

Columbia River Policy Advisory Group

June 4, 2020

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 9:30 a.m. Melissa Downes introduced new OCR Facilitator Cynthia Carlstad. She will be co-facilitating the PAG with Neil through December, and then take over completely. Neil is retiring and handing off his duties over the next six months. Neil then went over a couple of pointers for the online meeting. Cynthia read off the rollcall of who had logged in for the meeting.

Office of Columbia River Updates

Legislation: Melissa Downes, OCR, presented this topic. During the legislative session, a lot of attention was paid to water banking. Several bills were introduced, none passed. Ecology has formed a workgroup to look at some of those issues. Carrie Sessions will be providing a status report from that workgroup later in the meeting. Melissa also noted that the Walla Walla pilot program was extended two additional years. More information on that will be discussed at the end of today's meeting.

Tom Tebb noted that there was a Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) meeting yesterday to discuss the Walla Walla program. It can be viewed on TVW. OCR will be working closely with the Walla Walla Partnership Board on strategic planning.

Budget: Melissa noted that Covid-19 has impacted the current biennium budget. The Governor has issued some directives for agencies to address in saving costs. Construction was initially stopped under the Governor's stay-at-home order. Some construction can now re-start; a Covid safety plan is required. A hiring/contract/equipment freeze was implemented. No hiring is allowed unless it is health/safety related. There is no effect on existing contracts. She noted that OCR does not have the need for buying new equipment. They have been asked as an agency to reach budget reduction targets. Ecology is holding vacancies and has restricted out of state travel. The Governor vetoed some smaller items when signing the budget. Another revenue forecast is due in mid-June. She is hearing potential a \$7 billion budget shortfall within a 1-5-year window. They have been asked to consider a 15% reduction. OCR thinking is to reduce specific projects, not use across-the-board reductions. Tom said these are uncertain times; the only bright spot is the legislature and others are thinking about stimulus packages.

OCR then gave a budget presentation (the PowerPoint presentation can be found on the OCR web page¹). It highlighted the different items that are likely to be requested for 2021-2023 biennium. An emphasis is being placed on completing what has been started, e.g. the Odessa area projects. Craig Simpson noted that only 25% of the funding to finish Odessa is from OCR. The presentation reviews the other ongoing and potentially new projects.

Columbia River Treaty: The last round of negotiations was held on March 20; there have been no new sessions. Tom anticipates new sessions in the future; the state department website at state.gov has information.

¹ <https://www.ezview.wa.gov/?alias=1962&pageid=37050>

Columbia River System Operations Review (SOR): The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) has been issued, the comment period is completed. The federal agencies will be working on a Final EIS and plan to issue that in July. There is a preferred alternative which includes adopting a flexible spills operating regime. It also includes an adaptive management portion.

Fish Flow Release Advisory Group (FFRAG): Jeff Dengel, WDFW, discussed this advisory group. It is set up to work on permits issued for water from Lake Roosevelt. By contract, Lake Roosevelt has the top 1 foot (82,500 acre-feet) available during ordinary years and 1.8 feet (132,500 acre-feet) available during drought years. He had a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed the members and allocation framework; the presentation is available on the OCR website.

Public Comment: David Ortman asked about the Icicle program, what is the rationale for putting storage in the wilderness area. He also noted a lawsuit has been filed on the Yakima Plan. Tom Tebb explained that the Icicle storage pre-dates the wilderness designation. A pre-existing dam is identified as “high-risk” by the Ecology dam safety program and needs to be repaired. They are still in the planning stage, no environmental review. He also noted that there is no update on the lawsuit, which was filed by Friends of Kachess Lake.

Strategic Planning Workshop: Neil reviewed the timing for the workshop. He noted that he and Cynthia will work together for the September meeting and the workshop, then Cynthia will take over facilitation for the December meeting. Neil will still be available on an on-call basis after that. He noted that a previous strategic planning workshop was held in December 2017. The timing seems good to do another one, with the transition in facilitators and the changes in the CR Program. Cynthia then explained the proposed objectives and work that will be done in advance. She will be contacting individual PAG members to discuss their thoughts, and a SurveyMonkey questionnaire will be developed to receive comments. Neil asked for volunteers from the PAG to serve as an ad hoc subcommittee for workshop planning.

Walla Walla update:

Three people presented this topic (the PowerPoint presentation is on the OCR website). The first was Brooke Beeler, Ecology ERO Regional Director. She noted that no new water rights have been issued in the basin since 1992. A ten-year pilot program was created by the legislature in 2009 (RCW 90.92); a two-year extension was approved through 2021. The original program had five components. A performance audit has been completed with was presented yesterday to JLARC. She reviewed the audit conclusions. A strategic planning process has been started.

Chris Hyland is the Executive Director for the WW Partnership. He noted the plans include a flow enhancement study and a potential reservoir or exchange as an anchor. There are several technical subcommittees that are currently working on the project. A draft report was issued in December 2019, which will be part of the current strategic planning process. The future of the partnership after June 2021 is being reviewed. Ecology has weighed in with recommendations, his Board is still considering. Recommendations are due to the Legislature in November of this year.

Scott Tarbutton then took over the presentation. He is with the Office of Columbia River. He reviewed the strategic planning work. The plan is due June of 2021. He reviewed common themes for the 2050 vision, and barriers to the vision. Information is available on their website. He finished by reviewing the working groups.

2020 Water Supply Update:

Jeff Marti, Ecology Water Resources Program, presented this. His PowerPoint presentation is available on the OCR website. We ended up being a little cooler than last year. The last 15 days have been more normal. His conclusion is generally good news; there was a decent snowpack before the recent dry spell.

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 pm.

Attendees:

CRPAG members and alternates:

Ron Anderson, Yakima Co Comm
Jon Culp, Conservation Comm
Tom Davis, WSFB
BJ Kieffer, Spokane Tribe
Wes McCart, Stevens Co Comm
Lisa Pelly, Trout Unlimited

Mike Schwisow, Columbia Basin
Development League
Craig Simpson, ECBID
Mark Stedman, Lincoln Co Comm
Richard Stevens, Grant Co Comm
Jeremy Weber, ACOE

Others logged in for the meeting²:

Neil Aaland, Facilitator
Cynthia Carlstad, OCR Facilitator
Jeff Dengel, WDFW
Melissa Downes, OCR/Ecology
Carrie Sessions, Ecology
Ben Serr, Washington Department of
Commerce Growth Mgmt Services
Brent Nichols
Brook Beeler
Bruce Wakefield
Carl Merkle, Umatilla Tribe
Chris Hyland
David Ortman
Dan Haller
Dawn Vyvyan
Doug England
Ethan Lockwood
Greg McLaughlin
Henry Allen
J.R. Cook
Jason McCormick
Jeff Marti
Jennifer Hickenbottom

Jeremy Weber
Jim Heffernan
Joel Freudenthal
Joy Polston Barnes
Joyce Redfield
Justin Harder
Karen Epps, Coordinator for Senate
Committee Services
Larry Mattson
Megan Kernan
Raelene Gold
Rick Miller
Scott Kuhta
Scott Tarbutton
Sean Gross
Stuart Crane
Sue Kahle
T. Flynn
Theodore Knight
Tom Myrum
Paul Jewell

² Note on attendance: some participants were not identified by their name, so we do not list those here. At the peak we had around 64 people participating