



Columbia River Policy Advisory Group

October 3, 2024

Hybrid Meeting – Hal Holmes Community Center, Ellensburg, and online via Zoom

Meeting Summary

Slides and recording available at the [CRPAG website](#)

Welcome and Introductions

Tom Tebb (WA Ecology) opened the meeting by welcoming the group and sharing an overview of the meeting agenda. Rob Willis (Facilitator, Ross Strategic) welcomed two new Columbia River Policy Advisory Group (CRPAG) members, Annie Byerley (Walla Walla Conservation District) and Richard Law (City of Moses Lake). He then kicked off a round of introductions for all CRPAG members present in-person and online. Members stated their name, affiliation, and purpose for participating on the advisory group.

CRPAG Annual Planning – Insights and Future Directions

Rob Willis summarized findings from recent CRPAG member interviews conducted by the Ross Strategic team. Rob highlighted the group's transformation over time, areas of interest, and ideas for improvement. Members emphasized avoiding duplicative efforts and coordinating agendas with other relevant meetings. Key topics of interest include long-term scenario planning for water supply, climate change impacts, water efficiency, and advising OCR on resource needs. Members also expressed valuing member-to-member engagement, site visits, and staying informed on Basin projects. Rob concluded that 2025 meeting agendas will aim to reflect topics that are most valuable to the group while keeping flexibility for emerging issues.

Presentation slides are available on the WA Ecology CRPAG website ([view slides](#)) and on TVW ([view presentation](#)) at 00:11:05).

Tom Tebb and Melissa Downes (WA Ecology) thanked the group for their feedback and shared their perspective on the group's direction. Melissa agreed the recent focus has been on project updates and emphasized the need to remain flexible on agenda topics for emerging issues. She also agreed long-term planning is crucial and noted that work is underway with WSU for the 2026 forecast report. Melissa encouraged feedback on these topics to ensure the group's efforts align with members' needs.

Tom highlighted OCR's implementation phase with projects such as the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Project, Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, and more, emphasizing the importance of completing these initiatives. Looking ahead, Tom agreed that shifts in water usage patterns due to climate change and declining groundwater in Eastern and Central Washington is a growing concern, with significant costs to address it. Tom stated that collaborative efforts in the Columbia Basin, including integrated planning and water efficiency projects, are essential. They also see opportunities in power management to benefit both the environment and water users. Tom concluded by reiterating that feedback from this group will be vital in navigating these challenges and pursuing their mission to secure water supply for various uses.

Discussion – Pump Back Systems and Power

A CRPAG member supported Tom's idea for energy price offsets from pump back systems, noting their benefits as an instream enhancement tool, energy costs as a key obstacle, and need for legislation. Tom requested future feedback about the potential need for legislation to get a project like this going.

Another member requested more detailed information from irrigation districts about their power purchasing processes, including the involved players like PUDs, past practices, and specific examples of proposed projects. They suggested more informal member-to-member engagement to better understand each other's perspectives to be able to dig into this topic.

Another member suggested exploring the environmental mitigation benefit of pump back systems and how that would be ascertained. Tom suggested forming a small group conversation to identify potential opportunities and articulate their environmental benefits. He noted that the challenge lies in figuring out how to deliver power at a reduced cost.

Another member stated that having a planning tool that can input data and provide possibilities based on a project's location would streamline the process.

Discussion – Drought Response

A CRPAG member identified drought response as becoming a larger, recurring issue. highlighted the increasing issue of drought response, noting that changes in how Ecology and Water Resources interpret statutes and policies have hindered mitigation efforts. Conservation Districts now need a 50% non-state match, which is nearly impossible. Tom agreed on the need for strategic drought responses, citing pulse flows in the Walla Walla Basin as an example.

Another CRPAG member asked how OCR plans to address changing climates with drier, hotter summers and reduced flows from Canada. The member reflected that if there is less storage in Canada, then presumably on dry years, there will be deeper drawdowns in Grand Coulee meaning less water flexibility. Tom mentioned the need for more ongoing learning and collaboration with Federal partners to model and understand these concerns. He also noted OCR's collaboration with large agricultural interests to streamline their water rights portfolios, and in return, gain the right to use some of their water during drought years.

Another member added that they feel Ecology's Water program's focus on water right changes, auditing, and marketing efforts have diminished and suggested that administrative, regulatory processes for water rights should go back to being managed by OCR rather than a water resource program. This would align with the original intent of OCR and ensure effective ground-level management. Tom highlighted the challenge of managing workload with a small team compared to a larger water resources program.

Discussion – Water Efficiency and Conservation

Tom requested feedback on future water conservation programs, including potential incentives and public benefits. A CRPAG member added that maximizing water right changes and transfers is crucial for protection against climate impacts. Another member commented that the WA State Conservation Commission's (SCC) \$27 million decision package for irrigation efficiency and new guidelines to enhance



drought resiliency for both in-stream and out-of-stream resources, which have been successful but have exhausted their funds. Moving forward, SCC plans to adopt a basin-level conservation approach to improve efficiency and address local needs more strategically.

Another member stressed the importance past conservation objectives, which prioritized voluntary, incentive-based tools to balance consumptive water use and restore in-stream flows, even as new goals like resiliency and maximizing current resources are added.

Another member asked for more information on the performance of donations to the trust water right program for the creation of water banks and how that is performing relative to conservation. Tom explained the two types of trust water and agreed on the need to assess the program's performance.

Discussion – 2026 Forecast

A CRPAG member asked if OCR and the WSU forecast team will have access to technical information from the Columbia River Treaty now that an Agreement-in-Principle (AIP) is in place. Melissa responded that historically they have not been able to, but they anticipate more data sharing opportunities with the AIP. The member also inquired about higher water groups. Tom responded that they are working on obtaining elevation data, recognizing its impact on Grand Coulee and other reservoirs.

Upper Columbia River Basin Adjudication Update

Robin McPherson (WA Ecology, Water Resources) provided an overview of the Lake Roosevelt adjudication timeline, starting with the Colville Confederated Tribes' petition in August 2019 to the latest Federal meeting in August 2024. In 2020, Water Resources issued a Legislative report highlighting the need for adjudications in Lake Roosevelt and Nooksack areas. Robin explained the adjudication process, the Tribes' interest, and the challenges with current State law and Federal jurisdiction concerns. Several maps were included to illustrate boundary designations and challenges.

Robin's slides are available on the WA Ecology CRPAG website ([view slides](#)) and on TVW ([view presentation](#) at 01:00:51).

Discussion

A CRPAG member asked for clarity on the Colville Tribes' objectives for adjudication. Another member responded that without adjudication, the State doesn't have the volume that they know they need to account for when planning for Columbia River uses. The Tribes aim to be proactive in long-term water planning and ensure that unquantified tribal waters rights are accounted for, especially as water demand in the Basin increases.

Lower Snake River Water Supply Replacement Study

Tom Tebb announced an upcoming virtual public meeting on October 9th about the Lower Snake River Water Supply Replacement Study by the Bureau of Reclamation and Ecology. Tom outlined the study's scope and goals and encouraged participation to learn more. Additional details about the study are available on the Bureau of Reclamation website [here](#).

Tom's update is available on TVW ([view presentation](#) at 01:27:30).



Discussion

One CRPAG member asked if there is an ability to integrate unquantified claims in this process, circling back to thinking about adjudication as well as the Columbia River Treaty. Tom responded that the study is focusing on analyzing water availability in the Snake system as they have heard clearly from folks not to look to the Columbia River to replace this water supply.

Pasco Basin Boundary Designation Update

Tom Tebb explained that the original groundwater management area, known as 508-14, included the Quincy and Odessa sub-basins, which have been carved out in previous rulemaking processes. The remaining area is now renamed the Pasco Basin. Tom commended the project for its long-awaited process and legislative achievements.

Karl Rains (WA Ecology) provided a historical overview of efforts to manage artificially stored groundwater from Columbia Basin project irrigation return flows. Defining the Pasco Basin sub-area remains challenging due to the lack of recapture facilities. In 2016, Ecology contracted with the USGS to quantify artificially stored groundwater in the Pasco Basin, leading to a 2021 legislative bill that outlined a co-management agreement process with Reclamation.

Karl focused on the boundary designation process under RCW 90.44.130. In 2022, Ecology initiated rulemaking for the co-management agreement, began outreach to tribes and local communities, and Reclamation began updating the 2016 USGS groundwater model. A draft order for the boundary designation will be released soon for public review, with a virtual hearing planned for mid-November. Karl noted that the co-management framework development will continue into 2025 and 2026, involving further rulemaking and environmental reviews under SEPA and NEPA.

Karl's slides are available on the WA Ecology CRPAG website ([view slides](#)) and on TVW ([view presentation](#)) at 01:33:22).

Discussion

One CRPAG member inquired if the order includes an estimate of the existing 508-14 permits. Tom responded that the draft order focuses on the boundary. He explained that the next step is rulemaking around the program itself, which will include 324 permits. Melissa also noted that a public process will be part of the program development after the boundary designation.

Washington State Climate Resilience Strategy

Jimmy Kralj (WA Ecology) provided an overview of Ecology's newly published Washington State Climate Resilience Strategy, explaining its creation and development involving ten agencies, the Climate Impacts Group at University of Washington, and extensive engagement community engagement across the state. The strategy provides an opportunity for agencies to coordinate efforts climate resilience efforts and is required to be updated every four years.

Jimmy outlined the five key climate stressors impacting Washington, the eight climate resilience strategies, and the specific actions agencies will take to build resilience. Jimmy detailed Actions 6A, 6B, 6F, and 6H which are the most relevant to the CRPAG, noting many additional water actions beyond



these ones. More details about each Action can be found on the program website:

www.ecy.wa.gov/climate-strategy.

Jimmy's slides are available on the WA Ecology CRPAG website ([view slides](#)) and on TVW ([view presentation](#) at 01:46:32).

Discussion

Tom noted that the strategies are embedded in programs, including budgets and funding requests, to support the statewide Climate Resilience Strategy. Jimmy confirmed this and mentioned a summary table in Appendix D that links actions in the strategy with decision packages submitted by agencies. This crosswalk helps track the actions in the upcoming legislative session and draw connections between proposed work and funding.

A CRPAG member asked if the legislative bill is on the website and if there is a separate policy bill. Tom confirmed all materials are available online. Jimmy added that the only request legislation is for setting up the governance structure, with the rest involving budget requests.

Another member asked about data sharing capabilities between GMA entities incorporating climate resilience into their plans, noting that data integration in a statewide system would avoid duplicating tracking efforts during implementation. Jimmy explained that the strategy primarily focuses on new initiatives and coordinating efforts. Once agencies receive funding and begin actions, data sharing and integration could become a significant topic.

Climate & Water: Emerging Topics

Guillaume Mauger (WA State Climatologist) introduced the work of the Washington State Climate Office and shared a presentation focused on three key areas. First, Dr. Mauger discussed advances to "downscaling," referring to methods used to refine global climate model projections to a local scale, enhancing accuracy for assessing future changes in hydrology and stream flows. The newer, dynamical approach they are taking provides significant potential for improving climate forecasts.

Second, Dr. Mauger explored evaporation trends, especially increasingly high evaporation days and potential impacts to crops, irrigation, wildfires, and more. Lastly, Dr. Mauger recognized gaps in scientific research and the need to do more regarding impacts. He also emphasized valuable learning opportunities that weather disasters present, using the 2015 drought's impact on Icicle Creek stream flow as an example. Dr. Mauger concluded with information about an [upcoming workshop](#) on October 29-30 as part of their annual Water Year Impacts Assessment.

Dr. Mauger's slides are available on the WA Ecology CRPAG website ([view slides](#)) and on TVW ([view presentation](#) at 02:04:58).

Discussion

Tom requested an additional explanation regarding the evaporation graph shown. Dr. Mauger clarified that the graph shows estimates based on humidity, radiation, wind, and temperature, rather than actual plant evaporation. Tom linked evaporation and heat domes, highlighting how challenges from extreme

heat can stress water and power systems. Dr. Mauger emphasized that they have not confirmed these high evaporation days are happening during heat waves, however it is likely.

A CRPAG member inquired whether evaporation research accounts for changes in cropping patterns, like double cropping, which would require more irrigation. Dr. Mauger clarified that the research is currently observational and does not yet include future modeling. Rob followed up to ask what mitigation strategies the group should consider regarding evaporation. Dr. Mauger suggested that while evaporation is a minor detail compared to snowpack and winter precipitation in the Columbia Basin, it's important to know when to focus more on evaporation.

Another member observed that reduced water vapor deficits in plants, combined with crop evaporation, lead to more severe fires and increased runoff in dry years. This reduces control over water in upper watersheds, impacting timely water release, especially in late summers. Dr. Mauger agreed that implications for ecosystems are important to think about as well.

Tom asked Dr. Mauger to share his insights on winter precipitation levels. Dr. Mauger mentioned that La Niña is a good indicator of strong snowpack years, though it doesn't provide much information about overall precipitation levels.

Walla Walla Basin Pump Exchange Project

Tom introduced the pump exchange project and requested feedback from CRPAG members before the proposal closes on October 30th. Chris Marks (CTUIR) and Chris Kowitz (OWRD) provided a detailed overview of the project.

Chris Marks emphasized the importance of state leadership and community involvement in managing the bi-state basin, integrating climate resilience, water quality, and habitat improvements. He explained that the project aims to shift surface water users to alternative sources, ensuring water availability for fish and other ecological values. He also discusses ongoing studies, highlighting the Bi-State Flow Study. Tom added that initiatives are in place to protect water across state lines, despite initial challenges.

Chris Kowitz detailed the project, including the pump exchange and mitigation considerations, and referenced models from Yakima and the Umatilla River Basin projects. The project involves a 120 cfs pumping station from the Columbia River to Milton-Freewater, Oregon, to exchange water at diversion points while protecting senior surface water rights. Preliminary engineering confirms feasibility, with ongoing refinements expected. Chris shared models showing the project meets flow targets effectively across different year types. He concluded with the next steps, including additional studies and evaluations for storage options and reiterated the importance of stakeholder feedback by October 28th. Tom requested that feedback from this group be sent directly to him.

Their slides are available on the WA Ecology CRPAG website ([view slides](#)) and on TVW ([view presentation](#) at 02:29:00).



Discussion

One CRPAG member asked about funding for operations and maintenance (O&M) and whether it would be covered by Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) or require Federal legislation. Tom confirmed that congressional authorization is required.

Chris Marks recognized that the agricultural community will not be able to cover O&M costs and that long-term O&M commitments are not favored on a local or Federal level. Chris highlighted the importance of the CRPAG's diverse connections and lessons learned from various initiatives which may help them find other options.

Public Comment (02:57:50)

Chris Maykut, representing Friends of Bumping Lake, provided comments about a detailed report submitted to Ecology by Friends of Bumping Lake and Save Lake Kachess. Chris commented that the report, co-signed by several environmental organizations, highlights ongoing issues with Ecology's pursuit of new water supplies, which are seen as wasteful, uneconomical, and environmentally harmful. Chris stated that they undermine efforts to reduce water demand in the face of climate change. Chris also criticized high costs and lack of environmental review for projects like the Lake Kachess Pumping Plant and the new Bumping Lake dam. Chris noted that the report calls for a performance audit by the Washington State Auditor, echoing recommendations from a 2016 study.

David E. Ortman provided comments expressing their disappointment in the Climate Resilience Strategy for not prioritizing the reduction of water demand in over-allocated basins with declining groundwater levels. David stated that reducing water demand should be prioritized over voluntary water conservation efforts. David commented that, instead, Ecology is aggressively promoting new water projects and dams in the Yakima River Basin, Chehalis River Basin, as well as through the OCR. David requested that Ecology avoid scheduling the Chehalis Basin and OCR meeting on the same days.

Legislative and Budget Update

Melissa referenced the budget presented at the July 11 CRPAG meeting, noting no significant changes. Melissa also reminded the group that OCR requested \$57.5 million for implementation of Columbia River Basin projects, with nearly half allocated to Odessa. Tom added that on the Yakama side, OCR requested \$59 million for a feasibility analysis of the Springwood Reservoir with Reclamation, a study of the Low Head Dams, and the Bateman Island removal project. Their update also included details about the Columbia River Initiative MOU, signed in 2004 and extended to 2024, which is foundational to legislation and includes major programmatic items. They are seeking another 10-year extension to continue progress.

The capital budget development slides from July 11 are available on the WA Ecology CRPAG website ([view slides](#)) and Melissa and Tom's update is available on TVW ([view presentation](#)) at 03:08:50).

Wrap-up

Rob Willis concluded the meeting by sharing that all meeting materials will be uploaded to the CRPAG website and the next meeting in January will be virtual. Rob, Tom, and Melissa expressed gratitude to everyone who attended in-person and online.

The meeting adjourned at 1:10pm.

Attendees

CRPAG members & alternates:

Adriana Rasmussen, BPA
Annie Byerley, Walla Walla CD
Bruce Wakefield, Confederated Tribes of the
Colville Reservation
Chris Kowitz, OWRD
Chris Marks, CTUIR
Clint Didier, Franklin County
Cody Desautel, Confederated Tribes of the
Colville Reservation
Craig Simpson, ECBID
Darryll Olsen, Columbia-Snake Rivers Irrigation
Association

Jerome Delvin, Benton County
Jon Culp, WA State Conservation Commission
Justin Yeager, NOAA Fisheries
Lisa Ganuelas, CTIUR
Megan Kernan, WDFW
Mike Schwisow, Columbia Basin Development
League
Milli Chennell, BPA
Melissa Downes, OCR/Ecology
Richard Law, City of Moses Lake
Sarah Dyrdaahl, American Rivers
Tom Tebb, OCR/Ecology

Guests & staff (online):

Ben Floyd, White Bluffs Consulting
Brad Trammell, AWO
Carl Merkle, CTUIR
Chris Maykut, Friends of Bumping Lake
David Ortman
Guillaume Mauger, WA State Climatologist
Jeff Dengel, WDFW
Jimmy Kralj, Ecology
Karl Rains, Ecology

KayDee Gilkey, WAWG
Kelsey Mach, Aspect Consulting
Lara Floyd, White Bluffs Consulting
L Martin
Paul Jewell, WSAC
Robin McPherson, Ecology
Sarah Weeks, Landau Associates
Stuart Crane, Yakama Nation
Tim Poppleton, OCR/Ecology

Facilitation:

Piper Casey, Ross Strategic
Rob Willis, Ross Strategic