

Oregon Tide Gate Partnership Meeting Summary

June 17, 2024

Introductions

Stephanie Page, OWEB Acting Executive Director, opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. The original Tide Gate partnership started meeting in 2017 and the full group last met in 2021. A lot has changed and a lot has been accomplished since the group began meeting. The purpose of today's meeting is to review accomplishments to address barriers identified by the partnership, identify what needs to be done, and identify potential partners to address the outstanding needs.

OWEB's core product and service is grantmaking and the agency is looking for another partner to take over the convener role for the partnership. OWEB will continue to support planning, design, engagement, and replacement/removal for tide gates.

Review of draft tide gate report

Taylor Larson, Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program Coordinator at OWEB, walked the group through the Tide Gate Partnership web site and reviewed the draft report with the group to ask for feedback section by section. He also reviewed several tools, many of which were funded by OWEB, created by partners to address barriers to tide gate projects.

Taylor reviewed the history of the tide gate inventory, which was first created by OSU and updated by the Nature Conservancy. Jason Nuckols (TNC) commented that the boots-on-the-ground inventory update that was completed was of publicly accessible locations. He noted that behind a publicly accessible tide gate, you can have multiple secondary gates that are not publicly accessible.

Guillermo Giannico (OSU) noted that we don't have the best ecological information to make sure replacement tide gates will be better for fish passage and connectivity.

Taylor Larson (OWEB) and Greg Apke (ODFW) reviewed the decision support tool which can be used to optimize tide gate upgrade projects within an identified set of goals, budget etc. Greg explained that ODFW took the list and ran it through a model. It looked at attributes and did a cursory prioritization to get a better handle on ecologic function and uplift. They have completed preliminary work on the tool.

Taylor demonstrated the decision support tool. He showed how the user can pick a region, budget and what you are trying to optimize for.

Jason Nuckols (TNC) noted that over time, we need to update the baseline data that underlies the decision support tool. He is always able to help people with the tool.

Haley Lutz, Coos Watershed Association, reviewed the engineering tool. She noted that the tool does not replace the need for engineering and for full consultation with the agencies. She noted that needs to be made very clear when working with folks. The tool can give users a very clear estimate on size. The tool uses the tide gate inventory to populate it so you can zoom in on your area.

Irma Lagomarsino (NOAA) asked if anyone is using the tool. Haley indicated that the Coos Watershed Association is actively using it. They are able to do some initial run-through. The tool is also directly in the hands of landowners and they are using it as well.

Craig Herman (rancher, Coos-Curry Farm Bureau) expressed concern that the decision support tool discriminates against farmers and ranchers and noted the fish habitat value of smaller-sized projects. Stephanie Page (OWEB) noted that it shows options for projects depending on the users' goals. Taylor Larson noted that in addition to OWEB, Business Oregon had some funding available during the past biennium to fund projects, including projects that don't have a watershed benefit but have other important benefits to local businesses and communities.

Haley Lutz expressed appreciation for Business Oregon for funding projects that are supportive of agriculture and other needs but don't necessarily have a fish focus.

Taylor Larson reviewed several resources on the Tide Gate Partnership web site created to support regulatory coordination. He noted that OWEB worked with the permitting agencies to create a process map of the regulatory/permitting process. The regulatory agencies are still meeting monthly with OWEB coordinating the meetings.

Additionally, OWEB received funding from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for a tide gate coordinator to serve as a navigator. OWEB has not received a lot of inquiries; our thought is that this is because local partners are providing this service to landowners and managers in their communities.

Irma Lagomarsino (NOAA) noted that replacing a tide gate is highly regulated. The agencies were trying to create a more transparent process because we didn't know what the other agency processes were. It was very helpful to better understand and align with other agency processes. It has helped the agencies work more as one interagency team in the permitting process. The agencies are sharing information early, going to site visits together, and coming out with one consolidated response early in the process. She also noted that delegation of authority, which was determined to be infeasible during the initial partnership effort, is really rare.

Greg Apke (ODFW) recognized that the process is complicated but noted that the group made a lot of progress and are waiting for folks to try it. He believes the process is being under-utilized.

Haley Lutz (Coos WA) noted that having the agencies talk to each other has provided significant benefit. She has not seen this coordination at the county level; projects are getting stuck in permitting process at the county level and that is why.

Haley also expressed the need for agency capacity; we need partnerships to help move tide gate projects forward. There is a lack of capacity at NOAA and they are not able to show up the way that they previously did in the permitting process. Staff turnover has been very challenging.

There was some discussion about the best way to connect the tide gate partnership to the county process. Meg Reed (DLCD) noted that DLCD works closely with counties on the land use process and could be a resource. It's a big priority of DLCD to update estuary management plans. Association of Oregon Counties was also mentioned as a possible option.

Jason Nuckols (TNC) reviewed the tide gate monitoring guidance that was recently published. He explained that the goal of this guidance was to help keep local partners from having to reinvent the wheel when it comes to designing monitoring strategies for tide gate projects.

Zachary Sherker (OSU) commented that it would be helpful to have annual updates on the base data for the optimization tools.

Monitoring handbook – use of PITT – forward looking effectiveness monitoring; what’s going on and what has been found.

Fish/WQ data – how many sites should we have fish movement on.

Updating the handbook – gold standard monitoring sites vs silver standard monitoring sites.

Decision support tool for monitoring.

Craig Herman (rancher, Coos/Curry Farm Bureau) expressed a need for support and funding for smaller tide gate projects. These projects have not fared as well in the grantmaking process. One of the roles of a future convener could be investigating alternative funding streams.

Stephanie Page transitioned the focus of the discussion towards identifying remaining work that needs to be done and identifying possible partners to lead efforts to complete that work.

Jason Nuckols (TNC) recommended starting with the list of needs from the draft tide gate report. Additionally, he noted it would be beneficial to develop a coastwide tide gate project list looking out multiple years and create a clearinghouse of tide gate project grant and funding options.

Haley Lutz (Coos WA) mentioned that the cross-sectional group is really valuable. She referenced the connections the group helped establish between public safety, fish/watersheds, and agriculture. The group has helped build trust and get people to talk to each other. There is an ongoing need for facilitation to bring the group together. She also mentioned the value of flagging issues in the group. Coos County has 36% of the tide gates in Oregon.

Haley noted that manufacturing is a substantial issue that hasn’t been solved. She recommended adding this to the report as a barrier.

Jillian McCarthy (OWEB) noted that the group has been focused on watershed health and agriculture, and may want to consider expanding to include public health and safety.

Kevin with Partnership for Umpqua Rivers recommended adding folks in the risk management/legal world because tide gate projects do involve significant risk management and liability issues.

Sharon Waterman (Coos County Farm Bureau) said she would like to see projects addressed that are a priority for agriculture. She expressed appreciation for the value of the tide gate partnership. She mentioned that with the MTR, it is a change in the hydrology. It’s managed by the person who has the control. She is concerned there are a lot of tide gate projects in the area and the area is losing some ag ground.

Stephanie Page asked if the group had thoughts about other possible conveners. Jillian McCarthy (OWEB) noted that the original convener of the tide gate partnership was the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC). Heather Medina (NRCS) suggested having a conversation at the Oregon Technical Advisory Committee about the tide gate partnership and future needs. She noted that NRCS has received only one application for funding for a tide gate project.

Haley Lutz noted that smaller projects are not faring as well. Not everyone is a good fit to work with NRCS. Nobody else is currently providing ag and working lands-focused funds for tide gate projects. The focus of the dollars available is for massive ecological uplift. Would be helpful to have more diversity in funding sources.

Zachary Sherker (OSU) mentioned encountering an alternative to the MTR when working in the Fraser River valley in British Columbia that may be worth exploring.

Stephanie Page closed the meeting and indicated that OWEB will follow up with a meeting summary and will reach out to the possible additional partners mentioned during today's meeting.