

Instream Flow Advisory Group Meeting #4 Notes

**OWRB, 3800 N. Classen Blvd., Oklahoma City
January 16, 2014, 1:30 p.m.**

ATTENDEES:

Barry Bolton, OK Dept. of Wildlife Cons.
Shannon Brewer, USGS
Angie Burckhalter, Devon
Mark Derichsweiler, ODEQ
Tom Elkins, Cherokee Nation
Mike Fuhr, The Nature Conservancy
Bud Ground, PSO
**Doug Hawthorne (for Tom Creider),
OTRD/State Parks**
Charlette Hearne, ORWP
David Martinez, (for Kevin Stubbs), USFWS
Marla Peek, OK Farm Bureau
Jim Reese, ODAFF
Marsha Slaughter, Oklahoma City WUT
Jeff Tompkins, Bureau of Reclamation
Brooks Tramell, OK Conservation Comm.
Brian Woodard, OIPA
J.D. Strong, OWRB
Owen Mills, OWRB

Derek Smithee, OWRB
Terri Sparks, OWRB
Darla Whitley, OWRB
Brian Vance, OWRB
Bryan Taylor, Corps of Engineers
John Rehring, Carollo Engineers
Bryan Mitchell, CH2MHILL
Anna Childers, CH2MHILL
Forrest Olson, CH2MHILL
Dean Couch, Self
LeeAnna Covington, OK Farm Bureau
Buck Ray, OK Dept. of Wildlife Cons.
Cedric Bond, Student
Daniel Fenner, USFWS
Brandon Brous, OK Dept. of Wildlife Cons.
Russell Doughty, ORWP
Kim Elkin, The Nature Conservancy

[bold font indicates Advisory Group members or their delegates present for this meeting]

Welcome

OWRB Executive Director J.D. Strong made opening remarks and asked participants to introduce themselves. John Rehring, Carollo Engineers and meeting facilitator, went over the Agenda and gave a brief review of the previous meeting.

ISF Pilot Study Work Plan

Recap of Key Issues: Mr. Rehring gave a brief overview of the key issues that were identified by the Advisory Group in previous meetings and discussions. A synopsis of these issues is posted to the ISF webpage at <http://www.owrb.ok.gov/supply/ocwp/instreamflow.php>; it is recognized that the list does not represent consensus on the issues, but indicates the types of questions and concerns raised by members of the group. He asked the group to revisit the issues and think about whether the proposed process for an instream flow pilot study would address these concerns.

Overview of Draft Pilot Study Work Plan: Mr. Forrest Olson, CH2MHILL, gave a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the process described in the draft Oklahoma Instream Flow Pilot Study document. The draft work plan and presentation are posted to the ISF webpage. Mr. Olson responded to several questions posed throughout the presentation.

Discussion/Questions: Mr. Rehring then indicated that the Agenda allowed time for additional discussion and questions, which are summarized below:

- Why was the Instream Flow Incremental Methodology (IFIM) method chosen?
 - The IFIM method is the most commonly used and it has a strong institutional and stakeholder involvement component. Also, the method was previously used in Oklahoma.
- How does IFIM deal with recreation, as opposed to flows for fish and habitat?
 - Hydraulic recreation parameters can be developed for inclusion of recreation. The process helps inform decision-making to reflect the competing needs of various water users and uses, and culminates in negotiations between various interests in the watershed. OWRB/consultants will make sure that recreation is included in the process.
- There was considerable discussion on the purpose of the pilot study as outlined in the draft, how study results would be used, and concern regarding whether and how the results of the pilot would be applied elsewhere in Oklahoma.
 - The primary purpose of the pilot study is to define, test, and adapt a process that could be applied to any potential study area. A pilot would answer questions and concerns voiced by the advisory group that could not otherwise be answered in the abstract.
 - The pilot study (or study process) suggests the Illinois River system upstream of Tenkiller Reservoir as the pilot study area; the wording could be changed to specify that as the study area.
 - The pilot organizes the steps to a process that allows stakeholders to be involved and provide perspective on what needs to be addressed in a selected study area.
 - The watershed-specific results of the pilot would only apply to the upper Illinois River watershed. However, the same process (or modified process based on lessons learned in the pilot) could be applied to other watersheds in Oklahoma with different watershed-specific conditions and goals, and watershed-specific findings.
- An IFIM study is used to address a “problem”; we do not know that there is a problem, so why should we move ahead with an IFIM?
 - Study will be used to address a process not a problem and will not be used to make a decision on whether an instream flow program should be implemented.
 - Maybe the problem is that we do not know the future impacts of implementing an instream flow program or not implementing a program.
- Will the results from the study be used to extrapolate to other watersheds and/or streams? Is the study approach repeatable?
 - The pilot study will not be used to set flow targets in other watersheds. Rather, it will test the process that could be applied to any watershed to yield stakeholder-supported flow targets specific to the watershed in question.
- Is there anything about the process that seems to bias any particular use?
 - M&I was not mentioned in the draft process, and recreation should also be considered in the evaluations.

- The intent of the pilot is to consider all water users and uses without bias, but with opportunities for each interest group to engage in the process. The work plan will be reviewed and updated to reflect this basic tenet.
- There are not many withdrawals from the Illinois River system; will this provide useful results regarding potential impacts to consumptive users?
 - The recommendation by the previous ISF Advisory Group was to do a pilot study on a Scenic River, and this recommendation was supported by the current ISF Advisory Group at the previous workshop. The Illinois was chosen because it has some discharges and has a broad existing dataset that should help reduce study costs.
 - The group discussed the merits of conducting the pilot in a watershed that is more heavily used by consumptive users, or conducting pilot studies in more than one watershed. The group ultimately determined that an upper Illinois River study as the first watershed to be analyzed would be the best approach for initial testing of the proposed process.
- If we focus on a Scenic River using the metrics identified in the work plan as Phase 2, will it result in a framework that is biased towards natural flows that will not apply to rivers with higher industrial water uses?
 - Pre-development flows are typically not used as goals, recognizing that consumptive diversions will continue to exist in the stream system. The process can be similar, but will have to reflect supply, demand, and water use attributes and priorities specific to each stream studied.
 - Language of draft pilot needs to be more specific about the goal being to develop a process, not a flow regime that would be extrapolated to stream systems statewide.
- Can the IFIM method be applied to different projects?
 - It can be applied to many different types of projects—irrigation, hydropower, multi-use stream systems, etc.
- The proposed pilot study process should help answer the group’s questions and concerns; we should concentrate on how and what we can learn from the process.
- Would process be radically different if a different methodology was used?
 - The IFIM process includes basic steps, generally consecutive, that would essentially be a part of any method employed.
- The draft pilot study work plan does not say anything about consumptive uses of water.
 - The goal is to look at impacts of instream flow alternatives on all users; OWRB/consultants can include language to emphasize that.
- There seem to be different interpretations of the language in the draft document and the intent.
 - Need to create a glossary.
 - Clearly state up-front what the expected outcome of the pilot will be, and how those results will be used to assess impacts of alternatives.
- In identifying representatives of stakeholder groups, need to recognize that many stakeholders for recreation do not live within the watershed; many are tourists and visitors from other areas.
- Did not see anything in Phase 1 about negotiating teams; need to define different teams.
 - The term “negotiating teams” is often used in specific flow-related controversies in watersheds when using the IFIM process.
 - For this pilot study, it is anticipated that a diverse set of water interests would make up the overall stakeholder group.
 - The study team is envisioned as being technical members, while stakeholders may not be.

- The pilot study should include an evaluation of how setting flows could impact downstream reservoir levels, yields, and/or operations.
 - References in the work plan and IFIM documentation are geared more toward upstream reservoir releases into the stream segment in question, but impacts of an ISF program on downstream reservoirs should also be considered where applicable. In the upper Illinois River watershed, there are no major upstream reservoirs, but flows do feed Lake Tenkiller.
 - Study Planning (Phase 2) of the work plan would define metrics that need to be evaluated, including reservoirs; Alternatives Analysis (Phase 4) would look at impacts.
 - Although the timing of flows into a reservoir could affect lake levels and operations, maintaining a set annual flow into downstream reservoirs may help protect yields.
- Change terminology from Problem Identification to Issue Identification; the intent of the pilot is to test the process, not come up with a set flow that would be applied to other watersheds. Essentially, one of the overarching goals is to test the ability of the proposed process to answer the questions voiced by the Work Group by using a real watershed—i.e., What are the costs? To what extent would existing and future uses be impacted?
- As written, the goal of the pilot work plan appears to be the determination of a single flow or flow range for the upper Illinois River watershed, rather than validating the process to see if it answers the key questions posed by the ISF Advisory Group.
- It was suggested that an additional step, “Phase 6” is needed to evaluate the process and address questions such as: Does the process answer the questions we have? Do we need to go back and modify the process so the key questions are answered?
- Need to recognize the uniqueness of the Illinois River watershed during the process development.
- Need to put in an estimated schedule/time frame for each phase of the work plan.
- The timeframe set out in the OCWP recommendations will not be met if we can only get through Phases 1 and 2 within a year.
 - We are already somewhat behind schedule and may need to adjust that when we put some timeframes to each of the Pilot Study phases.

Path Forward: Status and Next Steps

OWRB and its consultants will address comments provided at the meeting on the draft Pilot Study work plan and will distribute the revised draft to the Instream Flow Advisory Group within three weeks. Instructions on when and how to provide comments on the revised draft will be distributed along with the document. In the meantime, any member wanting to provide comments on the initial draft is welcome to send those to John Rehring (JRehring@Carollo.com). Some Advisory Group members expressed interest in meeting periodically to share viewpoints and discuss instream flow issues. At this time, no Instream Flow Advisory Group meetings are scheduled, but members indicated that they would like to meet again prior to getting a pilot underway. OWRB will investigate logistics and timing for the pilot study.

Public Comment

An attendee questioned if/how instream flow and model results would be affected by climate data and projections of climate change. He cautioned that flows based on current data could ultimately not provide sufficient flow under changing climatic conditions.