THE SNAKE RIVER RESOURCES REVIEW...

ONE RIVER, MANY VOICES

by Deb Kidd[1]

ABSTRACT

Through the Reclamation Act of 1902 the Reclamation Service, since renamed the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), was created to develop irrigation works for storage, delivery, and development of water. More recent legislation has placed additional requirements on Federal agencies, including Reclamation, to comply with specific environmental protection measures. Reclamation recognizes that salmon and other water-related resource needs require it to look at the way it will operate in the future. The SR^3 Leadership Team has been tasked with developing the necessary technology to help decision makers assess the effects of potential operation decisions and better understand the trade-offs to the Snake River resources. Because SR^3 is not a decision making process, its public outreach is not geared towards identifying and evaluating alternatives. Public involvement, in its traditional sense, is not a part of SR^3. Public participation in SR^3 is taking two basic forms; outreach to the interested public and participation by key stakeholders. The public outreach and stakeholder participation activities are uniquely designed to meet the needs of SR^3. The SR^3 Leadership Team adopted the Bleiker Systematic Development of Informed Consent (SDIC) methodology. SDIC is a methodology in which management tools are systematically applied to improve public agencies' implementation capabilities. During the first half of SR^3, the SDIC methodology has served SR^3 well. SR^3's experience thus far has shown that reapplying the SDIC methodology at major transition points in the life cycle of a project is important. It is incumbent upon us to be knowledgeable of the different methodologies available, to select an appropriate methodology, and apply it properly. Productive stakeholder involvement does not happen by accident.

Why Snake River Resources Review (SR^3)?

To understand the need for SR^3, one must look to the history of the Snake River and Reservoir system. The 1894 Carey Act granted large Federal land holdings to the arid Western states on the condition that these lands would be irrigated and

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settled. Through the Reclamation Act of 1902 the Reclamation Service, since renamed the Bureau of Reclamation, was created to develop irrigation works for storage, delivery, and development of water. Under the Reclamation Act, the Minidoka Project, located in southeast Idaho on the Snake River, was authorized in 1905. Shortly thereafter, the Boise Project in southwest Idaho was authorized. Additional projects followed on the Snake River and its major tributaries in Wyoming, Idaho, and Oregon, with the last major construction taking place in the early 1970s.

Congress enacted the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in 1969, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 and the Clean Water Act of 1977, all of which, among other legislation, require Federal agencies to comply with specific environmental protection measures. A major consideration in water management in the Pacific Northwest developed when the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) listed the Snake River sockeye salmon as endangered and the spring/summer chinook salmon as threatened in 1991 and 1994, respectively. The NMFS 1995 Biological Opinion on the operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System called on Reclamation to deliver 427,000 acre-feet of water for flow augmentation from the Snake River upstream of Lower Granite Dam to the Columbia River system. Flow augmentation is intended to improve migration conditions for salmon.

Reclamation recognizes that salmon and other water-related resource needs will require it to look at the way it operates in the future. Some issues potentially affecting Snake River operations include declining aquifer levels, state water rights, Clean Water Act standards, ESA listings, and conversion from irrigation to domestic water use.

In recent years, requests for water and system operation changes have out paced Reclamation's ability to adequately assess the potential effects. Reclamation realizes that it would be irresponsible to consider operation changes without better understanding of the effects—good and bad—changes in operations could have on Snake River resources. Understanding these potential effects, and in particular Reclamation's ability to meet contractual obligations, is needed prior to making any decisions on operational changes. The Snake River Resources Review was initiated in 1995 to develop technology to help solve this problem of understanding potential effects.

How Are We Helping to Solve the Problem?

The SR^3 Leadership Team has been tasked with developing the necessary technology to help decision makers assess the effects of potential operation

decisions and better understand the trade-offs to the Snake River resources. Using the best available technology, SR^3 is building a Snake River Decision Support System (SRDSS) which will be a toolbox in which analytical tools, databases and geographic information systems (GIS) are linked to provide reliable and timely information about the river/reservoir system and its resources. Currently, technical experts can access certain information, data and tools, but do not always have the technology to use the information, data and tools together. With the SRDSS, technical experts will be able to use the information, tools and data in conjunction with one another, or use each independently, as is currently being done. This interaction will occur through an Integrated Information Environment (IIE).

The theory of the SRDSS was tested on a small scale by developing a Proof of Concept (POC). The POC was successfully completed in early 1998, and feed back for the design of the final system was obtained from staff, managers, partners and stakeholders throughout the basin. Alternative approaches for the design of the SRDSS were developed and assessed. A design approach was selected and the SRDSS Staged Development Plan was composed. Sequentially, analytical tools and data bases will be integrated and users brought on line. The SRDSS is being developed using an incremental building approach so that it will be functional at the conclusion of each stage.

What Are the Options?

Many people have concerns with SR^3. Some people say that Reclamation should not be looking at the effects that operational changes might have on Snake River resources. They fear that looking at effects of potential changes will lead to making a change in operations. Others say operational changes are inevitable and we must develop better tools to evaluate effects.

Reclamation believes that we should be looking at the effects that operational changes might have. If we do not, we cannot properly evaluate these options when they arise, and some of the following may occur:

- Managers of the Snake River/Reservoir system—Reclamation, the States of Idaho, Wyoming, and Oregon, and others—may make separate, uncoordinated efforts which could result in duplication, confusion, and conflicts.

- Future Reclamation decisions on Snake River operations will be made without adequate information about the effects in terms of all the Snake

River resources and the entire Snake River/Reservoir system, and the trade-offs involved will not be clearly understood.

- Adequate information on the benefits of existing operations will not be available in the face of growing demands being placed on the Snake River system.

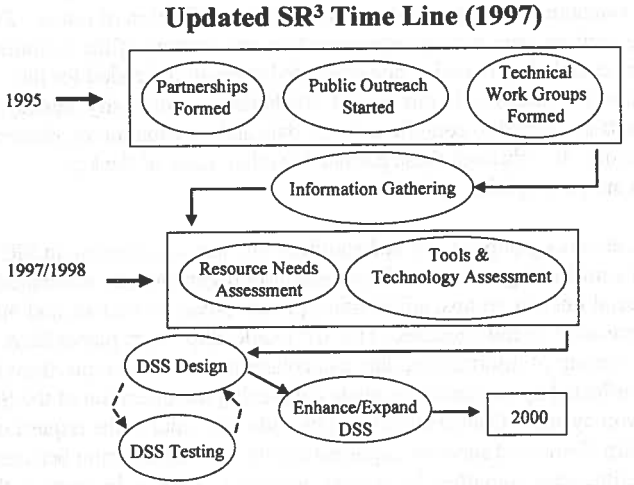
- Opportunities to benefit or enhance fish, wildlife, water quality, recreation, and other resources or uses, while still meeting contractual and other legal obligations, may be lost due to a lack of information.

Where Are We in the SR³ Process?

The Resource Needs Assessment (RNA) is an integral step in the SR³ process. The RNA presents a compilation of existing information on natural and other resources, and describes possible effects of the Snake River/Reservoir system river flow or elevation conditions on resources in quantifiable terms which can be used in the SRDSS. In March 1998, the RNA was issued in draft form. It will be finalized this winter.

In order to build an SRDSS which would be useful to Reclamation and its partners, the SR³ Leadership Team first needed to determine what tools and technology were available or desired for inclusion in the SRDSS. To this end, the SR³ Leadership Team conducted a Tools and Technology Assessment (TTA). The TTA, which was issued in draft in March of 1998, contains a comprehensive inventory of the analytical tools and models, databases, data, GIS, and decision support systems available in the basin and throughout Reclamation. It attempts to match resource needs, as detailed in the RNA, with the identified tools and technologies, and with the requirements of building a DSS, to produce a list of candidate tools and technologies that may be included in the SRDSS. The TTA will be finalized this winter.

Presently, we are in the iterative process of system design and testing. A number of IIE software platforms were evaluated for use in developing the SRDSS, and in April of 1998, *Facet* was chosen. In August, the Information Network Assessment was completed, providing an inventory and assessment of the relevant LAN/WAN/Internet interconnections among different offices of Reclamation, SR³ Partners, and other state and Federal agencies who may provide data for the SRDSS. A basic depiction of the SR³ process and time line is shown below:



How Does the Public Participate in SR³ ?

The creation of a DSS, which is the primary focus of SR³, is not an activity that requires the NEPA process, or any other regulated form of public involvement. Because SR³ is not a decision making process, its public outreach is not geared towards identifying and evaluating alternatives. Public involvement, in its traditional sense, is not a part of SR³.

Public participation in SR³ is taking two basic forms, outreach to the interested public and participation by key stakeholders. The public outreach and stakeholder participation activities are uniquely designed to meet the needs of SR³. The outreach program is designed for a broad population with an interest in a healthy Snake River. A Public Outreach Plan was developed and is continually evaluated and periodically updated to reflect new information and outreach needs, more effective communication activities, and/or SR³'s evolution toward completion. Within the specter of key stakeholder participation, SR³ has two main forms of participation; partners and contributors.

Reclamation recognized from the start that it could not successfully carry out SR³ alone because Reclamation is not the only entity involved in managing the Snake River and Reservoir system. This made it necessary to form partnerships with other interests in the basin. The SR³ partnering program is an effort to include entities that have management responsibilities, expertise, or special knowledge of the resources of the Snake River basin. Partnerships have been established with

entities such as state agencies, universities and tribes. The partners are particularly valuable sources of information in the identification of issues. Fully participating partners are typically represented on one or more of the Technical Work Groups established to gather and evaluate information needed for the development of the SRDSS. In this format, Reclamation, university, agency, and consultant staff are joined to compile existing data and information on resources and other factors. It is through these partnerships that many of the key stakeholders are participating in SR^3.

Contributors are also groups of key stakeholders who are participating in SR^3. Examples of contributing entities include water user organizations, watershed councils, special interest groups, universities, private power providers, and other tribes and state and Federal agencies. The SR^3 Leadership Team places high value on the sharing of information, data and concerns, and seeks input from those who may be affected by the decisions made concerning the operation of the Snake River/Reservoir system. Contributors often provide this input at the request of the SR^3 Leadership Team, and serve as important conduits of information between SR^3 and constituencies who often have legal, economic or social interests in the Snake River and its resources and/or uses.

What Are the Public Participation Goals for SR^3 ?

To be credible, it is necessary for SR^3 to communicate the needs for SR^3, and how the various SR^3 products are being developed to meet these needs. Thus, the public participation efforts are designed to meet the following goals and objectives:

- Identify public concerns and issues, so that the DSS created by SR^3 can address those areas of concern in the Snake River basin.
- Increase public awareness of the complexity of managing the Snake River by providing information about resources, river and reservoir system operation, and potential trade-offs in water operations.
- Facilitate people coming together in the future to solve the complex issues associated with the Snake River by creating an improved communications process between the interested public, key stakeholders, and decision makers.

What Is SR[3]'s Strategy for Meaningful Public Participation and Effective Outreach?

The SR[3] Leadership Team adopted the Bleiker SDIC methodology[2]. SDIC is a methodology in which management tools are systematically applied to improve public agencies' implementation capabilities. Often referred to as Citizen Participation by Objectives, the SDIC methodology contends that substantial effective agreement on a course of action (SEACA) is the minimum agreement required to make a project implementable in the public sector; an environment where some or all affected interests hold veto power.

Key to achieving SEACA is successfully communicating to the public that someone's quality of life will be reduced below what it is, or ought to be, unless a particular problem is solved or prevented. To communicate this, Bleiker suggests using the following key message points:

1. identify the problem (or potential missed opportunity) that has to be addressed. Often this is done by articulating the null alternative.

2. establish that you are the right entity to be addressing this problem/opportunity. Providing an audience-appropriate description of your responsibilities or raison d' etre communicates this point.

3. explain that the approach you are using in addressing the problem/opportunity is reasonable, sensible and responsible.

4. demonstrate that you are listening and you care.

Bleiker equates substantial effective agreement on a course of action to *informed consent*. In the SDIC methodology, informed consent is defined as "the grudging willingness of opponents to (grudgingly) go along with a course of action that they, actually, are opposed to."[3] The following depiction distinguishes Bleiker's definitions of "informed consent" and "consensus":

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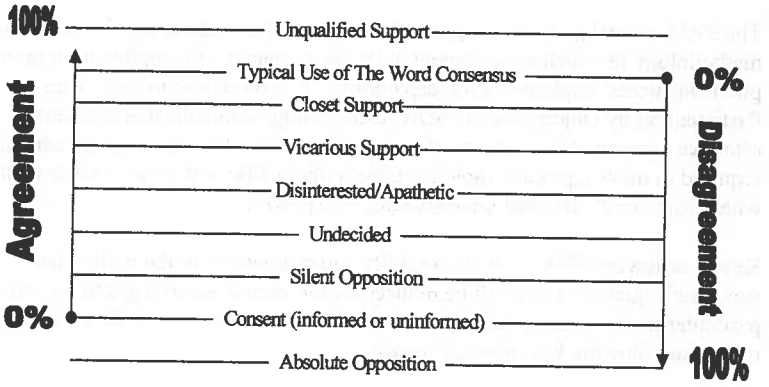
[2]Bleiker, Hans and Annemarie; Citizen Participation Handbook for Public Officials and Other Professional Serving the Public; IPMP, Monterey, CA 1995.

[3](Bleiker; *ibid*)

Agreement/Disagreement Scale



How Has SR³ Implemented Their Public Participation Strategy?

The SR³ Leadership Team analyzed the draft public outreach plan to determine if the outreach techniques proposed in the plan fulfilled the fifteen citizen participation objectives defined by Bleiker[4]. Interestingly, the draft plan, as written, was very much consistent with Bleiker's methodology for achieving informed consent. Clearly, the Leadership Team's intuitive direction was syncronistic with Bleiker's approach. Perhaps this explains the Leadership Team's choice of strategy for public participation!

In addition to ensuring that the outreach plan was aligned with the SDIC methodology, the SR³ Leadership Team made the SDIC training available to Reclamation, university, agency, and consultant staff who were involved in the SR³ process. This enabled many key participants to gain a common understanding of the purpose of public participation in SR³, and the approach which would be used.

In April 1997, SR³ sponsored a workshop. All people working on SR³ were invited, as well as partnership entities and key stakeholders who were contributors. At this workshop, participants went through the exercise of completing Bleiker's grid for identifying and relating Potentially Affected Interests (PAI's) and issues. This was a significant event in the public participation effort of SR³ . Workshop attendees formed small groups, each a mix of water users, environmental interests, tribes and agencies. Through this process,

[4] (Bleiker; *ibid)*

these small groups with their divergent perspectives and interests jointly acknowledged each other as entities with interests likely to be impacted by the SR^3 process, and identified the issues important to one another. Everyone began to realize the enormity, complexity and controversy involved in SR^3.

Armed with the input from key stakeholders on their perceptions of PAI's and issues, the Leadership Team as a whole went through an intensive exercise of analyzing their situation and applying the SDIC approach. The Leadership Team:

- identified who they would consider the PAI's throughout the SR^3 process;
- rigorously answered questions for each of the 15 SDIC citizen participation objectives;
- identified all of the SEACA needs for each objective;
- ranked the objectives by high, medium and low priorities;
- correlated the appropriate objectives to the citizen participation techniques;
- identified those techniques which would serve SR^3's purposes;
- selected those techniques which SR^3 would use; and
- added other outreach techniques as they deemed appropriate.

This endeavor was important in that it resulted in a unified view and common understanding among Leadership Team members of what needed to be accomplished in the arena of key stakeholder participation and the broader public outreach program, as well as the weak and strong parts of the over all SR^3 process.

What Is the Current Status of the SR^3 Public Participation Effort?

To date, SR^3 has implemented the following communication techniques:

- operating an SR^3 Speaker's Bureau to provide presentations about SR^3;
- conducting public forums and technical meetings throughout the basin to exchange information;
- disseminating an SR^3 contact list which provides interested publics a way

to contact a specific work group member or staff person regarding a particular SR³ issue;

- providing a toll-free phone number;
- establishing a homepage on the world wide web (www.pn.usbr.gov/sr3);
- producing an SR³ video, *One River, Many Voices;*
- producing displays for use at meetings and conferences;
- distributing printed materials via the SR³ mailing list of over 1600 people;
- periodically publishing bulletins called *River Currents*; and
- producing the SR³ Mid Term Report.

Where ever appropriate in these communication techniques, SR³ has incorporated Bleiker's four key message points. For example, the first *River Currents* and the script for the video *One River, Many Voices* both identify the problem/articulate the null alternative, establish Reclamation's authority to be addressing this subject, explain the approach SR³ will be using, and emphasize SR³'s commitment to "involving people with an interest in a healthy Snake River".

The public participation effort for the first half of the Review has focused on:

- determining what strategy to use in getting the message out (SDIC chosen) and implementing the strategy;
- identifying, designing and developing the tools necessary to deliver the message; and
- delivering the general message to, and getting feedback from the appropriate audiences.

All of these objectives have been successfully accomplished. And, the SDIC methodology has served SR³ well. Better communication is an intangible benefit which is difficult to quantify, and always leaves room for improvement.

However, it is possible to track progress towards this goal by noting the frequency and magnitude of interaction among people.

During the first half of SR^3, there have been substantive productive improvements in the communications between natural resource professionals and hydrology professionals both within Reclamation and across agencies and entities. Dialogue between Reclamation and the Tribes within the basin has become more frequent. Openly sharing information and frankly discussing tough issues with the water user community has become the norm in SR^3's program. Fielding inquiries from, and providing information to the general public is an ongoing routine. And, bringing all of these entities together has come to be expected within this basin, as evidenced by the reaction of disappointment to the cancellation of one SR^3 workshop in December of 1997.

What Are the Next Steps for the SR^3 Public Participation Effort?

Clearly, communication with all interests in the basin has opened up. Yet, there remains more work to be done if the communications network which facilitates people coming together to solve the complex issues associated with the Snake River basin is to continue beyond the lifespan of SR^3 itself. Achieving this long term change, which is the third goal of the SR^3 public participation program, will be a primary focus during the second half of SR^3's process.

The Leadership Team will reapply the SDIC analytical framework to guide the public participation and outreach activities in the last stages of SR^3. At this point, we expect that the public participation and outreach efforts will be designed to:

- keep people informed of progress;
- get input from appropriate sources as needed to continue the development of the best possible DSS and to maintain the most current data on natural and other resources;
- prepare for the transition from development to use of the SRDSS; and
- communicate the value to water management which results from the PN Region having conducted SR^3.

SR^3's experience thus far has shown that reapplying the SDIC methodology at major transition points in the life cycle of a project is important. In the case of SR^3, there was a shift in the issues around which informed consent needed to be developed.

Initially, issues around the need for SR^3, the legitimacy of the SR^3 process, and Reclamation's authority to conduct SR^3 were critical to address in order to

develop informed consent among the PAI's who were most likely to impede the implementation of SR^3. Presently, SR^3 is at the mid term of its life cycle. At this point, accuracy of data, methodology for gathering data, characterization of information, and other technical issues are critical. For SR^3 to continue on towards implementation, informed consent around these technical issues must be developed so that the SRDSS is credible as a tool to be used to support decision making about operating the Snake River/Reservoir system.

The Leadership Team expects that as the SR^3 process progresses from building the SRDSS to implementing it, there will be yet another shift. At that time, developing informed consent around the newly emerging issues will be critical to keeping SR^3 on track towards the successful achievement of it's purpose.

SR^3's experience thus far has shown that reapplying this particular methodology at major transition points in the life cycle of a project is important. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon those of us working in the public participation arena to be knowledgeable of the different methodologies available, to select an appropriate methodology, and apply it properly. Productive stakeholder involvement does not happen by accident.