



Milton-Freewater Oregon Solutions Levee Project

Oregon Solution Process: The Milton-Freewater project, as described below, has been designated as an Oregon Solutions (O/S) process by Governor Kulongoski. He has appointed State Senator David Nelson as convener of a Project Team. The O/S approach brings this Team together and encourages potential partners to work in a neutral and collaborative way to address issues and opportunities. The process emphasizes sustainable community objectives and outcomes.

Description of Project Issues: The Walla Walla River runs adjacent to the City of Milton-Freewater. In the 1940's the U.S Corps of Engineers (USACE) constructed levees along the river to protect property from flooding. Through the years USACE has made emergency repairs to the levee system following flood events, however regular maintenance of the levee has been the responsibility of the Milton-Freewater Water Control District (WCD) since 1964. The District collects approx. \$24,000 in tax revenue annually which is inadequate to maintain the levees and related structures. In 2002, the Walla Walla District of USACE informed the M/F WCD that several areas of the river had deficient flood control structures and needed to be fixed. The WCD unsuccessfully held three elections to seek funding to make the needed repairs. The cost to repair levee deficiencies is estimated to be approximately \$1 million.

In 2006, USACE gave a project condition rating of "unacceptable" for the Milton-Freewater levee structures and FEMA was notified of this action. FEMA is currently embarked on a nationwide flood plain mapping program, which includes Umatilla County. A draft map shows a sizable portion of Milton-Freewater to be in a flood plain. [Engineering analysis for the flood plain map is done as if there is no levee along the Walla Walla, since those structures have been found "unacceptable" by the Corps.]

Approximately 4,000 - 5,000 structures would be affected by the draft FEMA flood plain map. The city currently has no flood management ordinances in place and property owners will soon be facing the prospect of purchasing flood insurance. It is estimated that insurance for a moderate home with a basement will cost about \$2,400 annually, as opposed to the current annual cost of approximately \$600. In addition, construction costs will be higher in the flood zone to comply with new city flood zone regulations. The city is currently working on an appeal of the FEMA flood plain designation.

An added issue is watershed enhancement. USACE has restrictions on vegetation along flood control levees. Even if the levees were repaired, it is likely that the levees will not be deemed "acceptable" until trees and other woody debris obstructions are removed from the dike areas. Removal of vegetation along the levees would be contrary to adopted policies of several entities. Improving water quality in the Walla Walla Basin is the focus of many environmental interests including several state agencies, federal agencies, the Walla Walla Watershed Council, and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

The collaborative approach as provided by Oregon Solutions is seen as valuable for this project. Such collaboration would primarily address three issue areas:

1. Identify the financial resources to fix the flood control structures, as well as to maintain them over an extended period of time.
2. Work with FEMA to adopt an accurate flood map for the Milton-Freewater area.
3. Enhance the Walla Walla Basin watershed by finding solutions to address the Corps of Engineers requirement for limited plantings in levee areas and environmental requirements of other agencies for enhanced water quality.