

Middle Snake Watershed (WRIA 35) Public Involvement Workshops Summary

From May 21 – 28th, individuals interested in the health of the Middle Snake Watershed (WRIA 35) gathered in public workshops to discuss issues that impact the health of the watershed. Workshops were held in the Tucannon Subbasin (May 21), Pataha & Lower Snake Subbasins (May 22), Asotin Subbasin (May 27), the Lower Snake (Whitman County) Subbasin (May 28), and with the Nez Perce Tribe (May 28).

Although sponsored under WRIA 35 watershed planning (2514), the workshops addressed relevant issues for the three primary planning processes in the basin: watershed planning, subbasin planning, and salmon recovery planning. Coordination between these three planning processes is vital for efficiency and to ensure consistency between the plans and their objectives.

The purpose of these workshops was three-fold: 1) to introduce watershed planning, salmon recovery planning, and subbasin planning efforts and report on their current status; 2) to develop a list of specific concerns in the watershed related to low flows, instream habitat, riparian vegetation, upland management, water supply, water quality, and other issues and identify where those issues are of primary concern; and 3) to initiate a continuing dialogue between the various stakeholders in the watershed.

Benefits that were realized across all subbasins included enhanced education and involvement of local stakeholders, development of an information foundation for Phase 2 watershed planning, improved communication/understanding between Nez Perce staff and local resource managers, and input for subbasin planning and salmon recovery planning goals, objectives and potential strategies. Following is a summary of the information gathered during the workshops.

Common Themes: Accomplishments

A large amount of work that has been accomplished through implementation of model watershed plans. Specific enhancement efforts common across the watershed include the following:

- High level of Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) participation
- Extensive implementation of no-till and low-till agricultural practices
- Instream habitat enhancements such as vortex rock weirs and meander restoration
- Use of retention basins to collect sediment

Common Themes: Issues of Concern

Several issues of concern were identified throughout the watershed. The Nez Perce offered to partner on projects, with the potential to provide funding and/or technical expertise to address these issues and those that are subbasin-specific. Common issues of concern identified in the workshops include the following:

- Primary issue: need to identify and reduce sources of sediment (e.g. ag runoff, county roads, instream residue from the 1996 flood).
- Insufficient noxious weed control, particularly on public lands.
- Range/habitat management improvements are needed on public lands to reduce impacts to private landowners.
- Participation in no-till, low-till, CREP, CRP, and other conservation practices and programs should be expanded.
- Recreation and rural development pressures are causing water quality and potentially quantity concerns in selected areas throughout the watershed.
- Continue improving federal and state land management coordination with local landowners.
- Species of concern include: elk, deer, bighorn sheep, cougar and bear

May 21, 2003

Subbasin: Tucannon

Home of Don & Janet Howard-Pomeroy, WA

Approx. 15 attendees

Current Conditions

- Reduced sediment contribution from uplands through use of no-till and settling basins
- Significant CREP enrollment, with most contracts in 2nd or 3rd year
- CRP/CREP participation is approaching ceiling
- Designed new screens for 60 of the 64 diversions with permits/water right certificates
- Significant instream improvements have been made to stabilize banks and restore stream functions, but unstable streambanks do exist in some places (e.g. Tucannon River near Last Chance Resort)
- WDFW managed recreation areas in upper watershed
- Deer browsing is a significant issue for local private landowners
- No significant problems with meeting out-of-stream water needs
- USFS & WDFW lands need additional management
 - Potential for sediment inputs & loss of riparian habitat due to campgrounds along Tucannon River. Several have been moved away from the stream.
 - Lakes appear to have potential to elevate water temperatures, but this has not been documented.

Proposed Management Changes/Enhancement Projects

- Increase CREP enrollment to maximum
- Continue instream work to enhance meanders, channel stability and streambank stability
- Focus on state land and recreation management

- Water temperature could be decreased in water coming out of the lakes by using existing (inactive) bottom drains/subsurface systems.
- Reduce sediment from county roads and uplands

Miscellaneous Issues

- Projects that include riparian planting will need to consider irrigation needs as many stream reaches are confined (i.e. water from the stream does not infiltrate far into riparian zone).
- Starbuck's well may not be sufficient to support large water users that may want to locate in the area.
- Development pressure is limited in this subbasin due to current build-out status and large-lot county zoning.

May 22, 2003

Subbasin: Pataha & Lower Snake (Garfield County Portion)

Donna's Diner-Pomeroy, WA

Approx. 7 attendees

Current Conditions

- Agricultural community is actively employing conservation practices
 - 40 – 50% ag land farmed with no-till practices (2-pass or less) for the past 10 years
 - 800 acres of CREP in place
 - Approaching the 25% CRP acreage limit in this subbasin
- Springs provide 50% of Pataha Creek flow in summertime and are the City of Pomeroy's water supply
- A portion of water rights on lower Pataha have been reviewed in a court decision
- 6 temperature monitors are in place on Pataha Creek
- 25 – 40 total diversions, but screening is not a significant issue in this subbasin, as there are no direct irrigation ditches
- Estimated 50% reduction in cattle in last 10 years; impacts of cattle are decreasing due to diminishing numbers.
- Pataha is major source of sediment inputs to the Tucannon River, impacting fall Chinook habitat
- USFS Land Management
 - Several USFS roads have recently been closed. This should help decrease erosion & sediment inputs.
 - Heavy ORV usage on USFS land
- Garfield County Issues
 - Garfield County is actively working to decrease road erosion through stormwater management and winter road closures.
 - Noxious weeds along roadways have no filtration capacity.
 - County has considered weed control alternatives to spraying
 - Garfield County is actively managing septic system construction.
- Large beaver populations exist on Deadman and Meadow Streams
- Bull trout & brook trout are present in the headwaters, steelhead are present from Pomeroy upstream

Proposed Management Changes/Enhancement Projects

- Identify sediment sources and reduce sediment that impacts the Tucannon
- Explore reducing sediment on County roads by mowing instead of spraying and other land management practices
- Review impacts of ORV use on state and federal lands
- Evaluate fish passage barriers (Dodge junction and Pomeroy sewer line)
- Control noxious weeds

Misc Issues

- Nez Perce has access to additional funding sources to help and support identified projects.
- Snake River Mainstem: Little desire to use water from the Snake due to pumping/transportation costs
- Need to get DOT & USFS involved early in the planning process

May 27, 2003

Subbasin: Asotin

Asotin Public Utility District-Clarkston, WA

Approx. 14 attendees

Current Conditions

- Agriculture
 - 31% of ag land in CRP (ceiling bumped due to salmon issues)
 - 42 miles of CREP
 - Strip cropping, terracing, sediment ponds are common
 - 19 major growers/producers, with only 3 not adopting direct seed, no-till
- Fish Distribution
 - Only one small bull trout population high up on the Asotin N. Fork
 - Asotin Creek is a wild steelhead reserve stream
 - Charley Creek has some of the highest densities of juvenile steelhead in SE Washington
- Fish passage barriers (old culverts)
 - 1 on Lick
 - 1 on Charley
 - 2 on George
- Naturally-dewatered sections have more impact on fish than culverts
- Municipal Issues
 - Anatone issues: zoning & growth pressures; Cloverland: poor aquifer supply & growth pressures; growth pressures all along Snake River as well.
 - Asotin PUD has excellent, stable water supply. Needs protection because of sole-source aquifer issue.
- Sediment Concerns
 - Residual sediment still from '96 flood
 - County roads are a significant sediment contributor
- Ecology TMDL scheduled for 2005
- Restoration of stream meanders and riparian vegetation has occurred in many areas
- Rocky soils are common in this subbasin
- WDFW and USFS have significant holdings in the upper watershed

Proposed Management Changes / Enhancement Projects

- Fence wetlands

- Assess county roads for sediment reduction
- Assess septic/water quality problems in Anatone and other growth areas
- Explore establishment of regional sewer utility for Clarkston, City of Asotin and surrounding urban area
- Focus on improved stormwater management in urban areas
- Evaluate impacts of feedlots along Asotin Creek and potential management alternatives
- Riparian and stream channel function restoration needed on Charley, George, Pintler, & parts of Asotin Creek
- USFS Issues: Roads, grazing, ORV usage, other recreation, logging, sediment production, fire management
- WDFW Issues: Noxious weed control, improve range conditions to limit impacts of wildlife on private landowners, enhance instream habitat, enhance cooperation with local landowners for wildlife damage reimbursements. Need a grazing management plan for public lands.
- Improve management of state lands
- Improve land management cooperation between federal agencies, state agencies, private landowners, and tribes (management and funding partner). Any program will need to have sufficient cost-share opportunities to make it economically feasible.

Misc. Issues

- Programs need to balance riparian, upland, and instream enhancements.

May 28, 2003

Nez Perce Tribe

Pi Nee Waus Conference Center-Lapwai, ID

Approx. 20 attendees

Current Conditions

- Asotin Creek has instream flows in place
- Nez Perce is involved in each planning process
- 14 gauges – 8 continuous & 6 staffed
- Idaho has waste water treatment plant water quality issues

Proposed Management Changes/Enhancement Projects

- Restore wetlands and wet meadows (very long-term)
- Enhance and protect cultural and historic resources re: plants, fish, and wildlife and establishing location and cultural use of springs
- Re-establish tribal fisheries in usual and accustomed areas to align with treaty rights and educational values.
- Restore fish to harvestable levels
- Identify high priority areas
- Use modeling to help establish goals

- Use bio-assessment performance measures (e.g. indicator species) and other scientific indicators to support and measure watershed enhancements – “ridge top to ridge top”
- Monitoring and enhancement efforts need to consider more than just fish
- Water conservation: education and urban use need to be addressed

Misc. Issues

- Planning processes need to “think long-term”, not just respond to ESA – holistic approach
- Landowners want to do the right thing
- Nez Perce will have funding available to help fill some data gaps.
- Planning process need to be long term & on large scale to address instream, riparian, upland and urban issues
- Conflict exists between Nez Perce and economic interests on dam removal

May 28, 2003

Subbasin: Lower Snake River Mainstem (Whitman Co. portion)

CETC Building—Colfax, WA

3 attendees

Current Conditions

- Primarily dryland wheat
- No irrigation water rights, only stock watering
- Only two fish bearing/perennial streams (Almota and Penewawa) which support limited spawning in early spring
- Most streams go dry or are reduced to minimal flow by summer
- Grazing (estimated 1000 head) occurs until June
- Some no-till is occurring
- Extensive CRP enrollment (e.g. Penewawa Creek drainage)
- Sediment filled in the bottom of Penewawa Creek
- Noxious weeds less of a problem in this subbasin
- 2 stream gauges: 1)Almota & 2)Penewawa
- Development pressure is very limited

Proposed Management Changes/Enhancement Projects

- Increase CREP enrollment
- Reduce upland sediment inputs through expanded use of no-till and other methods