



**Hood River**  
WATERSHED GROUP

## Hood River Watershed Group

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

JUNE 22, 2021 MEETING MINUTES

### Watershed Group Members Present

Chuck Gehling	Cindy Thieman	Alix Danielsen	Rick Larson	Smita Mehta
Megan Saunders	Lauretta Burman	Richard Iverson	Susan Hess	Sam Doak
Debby Martin	John Buckley	Ryan Gerstenberger	Brian Nakamura	Jurgen Hess
Lindsay Cornelius	Kate Conley	Marion Fox	Cindy Luxhoj	Steve Pappas
Jim Wells	Kevin Liburdy	Gary Asbridge	David Legg	Krystyna Wolniakowski
Sue Kelso-Haines				

\*\* This meeting was conducted virtually via Zoom.

### Welcome and Introductions

At 6:02pm, Chuck Gehling welcomed everyone to the June meeting and stated the mission of the Watershed Group. There was a round of introductions. There were 26 people in attendance. Cindy introduced Lindsay Cornelius, the presenter.

### Monthly Informational Presentation

Lindsay Cornelius, Columbia Land Trust Natural Area Manager and the Manager of the East Cascades Oak Partnership, presented on *The Oregon White Oak: A Survivor and a Savior*.

Oregon white oak are abundant in our region, perceived by many to be prolific, unattractive, weedy, and indestructible. In fact, Oregon white oak habitat across its entire extent has diminished by nearly 97% since European settlement – and we are the stewards of what remains. Oak systems are one of the most biodiverse, climate resilient habitats in our region. They are fire resistant and provide important benefits to the people who live here.

More than 200 individuals from agencies, nations, businesses, organizations, and the general public volunteered thousands of hours over the last three years interviewing stakeholders, learning from presenters, mapping and modeling oak systems, and testing logic models to create a strategic action plan for oak conservation that the East Cascades Oak Partnership (ECOP) will work to implement over the next decade. Lindsay shared the story of Oregon white oak in the East Cascades, including important insights on the value of oak systems and how the ECOP can help each of us advance oak conservation in a meaningful way.

Lindsay discussed Oregon white oaks and their many benefits and interesting characteristics. Oaks grow at lower elevations where people are concentrated, so there is plenty of opportunity for engagement and interaction with oaks. Lindsay showed a map of traditional native lands to explain oak utilization (oak-associated flora and wildlife, grinding bowls, and roasted/raw acorns), cultural ecology (fire), oral histories, and seasonal rounds. Grinding bowls take a century to make – knots are tied in trees and a century later oral histories are used to find the trees, harvest them, and make the bowls.

Since European settlement, the conversion of lowlands from trading colonies, agriculture and grazing, travel and circulation, and other development have impacted oak woodlands. From the Lewis and Clark journals around 1805, we understand that oaks thrive in the moderating climate of the Columbia River. The East Cascades Ecoregion, with sharp precipitation and elevation gradients, has fine-scale system diversity, biodiversity, high occurrence of endemic plants and animals, and high predicted climate resilience.

Oaks first showed up in the cretaceous period, with *Quercus garryana* evolving in the late Eocene period in a temperate Mediterranean climate. Oaks grow in a wide range of soils but are intolerant of shade. They have high germination success, with help from wildlife (caching). There is a high degree of synchrony – large scale weather phenomena entrain acorn production regionally (dry March and April, cold October to December). Taproots may grow 1-3 times as much as the crown during establishment.

Oak system response to fire depends on the vegetation zone. Cambrial damage from fires can girdle the tree, resulting in long term impacts, but the buds are well insulated by thick bark and can withstand considerable heating. Oak is mostly successional to conifers, except in the xeric extent of the East Cascades and on rocky balds. Oaks in the East Cascades are vulnerable to replacement or encroachment when fires are suppressed.

Interestingly, an expansion of oaks eastward may occur in light of climate change. We may see new plant communities and assemblages, shrubbier oaks, and habitat and species loss. A combination of topo-climatic resilience and how wildlife moves through the landscape may indicate resilience. This region is the second highest in resilience next to the Columbia plateau ecoregion.

The East Cascades Oak Partnership was born out of a 2016 planning event hosted by the Columbia Land Trust. There are now approximately 180 individuals involved across a number of organizations, agencies, and landowners. There is a signed MOU among the core partners, as well as members and working groups. Meetings are organized around learning, with speakers at each meeting. Lindsay explained the services provided by ECOP, available tools, and future offerings.

ECOP also collaborated with OSU's LEMA Lab to access forest data to determine partnership focus areas. 97% of Oregon white oak habitat has been lost, making this region a very important resource. There isn't a lot of information about oak spatial information, so oak systems are often over simplified. ECOP attempted to capture the diversity of systems.

Partners bring perspective and expertise to the work, improve networking and collaboration, demonstrate support for the shared vision that may lead to more funding, and actively participate in project implementation.

Lindsay explained the limiting factors (fire suppression, fragmentation, loss of habitat, pests, pollinator declines, conifer encroachment) that impact ecological factors (diminished climate resilience, loss of biodiversity, and diminished health and productivity). There is a cascade of impacts, including the impact to gathering of traditional foods.

Priority geographies are focused on landscape scale conservation values, including patch size, system diversity, understory condition, terrestrial resilience, sensitive species, and actual occurrence of priority plant species. A model was used to develop priority geographies based on these factors, but this is not a static set of results. The model reveals landscape patterns, but they may change over time. This information was used to develop a map of partnership focus areas.

There are six primary ways that people interact with Oregon white oak. ECOP interviewed people who were representatives of each human behavior, then developed logic models to identify contributing factors and accompanying strategies. Map atlases were built at the watershed scale to demonstrate impacts from human behavior. Strategies focused on: rural residential development (the highest ranking impact), fire suppression and conifer encroachment, grazing, orchards and vineyards, recreation, and ecological stewardship.

Planning documents are available at [www.columbialandtrust.org/ECOP](http://www.columbialandtrust.org/ECOP). The ECOP Theory of Change summarizes the strategic plan. As far as convergence with "Watershed 2040", Lindsay highlighted upland conservation that can put water rights back in the stream, land conservation that includes riparian oak systems that provide riparian restoration opportunities, preparing the landscape for wildfire that can prevent large sediment slugs from entering streams in the steep Hood River Watershed, and research priorities that can help advance understanding of water and carbon budgets and trophic cascades in oak systems.

Questions:

Jurgen Hess applauded the presentation and asked about the ODF cutting post-fire, and whether ECOP is interfacing with ODF on this issue. Lindsay noted that ECOP is mainly focusing on outreach materials that landowners can use with fire information officers to express wishes for post-fire mop up, but it is a big beast to manage and a lot to understand.

Susan Hess asked whether the plan could become a curriculum for a college course. Lindsay noted that ECOP has so many research questions that one of the goals is to engage academia on some of the topics.

\*\* This presentation was recorded and can be found on the Hood River Watershed Group website under the 'News' tab.

### **Review and Approval of Last Meeting Minutes**

Chuck asked if there were any corrections to the May minutes. The group approved the minutes.

### **Old Business**

#### **Facilitated meetings to discuss 501c3 development**

An RFP was sent to three local facilitators to assist with conversations around possible 501c3 development. All three facilitators provided proposals and the plan is to choose one by July 8<sup>th</sup>. Cindy asked the group if anyone would be interested in participating in the facilitator-led meetings (~4-6 meetings over a 2-3-month timeframe).

Megan Saunders asked whether the process would be working through the relationship with the SWCD and HRWG or what a 501c3 would look like. Cindy noted that it would largely be about the relationship.

#### **Biennial self-evaluation survey and meeting**

This is the annual self-evaluation required by OWEB to determine whether the Watershed Group is meeting organizational goals and objectives. Cindy has reserved space at the Interfluv meeting room on the waterfront for a Tuesday evening in July. Cindy will send out a doodle poll to confirm a date and will send out a survey this week for evaluation input. Chuck encouraged everyone to respond to the survey ASAP when they receive it.

### **Reports**

Watershed Coordinator updates – Cindy sent out the draft strategic action plan for comment. Cindy has asked for any comments by the end of the month. There was a pre-construction meeting for the West Fork Red Hill project. Cindy participated in a recent Senator Merkley town hall event. State Representative Anna Williams spearheaded the event. Cindy had a chance to thank Senator Merkley for his support of the local irrigation water infrastructure improvements, as well as express support for the Port habitat improvement opportunities.

Restoration & Outreach Project Manager updates – Alix updated the group on the status of the Neal Creek projects, the Master Naturalist field day, and Evans Creek reporting.

### **Announcements**

John Buckley noted that the Whiskey Creek pipeline south end will likely get underway in the fall, with a second phase taking place early next year. Purchasing pipe is very slow right now. Steve is working on getting the sublateral pipe and will hopefully have it by the fall.

Megan Saunders noted that the Kingsley project has started up again and will be wrapped up this fall. FID is continuing to see higher than normal water use and they are actively putting the word out to conserve water.

Ryan Gerstenberger noted that the spring Chinook run is low – they are behind on brood but they are working with the Deschutes hatchery to possibly share fish. Fisheries are shutdown. Ryan also noted that the habitat biologist is finally getting filled by Patrick Hayden. He is starting in July and will focus on implementation of projects this summer.

Susan Hess asked about the Klamath region water issues and the drought outlook, and what the crisis situation might look like/whether there is a plan for this. Cindy noted that about 90% of water use is diverted by irrigation districts, including some for rural residential irrigation. Megan noted that FID has a plan through the state, and worse case scenario would be a shut-off, but this has never happened in her history here. John mentioned that EFID is around 80% right now when normally at this time they are running at 100%. This coming weekend may change things with the hot temperatures and expects that turbidity will certainly increase. Our basin is in a much better place than most other watersheds in Oregon right now, however. John would like to see the water conservation booklets from the HRWG reprinted and sent out. Cindy

noted that the City of Hood River is barely meeting its instream water right for the city water that is coming from a Lake Branch spring. There was discussion around a coordinated drought response and distributing an updated water conservation booklet.

Chuck noted that an annual picnic replacement may happen in September. Stay tuned for more information.

The group acknowledged John Buckley's contributions to the Watershed Group over the years!

### **Summary of Consensus Items and Establishment of Next Meeting**

#### **Items that Received First Consensus:**

None.

#### **Items that Received Second Consensus:**

None.

The next meeting will be on September 28<sup>th</sup> from 6-8pm. There will be no meeting in July or August.

### **Adjournment**

Chuck thanked the group for attending and adjourned the meeting at 8:15 pm.

Reported by Alix Danielsen.