



WATER RESOURCES STRATEGY 2015-2016

THE PROBLEM

Successful land conservation in OLT's service area depends upon effective water resource protection. Land and water are inextricably connected, and protecting one necessitates protecting the other. Effective protection of working farm and rangelands means ensuring a reliable water supply needed to irrigate crops and support livestock will remain in perpetuity. In addition, effectively protecting habitat means ensuring adequate water resources exist to support functional habitat over the long term.

OLT faces a few key issues related to water conservation in our region:

1. **Increasing water scarcity** – Demand for water in North Central Washington is increasing, with competition among orchardists, ranchers, farmers, residential uses, and instream flows for riparian habitat. Climate change predictions suggest that decreasing snowpack and increasing droughts will mean less and less water is available for these competing uses over time.
2. **Increasing competition for water rights** – Many experts believe that water rights in Washington State are over-allocated. With increasing scarcity, competition for water rights will increase over time.
3. **Lack of local knowledge about water rights** – A majority of landowners in OLT's service area do not understand their water rights. The system is extremely complex, but this lack of knowledge is leading to valuable water rights being abandoned and transferred away from areas with high conservation value.
4. **Land and water conservation efforts not well integrated** – Land conservation projects in our region often occur separately from water conservation projects, and vice versa.

STRATEGIES

To address the problem outlined above, OLT will pursue the following strategies:

Strategy 1: Increase OLT's understanding of water resource problems and conservation opportunities

- Meet with relevant experts and review relevant literature.
- Document innovative approaches to effectively integrating land and water conservation elsewhere in the country, such as water banks elsewhere in Washington and Colorado's flexible water sharing agreements.

Strategy 2: Build and strengthen partnerships with organizations/individuals who have specialized knowledge of water rights.

- Attend Similkameen – Okanogan Watershed Action Team (SOWAT) meetings regularly.
- Strengthen partnership with Trout Unlimited & Washington Water Trust.
- Strengthen partnership with Colville Tribe biologists.

Strategy 3: Determine and document water rights situation with all existing conservation easements.

- Review existing conservation easements with attention to these key questions:
 - What does the CE say about water rights?
 - What water rights currently exist on these properties?
 - How is water use measured?

Strategy 4: Develop process to incorporate water rights use, review, and inspection into annual monitoring protocols.

- Review other land trust processes for monitoring water rights.
- Develop water rights stewardship checklist.
- Monitor to ensure current water use does not decline on existing CEs.

Strategy 5: Develop landowner understanding of water rights issues and conservation opportunities.

- Include new Washington Water Trust publication as part of landowner packet.
- Host outreach/educational events with Trout Unlimited and Washington Water Trust.
- Where politically appropriate and with sensitivity to this topic, discuss water rights with landowners as part of ongoing landowner communication.

Strategy 6: Identify most important areas for water conservation in OLT's service area.

- Assess water resources as part of 2015 conservation planning effort.
- Determine where significant water rights exist in OLT's service area.

Strategy 7: Conduct due diligence with respect to water rights as part of new CE transactions.

- Develop due diligence process for water rights as part of new transactions.
- Revise CE template to accomplish one or more of the following depending on the particular conservation values of the property:
 1. Prohibit a change of the water right
 2. Provide for a possible change of water right in CE
 3. Require a change of water right

Strategy 8: Pursue joint land and water conservation projects where appropriate.

- Partner with water experts with local expertise on joint projects (Trout Unlimited or WWT depending on landowner).

Strategy 9: Frame messaging about water rights appropriately for the community.

- Develop key messages and talking points for OLT related to water rights.