Meeting Highlights: May 12, 2010
Owens Lakebed Planning Committee

Prepared by the Center for Collaborative Policy

Overview

The Owens Lakebed Planning Committee held its third meeting in Bishop focused on existing uses on the lakebed. The Planning Committee explored dust control measures' effectiveness, implementation, operational costs, and water use. Second, the Committee learned about the conservation action planning that has occurred on the lakebed and reviewed the Owens Lake Habitat Management Plan, which addresses habitat in dust control areas. The committee heard a presentation on the Rio Tinto mining operations. Lastly, the Planning Committee discussed its charter and the plan approval process. The Committee will approve the plan and seek conditional approval from member boards/commission before submitting it for formal environmental review. Once this has occurred, members will recommend that the implementing organizations adopt the final plan. The Committee is still deciding on its media representation.

Action Items

All	6/30/2010	Read "Getting to Yes" by Fisher & Ury
DWP	6/9/2010	Share groundwater fact sheet
Web Site	ASAP	Add to Web Site DWP 2002 Wetland Habitat Function & Values Assessment Report DWP 2006 Wetland Mitigation & Monitoring Plan
Tammy Branston	6/15/2010	Share Google earth links
CCP	6/15/2010	Post meeting materials and presentations on web site
Brad Henderson	6/15/2010	Follow-Up with Lahontan Water Quality Control Board to inform them about planning process

Site Visit Insights

The Planning Committee's second meeting was a site visit on April 28, 2010. The site visit focused on dust control areas. Participants commented that the vastness of the lakebed was much clearer when visiting. Members are interested in exploring the seeps and springs and other parts of the lakebed at a future visit.

Owens Lakebed Existing Uses

Approved Dust Control Methods

Grace Holder, Great Basin Air Pollution Control District, presented an overview of dust control measures. The primary reason for dust control on the lakebed is due to PM10 emissions. Before dust control commenced, the lakebed would emit approximately 76,000 tons of PM10/year. Since 2000, the program has reduced the number of "dusty"

or emissive days by 70%, and the amount of dust emitted has decreased 90%. This is a significant improvement in air quality. In 2009, only 33 days exceeded the regulated daily emissive rate. There are three approved, Basic Available Control Measures (BACM): flooding, managed vegetation, and gravel blanket.

Bill VanWagoner, Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP), discussed the cost of construction and water use for each approved dust control measure. Implementing any control measures on the lakebed is quite complex and requires both water and energy. DWP estimates that dust control consumes 95,000 acre-feet water per year.

Approved Measure	**Amount** (Sq Miles)	**Construction Cost**	**Annual Water Use** Acre-Feet/Sq Mile	**Annual Water Cost** (based on MWD Tier 1 untreated water = $485/af)
Shallow Flooding	35.2	$12.9 mil/sq mile	2,560	$1.24 million/ sq mile
Managed Vegetation	3.7	Approx. $15 mil/sq mile	960	$0.46 million/sq mile
Gravel Blanket	0.14	Approx $22 mil/sq mile	0	0

Bill discussed the possibility of exploring alternative dust control or hybrid methods through the planning process. Some examples might involve placing islands in ponds: these would improve habitat and reduce water use. Another option might be tilling the soil to provide temporary dust control while the planning process moved forward. Solar is another possible dust mitigation measure that the agencies, including DWP, are evaluating.

DWP has a stated policy to avoid exceeding the 95,000 acre-feet of water per year currently used on the lakebed. DWP would like to reduce water use below this amount if it can still achieve dust control objectives.

Groundwater

Committee members raised questions about the possibility of groundwater being used on the lakebed to achieve dust control. Efforts are underway to study groundwater as a resource in the area. However, additional monitoring wells are required to evaluate the sustainability of groundwater use. One concern is to avoid damage to seeps and springs that tend to be on the perimeter of the lakebed and sensitive habitat that might be associated with groundwater. Another is to avoid impacts on other surrounding users, such as the Crystal Geyser operations. The potential for subsidence is another factor that will have to be analyzed.

The goal of the planned groundwater study is to analyze groundwater in the area and model the effects of potential usage. The Planning Committee will receive information about the groundwater study and periodic updates from staff. When a public meeting is held on the groundwater study, staff will use the Committee's distribution list to ensure that everyone is informed about the meeting.

Birds, Wildlife & Habitat

Conservation Action Planning—Pete Pumphrey, Audubon

The public agencies and California and local Audubon (with The Nature Conservancy facilitating) met over the last few years to conduct conservation action planning. The outcomes from this planning work will support the work of the Planning Committee. The group looked at the historic lakebed to 1) identify habitat clusters; 2) "grade" or rate habitat clusters; 3) identify trends or issues that were stressing the habitat clusters or target species; and 4) shared the outcomes with the stakeholders and the public. This planning effort is an extension of this fourth element.

The effort identified the following priority habitat clusters:

- Shallow flood
- Plover nesting areas
- Alkaline meads
- Seeps and springs

Habitat Management Plan—Jeff Nordin, DWP

Jeff Nordin provided an overview of the Habitat Management Plan. DWP developed this plan for the California Department of Fish & Game. The plan focuses on the effects to wildlife from shallow flooding. DFG representatives Brad Henderson and Tammy Branston praised the plan. Jeff discussed bird use on the lakebed and identified the areas of the lakebed where birds tend to cluster. Habitat diversity is key. Important variables that affect habitat are salinity, water depth, vegetation, and proximity to other preferred areas. Everyone agreed that the Habitat Management Plan is an important resource to this effort. The plan will be linked on the web site.

Insights on Distributing and Linking Wildlife Areas and Habitat in the Lakebed to Maximize Benefit

After the presentations and discussion, the Committee discussed how it might link and maximize habitat. Key insights follow:

Possible Areas

- Northern portion has lots of use and provides diversity
- Northeast / T30s—northern portion along east side down to Keeler. This could be linked into the Delta.
- T36, in the northern portion, is one of the best locations for preservation
- T13, in southeast corner, has high use of snowy plover
- Southwest: A strip south of Keeler along the old shoreline might be possible
- Delta
- Link fresh water seeps and springs (this would affect project boundary)

Considerations

- The soils are a factor with regards to water use and application and ability to grow plans. In the northeast, sandy soils are more productive than clay soils.
- The existence of a food base and habitat should be factored into decisions since this is instrumental
- The diversity of plants is often tied to the diversity of wildlife. Plants can prevent erosion. Plant species vary in the amount of water required. Some vegetation won't grow in clay soils.

- Wetlands might be able to use less water than currently (currently must maintain wetness of shallow flood measured through satellite photos).
- The Delta is "pinched" and no longer able to expand or fluctuate. The Delta is productive and prime hunting area.
- First and foremost, this is dust control project. If possible, identify dust control that doesn't require water. Then work in other areas for habitat.
- Some of the seeps and springs are privately owned
- Consider Ash Creek on the west side, which is connected with the Olancha Cartego area.
- The process must be flexible and allow for adaptive management. Implementation must allow for trial and error as well as modification in response to the conditions.

Mineral Operations—Paul Lamos, Rio Tinto Minerals

Planning Committee member Paul Lamos provided an overview of the Rio Tinto Minerals mining operations on the lakebed. The Owens Lakebed has the third largest supply of trona in the United States. The State Lands Commission owns and leases the land for mining operations. Trona is used to make soda ash for detergents. Extracting the ore is a process of de-watering, excavating, and drying. The mine produces 50,000 tons per year. The presentation will be posted on the web site.

Planning Committee Charter & Decision-Making

The Committee discussed its charter. The facilitator will make modifications to the charter. One key issue is what to do if the Committee is unable to reach an agreement. The group explored the possibility of using some type of back-up voting. One option would be to use a 75% majority. The facilitator requested time to think about this and consult with colleagues because she is concerned that interest group representation be robust in any outcomes. She wants the group to avoid an outcome that ignores the concerns of one interest group because they constitute less than 25% of the group.

Plan Approval: The Committee will approve the plan and seek conditional approval from member boards/commission before submitting it for formal environmental review. Members will keep board members abreast as the plan is developed. Once this has occurred, members will recommend that the implementing organizations adopt the final plan. The Committee is still deciding on its media representation.

Agency Forum: The Army Corps of Engineers does not want to be formally part of the group, but would like to be kept abreast of planning efforts. The Agency Forum calls for two ex-officio members of the Planning Committee to attend the Agency Forum. The following people volunteered to serve on the "pool" of people able to attend. Attendance would be limited to two people; volunteers would rotate attendance based on availability.

- Mark Bagley
- Julie Bear
- Teri Cawelti
- Andrea Jones
- Pete Pumphrey

Press Releases / Reporting Outcomes
The Committee had an extensive discussion about working with the media. Everyone agreed that some basic information should be shared on a regular basis. For future meetings, the facilitator and the Committee will identify reporting outcomes at the end of each meeting for distribution to the email list. The group is still trying to determine how to handle press inquiries. One option would be to list the DWP local public affairs person, Chris Plakos, as the point of contact. He could then refer the media to planning committee members.

Everyone agreed that a one-page overview should be provided through the web site.

Web Site
The Committee agreed that it needs a public web site for related studies and meeting materials and announcements. The Committee also agreed that it would consider an internal web site for documents that it wishes to review and comment upon. Once a document is ready to be circulated at the meeting, the document would be placed on the public web site.