



Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan

Conversions Working Group Meeting

Draft Meeting Summary August 3, 2009 Bureau of Reclamation Burley, Idaho

Overview

In addition to a tour of Burley conversions projects sites, the Conversions Working Group (WG) discussed the following at the August 3, 2009 meeting:

- AWEF proposal success and its implications on the WG
- Update on conversations with members of the community
- Identification of projects sites requiring additional analysis
- Further refinement of project selection criteria

AWEF Proposal

The Conversions WG has until December to compile a package of recommendations on conversions projects in the ESPA. After December, the WG will likely continue to meet to refine and make any final recommendations to the Implementation Committee.

Parameters outlined in the ESPA CAMP as actions were confirmed, and WG members identified elements that are in the Plan regarding conversions. For example, it was noted that the full conversion of A & B Irrigation District is off-the-table although a partial conversion (particularly on the west end) is still considered. Other project locations included Hazleton Butte, Milner Gooding, Burley Irrigation District and Southwest Irrigation District. Additionally, WG members agreed that conversion and mitigation efforts need to be completely separated nor viewed as providing subsidies for groundwater users.

The final product of this WG will be a prioritized spreadsheet of conversions projects that includes detailed information such as: benefit to aquifer, cost to implement, water supply, depth to ground water, lift requirements to supply surface water, and environmental factors. Additionally, the list will include information on implementation steps and a coordinated plan to identify, rank and construct projects when funding becomes available.

Update on Informal Conversations

The Conversions WG reviewed ESPA CAMP elements related to conversions. As outlined in the Plan, conversions projects are broken into two categories: soft and hard. Cynthia Bridge Clark, Board staff, provided definitions of soft (small) and hard (large) conversions projects. She described soft (small) conversions as projects in which the infrastructure to divert and deliver surface water is constructed for an individual or farm level system. Canal delivery infrastructure is located nearby (e.g. less than one mile). Hard (large) conversions projects are ones in which the infrastructure to divert and deliver surface water is constructed for multiple farms through the same system, and is delivered to acres that are not currently being served by surface water.

Conversions WG members determined that both large and small projects should be considered conversions, which includes *all* the conversions projects under Phase I of the Plan (referring to both hard and soft conversions). In this first year, small projects will be implemented as immediate action items that produce timely results and can be expanded upon in future Phases.

Identified Project Sites

The WG discussed incentives that could serve as talking points when engaging landowners/operators. Incentives include water reliability, reduction in power generation costs, specific benefits to the aquifer, and overall aquifer benefit resulting in lower pumping depths as a result of conversion projects. The most important incentive according to WG members is the savings related to a reduction in power costs.

WG members emphasized the need to treat the aquifer as a reservoir, and want to create an incentive program that promotes this perception. The WG briefly discussed an incentive program for landowners/operators to construct conversions projects on their land. While this needs to be further discussed, one WG member suggested the idea of the CAMP covering more costs (e.g. 70% of infrastructure) on the frontend, and the owners/operators covering the water supply. This approach would allow for risk to be shared by CAMP and the landowners/operators. It also was suggested that the incentive program should create competition amongst those who have convertible acres.

Criteria for Project Selection

Cynthia also provided highlights from IWRRI's soft conversions study. Of the lands that are supplied by groundwater, and are near or adjacent to a canal system, approximately 53,000 acres could reasonably be converted to receive surface water. WG members are confident that there are more potential acres than the 53,000 identified by IWRRI. In order to know more about the 53,000 acres and other potential acres, WG members identified refinements to existing IDWR maps of the ESPA and other information needed to make recommendations. They include:

- Identification of groundwater systems with potential for conversion
 - within 5 KM of Snake Plain River
 - with less than 100' lift to deliver surface water from the source/canal to the site
 - with greatest depth to ground water
 - with water supply/canal capacity
- Additional information for future consideration in ranking sites
 - Cost and cost-benefit ratio of converting the system
 - Year to year conditions of system
 - Power costs of groundwater system
 - Conversion shall not injure existing water rights

Criteria for Project Selection

WG members discussed criteria for project selection. These criteria do not have a point or rating or system (at this point) as not enough information is known about proposed projects. Criteria include:

Once the project sites listed in the previous slides have been further analyzed, the following criteria will help to prioritize or even eliminate project areas. The criteria have not been identified in any ranking order yet, but they have been categorized as follows:

- **Required**

- **Within ESPA boundaries**
- **Benefit to the aquifer**
- **No injury to existing water rights**
- **No supplemental wells**
- **Preferred**
 - **Senior water rights will be honored over junior ones**
 - **Long-term commitment; people will continue project**
 - **Adequate/reliable canal capacity**
 - **Multiple benefits or purpose (i.e. recharge and conversions)**
 - **Long-term benefit to the aquifer**
- **Other**
 - **Willing to participate financially**
 - **Economically viable; can support themselves**
 - **Adequate/reliable canal capacity**
 - **Multiple benefits (i.e. recharge and conversions)**
 - **Emphasize reduction to groundwater pumping**
 - **People are ready and willing**
 - **A need for conversions**
 - **Cost-benefit ratio**
 - **Cost of implementation**
 - **Environmental factors**

Final Evaluation Criteria for Recommendations to Implementation Committee

The WG also established some preliminary criteria for the final package of recommendations for the Implementation Committee. WG members would like the final package of conversions to be judged with a comprehensive lens. Criteria include:

- Geographic diversity within ESPA, as outlined in the Plan
- Environmental considerations
- Early action items
- Long-term benefit to the aquifer

Next Steps

Conversions WG members agreed to develop a prioritized list of projects that meet the criteria developed above. In order to begin the process of developing such a list, the following steps must be taken:

Action	Responsible
Members of the Conversions WG will gain a sense of willingness and of specific acres that are convertible from landowners/operators and canal company managers	All WG Members
Identify ESPA acres that are potentially convertible to receive surface water from the Snake River	All WG Members
Further IDWR analysis on Hazleton Butte, H & P Farms, West End of A&B, East Shelley, and Rockford Canal	Cynthia Bridge Clark/Brian Patton
Continue coordination with BOR on Milner Gooding costs and working through rental pool	Rich Rigby
Conversions WG will apply identified criteria to potential acres	Upcoming WG meetings
Potential projects that meet criteria will be identified/listed.	Upcoming WG meetings
Discuss potential for funding mechanism addition to groundwater statute	AGs Office
Coordinate with Recharge WG on impacts that conversions projects may have on recharge and vice versa	WG Members and Bill Quinn
Coordinate with Craig and Steve Murdock to share information, generate interest, brainstorm incentives and arrange a Burley tour (if desired)	Steve Howser
	Lynn Tominaga

Next Meeting:

The next two Conversions WG meetings are:

- September 1st, 2009 at 9:00 am
- October 12th, 2009 at 1:00 pm

MEETING ATTENDEES

Conversions Working Group Members

- | | | | |
|-----|--------|-----------|-------------------------|
| 1. | Randy | Bingham | Surface Water Users |
| 2. | Jared | Fuhriman | Municipalities/Counties |
| 3. | Steve | Howser | Surface Water Users |
| 4. | Linda | Lemmon | Spring Water Users |
| 5. | Albert | Lockwood | Surface Water Users |
| 6. | Roy | Mink | IWRRI |
| 7. | Brian | Olmstead | Surface Water Users |
| 8. | Dean | Stevenson | Groundwater Users |
| 9. | Dan | Temple | Mixed-Use |
| 10. | James | Tucker | Hydropower |

Ex Officio Members and Other Attendees

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|-----|----------|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| 11. | Peter | Anderson | Environmental and Conservation |
| 12. | Ken | Beckmann | NRCS |
| 13. | David | Blue | Idaho Power |
| 14. | Jon | Bowling | Idaho Power |
| 15. | Cynthia | Bridge Clark | IDWR |
| 16. | John | Chatburn | Governor's Office |
| 17. | Steven | Goodson | Governor's Office |
| 18. | Jennifer | Graham | CDR Associates |
| 19. | Joan | Kathol | CDR Associates |
| 20. | Brian | Patton | IDWR |
| 21. | Rich | Rigby | BOR |
| 22. | Steven | Serr | Bonneville County |
| 23. | Lynn | Tominaga | Idaho Ground Water Appropriators, Inc |