

Residential, Commercial, Industrial, Municipal (RCIM) Work Group

Charge from Groundwater Management Area Advisory Committee

Working Group Members

Robert Farrell, Chair (Port of Sunnyside), Elizabeth Sanchez (Yakama Nation), Ryan Ibach (Yakima Health District), Jan Whitefoot (Concerned Citizens of Yakama Reservation), John Van Wingerden (Port of Sunnyside), Stuart Turner (Turner & Co.), Tom Ring (Yakama Nation), Kathleen Rogers (Citizen Rep), Sanjay Barik (Ecology), Dan DeGroot (Yakima Dairy Federation)

Meetings/Calls Dates

Meeting: January 28, 2016 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Radio KDNA, 121 Sunnyside Ave., Granger, WA 98932
Call in: 509-574-2353 (pin 2353#)

Participants

Present: Robert Farrell, (Chair), Jim Davenport, Ryan Ibach, Dan DeGroot, Kathleen Rogers, Vern Redifer, and Chris Saunders (Yakima County Support Staff)

Key Discussion Points

The group convened at 10:09am.

Bob Farrell began the meeting by stating his intention to resign as chair of the working group, due to work demands at the Port of Sunnyside. After thanking Bob for his service, and a brief deliberation, the group elected Ryan Ibach chair by acclamation. Bob continued as chair for the remainder of the meeting, and agreed to remain as a member of the GWAC so the group would have access to his institutional memory.

Recommended nitrogen loading from hobby farms

Following up on the RCIM's last meeting in September, Vern Redifer supplied the group with numbers as to the number of parcels in Yakima County with an area of 10 acres or less that may be hobby farms. According to the County's GIS Department:

0 – 2.5: 2,323 acres

2.6 – 5: 314 acres

5.1 – 10: 120 acres

Total: 2,757 acres

The GWMA contains 175,161.2 acres of land, leaving hobby farms as 1.6% of the total.

A member of the group inquired as to how the county wound up with so many tiny acres of land. Vern described the way the law had changed over the decades. Prior to the 1970s, it was very easy for landowners to go to Yakima County and subdivide their land. The laws became more stringent over time, especially with the passage of the Growth Management Act of 1990.

Nitrogen loading from large septic systems

A member of the group discussed his concerns about monitoring septic systems, which many news sources and commentary states that the EPA considers a leading cause of groundwater contamination. Vern replied that that the County can produce a map showing density of residential septic systems in the GWMA area. Such a map can be compared with a map showing locations of high-nitrate groundwater samples, and any correlations between the two can be observed. In addition, the Census provides demographic data for tracts of land, which can be used to refine the data.

Jim Davenport told the group that according to figures from the Irrigated Ag Work Group (IAWG), in 2014, 109,000 acres (62.2%) of the GWMA were classified as irrigated agriculture. Dairies are not counted as irrigated ag or RCIM. He cautioned that RCIM nitrate contributions compared to irrigated ag plus dairy were likely to be *de minimis*. Vern added that, percentages aside, it was still a valid public health concern to make sure people were aware of a safe septic pumping schedule for a dwelling of their density.

The group agreed to wait until the County had finished its work on deep soil sampling and had produced the maps Vern spoke of before RCIM made any recommendations to the GWAC.

Draft modifications to Deep Soil Sampling Plan for use at RCIM sites

Following up on the request made at the September RCIM meeting to contact Laurie Crowe in regards to finding a soil scientist for assistance in putting together a protocol, Bob summarized the replies Laurie received. Hiring a soil scientist would be an expensive proposition. Based on the work the IAWG has done so far, it is possible for working groups to modify their plans as they identified sites where more deep soil sampling was needed. It was recommended to Laurie that any field study of RCIM land must include lawns, evaluated using standard assumptions, and that the first cut should focus on literature values. Bob reminded the group that in the first survey for soil sampling, residential property owners had asked if they could be included, and the GWAC had never reached a decision on the matter. It was unclear whose budget the money would come from to conduct those samples.

The proposal to modify protocols on deep soil sampling at RCIM sites was tabled, to be taken up again at a future meeting, pending further information and data from the County.

The meeting adjourned at 12:10pm.

Resources Requested

- It was suggested that the group speak to the EPO workgroup about developing a public education campaign regarding pumping septic tanks
- The group would like to see the maps showing density of residential septic systems within the GWMA, to compare with map of high-nitrate groundwater samples
- It was also suggested that someone on RCIM should talk to the Regulatory Framework Working Group about scheduling presentations by the Department of Ecology concerning commercial, industrial, and municipal activities that may contribute to high nitrate levels in groundwater

Recommendations for GWAC

-

Deliverables/Products Status

-

Proposed Next Steps
