



Oregon Water Resources Congress

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August 1, 2011

Mr. David Raff
Bureau of Reclamation
Office of Policy and Administration 84-51000
P.O. Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Subject: Comments on the Draft WaterSMART Strategic Implementation Plan

Submitted via email to: WaterSMARTBOR@usbr.gov

Dear Mr. Raff:

The Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) is submitting comments on the U.S. Department of Interior's Draft WaterSMART Strategic Implementation Plan. The Oregon Water Resources Congress was established in 1912 as a trade association to support member needs to protect water rights and encourage conservation and water management statewide. OWRC represents irrigation districts, water control districts, and other local government entities that deliver agricultural water supplies throughout the State of Oregon. About one-half of our members are in Bureau of Reclamation Projects; most of the rest of our members have contracts for water with Reclamation. We offer these comments on behalf of our members, many of which have received grants under the WaterSMART program.

OWRC and its members strongly support the U.S. Department of Interior's (Interior) efforts to secure and sustain water supplies through the WaterSMART Program. WaterSMART provides a structure and funding mechanism so that agriculture, municipal and industrial, environmental and recreational interests can develop and implement valuable natural resources projects that will benefit current and future generations. OWRC members are dependent upon adequate water supplies in order to continue delivering irrigation water throughout Oregon and greatly appreciate the opportunities that WaterSMART has provided to increase certainty and sustainability of water supplies. Our comments focus primarily on the Bureau of Reclamation's role in this Plan as that is the agency with which our members are most involved, especially with regard to the Water SMART program.

General Comments

OWRC appreciates the complexity of undertaking a new inter-agency program such as WaterSMART and we find the Draft WaterSMART Strategic Implementation Plan helpful as far as it goes, but we think it is incomplete at this point. Successful plans include not only the tasks and assignment of these tasks (the content of this draft plan), but also include the resources needed for those tasks, timelines to guide the implementation, identification of the inter-related tasks in order to be prepared to adjust the plan if a timeline is not met, a step to evaluate progress and restructure the plan depending on progress, and alternatives for less resources than needed for full implantation..This draft Plan does not, with a few exceptions, extend beyond the description of the work and assignment of tasks. Without that information, it is not truly a plan, but more a statement of expectations of the agencies without anything to measure success or assess accountability. We recognize the difficulty in developing that information, but

The mission of the Oregon Water Resources Congress is to promote the protection and use of water rights and the wise stewardship of water resources.

without a timeline and resources, it is impossible to have a sense of the level of commitment the successful implementation of the WaterSMART Program will require. And there is no mean by which to measure the success of the program in terms of the return on investments and the value of the accomplishments.

We are concerned about the impact the implementation of the WaterSMART program will have on agencies. Will they be expected to incorporate this program into their existing workloads? Will other programs be sacrificed by shifting resources to the WaterSMART program? If so, which programs will be reduced or eliminated, how will they be identified, and how will the impact of those changes be determined? Will agencies be requesting increased budgets for staff or contracts for the WaterSMART program? What is the schedule for accomplishing the tasks described in the Implementation Plan? How do the different tasks interface with each other and which ones depend on the completion of other tasks? What happens if the timeline does not move forward as planned?

For example, how will the assignments to the Bureau of Reclamation impact its ability to continue support of its facilities and infrastructure and for the federally authorized Projects? How will the full implementation of the WaterSMART program impact other Congressional mandates for Reclamation? What efforts will Reclamation or the Department of Interior undertake to consult with partners who rely on Bureau facilities to serve their water users?

The answers to these questions are part of the implementation process and should be included in a discussion of resources for WaterSMART implementation in the interest of transparency as well as having a complete Plan.

The Strategic Implementation Plan refers to partners and partnerships throughout. We have taken note that local governments are often not included in the discussion of those partnerships. As an association representing irrigation districts who have been long-time partners with Reclamation, we are concerned that our members will not be included in these new opportunities to partner with Reclamation and other agencies in implementing the WaterSMART program. We have made comments about this in some parts of the document, but we ask the Department to fully evaluate the partnership opportunities throughout the Plan to ensure that local governments are included in those partnerships.

OWRC members have actively pursued opportunities to conserve water and energy and improve efficiency of their water delivery systems. We believe conservation and efficiency are key components of ensuring that our state can meet all of its water needs; however, we know that conservation and efficiency cannot meet those needs by themselves. They cannot provide the means to replace the water storage function of snowpack; they cannot provide flood control, and they cannot provide a means to control stream flow for fish and habitat restoration. Water storage, both above and below ground, must be a component of any water strategy for the West. Storage need not be tainted by the past tradition of on-stream reservoir storage. There are new technologies and new opportunities for alternative means to store water which are critical components of the full slate of options to meet water needs of the future. We request that Interior review the Implementation Plan and include above and below water storage throughout the plan when discussing the means by which to meet the West's water requirements.

Our following comments on the Sections of the Plan focus primarily on the Bureau of Reclamation's role as that is the agency with which our members are most involved, especially with regard to the WaterSMART Program, but those comments often could be applied to the activities of other agencies.

Section 1. Program Coordination

In addition to coordinating the implementation of the WaterSMART Program with the various Interior agencies, we suggest that the Plan recognize the program coordination with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U.S. Forest Service), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and other Federal agency partners that can help plan and finance cooperative conservation partnerships. OWRC strongly supports implementation of the Cooperative Watershed Management Program. The Deschutes River Conservancy model in Central Oregon was used to help design this program. The enormous success in the Deschutes Basin to increase stream flow and protect water for beneficial uses by agriculture and cities is evidence that this type of program can be successful throughout the West.

Section 3. The Energy/Water Nexus

OWRC and its members strongly support efforts to look at both water and energy efficiencies and opportunities given the interconnected nature of water and energy both in energy generation and the consumption of energy in water delivery. Water conservation, energy conservation, and clean, green, renewable energy generation are the cornerstone for the future of water and for economic stability and growth in the West. Reclamation's WaterSMART System Optimization Review grants and WaterSMART Water and Energy Efficiency grants have been critical to Oregon and, more specifically, for local governments such as our members, in developing consensus in their watersheds and then moving forward with projects to conserve water and energy.

Water conservation, energy conservation and clean, green, renewable energy generation are the cornerstone for the future of water in the West. In Oregon, small conduit and open canal hydroelectric projects will bring many benefits, including

- Water and energy conservation through the elimination of existing water seepage in canals and water evaporation, improved control of water in conveyance and delivery system, pressurization of water delivery to irrigators;
- augmented in-stream flows for aquatic wildlife and habitat;
- improved safety by reducing canal breaches; and
- clean, green, renewable power generation.

The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) responsibilities under the Energy/Water Nexus include "examining energy development projects for their potential to adversely affect water rights, groundwater levels, and water quality on FWS lands." Will FWS develop this data themselves, and, if so, on what expertise will it be based? Or will FWS seek available data from state agencies or through contracts with outside entities? Given the states' roles in managing water rights, it is important to know how that process will work.

Further, that statement seems to assume that energy development projects will have adverse impacts which fails to recognize that energy projects can be accomplished without injuring water rights, groundwater levels or water quality. In fact, some energy development projects can be

perceived as a water reuse project, putting the water to the additional use for hydropower generation while it is being delivered for another use such as irrigation.

How will Interior and its agencies coordinate their efforts with the Department of Energy and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission? While neither of these agencies are part of Interior and thus not subject to this Implementation Plan, they are key to the feasibility of low impact hydropower projects.

Section 4. Best Available Science

OWRC welcomes the development of regional or “downscaled” climate data that can be used to manage scarce water resources and prepare for potential climate change impacts. It is not clear what scale will be used to develop the data. We believe it is important to have data and models that are useful at the watershed basin or sub-basin level.

Reclamation states it will use best available science to “maintain infrastructure.” In the face of potentially devastating impacts from climate change, maintenance of infrastructure is the minimum of what should occur to ensure sustainable water management. Science should also be used to identify the needs for infrastructure upgrades, replacements, and new infrastructure. Aging infrastructure is a growing problem in Oregon and across the West and some facilities may have reached the end of their functional life and require more than just maintenance. Additionally, if models about changes in the timing and quantity of precipitation are accurate, infrastructure will need to be modified or developed to prevent flooding during the winter and spring and to capture rainfall to replace the snowpack that now serves as storage in order to ensure adequate supplies of water and stream flow during summer months.

Section 5. Water Footprint Reduction Program

OWRC supports efforts to reduce water use at Interior facilities. The very short statement about Reclamation’s Strategic Sustainability Performance Plan provides no information about what that Plan is or the process and timeframe for its development. How will the dams that Reclamation operates and the federally authorized Projects be included in the water footprint reduction plan? What will be the role of Reclamation’s partners that operate and maintain those facilities in this Program? How will the footprint be developed in areas without adequate water use measurement?

Section 7. Promoting Sustainable Water Strategies

OWRC supports both sustainable water strategies and the development of hydroelectric power where appropriate. However, it also important to include water storage projects as part of this effort, especially innovative types of below and above-ground storage that have potential for great benefit with minimal or no negative environmental impacts. Several Western States, including Oregon, are including storage projects as part of their planning and efforts to increase water supply.

The Fish and Wildlife Service responsibilities in this Section include the protection of water rights. This is a broad statement which needs explanation. It appears that FWS could move to protect water rights for habitat and species above water rights for other beneficial uses -- something that raises additional questions, and, frankly, suspicion. Does this mean that FWS will seek additional water rights, and if so, how and from whom? Does this mean that protection of water rights habitat and species will trump existing water rights? What role will states and other stakeholders have in this process? These questions need to be answered before we can

be supportive of this concept. Additionally, this is the first section that does not have a role for Interior listed, which instead could imply that FWS is the lead.

The items to be implemented by Reclamation are clearly stated, and in many instances continue existing valuable programs that are essential to its mission. OWRC's members are strong advocates of Reclamation's Water Conservation Field Services Program and we are pleased to have it recognized in this Implementation Plan. We encourage Reclamation to expand this program as it is unique among Reclamation's programs in its ability to support on the ground water efficiency and conservation project directly and quickly in a targeted manner.

We appreciate the recognition of the importance of low impact and small hydropower projects in meeting the West's energy needs. We request that local governments such as irrigation districts be included in the collaboration efforts for these types of projects.

Section 8. Evaluation of Needed Information

How does this Section relate to the Best Available Science section?

What are the timeframes for completing the evaluation of needed information? USGS is noted as identifying ways to develop needed information with an analysis due in April 2011. This statement seems to imply that the evaluation has been completed by all agencies, yet the language for the other agencies is stated in the future tense. If the evaluation has not been completed how will USGS respond to information gaps not anticipated in its earlier analysis? Since the date for completion of this work is now past, this statement needs to be updated to reflect the current status of this work. Timeframes are key to understanding this part of the plan as it does not make sense to provide ways to develop new information if you do not yet know what is missing and needed most.

Section 9. Education and Awareness

Reclamation is listed as conducting education and awareness activities through the Water Conservation Field Services Program in "some" regions. Will that be the limit of Reclamation's education and awareness efforts or are there plans to expand this program to other regions? What will the ongoing education and awareness program encompass or is there nothing additional planned? Given the importance of the WaterSMART program it would be prudent to expand these activities to all regions that Reclamation serves.

Section 10. Collaboration with States and Tribes

While OWRC supports collaboration with States and Tribes, we would like this document to recognize the already existing partnerships with local governments and to commit to continuing those partnerships and developing new similar partnerships. Many of our members are already involved in these types of cooperative partnerships which are key to successful watershed based water conservation, water efficiency, energy development and energy conservation projects. Building partnerships from the ground up with all stakeholders involved is critical to being successful in any watershed or river sub-basin. We believe these local partnerships are as important as the partnerships with the States and Tribes, albeit fulfilling different purposes, and they should be acknowledged as being equally important.

Section 11. Planning Efforts

Planning is a key, and often under-funded, tool in water management and we appreciate the inclusion of Interior planning efforts as part of the WaterSMART program; however, the section

on Reclamation's planning efforts could be enhanced. While evaluating impacts of climate change to water and power facilities is a key activity, the item fails to mention any strategies to address changes from climate change that may require new types of storage. Water conservation is and will remain a valuable tool in managing scarce water resources, but it cannot be the only adaptation strategy. While we recognize that new storage projects are politically difficult, as mentioned earlier there are new innovative above and below ground storage projects that should be considered as part of planning efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft WaterSMART Strategic Implementation Plan. We look forward to working with the Department of Interior and its agencies as partners to reduce or eliminate conflict in our watershed and move forward in developing sustainable water resources for the future.

Sincerely,


Anita Winkler
Executive Director