

School board hears safety exercise report at June 9 meeting

By Trisha Walker
Columbia Gorge News

HOOD RIVER — Catherine Dalbey, director of human resources, and Deputy George Economou, Hood River County Sheriff school resource deputy, presented the results of a multi-agency tabletop safety drill conducted May 27 in the Hood River Valley High School gym.

Tabletop drills are discussion-based sessions where team members meet in an informal classroom setting to discuss their roles and responses in an emergency. Economou worked with the Department of Homeland Security to find an exercise that could be used by the district and its community partners to practice responding to a safety threat or other type of emergency at a school. Afterwards, participants went over the exercise to assess overall strengths and weaknesses, and to discuss major takeaways.

"We're lucky the Oregon Department of Education and ESDs statewide came to assist," said Dalbey. "It was great to have their expertise, and it was designed to be our chance to talk through what we would do, and a safe space to make mistakes and ask those hard questions, and then try to figure out with our team what our next steps were going to be."

Multiple agencies were invited to participate — including private schools

in Hood River County and emergency services in Wasco County — because any emergency incident is a community response, said Economou. "We did use an active shooter incident as the driving exercise, but it could have been an earthquake or hazardous materials spill, and all of these people would have come to the table," he said. "It was a great opportunity to see faces and dust off the cobwebs, and work that collaborate muscle."

Dalbey said the long-term plan is for agencies to meet in the fall before school starts — including this fall — to maintain and foster relationships, continuously improve response systems and make sure that plans coordinate well.

Economou said the tabletop drills are a way to "crawl, walk, run."

"It wouldn't make sense to try to do (a live emergency drill) if we couldn't give people the opportunity to review (responses)," he said. "... We wanted to make sure people left positive and felt more confidence. It was a good confidence-building event."

Board Member Dr. David Russo asked if the district practices internal and external mass communication strategies. "How would we be communicating with our families, the media and the public?" he asked.

Dalbey said that each organization has identified a public information officer,

who would then work together at an information center.

"At the tabletop drill, all of our public information officers were able to collaborate and talk about who's doing the communication, what's going out, and how can we partner with the county emergency management and the emergency operation center to quickly set up a phone bank should we need to accept a large volume of calls into the district," she said, adding that they discussed automated calling and texting to push out a general message to families right away.

Board Member Chrissy Reitz and Vice Chair Julia Garcia-Ramirez pointed out that almost any emergency in the county was going to affect district families and staff, recalling the 2017 Eagle Creek fire that threatened homes in Cascade Locks.

"I think it's great that even if we're not at the center of the incident, we can still have those relationships so that we can say ... how can we mitigate any sort of aftereffects for our population or even, what can we do to help you," said Reitz.

Dalbey shared that the district is looking into the feasibility of putting solar and emergency power at Wy'east Middle School that would serve as a response hub for emergency services.

"From a resources standpoint, we have buses and are able to transport people



Multiple agencies in Hood River and Wasco counties participated in a tabletop safety drill, held at Hood River Valley High School, in late May. Stephanie Hoppe photo

Participating agencies

to and from an emergency," she said. "... We have food in our kitchens. We have a lot of resources to be able to assist if something happens."

Board Chair Rich Truax said he was grateful that so many organizations came to participate in the drill.

"It's obviously a big effort and a big commitment from a lot of different groups, and even ESDs across the state," he said. "It's a benefit to the community."

Participating with Hood River County School District and Hood River County Sheriff's Office were Hood River Police Department, Oregon State Police, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Hood River Fire and EMS, West Side Fire District, Wy'East Fire District, Parkdale Fire and Rescue, Cascade Locks Fire and EMS, Hood River 911 Operations, Columbia Gorge ESD, Providence Hood

River Memorial Hospital, Mid-Columbia Medical Center, City of Hood River Public Works, Hood River County Public Works, Hood River County Emergency Management, Columbia Gorge Community College, Wildwood Academy, Horizon Christian School, North Wasco County School District, Wasco County Sheriff's Office, City of The Dalles Police Department, Wasco County Emergency Management and Mid-Columbia Fire and Rescue.

Grants awarded for Fifteen Mile Creek project

Underground water storage would help cool summer stream flows

By Mark Gibson
Columbia Gorge News

A pilot project could prove key to the future health of Wasco County's Fifteenmile Creek, which originates in Mt. Hood National Forest above Dufur and joins the Columbia River just east of The Dalles. The project will test an underground water storage system designed to increase water flow and decrease water temperature in the creek, benefiting fish and area farmers alike.

The Fifteenmile Watershed Council has secured two grants from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) and a third through Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) to move forward on a pilot project to provide more water in Fifteenmile Creek in summer by storing some of the creek's winter and spring flow underground.

"Fifteenmile Creek often exceeds lethal temperatures to aquatic species, harming steelhead and other fish as well as threatening the water source for irrigators and their businesses, when flows are low," said Abbie Forrest of the Fifteenmile Watershed Council. "This project will benefit both farmers and fish in our basin and we are glad that OWEB and OWRD understood the need for this project."

The project will be located approximately six miles upstream from Dufur, which is south of The Dalles in Wasco County.

Surface flows in Fifteenmile Creek are over-allocated in summer months. Over-allocation is a term to

describe the water available instream versus the irrigation water demand for surface water diversion. Fifteenmile Creek is over-allocated, meaning there (typically) would not be enough water left instream if all water right holders were to use their legal water right the full length of the summer/irrigation season.

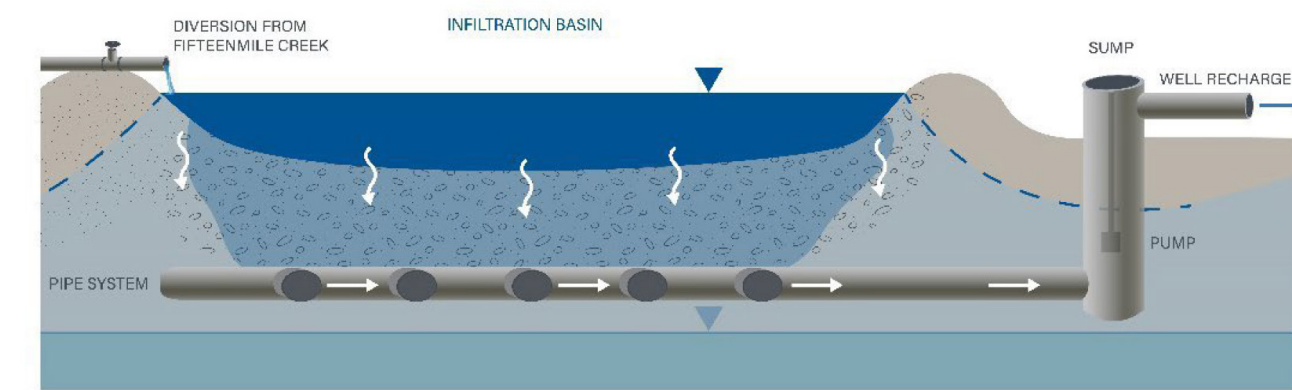
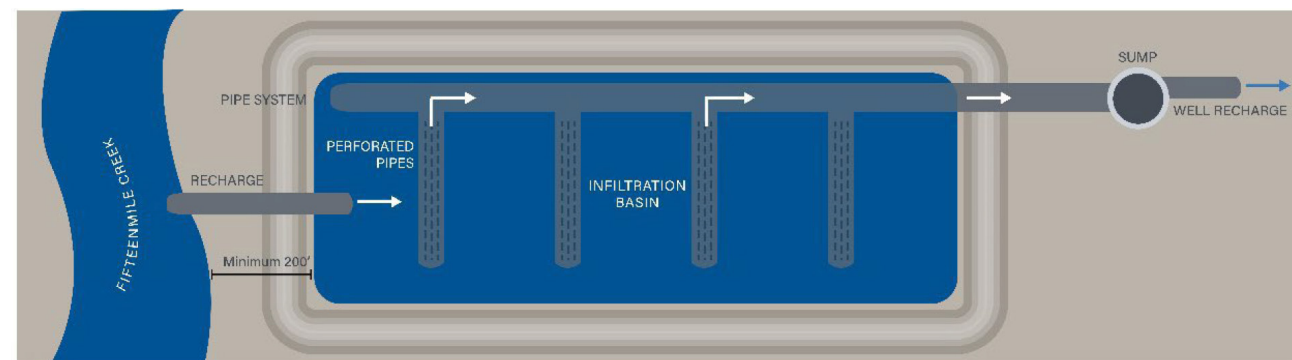
Watermaster Bob Wood "regulates back" (or reduces use for more junior water right holders) users based on water right priority dates to meet minimum flow needs. This is called the right of prior appropriation. During high spring flows, ample water is typically available to meet water rights and user demands. When streamflows decrease throughout the summer, there is less water instream than the certificated water rights.

With low water levels come hotter stream temperatures, which harms or kills salmon and trout that are spawning, rearing or migrating in the creek — including mid-Columbia steelhead, listed as threatened by the federal Endangered Species Act. Stream temperatures in lower reaches frequently exceed 65 degrees during late summer months, and have exceeded lethal thresholds in certain reaches, according to the grant application.

The Fifteenmile Creek Watershed Council is partnering with the Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District, which completed two studies that both determined it is feasible to divert cool water from Fifteenmile Creek during winter and spring when flows are higher, store it underground and return it in summer when flows are low.

The new funding allows the council and partners to:

- Construct a small-scale



An infiltration basin is shown in cross section. Creek water is diverted into the basin from the left and pumped through an underground pipe system into a deep basalt well to the right. The water is stored in the well until summer, when it is pumped back into the creek, thereby increasing summer flow and dropping creek temperatures. Contributed graphic

Stream temperatures in lower reaches frequently exceed 65°F during late summer months, and have exceeded lethal thresholds in certain reaches.

pilot project to test the underground water storage idea;

- Identify an owner and operator for the project long term, including potentially a special district;
- Identify funding for the project's long-term operations and maintenance;
- Create initial designs for the diversion;
- Design a treatment system to ensure diverted water meets water quality standards.

Other fish species that will benefit from the project include Pacific lamprey, cutthroat trout and more.

Additional project partners include Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon Water Resources Department and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

"The council has been seeking solutions to summer temperatures and low flows for over a decade," said Shilah Olson, district manager of Wasco SWCD. "They are a model for collaborative conservation and there have been a lot of thoughtful conversations leading up to this point. The district looks forward to helping the council implement these grants and move the project from

concept to reality." Wasco SWCD is providing match funding to support the project through their local tax base.

and partners that are focused on managing irrigation needs with fish needs.

About the Wasco SWCD

Wasco County SWCD was formed by a consolidation of three districts on June 10, 1973 (originally created in 1942). Conservation Districts are local units of government consisting of a seven-member, locally-elected board of directors. Through partnerships with organizations and public agencies, the district promotes a locally led, cooperative approach to natural resource conservation.

About the Fifteenmile Watershed Council

Fifteenmile Creek Watershed is a 373 square mile (238,720 acre) drainage area mostly in northern Wasco County. The City of Dufur, in the center of the watershed, encompasses 730 acres. The Fifteenmile Watershed Council was formed on March 19, 1997. The council is made up of many landowners, agencies

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Dr. Cullen's Student of the week

Damian Barajas, Student of the week

I am nominating Damian Barajas for student of the week. He has wonderful attendance, has great participation during all Zoom classes, puts forth 100% effort and loves to learn.

Congratulations

Damian Barajas, TDHS

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