



## Columbia River Policy Advisory Group

**July 11, 2024**

### **Hybrid Meeting – East Columbia Basin Irrigation District Boardroom and online via Zoom Meeting Summary**

Slides and recording available at [CRPAG Website](#)

#### Welcome and Introductions

Tom Tebb (WA Ecology) opened the meeting by thanking Craig Simpson (ECBID) and his team for providing the opportunity to tour some of the projects associated with the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Project (OGWRP). Tom mentioned this project is one of the highest priorities for the Office of Columbia River (OCR). Tom also shared an overview of the meeting agenda.

#### Field Tour Debrief & Discussion: Odessa Groundwater Replacement Project

Rob Willis (Facilitator, Ross Strategic) initiated the discussion by inviting in-person participants to reflect on the morning tour and ask any questions they might have regarding their experience.

#### *Discussion*

Tom Tebb started by highlighting the scale of the project, acknowledging all the moving pieces and collaboration between various groups involved in bringing it to life. Tom expressed gratitude to the ECBID team, the Bureau of Reclamation team, and other project supporters.

Tom emphasized the importance of having a legislative staff member associated with the capital budget join the tour. The tour provided an opportunity to showcase on-the-ground progress as work is being implemented and allowed for a first-hand experience that they can share with the legislature.

One CRPAG member inquired about the remaining permitting work needed to complete the build-out. Tom clarified that all water rights work has been addressed through a secondary use permit that was issued for Odessa years ago. As construction moves through the distribution lines, additional work related to Section 106 (for cultural considerations), easement requirements, and power infrastructure will be necessary. Craig Simpson added that while the overall land is covered by an EIS, each individual distribution system requires site-specific permitting, overseen by the district or consultants through Reclamation.

#### Columbia Basin Sustainable Water Coalition

Kristina Ribellia (Columbia Basin Conservation District) provided an overview of the Columbia Basin Sustainable Water Coalition (CBSWC) and described the impact of declining aquifers on municipal water purveyors and residents in the Odessa subarea.

Kristina described proposals submitted by CBSWC to NRCS for funding for the EL 11.8 and EL 22.1 projects. EL 22.1 aims to convert 17,000 acres from the deep aquifer, conserving 52,000-acre feet of water annually, serving 93,000 homes. Craig Simpson added that the Odessa projects already serve over



17,000 acres. One CBSWC board member noted that the project has already replaced enough water to support Moses Lake for the next 5 years.

Kristina described the formation of the coalition in 2017, its mission, funding sources, bylaws, board formation, and elections process. Kristina mentioned their new website includes water purveyor profiles that convey critical needs and direct impacts of declining aquifers on communities. Kristina also outlined their preliminary watershed management plan that focuses on the state of groundwater monitoring, current impacts to water purveyors, and future planning efforts.

Kristina discussed funding from OCR and Reclamation to develop an online Columbia Basin Groundwater Cooperative Interactive Web Application. This platform will incorporate GWMA data and new well monitoring data, provide easy public access, and help inform decision-making.

Kristina elaborated on two new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) proposals. The EL 11.8 has eight wells coming off groundwater with three identified for well monitoring. Currently, EL 22.1 has 34 wells coming off groundwater and they will have access to all of them for monitoring.

Kristina also provided information about CBSWC's commitment to improving water management and policy. CBSWC is helping establish an Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) Technical Work Group, which will provide recommendations for future legislation. They are also pursuing additional drought planning and more formal integrated efforts for the Franklin, Lincoln, Adams, and Grant (FLAG) counties.

Kristina's slides are available on the WA Ecology CRPAG website ([view slides](#)) and on TVW ([view presentation](#) at 00:11:56).

#### *Discussion*

One CRPAG member asked what happens to the valuable information that wells provide if the goal is to take people off groundwater wells. Tom shared that wells would go into standby reserve status in case of a catastrophic canal break.

A CBSWC board member referenced a report of an old, dry spring that started showing results of water for the first time in decades and emphasized the importance of keeping the momentum. State support and Federal funding gives them an avenue to help farmers financially to move forward with infrastructure.

9th District State Representative Mary Dye added comments about the importance of digitizing GWMA data as the GWMA project was a long-term and expensive state investment. They also provided comments about well shafts and how they can clean and process water from the Columbia system and repatriate the aquifer by injecting into the wells.

A CBSWC board member raised concern about placing wells in standby status, highlighting the cost and effort required to reactivate them in an emergency and the jeopardization of the year's crop. They suggested it may be worth exploring well injection as a future planning measure.

One CRPAG member asked whether they are only monitoring groundwater levels or if there are plans for aquifer testing. Kristina clarified that they are only monitoring groundwater as part of the Odessa



project, based on NRCS funding. A CBSWC board member added that municipalities measure water quality as well. Tom mentioned that Ecology collaborates with individual cities and communities on ASR, conducting pump tests and assessing aquifer characteristics to ensure suitable water storage options.

Another CRPAG member inquired about access to the Columbia Basin Project for municipal/industrial (M&I) water. Craig explained that this project has a separate water supply for irrigated agriculture and for M&I purposes. Although delivered through the same system, the M&I supply is limited to 7 months per year and has capacity limitations. A CBSWC board member added that cities face challenges in securing reliable, clean water sources—especially with schools and homes relying on M&I water supply.

Tom and several others expressed their appreciation for the coalition’s ability to bring together hundreds of community members, state agencies, and legislators to address these shared problems.

### [City of Othello Aquifer Storage & Recovery Project](#)

Mayor Shawn Logan of the City of Othello provided a briefing on the city’s water supply plan and Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) project. The briefing covered Othello’s demographics, its reliance on depleting groundwater supply, and commitment to achieving water equity. Mayor Logan outlined their short and long-term strategies for diversifying their water supply, highlighting the process of utilizing surface water through treatment, direct use, and ASR.

Mayor Logan shared details about how the ASR project will treat Columbia Basin canal water, recharge underground water levels, and provide a reliable water supply for all users. Mayor Logan described the ASR project development phases and funding. The ASR build-out is in pre-design stages, with construction slated to begin in 2026 and operation by 2027.

Mayor Logan also discussed future planning efforts for water reuse, increased diversion, and expanding ASR operations for year-round treatment. Tom contributed insights about the potential for using 508-14 water, mentioning Ecology’s plans to identify the geographic extent of the area and move into rulemaking. Tom commended Mayor Logan’s leadership and commitment in addressing technical challenges and planning for their community’s future.

Mayor Logan’s slides are available on the WA Ecology CRPAG website ([view slides](#)) and on TVW ([view presentation](#) at 01:01:25).

### *Discussion*

One CRPAG member inquired about the City of Othello’s preparations to support the power demands for water treatment resources. Mayor Logan explained that the city plans to rely on a nearby substation and Big Bend Electric. Additionally, large food processors in the area are also supporting increased power supply.

Another CRPAG member asked about the City of Othello’s M&I contract with Reclamation. Mayor Logan clarified that while they had a contract for the ASR pilot program, they have not yet secured it for the complete project. However, they have obtained water rights, and their next step involves securing more permits.



### Public Comment (01:47:00)

David E. Ortman provided comments concerning the Bureau of Reclamation's request for an extension of the period of withdrawal of unappropriated Columbia River water and tributaries upstream from Priest Rapids Dam for the Black Rock project. Additional feedback was shared related to the Roza Irrigation District's website information regarding drought year water supply and water allocation rates. David also raised the U.S.-Canadian Columbia River Treaty and inquired about how the CRPAG plans to be involved. David also suggested ending meeting conflicts between the CRPAG and Chehalis Basin strategy and sought an update on Ecology's plans to fill the vacant environmental position on the CRPAG.

Kristina Ribellia provided comments on the CBSWC's efforts to secure funding for the Odessa project. With OCR's support, they submitted seven applications to NRCS for RCPP funding last year. Three of these were funded at \$39.9 million for the Odessa project. They also received \$33 million in partner contributions from OCR, ECBID, Reclamation, landowners on EL 11.8 and 22.1, and other conservation district partners. Kristina shared that they submitted an additional 6 proposals for EL 11.8 and EL 22.1, totaling \$140 million in requests. Pending NRCS approval in October, construction is planned for fall 2025. Kristina thanked OCR and other partners for their support in pursuing Federal funding.

### Capital Budget Development

Tom Tebb provided an overview of the draft OCR budget for 2025-2027. Tom and Melissa Downes (WA Ecology) outlined 16 new and ongoing projects, providing detailed information and proposed budget for each. Tom highlighted that they are budgeting \$25 million for OGWRP based on feedback from legislators. With an extensive project portfolio and large budget, they are dedicated to increasing OCR staff by 4-5 people.

Melissa concluded that the OCR 25-27 budget proposal totals \$57.5 million. Additionally, OCR oversees the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, budgeted at \$59 million, and the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project, budgeted at \$4 million. Together this represents the largest capital budget request that OCR has ever put forward.

The capital budget development slides are available on the WA Ecology CRPAG website ([view slides](#)) and on TVW ([view presentation](#) at 01:54:00).

### Wrap-up

Rob Willis concluded the meeting by reminding folks that the facilitation team has been actively engaging with individual CRPAG members and aims to connect with those they have not met yet. These conversations are helping inform upcoming agenda topics and will guide the CRPAG's direction over the next several meetings. Additionally, there are plans to fill membership vacancies and reintroduce an executive team to enhance meeting planning and ensure relevance for all participants.

Tom Tebb expressed gratitude to everyone who attended the tour and hybrid meeting, extending special thanks to Craig and his team for hosting.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00pm.

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## Attendees

### *CRPAG members & alternates:*

Adriana Rasmussen, BPA	Megan Kernan, WDFW
Bruce Wakefield, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation	Mike Schwisow, Columbia Basin Development League
Chris Duke, Bureau of Reclamation	Milli Chennell, BPA
Chris Kowitz, Oregon Water Resources Dept.	Melissa Downes, OCR/Ecology
Craig Simpson, ECBID	Tom Tebb, OCR/Ecology
Jo M. Gilchrist, Lincoln Co. Commission	

### *Guests & staff (in-person):*

Annie Byerley, Walla Walla CD	Mary Dye, 9th District State Representative
Bobby Bischoff, ECBID	McKenna Murray, Ecology
Catherine Veninga, Senate Democratic Caucus	Michelle Kiesz, CBSWC/WAWG
Jennifer Hickenbottom, Bureau of Reclamation	Nate Andreini, ECBID
John Stuhmiller, WSWRA	Phil Lefler, Ecology
Jon Erickson, ECBID	Richard Law, City of Moses Lake
Kristina Ribellia, Columbia Basin CD/CBSWC	Shawn Logan, Mayor, City of Othello
	Tim Poppleton, OCR/Ecology

### *Guests & staff (online):*

Andrew Austreng, Aspect Consulting	Micah Galeana, Aspect Consulting
David Ortman	Norm Semanko
Heather May, Ecology	Paul Jewell, WSAC
Jeanine Carlson, Ecology	Randall Fox
Jeff Dengel, WDFW	Scott Tarbutton, OCR/Ecology
Jeremy Weber, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Stuart Crane, Yakama Nation
Kaila Anderson, Landau Associates	

### *Facilitation:*

Piper Casey, Ross Strategic  
Rob Willis, Ross Strategic