

LYV-GWMA Implementation Committee

Thursday, September 11, 2025

1:00 PM to 3:00 PM

Attendees: Caitlin McConkey (ECY), Damon Roberts (ECY), David Haws (YCPS), Anchee Durben (DOH), Robert Eastman (DOH), Holly Myers (DOH), Kyrre Flege (AGR), Obadiah Sheriff (AGR), Rodney Heit (SYCD), Savannah Crnick (SYCD), Bailey Draper (SYCD), Scott Tarbutton (ECY), Nicholas Peak (EPA), Heather Patt (ECY), Commissioner LaDon Linde (Yakima County), Steven Hockett (ECY), Kate Wolterstorff (YHD), Adam Peterson (AGR)

- 1:00-1:05: Introductions

New/Joining Today: Scott Tarbutton – Ecology EAP Section Manager

- 1:05 – 1:50: Group Roundtable Discussion - Agencies Share on Current Activities
 - Washington State Department of Agriculture
 - Kyrre – Busy with a variety of different work areas regarding groundwater nitrogen topics. We are working toward figuring out how we are going to ramp up the amount of outreach we are doing around groundwater nitrogen management. Next Friday, I am meeting with a dairy farmer out in the valley and setting up a stop on a tour, much like the GWMA tour we did last year. There is a stop at the dairy and a stop near the dairy, which Rodney and his team at South Yakima Conservation District, as well as Adam, are coordinating on talking points about our deep soil sampling programs and to look at what's going on in terms of nitrogen management in the field. The goal with these two stops is to make sure that nobody walks away from the tour with a narrow idea of where nitrate comes from. We're going to look at the production area at the dairy farms, the crop side of things, and we're going to drive home the point that there is a whole variety of crops and irrigated agriculture out there. And Holly, not to put you on the spot, but I think we might have you out there too to talk about the safe drinking water, alternative drinking water programs, and what we are doing about public health and safety.

- Washington State Department of Ecology
 - Damon – Similar to what Kyrre has been working on with the nitrate reduction plan, we met with our team that is going to handle that non-point piece of the nitrate reduction plan, getting them updated on all the different information and what's going on, reviewing the outline, reviewing what we have done already, and then we'll get a meeting together here in the next week or so to get it all put together. We are not quite finished with the point source work, but getting close. I'll put it all together in the document we are sharing. We could not meet with Ricardi this week or last, so we will work on updating him.
 - Scott – Working on navigating the hiring freeze for Melanie's vacancy. The team is starting to ramp up and plan for the next soil sampling event for the groundwater component in October.
 - Damon - On that note, Melanie did a great job at getting her section of the nitrate reduction plan piece put together before she left, so that's good news.
 - Steve – I don't really have a whole lot to add except I've been working with Heather Patt trying to identify animal feeding operations throughout the region. We have a database well developed. I can say that there are approximately a hundred animal feed operations here in the Yakima Valley. We have a few other sources of nitrate that we will want to consider.
- South Yakima Conservation District
 - Rodney – We're in the process of mailing brochures about deep soil sampling to the remainder of our phase areas. Savannah completed the new brochure and had it translated in Spanish by WSDA. There will be 540 envelopes mailed this round. We are working on gaining fields for sampling and doing the utility locates.
 - We have a couple of smaller irrigation projects that are starting next month.
 - Kyrre mentioned that we will be helping with a demonstration during their tour. Always good to be able to show people what we're doing.

Question: Do you have a targeted area that you're doing for your outreach?

Answer: We've initially divided the GWMA up into six areas called phase areas. We have already reached out and sampled some fields in areas 1, 2, and 3. Basically, we are getting some mailers out to the areas we haven't contacted yet since the cultural resources surveys were recently completed for those areas.

- Yakima County Public Services
 - David – Not a lot to report. This past month, we've been finishing off the last pieces of the Safe Drinking Water work; they've just been closing everything out. Other than that, our staff has mostly been supporting other things that we're going to talk about today and helping with the strategic implementation area meetings. There have been several people who have reached out and gotten some GIS data and sampling data, and other things like that. Other than that, it's mostly been support for others as they've been gone in the past month. Nothing else to report.
 - Rob – Monical Beltran continues to join our communications subgroup meetings. We had our September monthly meeting this week, and we appreciate having her there, so I'm glad that she's continuing.
- Yakima Health District
 - Kate – Our major update that we have right now is that we did move forward with an application for \$250,000 in funding from the Washington State Department of Ecology. And that funding is through the combined water quality fund and would be earmarked to do more outreach and prepare materials around Healthy Homes. We will not find out about this grant until next year.
- Washington State Department of Health
 - Rob – We are still in the process of getting our safe drinking water initiative program going. It has certainly been a learning curve, but we keep plugging along, and we are getting closer. Just as a reminder, our primary focus with this program is to move into the western part of Benton County, which was with the original GWMA designation certification. And we will also be doing what we call Lower Yakima Valley sustainability work for anyone in the Lower Yakima Valley who missed the opportunities with Yakima County and Health

District to get their water tested and have a well site assessment. We have a contractor who will be doing the well site assessments and taking the water samples. That contract is in place, and we have had, at this point, one day of training with our contractor Fulcrum Environmental Consulting, and that happened just this week. We will have another day of training with them, and the next piece that we are waiting for is a contract submitted to our contracts office for bottled water pick up in western Benton County through Leprechaun Harvest Foods. We still have our bottled water pick-up location in Sunnyside for the Lower Yakima Valley. Also, we are working on postcard mailings for western Benton County. Anchee has a meeting with DES (Department of Enterprise Services) to get that coordinated and get our first round of postcards out to folks in western Benton County.

- Holly – I don't have much to add, just want to thank Kyrre for inviting me to participate in the legislative tour. I have a handout that I can give to the legislators that has some basic facts. We've talked a few times about the documentary that our community entity ELLA is working on, and we've asked them in several different ways not to use the Department of Health logo until we approve the material that they're putting the logo on, but we have not had much success in getting a response from them. I'm reaching out to our AAG to find out if we have any legal recourse. The message from the ag industry (specifically Safe Family Farming, Dylan Hoop) stated concerns about having an agenda and pointing fingers at DOH for supporting ELLA since the DOH logo appears at the end of some of ELLA's video clips. We've had these discussions before. I'm working to elevate that to a point where we can try to get our logos removed. I will keep the group posted about this.

We are also working hard and meeting regularly with Ricardi to work on that comprehensive nitrate reduction plan. Working with EPA and the Yakama Nation is one of the primary reminders – every time I speak with Ricardi. I remind him that we have money for them and that we need to know what they want. We have included them in the vendor's scope of work contract so that we can provide sampling, site assessment, and possibly alternative options. What we are asking for EPA to do is to work closely with the tribe to help figure out what they need so that we can budget wisely. I think we are on the right track.

- EPA

- Nick – A couple of things I will mention. We are on our third office director for the Washington State Office Director. That individual is done at the end of September, and we do not have a game plan yet for who is going to fill the role after that. When we have a more permanent person in that role, it will stabilize things, so hopefully, we have a better game plan for that moving forward in the future. And the last thing that I just want to mention was that my regional administrator and I met with the newly appointed USDA rural development director for Washington State. I believe it was last week or the week before. His name is Kirk Pearson. This is the second time he's been appointed to that position under the Trump Administration. Kirk's trying to put together a big one-day forum called the Northwest Environmental Forum in late March 2026. It's in its infancy, but he's kind of reaching out to state and federal agencies in Washington, including Oregon and possibly Idaho as well, to give presentations about how those agencies assist state and rural or tribal communities in the state. He was telling us that he wants to have short presentations and then table events. I think it's supposed to be in Pasco. I don't know if that's an appropriate venue for getting some outreach information out there, but he said he was going to start reaching out to Washington State agencies soon. If this sounds like an appropriate thing, I can share Kirk's contact information because he hasn't done much outreach beyond federal agencies. I mentioned to him the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Health, and the Department of Ecology. Just wanted to put this on the group's radar.

- Question: Commissioner Linde – We have a national standard for drinking water of 10 parts per million (ppm), and I just learned that the World Health Organization (WHO) standard is 50 ppm, as is the standard in the EU. I'm wondering, why do we have a standard of 10 ppm if these other areas, including the WHO, have a different standard, an international standard?
- Answer: Nick – I do not have an answer for that, but it is a great question, and I will look into that.

- Roza/Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District – No one present for the meeting.
- Dairy Federation – No one present for the meeting.

- 1:50 – 2:00: Nitrate Reduction Plan Updates – No updates.
- 2:00 – 2:45: Presentation on Proposed Strategic Implementation Area (SIA) to Focus Efforts in the GWMA
 - Kyrre – Preface - This strategic implementation area conversation we're about to have is very much for the purpose of identifying priorities for us in the nitrate reduction plan. And I just wanted to illustrate real quick for everybody that the state agency nitrate reduction plan has a section on governance that talks about what the agency's roles and responsibilities are. It identifies that we are going to prioritize an area within the overall GWMA, the strategic implementation area. It's going to talk about activities and the schedule of implementation of different things within that strategic implementation area, and then it has sections that go into more detail around the safe drinking water program, alternative drinking water, things like that. Nitrate source control, which covers the whole swath of different potential nitrate sources, and there's a whole section on monitoring, I wanted to make sure everybody understands that this conversation about this strategic implementation area is rooted in this, the work we're doing in the state nitrate reduction plan.

Just as a refresher, then I'll kick it over to Adam. The last time we met, we talked about how a few of our subject matter experts were going to get together and come up with a proposal for a strategic implementation area, and that's what Adam's going to give us an overview of today. What we came up with, why we came up with it, and then we can launch into a conversation about whether it meets our needs and what kinds of activities we want to do with that.

*Adam presented to the group on screen various maps and data points

Adam – My position's focus is specifically on support tools, but I also have a background in GIS, so this will kind of cover the geospatial analysis that the group conducted to select the strategic implementation area.

We've introduced the concept of this strategic implementation area, so next, we will start with the steps we took to begin outlining where we might want to place one within the GWMA. We have a wide range of data that gives us insights into the GWMA as a whole. Our goal was to use this data

strategically to pick a strategic implementation area boundary that met our group's goals for targeted actions and outreach. We grouped our data roughly into three large categories. The first source of nitrate is the area under control, where we can, through our work, reduce nitrate loading.

The second is transport factors for how nitrate gets from the surface down to the groundwater. There are a few areas where we do have control, like irrigation, but for the most part, as it moves from soil, geologic layers are kind of one of the trickier aspects to consider. But it does govern how quickly actions on the surface are seen and changes apparent in groundwater.

The third set of data that we have is groundwater nitrate levels. We wanted an area with a diversity of sources. We had ample opportunities for strategic outreach in each of these categories for sources. For transport factors, we looked at a layer that judges the list for surface activities that contaminate groundwater. For groundwater nitrate, we examined the variation of levels of nitrate across the valley.

*Presented to the group the area on a map that they settled on. It is centrally located within the GWMA and includes a mix of urban and predominantly rural areas. It includes the cities of Granger, Outlook, and the western outskirts of Sunnyside. It includes Snipes Mountain as well as areas on both sides of it. It represents around 22,800 acres, estimated to be around 13% of the total GWMA size. Walked the group through data on multiple maps.

Questions and group discussion:

Kyrre – I think maybe the first map you showed kind of broke things down from irrigated agriculture, hobby farms, OSS, that sort of thing. Are the source percentages in those categories within the SIA (Strategic Implementation Area) roughly the same or similar to the overall GWMA?

Adam – Yes, if you're familiar with the 2018 WSDA study, it broke things down to low, medium, and high scenarios for some of those categories, particularly livestock. There are some big differences. This shows the medium scenarios.

I think what stuck out about this area was that there was a diversity of factors, no matter where you looked at it. There's an opportunity in each of those zones.

Kyrre – We are shooting for is to have our Implementation Committee here agree on this proposed approach, with identifying a priority area, SIA, within the GWMA. Now is a great opportunity to talk about what we are missing. Are we going too far? Are we not going far enough? How might we use this SIA in terms of prioritizing our work out there in the Valley?

Holly – Do we have an overlay with the monitoring wells? To see what we have within this area.

Adam – I believe I have a slide. *Pulled up slide from presentation showing good coverage north of 82. There is a little gap south of Snipes Mountain.

Heather – I'm curious, within the SIA, do you think we have a handful of landowners that have a lot of different crops? I'm thinking about managing outreach to that and those scenarios, and I'm also curious about crops and their use of livestock manure vs crops that use chemical fertilizer, and your knowledge of that.

Adam – I don't have the results handy, but I can do some work on our GIS later. In the original 2018 study, there is a breakdown of nitrate sources, and this might show manure vs chemical.

Kyrre – I think inventorying that kind of information and gathering that would be a reasonable next step. Having identified a smaller area where we can do more surveying, either remotely or through GIS analysis, or by driving down the roads and looking at manure applications.

Adam – Another thing, maybe I could bring up in terms of ownership is one question that we had, and that is how many farms are in this area, and unfortunately, there is no GIS layer for farms.

*Kyrre circled back and asked the group about the Implementation Committee coming to an agreement to move forward with this plan so we could write it into the state's nitrate reduction plan and send it to EPA.

Damon – We need to make sure that we're being realistic about setting the expectations. That's going to be important as we move forward.

Holly – I think you have the group's support so far. I think it's important when you start looking at next steps to think about the funding and whether we need to phase it. I think this is great and appreciate all the work you have all done on this.

Kyrre – Thank you, it's been fun. For everybody involved in this, who would be able to decide what is reasonable and what is appropriate for their individual agencies in terms of their specific agency actions within that SIA. I think as we go through the process of furthering this plan, we'll have the opportunity to evaluate what's reasonable.

*The group moved to adopt the SIA.

Kyrre - As we continue to move through the process of writing up our agencies' nitrate reduction plan for the Lower Yakima Valley, we'll make sure that we're sharing with this group what that looks like in terms of how it's being characterized and then talking more about the activities.

Also, I would suggest that Adam shares his slides after the meeting, as I think it would be beneficial for people to have a copy of this.

David – I just wanted to say that was all very impressive work, good job.

Rob – Many kudos to Adam for sure.

- 2:45 – 3:00: Continued Discussion of Mission & Purpose for the Implementation Committee – Proposed Structure of Future Implementation Committee Meetings
 - Rob – In previous meetings, we have thrown out the idea to have separate field staff meetings and manager or supervisor meetings, and then every two months have an all Implementation Committee meeting. Does anyone have any thoughts on this right now? I could do a follow-up email, and you can email your thoughts or ideas on that as well.
 - David – I definitely see the benefit of giving field staff their own meeting time.
 - “Field staff” would be identified by Kyrre and Rob and share it with the group.
 - Rob concluded that he would send an email about Kyrre and his initial thoughts on how to structure these meetings, and people can respond via email and possibly bring it back as an agenda item at next month's meeting.
- Open Discussion if Time Allows
- Next meeting: Thursday, October 9, 1:00-3:00 pm

