Preliminary Summary – Salem Council Support Listening Session, December 4, 2012

OWEB is holding Council Support Listening Sessions around the state to gather stakeholder feedback about proposed changes to council support grants. OWEB's Board will consider stakeholder feedback before making decisions in 2014. No decisions have been made at this point. A report of all sessions will be shared with stakeholders in January 2013. The report will include all notes, including Survey Monkey comments and small group discussion notes. Councils at the Pacific City session asked OWEB to share information after each session is complete. The final report will be more detailed.

Tom Byler, OWEB Executive Director, opened the meeting by voicing his appreciation for the thoughts and participation of everyone who is engaging in the council support review process. With long-term funding under Measure 76, OWEB has a responsibility to look at all our programs. This is an opportunity to improve the council support program. There is a specific statutory relationship between councils and OWEB. We need to continue and strengthen this relationship with a strong plan for the future. We are thinking long-term and statewide. We don't have all the answers and this is not a done deal. We want to hear from you, your thoughts are important.

Alan Henning, OWEB Board member, thanked everyone for their hard work and their participation in the listening sessions. OWEB wants to continue the success of the partnership between OWEB and councils, there is nothing else like this in the country. Nothing has been decided, but we cannot stay where we are, there needs to be some change made to address the long standing policy issues surrounding council support.

OWEB's power point presentation covered: 1) Why OWEB is proposing changes, 2) A future vision for council capacity, 3) What are the proposed changes and how they support the future vision. Participants then moved into three discussion groups. Each discussion group reported back to the full group. Notes were taken on flip charts and computer.

Key themes from group discussions (the final report will be more detailed)

Green Group
- Coverage of the whole state by watershed councils is good goal but not a necessity when there is another organization doing watershed restoration work for a watershed.
- OWEB should provide transition resources, such as funding, with benchmarks to help councils meet the eligibility criteria and the merit criteria. Stability is a good goal for the number of council support grants (e.g. capacity areas or watershed councils), but resources and partnerships change over time, OWEB should provide for periodic check-ins related to the number of council support grants it provides.
- Besides the proposed capacity areas, the rest of the eligibility criteria make sense.
- Idea: Have 6 regions each draw their own boundary maps.

Yellow Group
- There is a need for some kind of phased implementation towards a new scale that encourages councils to partner organically.

- OWEB should consider a range of criteria in setting the scale for council support grants, such as stream miles, population, and ecological needs.
- Some councils can't currently apply for council support funds and should have the opportunity to apply for funding.

Blue Group
- OWEB should consider other options when defining scale such as 1) Watershed complexity (population, stream miles, other), 2) Watershed council performance levels, 3) Community clusters, 4) Encouraging high performing councils to combine with smaller nearby councils, and 5) Let councils in each OWEB region decide the boundaries and number of councils for each region and cap total eligibility at 60 council support grants.
- Idea to increase capacity: Regional sharing of staff/functions, e.g., administration, grant writing. Consider fee for service collaboration.
- Idea to increase capacity: OWEB project grants could fill more of the capacity need of councils, e.g. project grants could pay for more project development work, allowing council support grants to cover base needs of operations.

Alan Henning thanked the group for their energy and highlighted two key points he heard. 1) Any transition to new capacity areas needs to be done carefully and 2) Councils will face operational challenges if forced to collaborate instead of allowing natural collaborations to form.   Tom Byler also thanked the group for their thoughtful participation and noted that he heard concern voiced for forced collaborations. Tom stated that due to the collective success of OWEB's partners, the budget pie is never going to be big enough; there is more demand for funding than OWEB can meet. The challenge is to find ways to keep the success going. There may not be one right answer, but we will consider all of your input and ideas before any decisions are made.