

Republican River Basin-Wide Plan Stakeholder Advisory Meeting Minutes March 31, 2015 | Community Center; Cambridge, Nebraska

Stakeholder Advisory Committee members in attendance were:

Jared Baker	Michael J. Kahrs	Roric Paulman
Brad Edgerton	Max Kaiser	John Runel
Jerry Ehrke	Jim Kent	Nate Schneider
Chris Flaming	Bradly Knuth	George Schortberger
Troy Fletcher	Jerry Kuenning	Richard Siel
Josh Friesen	Kent Lorens	Steve Smith
Dave Fulton	Jeff Loschen	Daniel Smith
Jerda Garey Vickers	Gale Lush	Glenn Taubenheim
Mike George	Scott Lutz	Aaron Thompson
Wayne Haarberg	Timothy McCoy	Ted Tietjen
Dale Helms	Cedric McDaniel	Marcia Trompke
Dick Helms	Dan Nelsen	Tom Vickers
Robin Hinrichs	Doug Ohlson	Todd Watson
William (Bill) Hoyt	Dave Oxford	

The following Stakeholder Advisory Committee members were absent:

Kurt Bernhardt	Curtis Kayton	Shad Stamm
Mike Delka	Kevin Slocum	Dack Vesta

Plan Development Team members in attendance were:

John Thorburn	Jack Russell	Amy Zoller
Ray Winz	Nate Jenkins	Karen Griffin
Mike Clements	Carol Flaute	Amy Vrtiska-Vorhies
Scott Dicke	Jim Schneider	Patti Banks
Sylvia Johnson	Jennifer Schellpeper	

Individuals from the community present during the meeting included:

Chelsea Erickson	Thomas Perks	Shane Stanton
David Gunderson	Tracy Smith	Adam Sund

NOTICE OF THE MEETING

Notice of the meeting was published on the Department of Natural Resources web site (dnr.nebraska.gov) and the project website (dnr.nebraska.gov/RRBWP/).

INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

The following informational materials were distributed:

- Agenda
- Map of the Republican River Basin

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Jim Schneider, Director of the Department of Natural Resources, welcomed everyone to the first Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting for the Republican River Basin-Wide Plan (RRBWP). He thanked all the stakeholders for their attendance and interest in this important project. Each member of the RRBWP development team, including the Lower, Middle, Upper Republican and Tri-Basin Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) and the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (NDNR), introduced themselves. The Olsson Associates Team hired by the NDNR to facilitate development of the plan introduced themselves.

Karen Griffin, Olsson Associates, provided an introduction to the project and project overview. The overview included a summary of the requirements of a basin-wide plan, the plan development schedule, and plan development partners. She explained that as defined in statute, a basin-wide plan is to be developed using a consultation and collaboration process involving representatives of water users in the basin. The role of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee is to provide input during this process. The project overview PowerPoint presentation and *Nebraska Revised Statute §46-755*, which requires development of this basin-wide plan and specifies requirements for the plan, are available on the project website (dnr.nebraska.gov/RRBWP/).

Each Stakeholder was asked to introduce themselves and identify what type of water user they represent. The introductions provided an opportunity for each stakeholder to describe why they decided to participate in the process. The outcome of the morning exercise was that the group identified the multiple water users they all represent, and found that the common ground amongst the group is the overwhelming concern for community. Some common themes expressed during this activity are listed below. Additional details about the issues and interests identified by stakeholders can be found in Attachment B.

- Cooperation; working together for the community
- Economic viability of the region
- Sustainability of water resources
- Opportunities for future generations
- Serving as a model for the state
- Equitability in competing uses
- Importance of water for recreation and habitat
- Technological advances in water efficiency and management

EDUCATION SESSION - Review/Discussion of Current IMPs

Karen Griffin introduced the plan that stakeholder meetings will usually include both an educational session and a working session. Today's educational session included presentations and discussion about the Integrated Management Plans developed in each of the four NRDs and a summary of the Republican River Basin litigation with Kansas. Karen provided a brief introduction to the types of groundwater and surface water controls authorized by statute for the NRDs and NDNR to use in development of the IMPs.

- Jim Schneider, NDNR acting director, summarized the history of water management and Republican River Compact (Compact) compliance in the basin, including the timeline of litigation with Kansas and the recent Supreme Court decision. He described how the IMPs have evolved over time with several iterations to meet the Compact compliance requirements.
- John Thorburn, Tri-Basin NRD general manager, provided a presentation on the surface and groundwater monitoring completed across the district. He also described the IMP and regulatory actions taken to protect groundwater quantity and multiple integrated management projects that the NRD is involved with. His PowerPoint presentation is available on the project website (<http://dnr.nebraska.gov/RRBWP/project-and-meeting-schedule>).
- Nate Jenkins, Upper Republican NRD assistant manager, described the IMP and the augmentation projects in the district including Rock Creek and the Nebraska Cooperative Republican Platte Enhancement project (N-CORPE).

Lunch Break

- Mike Clements, Lower Republican general manager, described the three generations of IMPs in the district and how they incorporated and then revised water allocations to meet compact compliance. He described how the N-CORPE project has helped the district avoid shut down in the quick response wells.
- Jack Russell, Middle Republican NRD general manager, described the district's IMP and compact compliance. He identified that the definition of sustainability can be different depending on who you are talking to. He referred to the recent publication related to economic viability and sustainability on the district website (<http://www.mrnrd.org/news/study-nrd-worth-millions-area-economy>).

A question, answer, and discussion period followed after each of the presentations. Some of the questions raised include:

- Has the possibility of providing compensation to water users who must turn off water for Compact compliance been considered?
- What have been the groundwater level changes in each NRD over time?
- Can you provide more details about how surface water administration works in the basin?

WORKING SESSION: Develop Goals and Objectives for the Basin-wide Plan

For the first working session of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee, Karen Griffin and Patti Banks asked the group to think about what they would like to accomplish with the basin-wide plan. These ideas can be used to define the goals and objectives of the plan. As required, the plan must have clear goals and objectives with a purpose of sustaining a balance between water users and water supplies so that the economic viability, social and environmental health and safety, and welfare of the river, basin, sub-basin or reach can be achieved and maintained for both the near and the long term. The plan must also ensure that compliance with any interstate compact or decree, or other formal state contract or agreement or applicable state or federal law is maintained. And finally, the plan must set forth a timeline to meet the goals and objectives that does not exceed thirty years, or April 17, 2044.

The NRDs and NDNR had met in Holdrege earlier in March to coordinate and prepare for this stakeholder meeting. Part of that preparation included brainstorming ideas about potential goals and objectives. The preliminary ideas developed at the coordination meeting were presented to the stakeholders as a jumping-off point for stakeholder discussion and input. The initial goals identified by the NDRs and NDNR were:

- Better utilize existing Republican River Basin water resources while maintaining Compact compliance.
 - Examples of this may include diversion and storage during high flow events
 - Identify potential methods to increase available supplies
- Minimize the burdens of Compact compliance under the current IMPs
- Better understand the nature of conflicts between water users and identify potential resolutions
- Better understand the interconnectedness between water sustainability and economic viability
- Share Republican River Basin water resources data/information and inform the public through education programs

During the working session, the Stakeholders provided some thoughts on what they wanted to accomplish with the plan:

- NDNR forecasting could be improved
- Change basin-wide plan priorities to identify Compact compliance as top priority
- Equity and fairness to all water users
- Identify projects that make all water users whole
- Support efficient water use systems/practices

This was the first working session and these ideas will be discussed at the next stakeholder meeting. Other comments and suggestions included:

- A question was raised about clarifying how stakeholders fit into the plan development process.
- More information about historical water use and water management was requested, including information about how previous management actions have helped the basin

improve.

- A suggestion was made to develop an executive committee for the Stakeholder Advisory Committee. The intent of the executive committee could include attending the NRD/NDNR coordination meetings that are held in Holdrege. The coordination meetings are held to help plan the next stakeholder meetings and plan development. A suggestion was made to place discussion of a possible executive committee on the agenda for a future stakeholder meeting.
- A suggestion was made to develop an online website that includes a forum for discussion.
- A question was asked about who stakeholders should contact for data or information between meetings.
- Questions were asked about whether the area covered by the basin-wide plan will include only the hydrologically connected area, or whether the outlying areas are also expected to be a part of the solution. A suggestion was made for NDNR to provide more information about the hydrologically connected area at a later meeting.
- A suggestion was made to gather more information about people living in groundwater-limited regions of the basin, as available data for these areas is currently very limited.
- A question was asked about how the stakeholders will know if decisions related to the basin-wide plan will keep Nebraska in Compact compliance. Jim Schneider assured the stakeholders that NDNR and the NRDs will be responsible for making sure that Nebraska remains in compliance.
- A suggestion was made to look back at the 2002 basin-wide plan for the Republican River Basin to see if anything it contains would be helpful for this basin-wide planning process.
- A request was made to provide the meeting minutes from the coordination meetings to the stakeholders.
- The stakeholders mentioned throughout the meeting that the concept of sustainability within the context of the basin-wide plan needs to be further explored within this group.

All of these suggestions will be discussed at the next coordination meeting. Results of this discussion will be reported back to the group at the next stakeholder meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

The public attending the meeting was invited to provide comments. No individuals provided comments to the group.

NEXT MEETING

On behalf of the entire basin-wide plan development team, including the four NRDs and NDNR, Karen Griffin thanked the stakeholders for attending and participating in this process. The next meeting will be held at the Cambridge Community Center from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm on June 16th, 2015. The meetings are scheduled to occur on the third Tuesday every other month at the same location. Future meetings are scheduled for June 16, August 18, October 20, and December 15. Meeting agendas, presentations, and meeting minutes will be available on the project website (dnr.nebraska.gov/RRBWP). Karen showed the group the website and where meeting materials and other information can be found. Stakeholders are asked to provide any

further input to Karen and/or Patti, and their contact information is on the website as follows:

Karen Griffin, kgriffin@olssonassociates.com
Olsson Associates
601 P Street
Lincoln, NE 68508

Patti Banks, patti@bevireo.com
Vireo
1111 N. 13th St., Suite 116
Omaha, NE 68102

Two final items of note:

- The stakeholders were asked to provide suggestions to Karen and Patti for educational speakers or information needed to help them develop the plan.
- The stakeholders were encouraged to sign up and attend the UNL Water Tour schedule for June 23-25, 2015. The tour will give the stakeholders an opportunity to get to know each other and learn more about water and water management in the Republican River Basin. More information on how to sign up will be sent via email and can be accessed through the Water Center website (watercenter.unl.edu).

Attachment B: Stakeholder Introductions and Interests

The stakeholders took turns introducing themselves and discussing their interest in the basin-wide plan. This feedback was recorded and then grouped into the general categories below:

Model for State/Messaging

- Expects this plan to set template for rest of the state to follow which will increase efficiency
- Interested in being a model for the state and in getting the message out there that groundwater and agricultural producers are doing the right thing, as that is not always how the light is shed
- Interested in building a template for the state for efficiency and balance.

Forecasting/Agricultural Producer Planning

- Would be nice to forecast five years in advance for wells in quick response area.
- Interested in more reliable forecasting

Community/Cooperation

- Interested in the importance of community in the Plan
- Would like community to be viewed as a stakeholder group; we are all tied together in this
- Looking for solutions to get along and make it last
- Interested in the opportunity for cooperation among users
- Interested in working together to finding solutions to water problems

Future generations

- This process is an opportunity to have a say in what will be here for future
- The river looks a lot different than when I was a kid
- Very concerned about next generations; not a lot of opportunity in farming for our kids
- Interested in continuing to farm for future generations
- We want things here for our kids
- Would like my kids to have the same opportunity that I have had; thus, I am interested in solutions for future generations

Equitability in competing uses

- Interested in balancing competing uses, many local water issues, building a template for efficiency and balance
- Concerned about flows in river; want a fair and equitable solution

Recreation/Habitat

- Importance of region for pintail duck migration
- Interested in knowing about impacts to whole system and riparian areas
- Increased reservoir levels are important for recreation

- Recreation is important to this plan
- Interested in reopening Bonny Reservoir and increasing the pool level of Lovewell

Economic Viability

- Surface water is sent to Kansas, we have all this investment, bills continue to go on whether we have access to water or not.
- Interested in the effect of water management on agricultural business
- I am concerned about cost of irrigation
- Interested in effect of acres restrictions on school support due to loss of tax base
- Concern that region stays economically sustainable
- Interested in tax base, schools, livestock, community—we all have to exist
- Too many taxes are making it hard to maintain a farm
- Interested in plan as 82 percent of per capita income can be related to irrigation, so if we take that away, there is no economic viability.
- Economic security is an important part of this plan
- Interested in importance of supporting the community through range/livestock and agricultural business

Sustainability of water resources

- Interest in sustainability of underground water because it is a limited resource
- We have seen the baseflow decline for years; we would like to see a plan that would inflows to reservoirs sustainable
- The writing of statutes was behind, as policy makers were told that irrigation development were to continue to develop, the river would go dry; thus, I am interested in tools for sustainability
- Interested in long-term sustainability of the aquifer
- Interested in sustainability and water conservation
- Interested in sustainable water
- There are lots of options within the basin for compact compliance and sustainability
- Interested in long term sustainability of whole region

Technology and Water Management

- Interested in the use of technology to find better ways to conserve water (moisture probes, etc.)
- It is important to better understand the balance between groundwater and surface water
- Irrigate with low volume wells