

Implementation Committee Meeting Notes – May 8, 2025

Attendees: Kait Wolterstorff (Yakima Health), Caitlin McConkey (ECY), Savannah Crnick (SYCD), Bailey Draper (SYCD), David Haws (Yakima County), Anchee Durben (DOH), Robert Eastman (DOH), Jocelyn Castillo (Yakima Health), Steven Hockett (ECY), Lisa Freund (Yakima County), Holly Myers (DOH), Melanie Redding (ECY), Damon Roberts (ECY), David Taylor (Dairy Fed), Eli Brito-Cruz (ECY), Kyrre Flege (AGR), Obadiah Sherriff (AGR)

- 1:00-1:05: Introductions
- 1:05 – 1:50: Group Roundtable Discussion - Agencies Share on Current Activities
 - Washington State Department of Agriculture
 - Kyrre –The two things that I can share is that at the last meeting I mentioned an agency budget request that made it into both the house and senate and was included in the budget that went to the governor’s desk. This is a proviso to explore how we can build and support infrastructure for on farm composting which is pretty common in the Lower Yakima Valley. We’re trying to develop better technical resources and capacities to better deal with this. Obadiah has been working on the process I had described before. We are working on ideas for nitrate reduction strategies/actions that the Department of Ag can prioritize. We hope to have something to share soon with the group.
 - Washington State Department of Ecology
 - Steven – Abandoned Wells Project Update – We’re going tomorrow to meet the owners of an abandoned property. Eli and I have spent quite a bit of time in the lower valley and have 9 abandoned wells we have eyes on, and a potential of 16. Some of it is real estate that has plans for re-development and/or will be real estate sales. Will continue our effort and explore more possible abandoned wells.
 - Damon – Will continue community engagement on the abandoned wells project in the lower valley. Identify some grant opportunities and explore options.
 - Melanie – I want to recognize one of our committee members, Eli who is not here, just won an agency award for Partners in Positive Change. Congratulations to Eli for the service award received! My team is out there doing the annual sampling; it’s all going well.
 - Eli – Thank you everyone for the kind words. Steve and I are still working on the Abandoned Wells Project.
 - Heather Pat – No new updates on the status of CAFO’s.
 - South Yakima Conservation District

- Savannah – I just wanted to give a quick update on the deep soil sampling program's spring campaign and soil moisture monitoring. At the last IC meeting, we were on an off week from sampling and had done 14 fields at that point. After the last IC meeting, we completed the 13 fields we had left for a total of 27 fields sampled. We're waiting on lab results. Landau Associates are working on compiling the data and we hopefully will have that in office either next week or the following week. The past couple weeks we have been focusing on soil moisture monitoring. We've been talking with our landowners who were interested in having probes out in their field.

We have an irrigation water management training coming up at Columbia Basin Conservation District in Moses Lake. They're having some speakers from NRCS, WSU Extension, and Columbia Basin Conservation District. It should be in-depth comprehensive training.

We're finishing a few irrigation projects for the end of our fiscal year.

- Yakima County Public Services
 - Lisa Freund – Our agreement with DOH requires us to prepare a sustainability plan for the Safe Drinking Water Initiative. As we are now down to 7 weeks before the end of funding on June 30th, we will be reaching out to this group for input and insight into that sustainability plan before submitting the final plan to DOH.

As of May 2nd, 130 RO units have been installed and more since then.

One thing that has helped our outreach, Independent Water went out independently and ran ads both on Facebook and Cherry FM radio announcing that Yakima County was offering free well testing and RO systems. We found out when we started receiving calls asking about it.

I've continued talking to the Lower Valley dairy attorneys, the appellants of DOJ's and EPA's 2024 injunction. They have opined that clean drinking water is a public health issue best addressed by local government agencies (not the dairies). I have also talked with EPA attorney Matt Moore about the Safe Drinking Water Initiative results. Attorneys on both sides of the injunction have now received the monthly outreach, well testing, and RO installation data that we have been providing to EPA and the Department of Justice since 2024.

Commissioner LaDon Linde – We have been working the last couple of weeks trying to see if we can have an audience with the new EPA Region 10 Administrator and we've got a tentative agreement for that meeting. We're still trying to nail it down, but we should have that in the next few weeks.

There will be some of you on this call contacted, we're trying to get representatives from various agencies to be there as well so we can have a conversation together and hopefully be on the same page and hopefully get a less heavy-handed approach from EPA. We will update the group.

- Yakima Health District
 - Kait – We have wrapped up our work with the Safe Drinking Water Initiative and now are looking at options to support work in the GWMA.
 - We have wrapped up the Culligan water program but still have a bottled water pick up program going to continue helping households.
- Washington State Department of Health
 - Rob – I wanted to circle back to what Kyrre spoke about with the state budget being at the governor's desk. DOH has made it to this point in the budget regarding funding to do sustainable work starting in July and moving into western Benton County. We are keeping our fingers crossed that he does not line item veto us.

We had our second meeting with Benton County partners to discuss moving forward with Nitrate Remediation in Benton County.

- Anchee – Still working with the City of Sunnyside for bottled water pick up.

On Tuesday, I had the opportunity to go to Seattle to the DOH shoreline office and film a video talking about nitrates and what Yakima County and the Health District are doing to help with nitrate mitigation and how we can continue to get the word out.

- Holly – The video is going to come out as a documentary. I just wanted to say to Anchee thank you for doing that.
I don't think anybody is surprised to hear when we are talking about budget.

We think that GWMA is covered, and we feel good about that. But regarding the Alternative Drinking Water Program, the Legislature decided to cut that for this year. We have had to contact the entities that applied for the grant program and to suspend their work. We have just under half of what we had allocated and proposed.

We are revising our Same Farm Exemption Policy. We've been working with many of our partners and opening it up for public comment.

We have received some comments and did make some changes. There is a recommendation in our (internal) policy that we gather information every five years on the water systems that are exempt. We do have a process within the county and Department of Health for approving adequate water

determinations for any building and construction permitting. This clarifies that if you are a public water system, you do not qualify for an exemption. If you are a group B system, you may apply for group B through the county. For some counties this will have a significant impact, for others, no. The EPA is mandating that we do this. We sent out letters to a group of agri-businesses in the LYV.

We had 13 that identified that they were serving greater than 25 individuals. So, we will be working with them to see how we might reclassify their water system. We will be managing and supporting them in their reclassification.

We recently had a meeting with state agencies including the Dairy Federation and EPA. It was a follow up to the enforcement meetings that we all participated in. We were informed we would be meeting annually vs quarterly. It will likely be Ricardi or Nick that will consider joining these committees.

- Dairy Federation
 - David Taylor - We are working with DOH – Not much of an update here, we are, as Holly Mentioned, working with DOH to get information out. I do think we are going to be getting something moving forward here soon.
- Continued Discussion of GWMA Logo and Mission Statements
 - Robert – From the last meeting we talked about addition to mission statements to the GWMA logo letterhead. We received a first draft from our communications person, Elizabeth. I've sent comments back to Elizabeth to make to the GWMA letterhead, but I have not seen that back yet from her.
 - Holly – We have had some letters that we have sent to external parties with multiple state logos and someone from the Governor's office asked why we didn't have a GWMA letterhead to represent the committee and agencies involved. I asked for our communications person to come up with something we can use as a letterhead. It's not something we have to use; it's not something we will even use very often. *(Holly shared example on screen)*
 - *(Robert will email the final version out to the group)*
- 2:10 – 2:30: IC Subcommittee Discussion of Recommendation to be Started – Group Discussion of Recommendation # 20, **Continue research of water management with application of agricultural nutrients - WSU.**
 - Damon – There's a lot of work already being done regarding water management and applications. We need several agencies input on it.
 - Kyrre – The document that I have shared with the group is this map (shared on screen during meeting) that Adam put together accounting for all the different crops in the valley. Adam has put together a colorful legend and has

them listed in descending order by number of acres. We've been working on pulling together all the fertilizer guides for all the various crops growing in the valley. Some are old and some recent. In general, the takeaway is, we're not dying for more research on how to apply more agricultural nutrients, including commercial fertilizer and organic nutrients, in an irrigated cropping operation, but there are a couple of crops that have older guides that are based on older information, or the system has changed. This list is straight forward with the color coding. The takeaway is we can stand to invest in research on certain crops that have older guides or no guides.

- Melanie – An easy way to start off is touching base with WSU. I know the vineyard study I am working on has a component of fertigation that is being looked at along with other irrigated agricultural research. I do feel like that we have tools and should only go out and do research if it is necessary and then we can start to fill in the blanks.
 - Question: Damon – Where would we seek the funding for a project like this?
 - Answer: Kyrre – I'm not entirely sure. Right now, we are looking at the funds we have available in a similar project(s) and what we can do with those to connect the dots on funding.
- 2:30 – 2:50: Discuss EPA's question following the 4/15 meeting regarding expectations to meet the petitioners' requests.
 - Holly – I have communicated with Ricardi. Lisa was communicating with Matt Moore. I heard in the meeting from Ed Kowalski, that a response is underway based on what was presented at the April meeting. I believe we have provided multiple versions of monthly, quarterly reports and data.
 - 2:50 – 3:00: Open Discussion
 - Damon – Nitrate Reduction Plan with the state agencies - We do have an outline and a meeting with Ricardi in a couple weeks. We will likely have to reach out to people to clarify information that we need to put in there.
 - Next meeting: Thursday, June 12, 1:00-3:00 pm