

Upper Methow - Community Drought Meeting

Wednesday, July 30th, 2025 | 6pm-8pm

Winthrop Library

SUMMARY NOTES:

Welcome & Purpose

51 people were in attendance (45 in person and 6 online) for the meeting. Partners included Okanogan CD, Methow Watershed Council, WSU - Water Research Center, Trout Unlimited, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and stakeholders like Town of Winthrop, Methow Beaver Project, & The Nature Conservancy.

Jack Owen (Okanogan CD) introduced the Local Drought Preparedness Project (LDPP) and goals for tonight's meeting. Jordana Ellis (Okanogan CD) continued with a project overview presentation discussing local drought conditions, research data, and future trends for Okanogan County.

Community Storytelling and Mapping Workshop

Participants broke into small groups to discuss three prompts focused on experiences with drought, risks to water availability and local supply, and impacts in the community.

Some participants stated that moving into Methow Valley came with realizations that aesthetic values don't necessarily match the reality of living in this area. For instance, green grass might be preferred but isn't always a possible outcome with water being a limited resource and the utilization of water is needed for other priorities, and it could be helpful to have a landscape professional to educate clients on a different aesthetic.

Others remembered experiences from the 1980s, in 1988, someone had lost a job cutting grass because there wasn't enough water for the grass to grow. Also, at that time in Texas, there was an interest in exploring the option of water being piped from other states. In 1989, someone bought a house solely because that house had water available while other surrounding areas did not have available water and the wells were dry. Someone recalled 2001, the year of the thirty-mile fire, and that it was a dry year as was 1996.

A local farmer shared having to think strategically about how to use water to ensure water is available and used efficiently for crop yield. Some expressed that wetlands in Upper Valley have dried out and it seems to be due to increased development. Others acknowledged that they are seeing less spring rain over time and less plentiful snowfall in

the winter, and realizing this through the inability to ski due to lack of snow and a later or limited snow season. For instance, impacts of this can be seen each season with the Loup Loup Ski Hill. Another comment was made about the lack of snowfall. Also, Winthrop Public Works has received many reports of wells running dry not just in the summer but in the winter.

Many in this group experienced lack of water availability in irrigation use with the season being limited. Someone expressed noticing this outside of the Methow, elsewhere in the United States and that lakes are running dry. Also, seeing fluctuations in the amount of water flowing into the Okanogan Valley from British Columbia. Location within the valley makes a difference and each area is different. Some mentioned upon first moving to Eastern Washington, is when they recognized water supply limitations and how different the area is from living on the East Coast.

Other comments including online participants shared in November 2023 having a large amount of snow that caused damage. There are trees along the river struggling to thrive due to lack of water, as well as wells running dry, especially shallow ones. Ephemeral wetlands drying up, low water in irrigation ditches, small streams in the Upper Twisp running dry this year. Others also recognized the connection between low flows, higher water temperatures, and salmon survival.

Mapping Activity & Group Sharing

Participants placed dots on maps of the subregion in areas in which the community may be vulnerable to drought and where community members are seeing drought impacts. The maps were organized into three main categories: Social/Human Health, Economic, and Environmental impacts.

A participant shared that the way the risks and impacts were categorized overlapped in many ways and were wondering if there's another way to categorize this, perhaps as a venn diagram or in another way rather than dividing up aspects of life.

Jordana responded that we are mapping in these separate categories for now and that these would be put together at a later time when trying to understand what type of projects would be helpful to address how these risks and impacts overlap across categories. A comment was made to shift from looking at concerns of drought and to put more energy towards talking about water wellness and the good of water.

When directing attention back to the maps, some dots were placed in specific locations and hot spot areas may be seen but there was limited discussion of the specific points on

the map and participants had more general discussions about risks and impacts seen generally across the Methow Valley as well as project ideas. This included ditches that are likely to turn off early this year due to lack of water availability, increased fire risk and smoke impacts, post-fire impacts and erosion or runoff, tree death and wildlife habitat loss, local food security issues, recreational fishing challenges, impacts to fish from water temperatures, reduced forest cover, and low flows in Methow River affecting endangered species and tributaries.

Jordana made a comment that she saw patterns of dots placed by Twin Lakes. Someone commented that they put a dot by Patterson Lake noticing that this serves water right holders, agricultural needs, and represents recreational use and impacts to livelihoods.

There were comments about projects involving more outreach and education. What someone would like to see is education on how humans impact water and how to protect it. Another comment was to have maybe a water week or water festival to celebrate water and gather community, to think about as a whole how we can fix things that are damaged. Then to construct a community project such as xeriscaping or other projects to start change. We are a community that comes together, just as we have for when disasters hit such as wildfire, but maybe doing this more proactively and celebrating what we have.

A dot was placed at Wolf Creek to show post-fire impacts like heavy weeds that have regrown and vegetation loss impacts. The comment made was that there are erosion impacts in the area and they also notice cattle are already returning to grazing. They were wondering if the timing of this is right or if more time might be needed for the area to recover before being grazed on again.

Someone asked, when thinking about project ideas, is geographic or spatial analysis the best way to identify these projects? Then, expressed trouble pinpointing specific locations on the maps but instead saw risks and impacts and the potential for projects generally and across locations. Jordana responded by saying, this is one way of trying to identify a list of projects for the area and seeing if patterns present themselves in locations that would help identify projects in the later stages of drought planning.

Someone else commented that they raise hay in the Methow Valley, and in other areas as well such as Wenatchee and the Okanogan Valley. In this valley, they notice a greater divide where people aren't as understanding and connected to agriculture. They commented that the fields in this valley have been agricultural for generations and for so long that they truly are integrated into the environment. They benefit the environment and habitat and it's not so separate as people think and express the desire for this to be better understood. They would like to see more education about how water is used as a resource

and for people to see the larger benefits of how water is connected, that it's not as simple as turning off the tap and cutting back on individual water use.

There were also comments about desiring to have discussions of Permaculture and see projects for more water storing and saving so the land can retain water. Concerns were expressed that sometimes we aim to save water, and for what, that this typically opens up the idea that now this can go towards more development which in the long run leads to less available water. It would be nice to truly save what we have.

Someone commented that their dots were placed on the Town of Twisp but their concerns are Valley-wide. Another commenter encouraged focusing our discussion on the source of water. With the intention to see education and outreach of the topic which then includes greater understanding of water users and how the plants need water, the fish, animals, people all need water. Then to talk about how we can conserve it. Also, get ahead of the changing landscape and think, what happens if we go from the shrubsteppe to desert environment? How do we get ahead of this and prepare to adapt to it?

Methow Beaver Project discussed the historic condition of 60-400 million beavers existing on our landscape, and that there were twice as many beavers as humans. If we were to try to bring the beavers back in these kinds of numbers there would need to be an increased understanding of how to co-existence with beavers on our landscape. It would be amazing to see their benefits, and projects such as beaver dam analogues (BDAs).

Another comment was made about thinking of the water in our bodies as well and understanding mental health and wellness impacts. Someone experienced this the hard way when going out hiking and experiencing dehydration so the comment was to keep in mind how to live and function in this arid environment and education, especially for newcomers. Also, that you might see water or snowpack around you in both the summer or winter but understanding that it is a hot and dry area so being properly prepared for spending time outdoors and maintaining wellness.

Takeaways & Questions

A comment was made that while pinpointing locations on the maps was difficult, it was still a worthwhile and helpful activity and that it allowed the group to come together to see and think about our community experiences and impacts we are seeing either specific to locations or generally.

Another comment was that they enjoyed hearing the multiple points of view on water. Someone else pondered the question, what does a healthy watershed look like?

Next Steps & Closing

Jordana shared the next steps for the project will be for the findings from the meetings, literature reviews, and the survey that is coming out later this summer, to inform and assist in formulating a project list. Emmy Engle encouraged participants to subscribe to the water communication list and tune into Okanogan CD's socials and website or partners such as the Methow Watershed Council to follow this project and stay updated on other community meetings as well as later down the line when project ideas are announced.

Meeting adjourned at 8:00pm.

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Name	Location
David Bittenbender GREG WELSH	Upper Methow Winthrop TWIN LAKE
MARY DAVISSON STEVE OULMAN, WRD	Colville RES
DICK EWING Ann Glidden Jannet Richards	Winthrop WA Twisp WA
Dylan Tuttt	
ROBAL STEPHENS CLAYTON KING	Winthrop, WA twisp, WA
Trish Rouse Kevin Van Bueren	Mazama, WA Mazama, WA
George Schoenfeld Jane Ramberg	Winthrop Twisp
GRIFFIN HEMMELGARN Joe Weirich	Winthrop Winthrop
Lorah Super Rocklynn Culp	Twisp Winthrop
Debra Culp	Okanogan

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Name

Location

Jon K. Galt

Okanagan

Lael Williams

Marama

Kari Gilje

Winthrop

Rosemary Seifried

Twisp

Louise Sühr

Twisp

Susan Hanley

Twisp