



Hood River Watershed Group

*"...to sustain & improve the
Hood River Watershed through
education, cooperation, & stewardship"*

APRIL 28, 2015 MEETING MINUTES

Watershed Group Members Present

Megan Saunders	Chuck Gehling	John Buckley	Phil Simpson
Jim Wells	Steve Warila	Steve Castagnoli	Sheila Holden
Joe McCanna	Kim Valentine	Anne Saxby	Rick Ragan
John Dodd	Leo Segovia	Brian Nakamura	Greg Short
Janeen Tervo	Whitney Olsker	Gary Asbridge	Colleen Coleman
Cindy Thieman	Lauretta Burman	Diana Burman	

Welcome and Introductions

At 6:05 pm, Chuck Gehling welcomed everyone to the April meeting. He thanked everyone for coming and invited everyone to introduce themselves. There were 23 people attending.

Review and Approval of Last Meeting Minutes

After reading the group's mission statement, Chuck asked if there were any corrections to the March minutes. No changes were noted and the group approved the minutes.

Monthly Informational Presentation

Chuck introduced Whitney Olsker, John Dodd, and Gary Asbridge for their presentation "Fuels, Fire, and Stream Health". Current stand conditions are denser than historic conditions, resulting in more high intensity fires. High intensity fires alter wildlife habitat, reduce unique ecosystems, and result in the loss of large diameter trees. Sheila Holden asked about the tree fall on Gnarl Ridge. It is likely insect/disease kill and trail work. High intensity fire reduces shade, potentially increases large wood, increases erosion risk, and decreases channel stability. Cindy Thieman asked if the increase in large wood would be positive. It is the difference between a sudden influx at once and then no input for a long time versus ongoing input around the landscape. Greg Short asked if thick riparian areas could be selectively logged to lower fuel loads. There are options, such as mastication, chipping, etc. Colleen Coleman asked about solutions, such as a long-term plan. USFS does not have a landscape level plan. On the Mt. Hood NF, they've been working on small-scale fuel reduction projects. If there is enough large-diameter wood, it can pay for the small-diameter removal. The USFS is working with partners to create a cohesive strategy. Colleen asked how policy could be changed. That will take a long time. Phil Simpson asked if there were case study areas that could showcase successes. A lot of forests are doing fuels reduction, but it is usually very site specific.

Sheila asked if there were best practices for sustainable forests. She asked if clearcutting could be used for fire breaks. The last clearcut done in the HR Ranger District was in 2000. They've transitioned to thinning for socio-economic reasons. Greg asked if selective logging mimicked fire. It depends on the stand, material, etc. Joe McCanna asked about prescribed burning. Fire is not a natural component in the stand current conditions. Prescribed burning can be paired with thinning. Colleen asked about joining forces with watershed restoration over time. That is building momentum. The Hood River Stewardship

Crew is engaging with the community. Polallie-Cooper is the 3rd project they've worked on. The Stew Crew is open to anyone interested. The USFS is also reaching out to the community more. Cindy asked about the economic viability of a biomass campus in HR County. A biomass campus would help pay for the removal of small diameter material. Moving biomass beyond the local area is the limiting factor. Rick mentioned that HR County considered a biomass plant, but County forestlands didn't generate enough slash to make it feasible. They would need USFS timber, without risk of interruption. Colleen suggested educating the public about restoration versus cutting.

Brian Nakamura asked if the USFS had assessed fire danger and prepared plans for if/when something happens. Given the lack of snowpack this year, the USFS is talking about what they need to do to set themselves up for success. There will be prevention messages to the public. Weather will be closely watched. Kim Valentine, USFS FMO, is also looking at regional resources. Sheila asked about new retardants. The retardant is the same (a water-based fertilizer) and there are gels. In the Hood, retardant can't be used in some areas due to water resources. Janeen reported that the USFS air tanker fleet has been reduced in the last few years, due to old/unsafe aircraft, but money is being put into larger tankers. This will take time, as they need to retrofit military tankers. Smoke management regulations limit prescribed burning. This will probably get tighter in the future, so other options need to be developed. Colleen mentioned that anything green after the burn will eventually be more fuel. She asked about management. There is a high risk of re-burn from brush re-growth and cone explosion. The USFS tries to plant fire-adapted species and address this risk where they can.

Chuck thanked Whitney, John, and Gary for their great presentation. The audience gave them a good round of applause.

~Short Break~

Old Business

Cindy reported that the riparian habitat restoration OWEB grant for the Powerdale corridor is more expensive than initially estimated. They asked for about \$60,000 for 8 acres. Whiskey Creek is a tough site with a lot of weed pressure. The three sites are the CTWS/CLT floodplain restoration site, expansion of Whiskey Creek, and the RM1.0 pond area. The work could be scaled down if they only got partial funding. *The group provided second consensus approval for the riparian habitat restoration grant application.*

New Business

None reported.

Reports and Announcements

Cindy presented her monthly Coordinators report. HRWG has officially met all criteria for OWEB council support funding. We are within the highest ranking. Anne asked how the rest of the state did. Cindy wasn't sure, but some councils did have to submit new information, were not eligible, or did not get maximum funding. Council support funding largely supports Cindy's position. Greg asked if the change in Governor impacted watershed councils. Cindy hasn't heard anything.

Phil Simpson reported that ODFW's screw traps started running in mid-March. Catch numbers are starting to pick up. The fish are a good size and seem well conditioned, probably from the warmer winter. Steelhead harvest is slowing down, but Chinook harvest is starting to pick up. The adult traps are starting to taper off. Overall, ODFW caught about 350 hatchery steelhead and 200 wild steelhead at all traps.

They caught 46 steelhead in Neal Creek, but they know they didn't catch all of them. All wild steelhead were released upstream of the Neal Creek trap. This year's steelhead harvest was about 600, which is good (and about 1/2 the run). Colleen asked why larvae were really big this year. This is probably also due to the warmer winter. With warmer water temperatures, there is no shut-down period and more growth. Greg mentioned that orchards are also a couple weeks early this year.

Chuck reported that CTWS acclimation for Chinook and steelhead is ongoing. Chinook were released this week. They have started receiving steelhead at the EFID sandtrap and a new experimental site at the mouth of Neal Creek. The steelhead will be released after about a week of acclimation. They are also a larger size this year.

Anne mentioned that given the low water this summer, everyone should talk to their neighbors, etc. about not watering their lawns. She's seen a number of people watering already and they definitely don't need excess water now. John Buckley added that EFID will be sending out a letter to patrons next week. FID's patron letter just came out.

Chuck asked if the irrigation districts would be talking about the low-water situation. The irrigation districts will be starting drought proceedings before mid-May. John will report at the next meeting. Cindy mentioned that people have been very interested in the Basin study talks. John added that with snow levels at such high elevations, the river levels will be lower during cooler weather.

Greg reported that the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation banquet netted about \$50-60,000. Turnout was similar to past years. They held it at the County Fairgrounds this year, which was better.

Gary announced that the USFS kids fishing days are coming up. Barlow's is May 9th and Hood River's is May 16th at the MFID settling pond. Phil added that the ODFW clinic is this Saturday at Meyer State Park.

Sheila announced that Pacific Power is planning to help with restoration after last year's fire on Indian Creek by 12th Street. They have \$2,000 to help with plants, etc. Apparently the big need at the site is irrigation, so Sheila has suggested that Cindy go for a foundation grant, which is due June 15th.

Chuck announced that the next meeting will be hosted by MFID at the Parkdale Community Center. Cindy will provide the address and directions.

Summary of Consensus Items and Establishment of Next Meeting

Primary Consensus items addressed tonight:

- none

Secondary Consensus items addressed tonight:

- HRWG approval of the riparian habitat restoration OWEB grant application

The next Hood River Watershed Group meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 26, 2015.

Adjournment

Chuck thanked the group for attending and adjourned the meeting at 7:45pm.

Reported by: Megan Saunders