Thursday, October 6, 2011

Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center

Hermiston, OR, 97838

**List of Attendees**

Leann Rea – Morrow County & LUB GWMA Chair

Dave Lovin – Port of Morrow

Tom Straughan – ODA

Greg Harris – Threemile Canyon Farms

George DesBrisay – Simplot Grower Solutions

Amy Baumgart - IRZ

Craig Williams – Hermiston Foods

Carla McLane – Morrow County

Kerri Deal – ConAgra Foods

Rick Bressler – ConAgra Foods

Mark Steele – Hermiston Foods

Chet Prior – Irrigated Ag Co-Chair

Jay Gibbs - NRCS

Bev Kopperud – Umatilla SWCD

Mike McNamee – Morrow SWCD

Don Horneck - OSU

Phil Richerson – DEQ

Sandy Halstead – US EPA

Vern Frederickson – Farmer

Brian Mannion – DEQ Office of Communications and Outreach

**List of Handouts**

* Meeting Agenda – 1 page
* LUB GWMA Land Use Survey – 7 pages
* Umatilla County SWCD Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Well Survey 2011 – 3 pages
* LUBGWMA: Communications planning 3; Making the Plan – 2 pages
* Figure 10-1 from *draft* “Analysis of Groundwater Nitrate Concentrations in the LUB GWMA” called Summary of Nitrate Concentrations and Trends at Individual Wells – 1 page

**10:10 am *Meeting Commencement Time***

***Introductions****-* A signup sheet was circulated and everyone introduced himself or herself.

***Outreach*** – Brian discussed making the Outreach Plan. He walked through an example of how to target an audience by using private well owners as the audience. The group discussed messages including financial impacts and health effects. Sandy will try to provide a summary of a Perdue University researcher’s work on the health effects of nitrate at the next meeting.

The conversation shifted to how to get people involved. Ideas included Don’s weekly radio show, outreach through the Master Gardeners program, and the Hermiston Horse Expo. Phil asked Sandy if she was aware of any EPA recommendations other than the 10 mg/l drinking water standard because he remembered seeing other recommendations for higher levels. Someone (was it Kerri?) used their smart phone to do an internet search and found recommendations from the University of Wisconsin that say water with 20 to 40 mg/l nitrate is considered unsafe for humans and might cause problems in livestock, 40 to 100 mg/l is unsafe for humans and considered risky for livestock, and over 100 mg/l should not be used.

The group thought that appealing to the horse-friendly nature of the region’s population might be an effective outreach tool. Carla pointed out that Morrow County animal density rules apply only to rural residential zoning and not in the city limits or in EFU ground.

Brian recommended a small group of people be assembled to start preparing the Communications Plan.

***Land Use Survey Update*** – Tom Straughan compiled and summarized the results of the land use survey around the DEQ LUB GWMA well network wells. He also conducted a drive by and categorized the wells based on surrounding land use.

Discussion of the survey results by the assigned subcommittee identified practices at a few wells that seemed likely to be linked to groundwater quality changes, but links between land surface activities and groundwater nitrate concentrations could not be identified at all wells. For example, one well with a steadily increasing nitrate trend is located inside an animal pen. This practice should be discouraged. Other examples included a change in nitrate concentrations that conceptually could be linked to a reported change in nearby irrigation practices, but no proof could be identified.

Bev pointed out that a lot of unlined irrigation canals are being converted to piped systems. For example, the Stanfield Irrigation district is now completely piped, and the Hermiston Irrigation District is almost all piped. Along with this conversion, most growers have converted from flood irrigation to sprinkling.

Carla synthesized this and other related conversations into the idea that we will likely want to divide the GWMA (potentially based on land use or hydrogeology) into areas that could have different requirements or goals for data evaluation, outreach, and success evaluation.

***Sub-Committee Reports –***

*Rural Residential Sub-Committee –* Leann reported that Clint Spencer (Hermiston City Planner) has agreed to serve on the sub-committee. She also reported that the Irrigon Planning Commission Chair and Barry Beyeler (City of Boardman) might also be agreeable to serve. Gus Wahner (Umatilla SWCD board member and organic farmer from Stanfield) might also be interested in serving on the sub-committee.

*Irrigated agriculture sub-committee* – Don reported that ODA is talking internally about imposing an additional fertilizer tax on fertilizer users within the GWMA to generate money for research and education within the GWMA. The next step is to meet with local representatives to change the law, because the existing law collects and distributes money state-wide. It looks doable. Don will meet with Janet Fults (ODA) next month to discuss the local fertilizer tax.

The sub-committee asked Dr. Jack Istok (OSU School of Civil and Construction Engineering) to review the trend analysis portion of the 2008 LUB GWMA Progress Report. Dr. Istok reviewed the document and provided some comments. In summary, he thought the statistical methods were appropriate but with minor modifications it might be possible to detect trends with greater precision and/or confidence. Phil, Don, and Dr. Istok had a conversation after receiving the comments to provide a bit more background and context to the evaluation. Dr. Istok concluded that there was no reason to pursue his review any further.

Phil has agreed to give a talk on the status of the next LUB GWMA Action Plan at the Hermiston Farm Fair to be held in December.

Don said he is working on a document with the Northern Malheur County GWMA folks on a grower’s guide to the causes and solutions to groundwater nitrate pollution.

*Food Processor sub-committee –* Don reports that they are working on a guide for the winter application of water. They are also looking into a self-assessed tax to do research and education.

*Education/Outreach sub-committee –* The following people were identified during this (and the previous) meeting as members of a new Education/Outreach sub-committee:

Phil Richerson (DEQ), Don Horneck (OSU), Janet Greenup (Morrow SWCD), Carla McClane (Morrow County Planning), Tom Straughan (ODA), Bev Kopperud (Umatilla County SWCD), and Sandy Halsted (EPA). They will meet during November to begin fleshing out the communications plan.

No other sub-committees had anything to report.

***Documents*** - Phil gave an update on the status of several documents.

Phil completed the draft document called Analysis of Groundwater Nitrate Concentrations in the LUB GWMA, and circulated it for comment. He provided a copy of Figure 10-1 from the draft document that summarizes all the nitrate concentrations and trends. The figure shows that at least 40% of wells tested have an average nitrate concentration greater than the 7 mg/l GWMA trigger level, and half the wells exhibit increasing nitrate trends. The report concludes that the goal of a decreasing nitrate trend throughout most of the GWMA was not met. Comments on the document are due by October 18th. Phil will address the comments received, then finalize the document.

Once the Analysis of Groundwater Nitrate Concentrations in the LUB GWMA document is finalized, the Third Evaluation of Action Plan Success will be prepared. The deadline for information to be submitted to Phil to include in the Success Evaluation was by the end of September. Phil indicated he had received some (but not much) information to include in the evaluation, so he made a “last call” for information.

Once the Third Evaluation of Action Plan Success is completed, the next Action Plan will be prepared.

**Round Table** – Tom Straughan asked about the recent meeting between ODA and DEQ Directors and Deputy Directors to discuss the LUB GWMA. Phil reported that much of the meeting involved discussing background information to get everyone up to speed. ODA was under the impression that a lot of work on BMP development and implementation in the GWMA had already been conducted. Phil pointed out that very little of that information was coming back to him to put in annual progress reports. ODA was interested in pursuing money to hire someone to do a “look back” to document what had been done. There was also an unresolved discussion of who should be the lead agency in implementing the next Action Plan.

NRCS plans to talk to DEQ Director Deck Pederson next week about their priorities and potential areas of cooperation.

All CAFOs in the GWMA will have Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans by the end of 2011.

The Umatilla County SWCD $59,000 319 Outreach grant has been funded. They still need help making the required 40% match.

***~12:25pm Meeting Adjournment Time***

***Next meeting scheduled:*** 10:00 am, Thursday January 5, OSU Experiment Station