

Drought Resiliency for Jefferson County Agriculture (“JeffCo Ag Drought Group”)

Meetings #2 = Frog HCP, Vision, and Solutions

Monday, December 5, noon-12

Participants:

Ally Steinmetz (MDWC)	Mark Wunsch (rancher & County Commissioner-elect)
Berit Nelsen (OSU)	Mike Badzmeirowski, (ODA)
Chris Gannon (CRWC)	Mike Britton (NUID)
Craig Weigand (JCSWCD Board & farmer)	Rob Galyen (JCSWCD Board & farmer)
Elaine Cornick (Culver citizen)	Scotty Samsel (JCSWCD Board & farmer)
Ellen Hammond (JCSWCD)	Smita Mehta (DEQ)
Lisa Windom (JCSWCD)	Staci Merkt (JCSWCD)
Lisa Seales (DRC)	Tom Osborne (BPA)
Jay McCabe (Wilbur Ellis)	

Due to issues with the GoToMeeting link, Tom, Mike B, and Berit were able to participate for only part of the meeting. Several members who wanted to participate couldn't do to an OSU Extension event and a school Christmas pageant.

I. Spotted Frog Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and its effect on Jefferson County agriculture (Mike Britton, NUID)

- HCP signatories included all 8 Central Oregon Irrigation Districts and the City of Prineville
- HCP covers Spotted Frog, steelhead, and Bull Trout. Chinook and Sockeye are not yet listed but would fall under this HCP. There is uncertainty about whether the Western Ridge Mussel will get listed
- HCP covers many activities, including storage and release in 9 reservoirs, pumps, and multiple location of spills from irrigation districts
- HCP requires winter flows, ramped up over 30 years. Currently releases from Wickiup of 100 cfs, then increasing to 300 in about 8 years, and then to 400. It is expected that the following types of activities will make up the shortfall that is not stored for NUID in Wickiup:
 - Water marketing with COID (NUID receives summer flow from COID)
 - Piping canal infrastructure
 - On-farm efficiency in COID; this has been a challenge for years because the COID irrigators are often part of a rotation and generally have little incentive to become more efficient. However, now COID is piping laterals and pushing farmers to improve their IWM (irrigation water management).
- HCP is a 30-year plan; this is the second year. Unfortunately, the first two years of the HCP coincide with significant drought, which has resulted in significant confusion on the part of NUID landowners about what is responsible for their short deliveries.
- In normal years in the early years of the HCP (e.g. winter releases of 100 cfs), the HCP should not affect the amount of NUID water deliveries
- Conservation projects are key to success moving forward. For example, when a Deschutes Basin irrigation district completes a conserved water project, that conserved water can be transferred to NUID as live summer flow in exchange for winter Wickiup spotted frog releases.

II. Vision Statement for Jefferson County ag

Those present for the discussion voted for the following, acknowledging that it needs some wordsmithing:

Jefferson County agriculture thrives as a result of nurturing and enhancing Jefferson County people, animals, culture, economy, and nature, together with effective cooperation and collaboration with all stakeholders in the Deschutes Basin.

III. Kinds of Drought

Mike Britton pointed out that Jefferson County is experiencing two kinds of drought and it would be helpful to realize this Group will probably focus more on the second as they have more power over responding to it:

- A. “Regulatory Drought” = lack of water due to state and federal regulations such as the 1) Endangered Species Act and resulting HCPs, 2) water law (prior appropriation resulting in NUID’s junior water right, and the low duty for NUID (2+cfs) compared to 4+ for Deschutes County irrigation districts)), 3) Clean Water Act, and 4) Oregon’s Exclusive Farm Use zoning (may require landowners to irrigate to maintain their tax deferral).

Tackling this type of drought requires changing state and federal laws, although Jefferson County stakeholders should be engaged in these processes and determine where tweaks could be made.

- B. “Hydrologic Drought” = lack of water due to climate and weather conditions, both high temperatures and low precipitation

IV. Solutions: brainstorm

Ellen referred everybody to the summary she put together of the first two meetings. There were several themes: 1) education of all stakeholders leading to understanding, respect, and support of Jefferson County ag, 2) tools for Jefferson Co ag, 3) and supporting watershed health.

#1: Education

- Coordinated message
- Using common language
- Social media
- Madras Pioneer
- County Commission as a voice for ag
- Jeff Co ag needs to advocate for ag for regional awareness
- Outreach Plan! (SWCD staff are already working on one for the SWCD)
- Videos of the reality of Jefferson County farming
- Jeff Co entities need to be more engaged in regional efforts to 1) represent Jefferson Co ag interests and 2) raise regional awareness of ag’s reality (struggles and accomplishments)
 - NUID, SWCD, MDWC, OSU (has limits), Jefferson Co Seed Growers (look into that)
- Advocates for Jeff Co ag need to be both confident in their information and competent to distribute it

- For example, how water law works at the farm level
- Need to find out who is already doing things, e.g. DRC has monthly seminars on topics such as groundwater and water rights ([Raise the Deschutes Seminar Videos \(deschutesriver.org\)](http://deschutesriver.org))

#2: Tools for Jefferson Co ag

- Funding for conservation practices
- Increased and consistent water supply
 - Regulatory Drought
 - NUID has the following legislative concepts for 'tweaks'
 - Allow split-season and split-duties in the Deschutes Basin
 - Change the 5-year clock for demonstrating beneficial use
 - Allow transfers between irrigation districts
 - Expand the definition of what constitutes 'beneficial use'
 - Is it possible to change water law to ensure that water rights lost to development in the Deschutes Basin go to the junior user?
 - Group members need to stay engaged in the HCP process ask for information to show that the HCP is meeting its goals of preserving species
 - Mitigate higher temperatures (plant trees for shade?)
 - Hydrologic Drought
 - Prioritize the most inefficient water quantity bottlenecks for improvement
 - Get uplands in better shape
 - Dig more wells
 - Increase efficiency in irrigation districts with the highest duty in the Deschutes Basin
- Adapt to less water
 - Research other commodities that use less water
- Reward farmers with recognition/cash for good stewardship, especially those ahead of the funding/support curve
- OSU study led by Berit is looking at what farmers affected by drought need
- BPA offers rebates to members of electric co-ops

Ran out of time!

V. Next Steps

Continue with solutions