



Hood River
WATERSHED GROUP

Hood River Watershed Group

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

JANUARY 25, 2022 MEETING MINUTES

Watershed Group Members Present

Chuck Gehling	Cindy Thieman	Alix Danielsen	Ryan Gerstenberger	Kris Schaedel
Patrick Hayden	Richard Ragan	Bernard Yoo	Chuti Fiedler	Kevin Liburdy
Andrew Spaeth	Gary Asbridge	Regan Steller	Beth Flake	Lauretta Burman
Diana Burman	Rick Larson	Ann Gray	Kate Conley	Katie Stanton
Matt Jordan	Dan Spatz	Emery Cowan	Lindy Collamer	Les Perkins
Megan Saunders				

** This meeting was conducted virtually via Zoom.

Welcome and Introductions

At 6:01pm, Chuck Gehling welcomed everyone to the January meeting. There were 26 people in attendance. Cindy introduced the speaker.

Monthly Informational Presentation

Andrew Spaeth, the facilitator for the Hood River Forest Collaborative and Wasco County Forest Collaborative, presented on *Forest Collaboratives: Building Partnerships between the Community & Forest Service*.

Forest collaboratives work to build partnerships and increase trust between the Forest Service and diverse stakeholder groups. Across the Pacific Northwest, forest collaboratives have developed agreements around shared goals and increased the pace, scale, and quality of watershed and forest restoration across public and private lands. This has been accomplished through engaging a diverse set of stakeholders in planning, evaluating, and monitoring projects using a science-based and holistic approach.

Andrew began by describing the Timber Wars, which stemmed from overharvesting public and private lands (between 90-95% of all old growth in the Pacific Northwest was cut), which was detrimental for old-growth dependent species like the Northern spotted owl. This led to the creation of the Northwest Forest Plan, which was hard on rural communities that were dependent on logging. What emerged from this conflict was the development of diverse groups called forest collaboratives, which were grounded in the belief that diverse interests could be met by a balanced effort of forest management.

Forest collaboratives are defined as “...groups of multiple stakeholders that meet on a regular basis for dialogue about forest management priorities on a given area of national forest land (Davis and Santo, 2019).” Andrew showed a map of current Oregon forest collaboratives, including all-lands and public lands collaboratives. The first collaborative was formed in 1992 (Applegate Collaborative), and there are 26 collaboratives today. These groups have mission statements that generally strive for a balance of social, ecological, and economic goals.

Most collaboratives have a facilitator, and engage in some combination of coordination, monitoring, research, and community outreach. Average annual funding per collaborative each year ranges from \$7,765-\$150,045 (2013-2018). In Oregon, many collaboratives receive funding through the Federal Forest Restoration Program (FFRP) Collaborative Capacity Grants.

Membership may include representatives from the USDA Forest Service, NRCS, state agencies, county government, soil and water conservation districts, environmental groups, school districts, watershed councils, the timber industry, concerned citizens, retired Forest Service, and local tribes.

For reference, view OPB Field Guide's: What happens when loggers and environmentalists work together?

The Hood River Forest Collaborative mission is to provide "... consensus-based recommendations on forestland management within the Hood River Ranger District of the Mt. Hood National Forest" (HRFC Charter). It was established in 2011 as a public lands collaborative and has since worked on the following projects: Red Hill (2011), Lava (2013), Polallie Cooper (2014), and Waucoma Huckleberry Enhancement Project (2020). The HRFC shares facilitation, note-taking, and administration with the Wasco County Forest Collaborative.

The Wasco County Forest Collaborative "represents a broad constituency of stakeholders interested in healthy forest ecosystems, economic vitality and quality of life in Wasco County" (WCFC Charter). It was established in 2015 as an all-lands collaborative and members are appointed by the Wasco County Board of Commissioners.

Andrew walked the group through recent happenings within the forest collaboratives. The White River Fire Salvage project resulted in a decision memo for a 250-acre salvage that will include replanting and pollinator habitat. Insect and disease projects are an example of categorical exclusions from Congress.

Insect and disease projects allow for up to 3,000 acres of harvest to mitigate for insect and disease impacts or pressure areas but require collaborative participation (three have been planned on the Barlow Ranger District to date).

The Hood River Forest Collaborative has been working over the last year to develop zones of agreement that reflect values and interests around plantation thinning that are shared with the Forest Service to aid in planning.

Andrew showed a map that laid out projects that HRFC has worked on or is currently working on. The next project to be planned is the 4410 Fuel Break, which is in an area near Highway 35 that is considered to have a high potential for wildfire.

The Central Wasco Joint Chiefs Initiative is a 3-year USDA (Forest Service and NRCS) funded project focused on cross-boundary restoration in fire-prone areas. On the eastside of the Mt. Hood, there is approximately \$1.5 million for FY22, and will focus on restoration thinning, including pine-oak restoration. Another project was recently applied for around The Dalles Watershed.

The Waucoma Huckleberry Enhancement Project prioritizes restoration of huckleberry for cultural use/harvest within 2,557 treatment acres. The project is in partnership with the Warm Springs Tribe, with monitoring managed by the Forest Service. Implementation is expected to begin in 2022.

The collaboratives just received a \$40,000 grant from the Oregon Department of Forestry to conduct a fire history study with OSU on national forest lands within Hood River County and Wasco County. Dr. Andrew Merschel from OSU will be leading the study. There is broad scientific consensus around the need to conduct thinning and reintroduce fire within our dry forest ecosystems, but there is differing opinion on the role fire historically played in moist mixed conifer forests and cold forest types. Andrew's research project will establish study plots in the 4410 project area and in one area within the Barlow Ranger District. He will take cross sections from stumps or short snags, date the cross sections, and reconstruct the fire return date for these forest types. The data will be combined with studies conducted in other similar forest types. He is finding the fire return interval is around 30-50 years, which is significantly less than what has been thought, suggesting a much more active role of fire in these forest types.

Looking ahead in 2022, the forest collaboratives will be working on applied research and planning (fire history study, wildfire risk reduction), outreach and education, and implementation and effectiveness monitoring of vegetation management projects. The Oregon Wildfire Risk Explorer, a quantifiable wildfire risk assessment developed in 2018, models different fire scenarios and evaluates the outcome to a particular resource value (negative or ecological benefits). The east side of Hood River County includes the 3rd highest concentration in Oregon of very high risk areas. There were 312 fires that burned 60,903 acres in Hood River County between 2008 and 2019.

The recently published Mt. Hood Climate Vulnerability Assessment lays out potential impacts for different forest types in light of climate change. Across all forest types, the researchers expect to see more disturbance (wildfire, drought, insect and disease outbreaks). This will be most pronounced in the dry forest ecosystems. The document includes climate adaptation actions, including decreasing stand density and increase structural and genetic diversity to adapt for drought, maintaining spatial diversity of forest stands and age classes to help maintain resilience to fire, drought, and insects, implementing fuel treatments in dry forests to help minimize stand-replacement fire, and many others.

Questions:

Gary asked about the collaborative budgets. Andrew said that the combined budget is about \$40,000 for both the Hood River and Wasco Collaboratives. Andrew thinks the budget will increase with recent grants that groups have applied for.

Gary also asked about the key elements of collaborative success. Andrew noted that a group really needs to be cohesive and care about each other. Empathy breeds success. Additionally, having science that is locally relevant can help bridge areas where they may be disagreement.

Cindy thanked Andrew for presenting a lot of information in a clear way.

Emery Cowan asked how the collaborative plans to act upon the Climate Assessment. Andrew noted that it's a challenge right now to operate within the rigid political confines, which don't even really consider climate change right now. The biggest challenge is that fundamentally addressing wildfire risk and climate change risk requires stand thinning, and some partners and the general public may be resistant to this. Emery followed up by asking if there were any actions that the forest collaborative could take outside of the NEPA process. Andrew noted that the collaborative will be talking about this and that some ideas include creating a climate change zones of agreement and working with Oregon Department of Forestry on their recent increase in funding.

Review and Approval of Last Meeting Minutes

Chuck asked if there were any corrections to the December 2021 minutes. The group approved the minutes.

New Business

Officer & Operations Committee Elections

Cindy provided some background on the operations committee and the committee role, and then walked the group through the officer and committee candidates (listed below). Les Perkins (FID) would be taking the irrigation district role over from Craig DeHart (MFID), and Kate Conley and Chuti Fiedler would be renewing their terms. Cindy noted that the candidates are typically presented as a slate.

Cindy put forward Chuck Gehling and Sam Doak as Chair and Vice-Chair. Members present approved the officer candidates.

Chuck put forward the slate of Operations Committee candidates. The members present approved the candidates.

Officer candidates: Chuck Gehling, Chair; Sam Doak, Vice Chair

Operations Committee candidates: Les Perkins (irrigation), Kate Conley (at-large), Chuti Fiedler (natural resources)

Old Business

501(c)3 non-profit organization development: review potential draft bylaws and policies

The group reviewed a draft bylaws and policies document that was drafted by the bylaws subcommittee. The draft versions are meant to serve as a starting point for conversation and a way to solicit feedback. The bylaws document can help frame a discussion around how the non-profit organization would be structured, how decisions would be made, etc. The bylaws are intentionally broad so they provide some flexibility and are not overly cumbersome. Further details are fleshed out in board and organizational policy documents.

Les Perkins noted that the document should include "local governments", as distinguished from state agencies, to include irrigation districts and other local government organizations.

The group discussed the potential membership structure of the nonprofit organization. There are coordination and legal drawbacks to being a membership organization in line with Oregon law. In developing the draft bylaws, the subcommittee aimed to find a happy medium between maintaining the same kind of membership engagement but avoiding some of the membership organization drawbacks.

Rick Ragan asked about member voting rights. Cindy noted that this is a question that several people have and explained that membership organizations operate differently than non-membership organizations. Most watershed councils in the state are non-membership organizations, largely for logistical reasons. As the bylaws are currently drafted, Watershed Group members would not have voting rights. This raises concern for some members of the group as it would mean moving away from the double consensus process that has been utilized since the Group's inception. Rick noted that he thought this change might alienate members of the group who value the consensus model.

Cindy noted that the Long Tom Watershed Council does utilize a membership organization model that allows members to vote on the board of directors' candidates at the annual meeting, but there are no voting rights beyond that.

Chuck noted that it is the intention of the subcommittee that the monthly meetings and presentations would still happen as they do now, and that projects and other work of the Watershed Group would still be up for discussion among "members", but as a nonprofit organization, the board of directors would make the final decision on voting matters.

Kate Conley asked if anyone remembered if/when a double consensus item had ever been challenged or had not passed. Chuck noted that the only time there was an objection was regarding Powerdale water rights. There have been other discussions in the past where items have been tabled so questions can be answered. More recently, there haven't been many examples of this because a lot of the leg work is done in advance of meetings so that when items are brought to the group, there aren't issues that would interfere with consensus. Cindy added that she thought Kate's comment is a good one and that moving forward, it raises the issue of whether the group would want to be more deliberate about bringing topics forward for consensus/vote. Kate noted that advisory committees having non-voting members (and perhaps anyone who shows up to monthly meetings could act as non-voting advisory members) could help bridge this potential gap in decision-making.

The group discussed the Watershed Group service area, which is the hydrologic boundary as well other parts of Hood River County outside of the watershed boundary. People living and working in these areas are also eligible for membership and these lands are included within restoration areas (i.e., Cascade Locks). Ryan Gerstenberger noted that this is new to him and he's happy to hear other watersheds like Herman Creek may be a target of restoration for the Watershed Group. Ryan expressed support for increasing outreach to these areas as they are significant fish streams.

The group proceeded through more details within the draft bylaws and policies. Alix pointed out that the board development policy allows for general membership to serve on the board development committee and influence the board make-up. Megan Saunders had suggested that when the board development committee puts forward a slate of candidates, perhaps there could be an opportunity for the general membership to provide feedback on the slate before it went to a board vote. Megan feels this is critical, especially during the transition, to ensure Watershed Group input and feedback rather than the board voting in the board. Many agreed with this point.

Les Perkins asked whether it was possible to have a separate meeting to discuss these topics in more detail. Others agreed this was a good idea, and Cindy suggested that this topic could be the sole focus of the February Watershed Group meeting (no presentation is currently scheduled). Therefore, an interim meeting will be scheduled in February to review 501c3 documents and the February Watershed Group meeting will be a business-only meeting focused on the draft bylaws and policies.

Reports

Watershed Coordinator updates – Cindy shared that the FIP implementation grant was submitted. The total ask was \$6.5 million for 6 years. Cindy provided a summary of the application and the actions/activities that the Partnership would undertake over the 6-year grant period.

Restoration and Outreach Project Manager updates – Alix noted that she assisted with the FIP grant application, has been working on annual reporting, and is working on the Neal Creek Phase 2 design with BPA and CTWS.

Announcements

None.

Summary of Consensus Items and Establishment of Next Meeting

None.

The next meeting will be on February 22nd from 6-8pm.

Adjournment

Chuck thanked the group for attending and adjourned the meeting at 8:13 pm.

Reported by Alix Danielsen.