

Comments flow freely at Siskiyou Water Network meeting

Mt. Shasta News, December 11, 2008

By Charlie Unkefer

Weed, Calif. - More than 50 people attended a meeting of The Siskiyou Water Network last Wednesday at College of the Siskiyous in Weed to discuss a plethora of water related topics.

The gathering, promoted as “a chance for information sharing and potential collaboration on water related issues,” was facilitated by Mt. Shasta based water activist Meadow Barr, who is a contractor for California Trout, a non-profit conservation organization.

According to Barr, “The initial objective (of the SWN) is to build a diverse countywide network to address the need for a county water plan that will protect everyone's interests in the value of water.”

In attendance were representatives of various county, state, and federal agencies, and environmental groups, as well as many concerned and curious citizens.

The agenda in brief

Topics at the meeting ranged from an update on a recently released California Trout document on the decline of California's native fish populations, to a report on the ongoing spring studies currently being conducted in the Mt. Shasta region. Also addressed were reports from the Sacramento River Exchange on their Upper Sacramento Watershed Assessment, a presentations by Winnemem-Wintu representatives regarding their concerns on numerous water related issues, an update on PG&E's cloud seeding project in southern Siskiyou County, and a presentation by Dr. Sari Sommarstrom, who was recently appointed by the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors to help inform them around water related issues and to develop a county water strategy.

Ric Costales, Siskiyou County's Natural Resource Specialist, represented the county's position on several of the issues and answered questions.

Following is a summary of some of the items discussed during the meeting:
Spring monitoring project

Lisa Unkefer of AquaTerra Consulting reported on the progress of an ongoing study of the springs in the Mt. Shasta region that she is conducting for California Trout. “The study is designed to gather baseline data about the many springs in the region in an attempt to better understand the complex geo-hydrology around the mountain,” explained Unkefer.

She said 20 springs in three watersheds are being monitored. Unkefer continued, "Between the three watersheds, we are monitoring about 20 springs, sampling for geo-chemical constituents, which can tell us more about the geology that the water flows through and if the springs are connected in any way. We have also sampled for stable hydrogen and oxygen isotopes, which can help us determine approximate recharge elevations. We are also monitoring select springs on a monthly basis for flow to track if they fluctuate seasonally and if they are affected by development and or climate change."

Historically, there have been very few studies done on groundwater in Siskiyou County. Unkefer added, "The objective of the study is to determine the vulnerability of springs in an attempt to assist local government entities in evaluating projects in the vicinity around these very important resources."

Upper Sac Watershed

Dr. Rene Henery, Research Director for the Sacramento River Exchange, updated the crowd on the progress of the Upper Sacramento Watershed Assessment.

The River Exchange received grant funding from the Department of Water Resources to conduct an assessment of the many variables that affect the health and viability of this watershed. The River Exchange is working with a steering committee that consists of representatives from a myriad of state and federal agencies, environmental groups, and private interests.

"The document is non-regulatory," Henery reminded the audience. In speaking to the effects that an assessment document of this nature might have, Henery noted, "I think the amount of clout it (the assessment) has will be a function of a number of things, like how well the steering committee agencies will work towards finding common ground."

Like California Trout's "SOS" report and the current spring study being conducted around the mountain, the watershed assessment is an effort to provide a set of complete and updated data on all of the factors that exert an influence on the watershed. "We'll eventually have a robust suite of information to make decisions," concluded Dr. Henery.

Winnemem-Wintu report

Mark Miyoshi and Luisa Navejas, Mt. Shasta representatives for the Winnemem-Wintu tribe, spoke generally about the tribe's cultural connection to water. "We're water people... Our name translates as "the middle river people," stated Miyoshi, underscoring their connection to all issues related to water in the region.

Among other things, Miyoshi spoke of the importance of the Upper Sacramento Watershed Assessment's inclusion of the tribe's relationship to the region, emphasizing not only the history and studies done by archeologists, but the

importance of the tribe as a living culture. “This is our history and who we are,” he asserted. “The watershed assessment is an opportunity to educate the public not just on studies by archeologists but should focus to on the river as part an integral part of a living culture.”

Miyoshi reminded the audience of the injustices perpetrated against the tribe, whose tribal lands were flooded by the construction of Shasta Dam. To date, the tribe has received little compensation and no official federal recognition, though they are indirectly represented under the “umbrella” of the Pit River Tribe.

Miyoshi and Navejas also spoke to their concerns about the upcoming relicensing of the McCloud Dam by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, noting that the agency was slow to inform and include the tribe in the relicensing process.

County perspective

Speaking on behalf of the County, Costales fielded numerous questions related to the proposed PG&E cloud seeding project, emphasizing the fact that the county, as they see it, has little or no jurisdiction on the matter.

After fielding numerous questions about cloud seeding, Costales remained the center of attention as he introduced the newly hired county water resource consultant Dr. Sari Sommarstrom. In his introduction, Costales reminded the audience about “the magnitude of the landscape and the diversity of interests that exist within the county,” a region 20% larger than Massachusetts and Rhode Island combined with a population of only 45,000. people.

He noted the tendency that many have to be “area-centric,” stating that “It is easy to lose perspective of the bigger picture.” His comments suggested that the interests represented in the room were not necessarily indicative of the concerns held by those in other parts of the county.

Underscoring Costales’s short speech was the importance of collaboration. “We need to work together and try to understand the diversity of the issues facing our county. We’re all going to be giving up stuff as we strive for compromise.” Costales emphasized too the importance of having experts to help inform policy decisions. “The technical stuff is what I am going to have to reach out for.” That said, he furthered that it was his pleasure to have Dr. Sari Sommarstrom, a water expert, working under contract with the county.

Sommarstrom’s agenda

Dr. Sari Sommarstrom, recently hired under a \$9,000 contract to assist the county in developing a county strategy around water issues, spoke of her 30 years of experience as a water resources consultant. The long time resident of the Scott Valley noted, “I’ve always wanted to take the bigger picture and apply it to policy and planning.”

She noted her connection to Siskiyou County. "I'm not just another consultant from afar. I care a lot about these areas," speaking with great affection of Siskiyou County, where she has lived for over 25 years.

Dr. Sommarstrom outlined her two-tier plan for beginning the development of a countywide water strategy, emphasizing the fact that she has funding for only the first items on her agenda. Her first five priorities are:

- Describe County's current water-related strategies. Describe pertinent state and federal water-related laws, regulations, and programs relating to the County's water resources.
- Identify water issues and critical areas requiring fact-finding in each watershed. Meet with pertinent people knowledgeable about local water resource issues and information sources.
- Identify available information sources related to each watershed's hydrology, water quantity, water quality, flood control, and water management. Develop a Bibliography.
- Clarify potential products, such as a Water Resources Guide, and/or various approaches that might be useful to the Board of Supervisors. Seek guidance from Supervisors on priorities to pursue.
- Identify funding for the preparation of the product(s) and approaches identified in previous phase.

Countywide inclusion

In closing, meeting facilitator Barr discussed moving the next meeting to a different locale in order include other perspectives. This idea was well received by the crowd.

Dave Webb, formerly of the Shasta Valley Resorce Conservation District, noted, "The meetings have to be spread out. The County Board of Supervisors need to get on board knowing that they have support from throughout the county. More people have to get involved."

A time and date for the next Siskiyou Water Network has yet to be announced.