



Partnership for Lake Abert and the Chewaucan Meeting #6

December 6th & 7th, 2023 in Paisley, OR

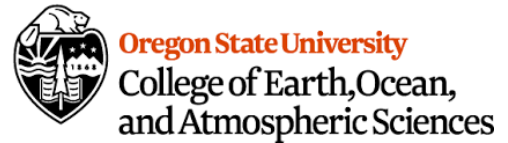
Participants present: Wilson Wewa, Eugene Long, Matt Withers, Ron Larson, Theo Dreher, JP Patt, Matt Anderson, Autumn Muir, Anton Chiono, Justin Ferrell, Quincy Warner, Colleen Withers, Tess Baker, Steph Hayes, Ed Contreras, Marty St. Louis, Cole Hendrickson, Jack O’Leary, Dacey Mercer, Barry Shullanberger, Ryan Houston, Scott Hynek, Greg Green, Tyler Dearman, Casie Smith, Matt Anderson, Amy Markus, James Williams, Ramon Naranjo, Tom Flynn

Presenters: Dr. Salini Sasidharan (Oregon State University), Peder Nelson (Oregon State University)

Oregon State University Team Members present: Aaron Wolfe, Henry Pitts, Hannah Steele, Georgina Mukwirimba

Oregon Consensus Facilitation Team present: Bobby Cochran

Action Items	
Relay any questions regarding the Fish and Wildlife chapter (or any other chapter) of the Joint-Fact Finding report and presentation by Stan Senner to OSU	All
Compile the responses regarding JFF prioritization (what areas are most important to find out more information about) from all groups for each chapter. Share the results once completed.	OSU
Digitize and summarize the responses to the conceptual model building activity (including surrounding landscape, topographic lines, land ownership, hydrologic directions, etc).	OSU
Complete PLAC website	OSU
Add chapter to JFF report on Fire and Upland Management	Autumn Muir and supported by Hannah Steele (OSU)
Send updated JFF report to full Partnership no later than February 7th	OSU



Welcome

Facilitator, Bobby Cochran, opened the meeting with a review of the agenda and an overview of the materials that had been provided in advance. He briefly introduced the activity structure of the following two days, noting that day one would focus on substantively reviewing the Joint Fact-Finding report, while day two would focus on conceptual modeling of the basin and future workflow planning for 2024. He also shared that the group charter would not be discussed in detail during this meeting but that it would be revisited in early 2024. Finally, he provided reminders for intentional listening to ensure that all group members are heard during exercises throughout the meeting.

Guests, Senator Findley, Representative Mark Owens, and Commissioner James Wilson, were in Paisley for other meetings and stopped by to welcome the group before leaving.

Joint Fact-Finding: Parts I & II

Aaron Wolf, OSU, provided a review of the Joint Fact-Finding (JFF) process up to this point by acknowledging the work of the chapter leads, JFF sub-group, and co-leads. He noted that the report functions as a living document, and that the process for providing feedback, updates or additional information is open and ongoing. He then reviewed the structure of the document and its purpose: to explicitly state what is known and what information is still needed to understand and make decisions regarding the basin. Aaron then walked through the agenda for how time would be spent on day one, reviewing the report chapters one by one, prioritizing additional information needs, and concluding with several guest speakers to provide additional, relevant information for the group to consider.

Joint Fact-Finding Chapter Presentations

Ron Larson presented the water resources chapter of the JFF report to the group. He first introduced how he became interested and involved in Lake Abert and the Chewaucan Basin and reviewed important aspects of the basin such as its designation as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern by BLM, the locations of monitoring stations throughout and nearby to the basin, as well as how the basin is partitioned between two catchments (the Chewaucan River and direct flows from small streams and springs into Lake Abert). He then systematically reviewed the hydrological information covered in the chapter, groundwater, precipitation at Summer Rim and in Paisley, river flow at the Paisley gage, Lake Abert ecology, and changes in air temperatures in Paisley over time. At the conclusion of his presentation, Ron received a number of questions and feedback comments relating to the possible impacts of fire activity and drought, the reliability of available weather stations and SNOTEL site outside of the basin (a need for more localized information), and the importance of Lake Abert as a bank for water which functions on a time delay.

Jack O'Leary gave the presentation on the agricultural activities within the Chewaucan Basin from the JFF report. He first provided an overview of the agricultural cycle in the valley, broken down by month. He then discussed how irrigation in the marshes is managed using three main diversions at Town Weir, Redhouse, and the Narrows.



He explained how the river is the lowest point in the marsh and diverted water is pushed out towards the edge before flowing overland back into the river. Jack then discussed the effects of drought on agricultural processes and the community. This included that drought significantly impacts yields, often resulting in less feed availability for cattle which in turns forces ranchers to sell cattle, and those that remain are more stressed and likely to fall ill. Restocking herds can take many years and is extremely costly to ranchers. Multiple questions and comments were posed regarding whether smaller diversions are gaged (no), the impacts of dredging and channelization on the river, and how the marshes and flood irrigation create habitat for rich ecosystems. There was discussion regarding the importance of wet meadows and how the presence of many young landowners in the basin provides a unique opportunity to focus on sustainable futures. There was also discussion about whether and how the marshes act as a “sponge” and how much the Chewaucan River channel does or does not interact hydrologically with the marshes/wetland areas. There were also questions about the role of depressions in the marshes, and the role of those in recharging and providing important waterfowl habitat,

Henry Pitts (OSU) provided an update that the Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Lived Experience chapter of the JFF report would not be covered during this meeting. This chapter is moving forward at a different pace due to its sensitive nature and to make space for continued dialogue around how best to incorporate this kind of information. Wilson Wewa added that Traditional Ecological Knowledge is a rich and vital source of knowledge that has great relevance to the discussions surrounding the processes in the Chewaucan Basin.

Stan Senner (National Audubon Society) provided a recorded presentation reviewing the Fish and Wildlife chapter of the JFF report. He highlighted the global importance of Lake Abert to multiple mass migrations of bird species. In particular, he focused on Lake Abert’s role in the Pacific Flyway, in which over 1 billion birds migrate through North America over the western interior. When important bird sites are lost, impacts are experienced across the network of birds. The group asked for clarification on some of Stan’s statements. The group also wanted to ensure that the fish and wildlife section included more than just shorebird discussions (e.g., fish, big game, waterfowl, and raptors). The group was also interested in the inclusion of discussion of the SONEC wetland sites, and role of flood-irrigated wetlands.

Ed Contreras (Intermountain West Joint Venture) presented the JFF report chapter covering Drought Mitigation. He began by noting important characteristics of wetlands (that they go dry sometimes) and drought (that its definition might differ between local knowledge and state agencies). He noted that closed basin systems driven by snowmelt throughout the intermountain west are showing declines in surface water. He noted that policy can directly impact surface water availability, such as at Mono and Owens Lake. Ed focused on the concept of resiliency, or how to bounce back from or cope with stressors to a system. He covered regional examples of resiliency, such as Ash Creek Wildlife Area in northeast California’s Pitt River in which state management has led to groundwater and wetland recharge through riparian restoration, and “plug and fill wetland meadows”. Ed answered questions and addressed commentary on how encouraging the provided examples were in terms of wildlife recovery, and what methods were used by the state of California to improve recharge (pond and plug). The group



had conversations about the hydrologic connection between the Chewaucan River channel and the marshes; and whether freshwater ‘backups’ could allow saline birds to ‘jump’ between sites. The group made the point that the JFF report needs a chapter on Uplands Management and Fire.

USGS Team Update

Scott Hynek (USGS) addressed the presence of USGS at the meeting and their interest in supporting the Partnership’s mission. Legislation focused on addressing the impacts of climate change on systems in the intermountain west and great basin are motivating scientific studies by the USGS. However, they cannot be everywhere and instead want to focus on understanding mechanistic relationships between hydrology and ecology that could be widely applied. As such, USGS is investigating the impacts of climate change along the salinity gradient, from hyper to fresh waters, and one area they are interested in potentially using as a study area is the Chewaucan and Lake Abert. Scott emphasized the availability of USGS resources to capture how a full system works and their interest in learning what specific information is needed within the basin and how their efforts can support everyone involved in this collaborative effort.

Joint Fact-Finding: Part III

All participants took part in a rotational table activity in which they were asked to select one of the areas covered by a chapter of the JFF report and to prioritize from a given list what areas are most important to find out more information about. The OSU team is working to compile the responses from all groups for each chapter and will share the results once completed.

Joint Fact-Finding: Part IV

Two presentations were delivered via Zoom by guest speakers. The first was given by Dr. Salini Sasidharan which covered groundwater management and recharge. She discussed how natural and engineered solutions can be implemented for improved groundwater quantity and quality and provided multiple examples of regional projects in northeastern Oregon and northern California. The second presentation was given by Peder Nelson who discussed the availability of remote sensing data and visualization tools as a way to assist in information gathering and decision making processes. He demonstrated multiple online tools including:

- [Dynamic surface water extent](#)
- [Globe ocean observer](#)
- [LCMS Data Explorer](#)
- [OpenET](#)

Closing

Bobby and Aaron provided a few closing comments to review the progress made during day one, and to affirm the importance of being open to new and additional information, such as what was provided by the guest speakers. They invited everyone to reflect on the day regarding what was learned and what will be needed as the group begins to move forward on day two.



DAY 2 - Welcome and Map Exercise

Bobby provided a quick reintroduction to the goals and agenda for day 2 and invited participants to share any updates or reflections. Participants went into breakout groups for a conceptual model building activity in which they used maps to label various processes taking place throughout the basin, using their shared understanding from the JFF report. These processes were related to specific geographic areas such as the upper Chewaucan, marshes, the Abert watershed and the lake itself, Southern Oregon and Northeastern California (SONEC), and others. Each group completed the activity and then shared the results of their labeled map with the full group. OSU will be digitizing and summarizing the responses to this activity. Feedback from the exercise included that groups wanted larger maps that included the surrounding landscape (such as Summer Lake), topographic lines, land ownership, hydrologic directions, and other additional information.

2024 Work Plan

Bobby provided a list of possible directions and goals for 2024 and opened up the floor for comments and feedback. The conclusion of the JFF process was discussed and the need for a website to host documents and maps was brought up (in progress by OSU), while additional members commented that the group is not quite ready for public facing information yet. There was discussion around areas needing further information including:

- Groundwater
- Wildlife activities
- Fire and upland management (a chapter addressing this will be added to the report led by Autumn Muir and supported by Hannah Steele (OSU))
- Climate and climate change data

The group also discussed information gathering and science strategy for answering the above questions, but resolved to hold for a bit until it is clear what level of involvement USGS will play within the basin. At this point, a meaningful discussion regarding the timeline for moving forward to making management decisions was brought forward by the group. It was suggested that in order to remain clear on the groups goals and to make efficient progress the charter should be revisited and that at the beginning of each meeting the goals and tasks should be stated specifically to help keep discussions on track. This led to the agreement that the planning team will meet soon (in late December and/or early January) to outline a work plan to bring to the wider group.

Next Steps and Adjourn

In closing, Bobby reminded the group to consider all that was learned and accomplished during the meeting and thanked everyone for their time and continued devotion to collaborative work.