

Columbia Basin Drought Community Meeting

8/27/2025

Summary Notes:

Welcome & Purpose

Jack started the meeting at 6:08 and opened with a round of introductions. There were 5 attendees: 4 in person, 1 online. Jack thanked everyone for attending, introduced the project, and the purpose of the meeting. Jordana shared a presentation explaining drought and a background on the current climate conditions and the drought declaration.

Community Storytelling Workshop

Participants stayed in one group as the number of attendees was small, and the group discussed three prompts focused on experiences with drought, risks to water availability and local supply, and impacts in the community.

One participant was just at a retreat the previous weekend with family/friends. Many have been there 3 years in a row and it's become tradition to swim in a nearby creek, but this year there wasn't enough flow to swim. When we were coming down her mom laughed at the sight. Nobody seemed to wonder why/if this is a problem.

One participant remembers in middle school, the teacher brought in someone to do an exercise measuring water use indoors, toilets, shower sinks. It's disheartening to be 13 and know that you can save water by changing your individual actions. It's a drop in the bucket.

Another participant reflected on when they were young, she and her brother liked to play outside in the "mud pit", one year we were told we were only able to use half as much water.

Along the same lines as calculating your water, another participant did it in the context of a dog owner. I learned that dog food is very water intensive to produce, also Jeans are very water intensive to manufacture.

On the Yakama Reservation, an irrigation purveyor with a large Junior water right, is currently prorated down to 40% for the season. Orchardists are struggling to raise apples.

The same participant who spoke first recounted her travels to Mexico: she visited 7 years ago to visit her father who grows fruit. He pipes his water to his orchard and was having difficulty. She remembers checking his reservoir level and seeing the bathtub ring. He had to sell his orchard because he could not afford to irrigate, and the farm became

unprofitable. He lives in an area near the ocean; you would think that there would be no water scarcity.

One Okanogan CD staff member shared that they grew up in Wisconsin, so there was more flooding than anything. However, we used to go sledding a lot over winter break, but more frequently there was less and less snow. Later through high school and college, there were Decembers where we couldn't go sledding.

Mapping Activity & Group Sharing

Economics: Concern for our orchards, this area is a huge apple and fruit producing economy.

Environment & Economics: One participant took a tour at Stemilt Hill in Chelan County and was surprised of the forest land rented to orchardists. She had experience as a picker and expressed that because the fruit needs the water at very specific times to grow, the irrigators are very strict on their water use. Orchardists spent a lot of money converting from big guns to drip irrigation, after learning that their water that deep percolates and is essentially wasted.

Social/Human Health: Multiple participants expressed concern for human health, in the context of clean drinking water supply.

Economics: In the packing houses along the Columbia River in between Pateros and Brewster where they process cherries. This process uses tremendous amounts of water to wash the fruit. This could be a non-consumptive use, and we don't know if the water is recycled or treated.

Social/Human Health and Economics: One individual recognized Alta Lake as a huge recreation hub. As it gets hotter and drier, this place could be a less desirable place to recreate. They also see a lot of people at the Brewster boat dock and fishing pier.

Environmental: A participant asked if drought has any effect on the river habitat since they know Okanogan/ Columbia confluence is important place for fish and bird habitat. Jordana reiterated how water quantity affects temperature and oxygen levels which change salmon behavior and migration.

Social/Human Health & Environment & Economics: There was a decent-sized fire south of Pateros a few months ago, the Carlton Complex fire burned right at Pateros. Fire seems to affect all 3 categories of impacts.

Economics: Mid-Okanogan: A participant has a friend who is an orchardist, and he has recently been harvesting just enough to get drought insurance and leaving the rest to rot on

the tree. They recognize the amount of water and energy that went into growing the crop that is now wasted.

The following impacts were noted as Thoughts instead of Dots. Meaning they are not tied to specific location, and are broad in scope.

Environment & Economics: Rivers get browner in the spring from sediment, do people notice this affect more after wildfires? Another participant answered yes, I've seen people needing to frequently clean irrigation filters.

Economics: Many cherry orchards last year did not harvest due to a frost. It could be due to climate change that temperature and water supply variability is now more severe.

Economics & Environment: One participant asked: is there a point where we can't grow our current crops? There may be a shift in crop type in the future. We are seeing different types of trees being planted.

Social/Human Health & Environment: A participant recognized the mental impact of poor water years, and how the dryness and struggling plants make her feel sad. Driving from Oregon used to be a beautiful drive with pine trees, but there seems to be less and less trees over time due to drought and fires.

Social/Human Health & Economics: Short water supply affects the livelihood of farmworkers, fisherman. This has a huge impact on communities such as Brewster. Many people move up here from California, but we are now facing the problems that brought people here.

Economics: When the water is short and the orchards are impacted, the crop suffers, which impacts jobs. The loss of local jobs, affects the local economy due to the loss of products being purchased and sold. A trickle down of impacts.

Social/Human Health: One participant expressed concern for laborers who can get ill; the dryness can affect their health. Also, it can be harder to harvest and do their jobs in a hotter, drier, dustier environment. The feeling of humidity and heat can really impact how people feel.

Social/Human Health & Environment: One of our major air quality concerns identified by an Okanogan CD staff member in the Columbia basin area is due to orchard tear-outs. Burning these piles is contributing to poor air quality and the empty fields could be contributing to dust and particulate matter.

Project idea: Have you noticed the nets that are being put up around orchards? They are for protecting against pests, wind and sunburn depending on style. There is research being done on how they can save water/reduce evaporative losses and transpiration.

Project idea: Orchardists are seriously struggling due to drought declarations, as we heard from the Yakama water resources specialist and for many other reasons. Maybe in the future there can be a more collaborative forecasting system for weather and market pressure.

Closing:

Jordana thanked everyone for attending and explained our next steps in the drought planning process, suggested the communications list and survey.

Adjourned 7:19