



Mid-Columbia GWMA Quarterly Progress Summary

First Report, January 1998

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Purpose:

This report covers the time period from October 1997 through December 1997. It is intended to provide information to the Boards of Commissioners in Adams, Franklin and Grant Counties, and to the following state and federal agencies: Washington State Departments of Agriculture, Ecology and Health, the Washington Conservation Commission, Washington State University College of Agriculture and Home Economics, and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

These six agencies are signatories to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) developed in October of 1996 related to the "Respective Roles of the Six Agencies to Coordinate Activities regarding Ground Water Quality Protection in the Mid-Columbia Basin, Washington." A copy of this MOU is included in Appendix A, which is available upon request from Ecology.

Background:

As part of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) National Water-Quality Assessment (NAWQA) Program the Central Columbia Plateau – consisting of Douglas, Grant, Adams, Franklin, Lincoln, Whitman and a portion of Spokane County in Washington State and a portion of Latah County in Idaho – was intensively studied. USGS found that 19% of 573 wells studied

exceeded the EPA maximum contaminant level (MCL) for nitrate in drinking water. Results of that study have been made widely available through USGS Open-File Report 95-445 by Sarah J. Ryder and Joseph L. Jones. The report draws the following four conclusions:

- "Land use is the greatest influence over nitrate concentration.
- Nitrate concentration is related in general to fertilizer and water usage.
- Nitrate concentrations in shallow ground water vary greatly, but have generally increased since the 1950's.
- Nitrate in drinking water is a health issue in parts of the Central Columbia Plateau."

The Washington State Interagency Ground Water Committee issued "A Report on Nitrate Contamination of Ground Water in the mid-Columbia Basin" on September 17, 1996. One of the highest recommendations in the report is: "State and federal agencies should support local efforts to establish and undertake one or more Ground Water Management Areas in the mid-Columbia Basin."

EPA has set aside designation of the region as a sole source aquifer on the basis that designation as a Ground Water Management Area, driven by local authority and under local control, would perhaps be more protective of ground water than a sole source aquifer designation.

The conservation districts in Grant and parts of Adams Counties had recently formed a Water Quality Partnership to make good use of limited resources. When the Water Quality Partnership joined forces with the Franklin Conservation District the nucleus of the developmental group for the Ground Water Management Area was formed.

The Boards of Commissioners in Adams, Franklin and Grant Counties passed resolutions to use the GWMA process in a coordinated effort to address nitrate in drinking water concerns. The Adams Conservation District joined the discussions. These groups began investigating the process for GWMA designation nearly two years ago. It is the efforts and progress of these groups that led to this report.

First Quarter Progress:

In September 1997, when Viki Leuba from Ecology's Eastern Regional Office began working with the GWMA organizers, a draft petition had been developed, an organizational structure defined, and a proposal for Centennial Clean Water Fund grant funds was pending. The language in the petition was finalized at the end of October and Leuba scheduled and held four hearings on the petition in mid November. Appendix B begins with a copy of the petition and the hearing notice that were sent to over three hundred persons and organizations.

The comment period on the petition closed January 16, 1998. All testimony received at the hearings and all written comments reviewed to date have been supportive of the locally driven Ground Water Management Area process. Ecology is preparing a summary of the comments received. Leuba expects it to be ready for review within a week. Appendix B contains a listing of the written comments received to date (January 20, 1998) and a transcript of comments received for the record at the hearings.

The Boards of Commissioners in Adams, Franklin, and Grant Counties will be the lead agency for the GWMA, as defined in Washington Administrative Code Chapter 173-100, and the controlling body for the GWMA. This group is the decision making body for the GWMA. A ground water advisory committee (GWAC), selected by the commissioners from local residents and stakeholders, will make recommendations for a ground water management plan.

The Conservation Districts will advise the Boards of Commissioners about the applicability and potential success and impacts of the recommendations made by the GWAC. The petition includes a draft budget, a timeline, and has divided the work of the GWMA into four tasks:

1. Plan development and administration;
2. Monitoring and characterization;
3. Public information and outreach; and
4. Practice implementation and field research.

In the section "next quarter's issues and events" Ecology will describe the activities currently being conducted in each area.

Since the petition became a public document in November, the meetings of the GWMA development group or "steering committee" have grown from 20 attendees to over 45 attendees. The steering committee met three times during this quarter and several formal and informal working groups advanced the activities of the GWMA outside the steering committee meetings. The steering committee's next meeting is scheduled for January 29 in Othello. Appendix C includes minutes of the steering committee meetings, an announcement and agenda for the January meeting, and a copy of the mailing list for active steering committee members.

In addition to advancing the GWMA process, Leuba's time has been devoted this quarter to becoming familiar with and known to the steering committee participants. She has



used this time to begin to understand the driving forces for the GWMA and the expectations and hopes of the local GWMA participants. She has met with the Boards of County Commissioners in Adams, Franklin, and Grant Counties three times each and will continue to meet with them at least monthly.

Next Quarter's Issues and Events:

This quarter, January 1998 - March 1998, will see the formal designation of the Mid-Columbia GWMA and Leuba expects another increase in the level of participation, by both local constituents and by interested state and federal players. The GWAC will be selected and will meet to begin development of plan elements.

The MOU signatories will be invited to participate as technical advisors on the GWAC. It is Ecology's hope that the steering committee will become steering advisors to the GWACs. The steering committee, at its last meeting in December, assigned four tasks to sub-committees:

- Development of a job description for a local project manager;
- Development of process and criteria for selection of GWAC members;
- Development of a plan for fiscal management; and
- Development of a "scope of work" for the characterization and monitoring element of the petition.

Leuba has been working actively with these four subcommittees. Recommendations from them will be presented to the commissioners during meetings with the Boards of Commissioners on January 26 and 27. The recommendations will be reviewed by the steering committee at the January 29 meeting. Appendix D is a compilation of minutes from the meetings of these sub-committees or recommendations or other products offered by them.

Leuba is preparing a draft request for proposal for review by the county commissioners to obtain the services of a public relations/communications firm to develop a public information/education strategy and to assure consistent public messages from the Boards of Commissioners.

It appears at this time that the paid staff for the GWMA will consist of Ecology's coordinator, the local project manager, and contract services for communications, accounting, and characterization and monitoring. The research and implementation portion of the Ecology grant, EPA grants and funds from USDA projects will be directed by the Conservation Districts in partnership with state and federal agencies, and GWMA staff and participants.

The Ecology CCWF grant is ready for signature and the Conservation Commission approved \$170,000 for the GWMA. EPA, through the Columbia Plateau Agricultural Initiative (CPAI), has awarded monies to the Conservation Districts for GWMA-related activities at about \$50,000 level. The GWMA anticipates revenues from a variety of sources for both the planning process and later for field research and implementation. The unique structure of this GWMA, involving three political jurisdictions, six conservation districts, three jurisdictional health districts, and the whole of the Columbia Basin Reclamation project, poses both interesting challenges and innumerable opportunities for creative solutions.

By the end of the second reporting quarter, the GWMA hopes to have hired a local project manager. An accounting consultant will have been selected and an accounting system for the GWMA designed and approved. Work will continue on the GWAC selection and to the degree possible, work will continue on the Ground Water Management Area Plan development. The characterization and monitoring scope of work may be completed after proposals for meeting the objectives of the



scope of work have been developed and evaluated.

Ecology's Participation:

The ground Water Management Area must be designated by order and Ecology must add the Mid-Columbia GWMA to the General Schedule. It is hoped that designation will occur by March 1, 1998. The members of the steering committee have expressed a desire to have Ecology Director Tom Fitzsimmons sign the order designating the Mid-Columbia GWMA. Keith Phillips, program manager for Ecology's Water Resources Program, has said that having the director sign the order may be appropriate. Ecology will be pursuing this idea and developing plans for appropriate media coverage to accompany the designation of the GWMA as a way to further stimulate public interest and participation.

During the second quarter Leuba will be investigating the requirements and procedures for getting this GWMA on the General Schedule, including a public hearing held in June of this year. She expects her role as liaison to the state and federal agencies on behalf of the GWMA to continue to develop. Leuba will be devoting more time and energy to coordinating local, state, and federal efforts.

Coordination will eliminate as much duplication as possible while retaining control of the Ground Water Management Area at the local level. She encourages the steering committee to invite representatives of the MOU signatory agencies to a February or March meeting in order to discuss projects of mutual benefit. All meetings of the steering committee are open to the public, but the schedule is not developed very far in advance. In order to accommodate agency representatives, she hopes to have two additional GWMA steering committee meetings scheduled at the January 29 meeting.

References and Comments

1. Report on Nitrate Contamination of Ground Water in the mid-Columbia Basin, edited by: Kirk Cook, Lee Faulconer, and David Jennings, Washington State Interagency Groundwater Committee, Publication No. 96-17, September 17, 1996.
2. Guidelines for Development of Ground Water Management Areas and Programs, Chapter 173-100 Washington Administrative Code, Washington State Department of Ecology, Publication 86-2, August 1988.
3. Nitrate Concentrations in Ground Water of the Central Columbia Plateau, Sarah J. Ryker and Joseph L. Jones, USGS Open-File Report 95-445, 2nd printing, January 1996.
4. All Appendices listed in this report are available upon request from Leuba at the Department of Ecology.

Please send comments on this report and the process and progress of the Mid-Columbia Ground Water Management Area to:

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