Public Comments on the Water Plan

Governor's Water Conference and
OWRRI Water Research Symposium
October 24, 2007

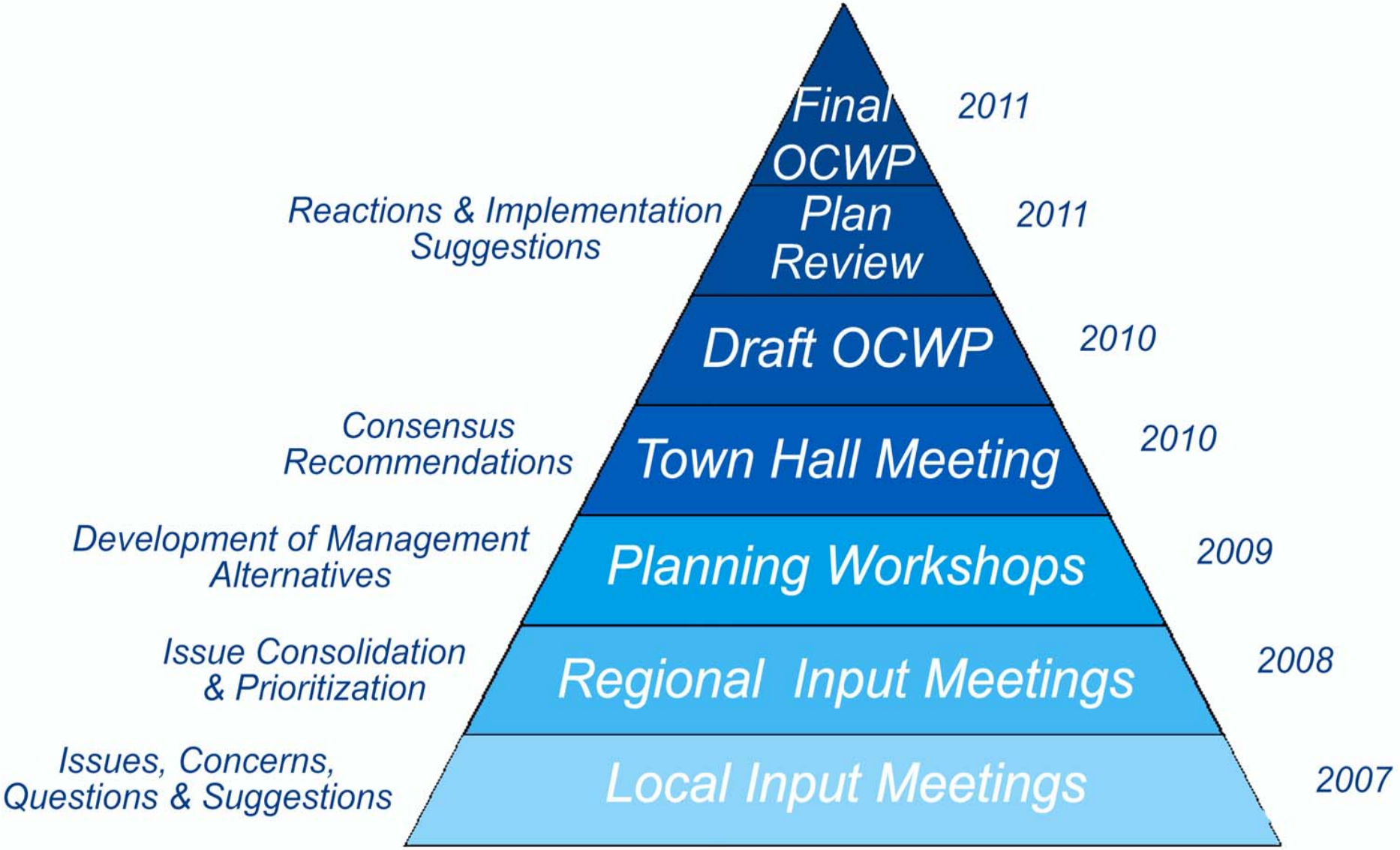
Public Participation Process

- Why involve the public?
  - To provide information about water resources and their management in Oklahoma
  - To identify the issues, concerns, questions, and suggestions that are important to the people of Oklahoma
  - To engage citizens in deliberations about the contents of the water plan
  - To increase public support of water plan provisions

Importance of Process

- A good process leads to a better plan <u>and</u> more support for its implementation
- The OCWP process is designed to be *FIT*
  - **Fair** = unbiased, representative of all interests, accessible information
  - **Inclusive** = open to all who want to participate – via meetings, website, email, postal mail, telephone, fax, or personal visits
  - **Transparent** = meeting dates, places, and agenda are public; proceedings are open to the public; reports are readily available

Public Participation Process



Local Input Meetings

- Meeting Statistics
  - 35 of 42 meetings conducted (April-November)
  - 1820 persons attended (52 per meeting on average)
    - 38 State legislators
    - ~ 160 State agency officials
    - ~ 120 Local officials (commissioners, mayors, managers, planners, engineers, utility reps)
  - 1850 comments received (53 per meeting)
    - 1700 comments received at the meetings (oral and written)
    - 150 comments received after the meetings (website, email, postal mail, telephone, fax)
- Reports
  - 42 LIM reports
  - Newsletter updates, conferences, visits

Local Input Meeting Locations

Regional Input Meetings

- 11 meetings (COG regions) in 2nd half of 2008
- Purposes
  - Ensure that full range of issues have been identified
  - Consolidate issues into issue categories
  - Prioritize issues for planning workshops
- Participants
  - Discussants nominated by the public
  - Selection based on knowledge of water issues, willingness to engage in respectful and reflective deliberation, and commitment to full process
  - Facilitated proceedings are open
- Reports
  - Statewide and 11 regional LIM reports
  - Preliminary issue categorization scheme
  - Statewide and 11 RIM reports
  - Twelve issue-theme reports

Participation Website

- http://okwaterplan.info
- Statistics
  - More than 7,000 hits (avg = 35/day)
  - Average visit = 6 minutes, 3 pages
  - 125 comments received
  - 730 subscribers to email list
- Features
  - Check meeting dates and locations
  - View meeting reports
  - Search comments
  - Offer a comment or ask a question
  - Nominate future participants
  - Join e-mail list

Water Quality

Economic Development

Water Conservation

Water Quantity

Comment Summary

Cultural Issues

Property Rights

Water Transfers

Frequent Comments (p.1)

- New EPA DW standards increase cost of WQ testing
  - Small systems want additional State or Federal funding
- Economic impact of water recreation and tourism should be assessed and better appreciated
  - Decreased lake levels cause nearby communities to suffer; thus, State should set minimum lake levels and stream flows
- Water conservation measures should be instituted
  - Provide incentives to decrease water usage
  - Meter all water wells (with State verification)
  - Control salt & red cedars, especially in west & central Oklahoma
- Conjunctive use of water should be considered in planning
  - State should recognize interaction of surface and ground water

Frequent Comments (p.2)

- Water rights, as a property right, should be protected
  - Right to drill water wells and use groundwater is essential to many landowners, especially farmers, ranchers, and municipalities
  - Surface water “use or lose” provision should be evaluated
- Environmental flows
  - State should recognize ecological uses of water and define minimum in-stream flows
- No government unfunded mandates
  - Especially to rural water districts and small communities
- Infrastructure needs more state and federal funding
  - For installation, repair, and maintenance of water supply infrastructure
- Aging reservoirs & flood control dams need maintenance
  - Many are reaching their design life spans
- Industrial users should use low quality water
  - e.g., oil and gas, commercial animal operations, and quarries

Frequent Comments (p.3)

- Regionalization of water systems should be examined
  - To accommodate urban expansion and to save money on water treatment, distribution, and management
- Water quality should be addressed in the plan
  - Concerns about GW and SW; threats from toxics and nutrients
- Water use prioritization
  - Drinking water should be highest priority; no consensus after that
- Water sales to Texas
  - Most commenters are opposed
  - Those who favor water sales want compensation returned to the source region
- Planning process
  - Courts could rule on water sales before the plan is revised
  - Plan should look further into the future (e.g., 100 – 200 years) so the state doesn't have "excess water" that could be sold
  - Plan should include regional provisions, where appropriate

Regional Differences

- West
  - Droughts (more impoundments; water transfers from the east)
  - Panhandle is ignored by the State, except at tax time
- West and Central
  - Groundwater contamination
- Central and East
  - Tribal issues more salient as one moves east
  - State and tribes should reach agreement on water rights
- Urban – Rural
  - OKC and Tulsa will control water in the State – leaving rural areas (the source of the State's water supply) without adequate water to grow
  - Rural areas should be compensated if water is transferred to metropolitan areas

Not much so far on…

- Wetland protection
- Weather modification
- Water availability for firefighting
  - Other than rural water districts need bigger lines
- Consolidation of water regulatory agencies
- Navigation
- Culturally sensitive waters
- Public participation after plan is revised
- Conflict management strategies

Partners

- Thanks to our partners:
  - Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
  - Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils of Government
  - Oklahoma Municipal League
  - Oklahoma Rural Water Association
  - The many public and private organizations who help us advertise meetings and encourage participation

Water Research Institute

Communication Portal for the Oklahoma Comprehensive Water Plan

OCWP

For more information, visit:

http://okwaterplan.info

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