

Update from the Network of Oregon Watershed Councils

May 8, 2007

- * Strategic Plan approved by Board of Representatives
- * Legislative update
- * OWEB Board Meeting May 15-16, 2007 – Council Support
- * Project management workshop summary
- * 2007 Gathering- November 13-16- Mark your calendar!

Strategic Plan Approved

At the April 26-27 Network Board meeting, the Strategic Planning Team presented a “final” draft of the 2007-2010 Network of Oregon Watershed Councils Strategic Plan to the Board of Representatives. The planning process began with information that had been provided by councils during the past several years—from the early direction councils provided at Wilsonville in February 2004, to ideas shared at Bend in November 2005, to input based on council discussions over the past two years about their expectations of the Network. The Strategic Planning Team (composed of Network Board members and supportive members of the public) worked with this information to confirm our goals and develop specific objectives for each of them. As these goals and objectives were refined, they were shared both with the Network Board and with all councils (see my email dated 2/26/07) for comments and input. The Team worked with that additional council input during March and early April, then presented a plan with actions for the Board to consider on April 26th. We’re currently doing the final formatting and will post the plan to the Network website shortly. Our next step will be to develop an implementation work plan to continue making progress toward our goals.

Sincere thanks for the many hours of work contributed by our Strategic Planning Team:

- * Liz Redon, Coordinator, North Santiam Watershed Council,
Network Board Chair
- * Michelle Bussard, Executive Director, Johnson Creek Watershed
Council, Network Board Vice Chair
- * Brad Carlson, Coordinator, Middle Rogue Watershed Council,
Network Board Secretary
- * Ryan Houston, Executive Director, Upper Deschutes Watershed
Council, Network Board Member
- * Jeff Oveson, Executive Director, Grande Ronde Model Watershed,
Network Board Member
- * John Runyon, ESA Adolfson (former coordinator, McKenzie
Watershed Council), Chair of Strategic Planning Team
- * Barbara Bell, Development Strategist and Fundraiser

- * Jackie Dingfelder, ESA Adolfson (former coordinator, Tualatin Watershed Council)
- * Peter Ruffier, Wastewater Division Manager, City of Eugene (former steering committee member, Long Tom Watershed Council)
- * Chuck Sams, Tribal Lands Director, Trust for Public Lands (former executive director, Columbia Slough Watershed Council)
- * Susan Schwartz, Chief Administrative Officer, River Network
- * Diane Snyder, former Executive Director, Wallowa Resources (OWEB Board Member)

Legislative Update

Many of you have taken the time to write, call, visit or email your state legislators about the importance of sufficient support funding for watershed councils and SWCDs, as well as funding for OWEB's non-capital grant program. Others took time to testify about the work of your councils at the Joint Ways & Means Committee budget field hearings held throughout the state in April. Thank you! The legislative budget process is still underway, but there are indications that our message is being heard.

There are some positive signs emerging with respect to council support funding in OWEB's budget. The Oregon Department of Agriculture budget was recently passed out of the Ways & Means Natural Resources Subcommittee for consideration by the full Ways & Means Committee. This is an important first step in the process toward passage by the full House and Senate. The reason this is of special importance for watershed councils is that the ODA budget included \$5 million for SWCDs and a budget note instructing that watershed councils are also to receive a line item for \$5 million in council support funding. If successful, that will represent the first increase in the council support line item in over 8 years. And—this is very important—it will represent the starting point for the council support line item in the 2009-2011 budget. While it is not everything we've asked for, it is a 25% increase over current funding and a strong step in the right direction. Word has it that the combined effort by the Network and OACD to bring a joint message about the importance of councils and districts has been a key part of this proposed increase. So have your letters, calls, emails, testimony and visits. Your voice, representing communities throughout Oregon, is being heard.

However, this is NOT a done deal. The work session on OWEB's budget is tentatively scheduled for May 24th, and the final council support number (as well as other critical non-capital grant program funding) could still go up or down. Your continued letters, calls, emails and visits to legislators re-emphasizing our original message of \$6 million for watershed council support, \$6 million for SWCDs and \$14 million for OWEB's non-capital grant program are still crucial. Nothing is final until the legislative session closes.

If you're planning to come to the OWEB Board meeting to present comments regarding the council support process (see next item), please consider making an appointment with your state representative and/or senator that afternoon. It's a good opportunity to let them know about the important work your council is accomplishing in their home district. Call in advance to make an appointment. Regardless of where they are in the budget process, it is always valuable to communicate with them about your efforts. Please continue your calls, letters and emails.

OWEB Board Meeting & Council Support

Closely related to the legislative budget process is the council support funding process. Once again, you've all been through the challenging process of council support grant application and review, with the OWEB Board scheduled to hear comments from councils at their meeting next week in Salem. Once again, OWEB staff and volunteer reviewers made a strong effort to develop and implement a fair and equitable process.

And, once again, it wasn't perfect (though many people have commented that this effort represented another improvement in an evolving effort).

Much of the Board's first day agenda (May 15th) will be open for public testimony about council support applications before the Board makes its decisions regarding council support funding. As you know, the Board only hears from a significant number of councils every couple of years, so it's critical that the message they get is not simply a complaint about council support recommendations, but also a positive expression of the work councils accomplish and a strong argument for the support councils need to continue that work.

I've met with a number of coordinators who agree about the importance of all councils having the opportunity to speak their minds about the council support recommendations from the review teams and staff, AND of councils presenting a solid, convincing argument about the importance of sufficient capacity funding for all councils. This is a chance to present testimony that identifies legitimate issues and disagreements, points out problems with implementation of the merit ranking system, helps the Board to recognize grant review issues that were unresolved, AND delivers a clear argument for providing sufficient support funding so that ALL councils can function effectively—diverse voices; legitimate gripes; a strong, respectful request for sufficient support for all. The key point is to provide authentic concerns, and to do it in a way that is positive and oriented toward solutions. The Board commented on the quality and value of council comments during the last council support meeting in 2005. This is a chance to demonstrate that cohesiveness again, and strengthen the case for increasing the amount of support funding available.

As the legislative update points out, there are strong indications that the legislature is recognizing the value of your work. Please work together to reinforce that message for the OWEB Board. The Board is very supportive of councils and your testimony can build the record for increased council support.

Project Management Workshops, 2007 Gathering, and more...

48 people from 30 watershed councils and four partner organizations participated in the four regional project management workshops that the Network organized in March and April this year. Many thanks to OWEB, the Grande Ronde Model Watershed, the Long Tom Watershed Council and ESA Adolfson for their support of these workshops. Participants provided positive evaluations of each session, as well as some helpful suggestions for improvements and added information. We will use those suggestions to plan future workshops and sessions for the 2007 Gathering in Hood River November 13-16, 2007. So, mark your calendars for a GREAT Gathering. Also, stay tuned for New Coordinator Trainings that will premier in early 2008.