will depend on gaps identified.

Ben Serr asked if there is monitoring of the wells in the Odessa Ground Water Replacement Program being built out now to take groundwater wells off and transfer to surface water? OCR is trying to develop a better monitoring network to support OGWRP or understand how the aquifer is responding. OCR wants to expand their network.

Kristina Ribellia noted this discussion is the power of the group.

Michele Kiesz proposed using watershed planning to help address issues and perhaps doing another EIS to look at issues holistically.

Kristina Ribellia suggested asking municipalities for wish list of projects they'd like.

Contractor Update—Organizational

Sara Higgins reported on the organizational development of the Coalition. After the June stakeholder meeting, the Coalition's Steering Committee was re-engaged and is in the process of being developed. Steering Committee Members currently include:

Michele Keisz, East Basin Irrigators District

Shawn Obrien, City of Othello

Allison Williams, Moses Lake

Kristina Ribellia, Columbia Basin Conservation District

Mark Stedman, Lincoln County Commissioner

Elsa Bowen, Lincoln County Conservation District

Judi Ellis, Group A and B Satellite Management Agency

Paul Wollman, Warden Hutterian Brethren

Rob Jones, Grant County Commissioner

The Steering Committee will meet monthly. General stakeholder meetings will happen periodically. The next one is slated for October 27.

The meeting concluded at 12:05pm.