LRC Water Use Conflict – STAKEHOLDER BI-WEEKLY MEETING MINUTES

Date: February 17, 2026 8:00 AM

Location: Microsoft Teams

Attendees:
Brent Beste (DNR)
Jason Moeckel (DNR)
Glen Champion (DNR)
Gary Johnson (University of Idaho)
Hans Holmberg (Limnotech)
Uma Vempati (KH)
Anna Bregier (Prairie Farms)
Jocelyn Schlichting (Schlichting Farms)
Wally Parkins (Royal Farms)
Randy Klaphake (Baker Lake Nursery)

1. Modeling Discussions

- Instream Flow and Habitat Analysis:
  - Quantifying the impact of flow changes on fish habitats in Little Rock Creek - The method involves simulating how flow data affects habitats in representative sections of the creek, extrapolating those findings to the entire system.
  - The goal is to prevent a habitat loss of more than 20% for any habitat type used by the various fish species in the creek.
  - Fish and their habitats are used as the primary indicator for ecosystem impacts because this method is well-developed and quantifiable, although it doesn't cover all ecological aspects like aquatic insects or water quality.
  - The modeling team expresses confidence in their methodology, noting that the work is led by competent individuals involved at a national level with the Instream Flow Council, ensuring the use of proper and "top-notch" techniques.
  - It's acknowledged that the creek is a naturally sandy system, and factors like upper watershed runoff and erosion are part of the equation. Enhanced storage of spring runoff is mentioned as a potential outcome that could help mitigate some erosive forces.

2. Project Goals

- Concern was raised about the lack of clear, written goals for the project, leading to fears of no accountability in the long term. A parallel was drawn to trout stocking efforts where significant investment has not yielded desired results like self-sustaining populations.
- A suggestion was made to formally document the project's vision and goals to provide a benchmark for measuring success five to ten years from now. This would help irrigators understand the expected changes and see tangible outcomes.

3. Trout Stream Management

- A clarification was provided on trout management:
  - Fishery surveys indicate that stocked trout are surviving, growing, and showing some natural reproduction in the stream.
  - The stocking program is funded by optional trout stamp purchases, not general tax dollars.
- The project's primary goal is not to improve trout fishing but to ensure groundwater use complies with state statutes and is supported by defendable science. The habitat analysis is based on the entire fish community, not just trout.

4. **Water Quality**
   - DNR's role is to administer existing statutes, not to advocate for changing them, even if they are difficult to implement. DNR provides information and expertise when the legislature considers bills related to these statutes.
   - It was stated that while water quality is important to the public, DNR's specific authority and statutory responsibility for this project are tied to groundwater quantity and use, not quality.
   - While the physical habitat simulation model does not directly incorporate water quality, there's an acknowledgment that water quality does affect fish.
   - Any potential water quality benefits resulting from mitigation options (e.g., fallowing land) would be considered in the overall evaluation, as they could impact the viability and funding of those options.

5. **Collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA)**
   - The DNR reached out to the MDA to leverage their resources and expertise on crop rotations and their environmental impacts.
   - The MDA has modeling tools, primarily used for Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMAs), that can analyze how different crop rotations affect nitrate levels.
   - The intent is not to integrate the MDA's models directly with the DNR's groundwater model. Instead, the MDA's analysis would serve as a supplemental, "add-on" evaluation.
   - This analysis could provide generalized estimates of changes in nitrate loading from different agricultural practices (e.g., replacing corn with a cover crop). This information would be included in the cost-benefit analysis of various mitigation options.

6. **Project Timeline and Stakeholder Meeting Schedule**
   - A consensus was reached that the upcoming meeting on 2026-02-05 was not feasible due to a lack of progress and the need for more time for model review and discussion.
   - A tentative meeting date of March 12, 2026, was discussed and will be held on calendars. The first two weeks of March are considered the last reasonable time for a meeting before the busy planting season begins.
   - A request was made for the DNR to develop a new one-year timeline for the project, including checkpoints, milestones, and expected results. This timeline should be presented at a future check-in.
   - A decision on whether the March 12, 2026 meeting is viable will be made by the February 17, 2026 check-in to provide stakeholders with at least two weeks' notice and avoid last-minute cancellations.
   - Stakeholders emphasized the need for reasonable time to review materials before meetings and requested that major announcements or meetings be avoided during their busy season (mid-March to mid-July).

7. **Action Items / Next Steps**
   - DNR will cancel the stakeholder meeting scheduled for Thursday, February 5, 2026.
   - DNR will send a notice to stakeholders about the cancellation of the February 5, 2026 meeting.
   - DNR will develop a new one-year project timeline with checkpoints, milestones, and expected results, to be presented at a future stakeholder check-in.
   - DNR to make a final decision by the February 17, 2026 check-in on whether the March 12, 2026 stakeholder meeting is viable, to provide adequate notice.
   - KHTT and DNR will provide stakeholders with simple, easy-to-read charts in the final model report to help them understand the data and ask better questions.

8. **Next Bi-weekly Stakeholder Virtual Meeting**
   - March 5, 2026

9. **Potential Next Workshop Meetings**
   - March 12, 2026