

Fifteenmile Watershed Council

Fifteenmile Creek and Tributaries Eightmile, Fivemile & Ramsey Creek

Wasco County SWCD 2325 River Road Suite 3, The Dalles OR, 97058 Phone: 541-296-6178 x102 Fax: 541-296-7868

Minutes

Thursday December 17th, 2020 at 6:00 pm

Teleconference

Attendees:

Phil Kaser, Co-Chair

Abigail Forrest, SWCD

Drake Gilbert, SWCD

Robert Wallace, Wy'East

Jim Olson, Member

Bill Hammel, Co-Chair

Mike Kelly, Member

Jason Keller, GSI

Robin Cook, GSI

David Brewer, Member

Walt Burt, GSI

Steve Kramer, County Commissioner

Call to Order

Phil called the meeting to order and asked if everybody had a chance to look over the minutes and meeting packets.

Bill motioned to accept the minutes as presented, Jim seconded, motion passed

2020 Irrigation Season FAST Review - Drake Gilbert - SWCD

Drake began by asking if there was interested in going over the background on the FAST program, or if he should just jump into the review of the 2020 irrigation season itself. Attendees responded that it would be best to jump into the 2020 season review, as most in attendance are familiar with the program.

Drake explained that the 2020 season was fairly mild overall, although it did have one alert spanning a period of three days. The 2020 season was the first season in which the 3-day alert minimum was able to be tested, as the 2019 season went without alerts due to mild summer weather that year. The alert during the 2020 season started on July 29th after a prolonged period of days in the 90's with a few days exceeding 100 degrees, and ended July 31st. July 31st was the first day the alert was eligible to be ended due to the new 3 day alert minimum, which Drake explained was designed to alleviate the confusing "off-and-on" alerts that had been experienced in past seasons. He also stated that he felt that the 3-day shut-off minimum was crucial in ending the alert. The three consecutive days where irrigators had diverted their water proved to show a more substantial improvement in in-stream flows, compared to the previous on and off method. Temperatures measured during and after the alert were 1-2 degrees cooler than they were forecasted to be, and flows increased by 1-3 cfs depending on the gauging station. This demonstrates the benefit of the FAST program and its ability to provide thermal relief to steelhead within Fifteenmile Creek.

Next, Drake opened up the discussion to questions, as well as comments or suggestions for the FAST program. He also mentioned that there had been some discussion within the SWCD around ending option 2 of the program. Option 2 is much more time intensive as far as FAST monitoring during an alert, and FAST 2 payments also take quite a bit of time to calculate properly. Abbie added that option 2 isn't funded by any of our grants, and that the money comes directly from the SWCD. She also noted that FAST 2 payments are usually not large compensations, and that there's only been a handful of option 2 participants in the past few seasons. The largest option 2 participant in the past would also be switching to option 1 regardless next year, meaning option 2 would only have 3 producers assuming nothing else changed.

Bill asked if option 2 was really worth it due to the increased personnel costs, or if it would be worth it to end option 2. Phil mentioned that option 2 was a great way to get people involved with the program at its beginning, but that it might not be as necessary anymore.

Bill motioned to remove option 2 from the FAST program, making fast option 1 only. Mike seconded, motion passed.

Abbie added that if for some reason we receive a lot of feedback for removing option 2 that the council could always add it back if need be.

8mile SIA E. coli monitoring results and SIA update – Drake Gilbert

Drake started by saying that Strategic Implementation Areas (SIA) were an Oregon Department of Agriculture program meant to funnel funding and monitoring into a chosen watershed for a period of time. He said that he had been conducting E. coli monitoring as a part of the SIA monitoring, but wasn't aware of any projects that had been implemented yet. The monitoring currently taking place is meant to show pre-implementation conditions for the SIA project. E. coli patterns in Eightmile Creek have shown a general

trend of being lower during the winter and spring, and higher during the summer and early fall. Drake thinks that this could be due to wildlife and livestock interacting with surface water more frequently as the air temperature rises and becomes more preferable to them. The low flows in summer also contribute to there simply being less water to dilute E. coli contamination in the stream as water levels drop. He noted that the Endersby and Eightmile Rd bridge sites showed the highest levels of E. coli contamination, while the rest of the watershed actually looked fairly good as far as E. coli levels are concerned. He also noted that the two sites highest in the watershed were meant to reflect what ambient E. coli levels might look like without human influence, due to being above and just below the National Forest boundary.

Abbie added that the SWCD has contracted Dusty Eddy to work on the SIA projects, and that he's been working closely with landowners and the SWCD on SIA implementation projects.

15mile Managed Underground Storage Pilot Project - Abbie Forrest and Shilah Olson

Abbie updated the council, that we applied for a technical assistance grant and stakeholder engagement grant through OWEB, with the assistance from GSI and GeoSystems Analysis. OWEB has issued preliminary rankings for the technical assistance grant, and has notified us that we're currently ranked #3. Additionally, the stakeholder engagement grant was the only grant that was submitted. Abbie also added that there may be a period of public comment for the grants, and additional letters of support may be needed for an extra push of support later on. Finally, she asked if any of the folks from GSI on the call had anything to add to her update.

Walt said they had put together a framework for a monitoring plan for the storage pilot project with the hope to collect data this winter. From a funding standpoint there's some follow-up Walt needs to do with the district and the other partners to get things moving forward this winter.

Steve Kramer added that the Wasco County conomic Development Commission has the project on its top 10 projects to move forward. Steve Kramer said he'd love to lend assistance wherever possible and to see it move forward.

Phil asked what the timeline would be if we're successful with getting these grants. Abbie said she would hope to have an agreement in place in late spring if the grants are awarded funding. Walt said that he hoped to do a pilot test this spring, but that it seems like it would be pushed back to next year or possibly late 2021 and collecting data in 2022.

Walt said that one of the things that put the brakes on the pilot project is that OWRD was interested in funding it with water development grants, but we needed to figure out the governance piece before they would fund it. Finally, Abbie added that Covid restrictions may make the stakeholder engagement grant harder to get off the ground.

Wy'East RC&D on farm monitoring - Robert Wallace

Robert started by explaining that the SWCD had been supporting monitoring through Wy'East within the Dufur Valley area, through irrigation pumps, soil moisture monitors, and remote pump monitoring. The Wy'East on farm monitoring system is useful for the FAST program because the FAST coordinator can check pump activity remotely, and can be used as a proof of pump activity for the irrigator in the event of another fish kill. Robert mentioned that he had a meeting with Wasco Electric Co-op recently in regards to the ability to use electric meter records as a record of pump activity in the event of another fish kill. Wasco Electric Co-op said that the electric meters report only once a day, and that it doesn't keep a log of when the pumps were active, only if they were on during the last 24 hours. They may also not update for multiple days at a time, making them an ineffective record keeping tool for alleviating irrigator liability in the event of another fish kill. In contrast, Robert's monitors are connected to the pump and work instantly to keep more complete records of pump activity. Additionally, the soil moisture probes are useful for managing irrigation scheduling, and for applying a more precise amount of water to crops. Robert mentioned that there were interesting results, in that the irrigator may be able to load fields with water before hot weather comes, allowing them to shut off when the hot weather moves in and improve in-stream flows during the weather event as a result. Robert mentioned that the City of Dufur and DEQ funded more soil moisture monitoring sites including, new producers that hadn't used the system before. Robert explained that he felt that it was possible that FAST 2 folks might be more likely to shut off if they have soil moisture data providing peace of mind in knowing exactly how much moisture is in their fields.

Robert said that next Spring they're looking at working with Drake and the SWCD to make sure new soil moisture monitoring sites are up and running, and that producers are comfortable with the software and able to use it.

Lamprey monitoring updates – Shay Way – Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs

Shay Way was unable to make it to the meeting, so Drake provided a short update on her behalf on Lamprey monitoring within the Fifteenmile watershed with information he had gathered from their previous conversations.. He started by explaining that the Tribes were unable to monitor during lamprey migration in Fifteenmile Creek due to the covid shutdown coinciding with the time of lamprey migration. This means that they were unable to sample adult lampreys at Cushing Falls like normal. They also experienced a period of being short staffed following the covid shutdowns, and were unable to electrofish during their normal monitoring timeframe. They were able to get out and sample 10 sites during the fall, although he said that he didn't have any data for how those sampling events went.

2020 Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Wasco County area watersheds update – Abbie Forrest - SWCD

Abbie explained that Kevin Masterson put together an overview of the 2020 Pesticide Stewardship Program Monitoring results, but that the results only include samples collected before June 1 at this point. She noted that only 6 pesticides were detected in Wasco County, and that detections were well below the aquatic life benchmarks. She noted that deet was also detected, but that it does not have an aquatic life benchmark set. Detections within Wasco County were in The Dalles watershed, and were found on Threemile and Mill creek.

Updates & Announcements

Fifteenmile Focus Area Update

Drake said that he hoped to have a bit more to report on the Focus Area in addition to the E. coli monitoring run on Fifteenmile Creek that was conducted in September. He noted that concentrations across the creek were actually well within the standard levels for recreational waters, and that only one area near the City of Dufur showed highly elevated E. coli concentrations. He also noted that macroinvertebrate sampling will be taking place, although timing is uncertain due to Covid restrictions and budgets cuts for the DEQ, limiting macroinvertebrate sampling training.

Annual report

Abbie touched on the annual report and her presentation to the county commissioners. She thanked everybody for their support, as well as the commissioners for inviting the watershed councils. Phil said that he attended the county commissioners call, and that she did a great job on the report and presentation.

Steve Kramer added that Abbie gave a great presentation yesterday, and that he appreciates the updates. He noted that a legislative session will begin in Salem on Monday, and that he would like to make sure our projects keep at the forefront.

Schedule Next meeting

Abbie asked if anybody would be interested in doing a Zoom or GoTo meeting instead of a teleconference for the next meeting. Phil said he thought it would be beneficial to do a Zoom or GoTo instead, and that it may make running the meetings go a bit smoother. Bill said that he didn't think the phone call or Zoom made much of a difference, and that he didn't mind either way.

Abbie asked about a next meeting date, to which Phil responded that normally we'd meet in February at the neighborhood meetings, but that those were likely to be canceled. It was concluded that the meeting would likely need to be held in March as a teleconference assuming Covid was still a concern at that time. The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for Thursday, March 11th. The meeting date would be confirmed by Drake as the date drew closer.

Meeting adjourned at 6:50PM.

Minutes prepared by Drake Gilbert