

**Columbia River Policy Advisory Group**  
**April 6, 2023**  
**Draft Meeting Summary – Online Meeting**

*Note: Powerpoint presentations from this meeting are available on the OCR website:  
<https://www.ezview.wa.gov/?alias=1962&pageid=37050>*

**WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS**

The meeting began at 9:30am. Facilitator Cynthia Carlstad reviewed a couple of pointers for the virtual meeting and introduced co-facilitator Ben Floyd.

Cynthia welcomed new county members – Jo Gilchrist from Lincoln County stepping into Mark Stedman’s former role, and other new county member roles – Clint Didier (Franklin County) moving from an alternate to member (replacing Ron Anderson from Yakima County) and LaDon Linde (Yakima County) taking the vacant alternate county role.

Members introduced themselves and guests added name and affiliation in the chat for attendance tracking.

Cynthia announced that the public comment period will be at approximately 10:30am and asked that anyone who wants to make a public comment send a chat directly to Ben Floyd.

**2023 WATER SUPPLY FORECAST**

Jeff Marti, water resources planner for Ecology, presented the statewide water supply forecast for 2023. Jeff started by describing the difference between what was expected and what actually happened given the La Nina ocean conditions. Usually La Nina ocean conditions lead to more wet and cooler conditions for Washington State. We did get cooler than normal during Dec – Feb, but it was unexpectedly drier than normal. California received the precipitation that Washington and Oregon would typically receive.

At this point, much of Washington is considered abnormally dry, as depicted in April 4 graph. Snowpack is slightly above normal (104%), and better than last year (86%), but in north central Washington snowpack is lower compared to the rest of the state, likely due to lower precipitation and drier soils from last fall. Fortunately, there has been many fewer melt days compared to 2022. British Columbia has below normal snowpack in BC, which will affect the Columbia River runoff. Statewide average of precipitation is 84%. Central Washington is about average.

In terms of volume, as of April 1, there is more than 40 million acre-feet of water stored in the snowpack statewide. We live in the part of the world that receives moisture from the ocean and when the snowmaking machine when system is working, turns it into snowpack. When this doesn’t happen, we have severe shortages. For example, in the 2015 drought, there was just 12 million acre-feet statewide; for the Yakima basin it was 200,640 acre-feet in 2015 vs 2.7 million acre-feet in 2023. Statewide, that is a 28 million acre-feet difference between 2015 and 2023.

Streamflow forecasts for the Columbia Basin show many areas with below normal conditions, particularly in Central Washington, even though state forecast is near normal (97%). The Methow and Okanogan rivers are areas of concern. The reason for this is continued low soil moisture that has not rebounded even with a good snowpack.

The runoff forecast for the Columbia River at the Dalles Dam, which is the control station for the Columbia Basin instream flow rule, is above the 60 MAF (March 1 forecast) trigger for curtailments, therefore no curtailments are envisioned on the Columbia. However, water use curtailments for interruptible water rights could occur in the Okanogan, Methow, Little Spokane, and Entiat Rivers, especially if flows drop below average later in the year.

Higher than average precipitation is forecast for April, but this is not likely to change the situation for the Columbia Basin much. It is also unlikely that we will reach normal by end of water year (September 30). But it is also unlikely to be below the 75% drought declaration threshold. Looking into 2024, we should plan for below-normal precipitation with El Nino ocean conditions forming.

In conclusion and summary:

- Snowpack is good but we are below normal for precipitation. Cold conditions have helped retain the snowpack we have.
- Low soil moisture in some areas is missing below the snowpack.
- Forecasted runoff is near normal but a few watersheds are expected to dip below the statutory drought threshold (75%).
- Yakima reservoirs will be below average and junior water right entitlements will likely be pro-rated. Curtailment of junior water users in some watersheds is likely.
- As conditions unfold during the spring, some of these findings will need to be updated.

#### Questions and Answers

- Clint Didier – What about the snowstorm earlier this week? It resulted in something like 18 inches on Snoqualmie pass? Jeff to follow up with Clint.
- Cynthia – How would you overcome the low soil moisture conditions? Last fall was dry into October, and we didn't receive a lot of precipitation to bump up soil moisture before snow fall started. When snow melts, the dry soil gets saturated first and then starts to runoff. In Methow, this will likely result in a muted and delayed response to streamflow.
- Jim Thornton – How much does the British Columbia snowpack impact portions of the Okanogan, Kettle and Similkameen rivers and flows in the state? Jeff will have to look this up. Similkameen has lower flows than Okanogan mainstem, due to low snowpack conditions. Good conditions in one will impact the other once the overall contributions come together.
- Tom Tebb shared in the chat the latest proratable supply percentage is at 82% for Junior water users in the Yakima, as of April 6, 2023.
- Cynthia – She appreciated Jeff's caution about next year's conditions with the expected El Nino pattern - how can we plan for this condition? California compared to Washington received much higher precipitation than typical– unprecedented back to back atmospheric rivers – how likely could that happen for Washington, with warmer, wetter conditions is an important question? Ecology has water supply availability committee with climate experts. These are the kind of question that Jeff would seek their input on.
- Cynthia – we have many more tools to measure these days. Important to use these tools to track and respond to trends as they happen. With the lack of soil moisture do we expect drought like conditions in dry land wheat areas of the state? Potentially.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

David Ortman gave public comment covering the following topics:

- New water rights – Noting one of OCR’s mandates to identify sources of water available for new uses, he would like to know the quantity of new surface water rights that Ecology has issued in eastern Washington since 2006 and what has been the increase in instream flows in Columbia River tributaries for each year since 2006 from new sources of water.
- Alpine Lakes Wilderness – Referencing the Icicle Creek Strategy, he stated that materials and website descriptions do not mention the presence of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness in the watershed and thinks this is a serious omission.
- Washington Irrigation Guide – He would like to know the status of updating this document.
- Yakima River Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan Implementation Status Report, due December 1, 2021 – He commented that the status of this report has not been provided.
- Endangered Species Act – He referenced a WDFW document from 1997 that spoke to potential hardships for much of agricultural parts of eastern Washington from Endangered Species Act listings of salmon and steelhead species and asked if the document reflected current WDFW policy.
- Jeff Marti’s Water Supply Forecast presentation – He would like to see how the forecast impacts anadromous fish in future updates.

## **2023 LEGISLATIVE SESSION UPDATE**

### Legislative activity

Noah Wentzel gave an update on water-related legislative activities. April 23rd is the end of session. We just passed the fiscal cutoff, so now only looking at bills that have passed out of the House/Senate and that have been passed out of committee by the respective houses. Both houses are getting ready to finalize these bills and send to the Governor.

For this session, 230 bills are being tracked by Ecology, with only 10 water resources bills. Currently, there are only 3 that have made it through all the hurdles and are waiting on final action and approval.

Ecology has three agency requested bills:

- SHB 1138, addresses drought preparedness and response. It amends the current treasury account system to establish two accounts: 1) for planning and preparedness and 2) for emergency response. The original proposal also included planning funding of \$2.5 million and \$3 million for response funding, when triggered by an emergency order. Often the drought declaration happens after the session has ended so this is important. House removed funding provisions from the bill but passed 96 – 1. The Senate Ag, Water, Natural Resource and Parks committee restored the emergency response funding provision. They are now waiting for Rules committee to take action on this bill.
- 2SHB 1322/SB 5384 is for the Walla Walla Water 2050 Plan, and gives authority to implement the plan, giving Ecology direction to determine type of agreements needed between Washington and Oregon, and authorizes Ecology to fund projects in the Oregon part of the basin. Some minor tweaks are being made to the bill. Water supply projects will still be funded through state legislative process. This bill is also in the Senate Rules committee - hoping to get a floor vote before next week cutoff. Tom Tebb added that

Senator Hansel from Oregon, has introduced a similar bill in their state legislature; Ecology is watching this one as well.

- E2SHB 1170/SSB 5093 is on climate resilience planning. Minor changes are being made, including reporting dates and stakeholder coordination. This was pulled from Rules yesterday and Noah is hoping for Senate vote soon.

Other water resources bills include the following:

- SHB 1285 (Bill would have expanded the pool of uses that existing Family Farm act water rights could be transferred to – LAMIRDS and master planned resorts. Master planned resorts were removed from the bill, but it died in committee.
- HB 1752 – Reclamation water rights to be spread across Columbia Basin project and not be subject to RCW 90.03.0380 test. Bill died in committee.
- HB1792 – Water rights adjudication process, applying to upcoming Nooksack adjudication. Makes some procedural changes and stakeholder engagement beefed up. Moving forward still. HB 1792 is on the 2nd Reading Calendar
- SB 5157 – Water Infrastructure Projects - \$50 million per biennium. This year's bill didn't go anywhere.
- SB 5517 - Water resource mitigation – addressing Foster Task Force and recommendations – establishes mitigation sequencing for new groundwater rights. For applicants applying for new groundwater rights for regulated water bodies, follow sequencing. Includes both in kind and out of kind mitigation, e.g., habitat projects. Directed Ecology to establish standards for groundwater modeling through rulemaking. Had hearing but didn't go forward. Expected next year
- SB 5622 – Muni water right transfers. Recognizes alternate water rights (alternate sources with no additional annual quantity), and would also have recognized the inchoate quantities for municipal permits and certificates. Had hearing but didn't get out of committee. Could come back next year
- SB 5628 – Family Farm water right transfers. – Would allow family farm permits to be transferred for use outside of WRIA within the mainstem corridors of Columbia and lower Snake. Bill is inactive.

Other notable bills are listed below:

- SHB 1216/SB 5380 – Clean energy project siting; directs WSU to survey of potential pump storage opportunities
- SSB 5094 – Water system planning. Climate resiliency planning in Water System Plans for Class A water systems. Substance of the bill has been incorporated into the GMA bill. Lots of GMA bills this session.

See bill tracker link - <https://apps.wa.gov/ecology/docs/WaterRights/wrwebpdf/WRP-BillTracking.pdf>

## OCR 2023-2025 Capital Budget

Melissa Downes presented the almost final OCR capital budget and work plan for the 2023-2025 state biennium, which begins July 1. OCR's budget is included in what Ecology submitted to the Governor in September 2022. The Governor's budget was released in December, 2022. Over the last few weeks the House and Senate have been working on their proposed budgets. Some funding amounts mirror each other and others are different; these are described in the passages below for each element.

OCR's work program for the Columbia Basin for 2023-2025 consists of the following elements:

- Odessa GW replacement program – Governor requested \$20M and Senate has included \$34.15M + proviso with the House \$20.85M +proviso. Senate provides funding for Reclamation and groundwater related work. Need to have pumping plants and 30% design by July 2025. Have some systems that have already met the 30% design, and three that have not.
- Icicle Creek water management strategy. This biennium the budget is \$4 million; expecting \$5 million in budget. Possible projects for funding include alluvial water storage, alpine lakes water storage, irrigation conservation, and dam rebuild construction. Clint Didier asked about the dam rebuild and Melissa responded that a more detailed description of that will be provided later in the meeting.
- Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) Exploration and Development - \$6 million, including streamlining technical and permitting processes. Working with several communities across Columbia Basin. Continuing to partner and explore ASR for water supply purposes.
- Walla Walla Basin Strategic Plan – Already heard about the legislation update. \$4.7 million – for things that are in process such as the USGS groundwater study, the bi-state implementation committee, stream gauges and a Reclamation basin study cost-share, plus early projects implementation. Have \$3 million now that has been put towards early implementation and strategic plan prioritization of projects.
- OCR Project level mitigation is \$2 million. It includes wetlands mitigation, boat ramps affected by drawdown, and other activities.
- Potholes supplemental feed route. Expanding capacity in east-low canal from Banks Lake; as Crab Creek feeder route gets established.
- Pasco Basin Water Supply - \$400K for EIS and rulemaking process
- Columbia River interruptible water rights – no funding being provided.
- 2023 – 2025 Projects (new proposals) – \$1.5 million for new water supply development projects for feasibility, Port of Walla Walla lease (\$1 million but at risk). Lake Roosevelt incremental storage releases program (\$1 million to pay Reclamation), OCR facilitation support (\$600K), and OCR WDFW staff support fully funded.

In summary, OCR's capital budget appears to be firming up as follows:

- OCR - \$43.8M (Gov)/\$60.7 (Senate) /\$44.7 (House)
- Yakima Basin Integrated Plan - \$49M in House and Senate and \$42M in the governor's budget
- Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Program - \$3.2M

Melissa reiterated that OCR's priorities are to work diligently with basin partners to finish the work already underway as described in the 2023-2025 work program. She and Tom would like PAG input on priorities should projects be completed under budget and funds are available for other work. For example, the potholes supplemental feed route and Walla Walla are two projects being considered.

### Questions and Answers

- Cynthia – Clarification - for the additional Odessa funds and proviso, would it allow for funding to be moved around? Melissa responded that will be one area where they cannot move funding around.
- Clint Didier – Question on \$500k for Snake River irrigators – approved or no? This showed up in line item for the House; for evaluation of Snake River dams removal. Big impacts – carbon emissions, etc. Tom noted the proposal was for doing analysis on what benefits would be lost with irrigation infrastructure if dam breaching occurs, considering cost and associated impacts to irrigated agriculture.
- Wes McCart – If Ecology is able to move funding around, he would like to see more funding for interruptibles water rights work. That has been part of work plan since inception of OCR with little progress made so far.
- Clint Didier – what about funds for completing East high of the Columbia Basin project? Tom – only able to spend money on groundwater mitigation for Odessa. Clint asked a follow up question – for Pasco Basin, who will get the water? State or feds? Tom – Ecology will be determining how to allocate this water for future uses. More to come on this later.

### **WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES COLUMBIA RIVER CAUCUS UPDATE**

Paul Jewell, WSAC Policy Director, recognized the new County representatives joining the caucus, including Clint Didier (Franklin) and Jo Gilchrist (Lincoln). New alternate is LaDon Linde (Yakima). Wes McCart (Stevens) is going on the Executive Committee. He then gave the following update from Caucus' most recent meeting:

- Jeff Marti present similar information to what he shared today.
- Went over leg session and bills status. Water banking pilot project also tracked - dollars and also one program tweak
- OCR update and budget status (provided by Melissa Downes)

### **COLUMBIA BASIN UPDATES**

Pasco Basin Rulemaking – Melissa Downes shared the following:

- See Ecology website – updates on rulemaking, how to get on email list, etc. See: <https://ecology.wa.gov/Issues-and-local-projects/Environmental-projects/Pasco-Basin-groundwater>
- Ecology is holding one-on-one meetings with Conservation Districts, City of Pasco, Port of Pasco, City/Port of Mattawa
- Started rulemaking July 13, 2022, and it includes two parts – 1) boundary designations of the mounded groundwater area. WAC 508-14 has an interim designation that looks

similar to what Ecology is finding in their rulemaking; and 2) How to permit or appropriate water. Rulemaking starting with the outreach described above.

- USGS/Reclamation working on the groundwater model; refreshing it since it is almost 8-years old
- Melissa shared schedule of steps and timeline for strategy and rulemaking, and environmental review. The schedule also includes permitting and strategy steps.
- Question from Mark Nielson – will the boundary designation be appealable to the PCHB? *Tom answered yes.*
- Cynthia reminded the group that more detail is available in past meeting materials

Eightmile Lake Dam Rebuild and Restoration - Melissa Downes shared the following:

- See Ecology website - <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply/Water-supply-projects-EW/Icicle-Creek-strategy/Eightmile-Dam>
- The dam is owned by Icicle/Peshastin Irrigation District
- Ecology is lead for Environmental Review. Comment scoping summary is available
- Planning to release the draft EIS April 19. Looking at 3 action alternatives (1 added since scoping) and no action. Inviting public comment on alternatives and impacts.
- Looking at a variety of factors in EIS. More to come once draft EIS is released.
- Tom thanked Melissa for all her hard work.
- Clint Didier commented – shocking to see dam being restored. Hate to see any breaching of the lower Snake River dams.
- Margie Van Cleve – Sierra Club – how confident is this date? *Quite confident, Melissa replied.*

CRPAG membership and Executive Committee Update – Cynthia provided the following update: As Paul Jewell mentioned, we have an updated County roster now. We are also reconfiguring the Executive Committee to be slightly larger. The primary role of the Executive Committee will help with agenda review and strategies.

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**Attendees:**

*CRPAG members and alternates:*

Clint Didier, Franklin Co. Commission	Lisa Ganuelas, CTUIR
Jacob Anderson, Klickitat Co. Commission	Lisa Pelly, TU
Jeff Dengel, WDFW	Milli Chenell, BPA
Jeremy Weber, ACOE	Mike Schwisow, Columbia Basin Development League
Jerome Delvin, Benton Co. Commission	Sarah Dyrdaahl, American Rivers
Jo Gilchrist, Lincoln Co. Commission	Stuart Crane, Yakama Nation
Melissa Downes, OCR/Ecology	Tom Tebb, OCR/Ecology
	Wes McCart, Stevens Co. Commission

*Guests / Staff:*

Annie Byerly	John Reeves
Abby Hendrickson, CFRA-490	Lorah Super, Program Director, Methow Valley Citizens Council
Bruce Wakefield, Colville Tribes	Margie Van Cleve, Sierra Club volunteer
Carl Merkle, CTUIR	Mark Nielson, Benton and Franklin CDs
Chris Voigt, Potato Commission	Mike Noone, Ecology
Craig McDonald	

David Ortman  
Cristina Frank, DNR  
Erin Cox, Jacobs  
Harmony Gehlert, ECY -WR/OCR  
Heather May  
Jeff Marti, Ecology (to present)  
Jim Thornton, Governor's Office  
John Reeves  
Jon Call  
Larry Martin,  
Kelsey Mach, Aspect Consulting

Noah Wentzel, Ecology (to present)  
Paul Jewell, Washington Assoc. of Counties  
Perrin Robinson, Jacobs  
Tim Poppleton, Ecology  
Todd Kimball, Walla Walla Co. Commission  
Ranie Haas, WA State Tree Fruit Assoc  
Rick Evan, Sen Cantwell's office  
Steve Nelson, RH2 Consulting  
Tim Kovis, WA State Tree Fruit Assoc

*Facilitation*

Cynthia Carlstad, NHC  
Ben Floyd, White Bluffs Consulting