



Communications Workplan (Draft)

Morrow and Umatilla Counties | Drinking Water
Investigation

Morrow and Umatilla Counties, OR

July 2024

This document was prepared with support from:
Conсор and GSI Water Solutions, Inc.

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Introduction

This workplan guides the external communication and public involvement efforts related to the Morrow and Umatilla Counties Drinking Water Investigation Project (referred to as the “Project”). It identifies key messaging themes, primary external communications and public involvement-related strategies, and other foundational resources including an organizational chart, Project area map, and stakeholder list. This workplan aligns with the Project’s overall scope of work, which has four Stages over 26 months. Although there is an overall allocation of resources to support the Project’s external communications and engagement work, detailed resource allocation is only defined for Stage 1 (April–October 2024). As a result, while some broad activities are mentioned, detailed plans beyond Stage 1 will depend on Project priorities directed by the Counties and Steering Committee and resource availability.

Document Revision Strategy

Per the scope, this workplan can be updated during the start of each stage of the project. Before the Project’s subsequent Stages begin, GSI Water Solutions, Inc. (GSI, prime consultant) will plan a meeting with the Steering Committee and consulting team to identify the communication/engagement goals for that Stage and align available resources. Anticipated timeframes for the Project’s Stages are:

Stage 1 – April–October 2024

Stage 2 – 3rd quarter 2024 to 2nd quarter of 2025

Stage 3 – 3rd quarter 2025 to 2nd quarter 2026

Stage 4 – 2nd quarter 2025 to 2nd quarter 2026

Project Purpose and Background

The problem with elevated nitrates in groundwater prompted the creation of the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area Committee (LUBGWMA). This Project is focused on the LUBGWMA-designated area of northern Morrow and Umatilla counties with the following overarching goals:

- Improve understanding of the extent of nitrate contamination in groundwater.*
- Engage and educate domestic well users and the community about nitrate in groundwater.
- Develop an action plan to implement connections to public water systems and other drinking water alternatives.

** The Steering Committee commented that this may not be a primary goal for this project, because it is primarily a LUBGWMA Committee goal.*

External Communications/Public Engagement Goals

The Project's external communications and public engagement goals are to:

- Educate local users about drinking water nitrate contamination and this Project's role in identifying clean drinking water sources.*
- Encourage well user participation in the Project's multiple sampling efforts.
- Inform well users of the considerations associated with connecting to Public Water Systems and other drinking water options.

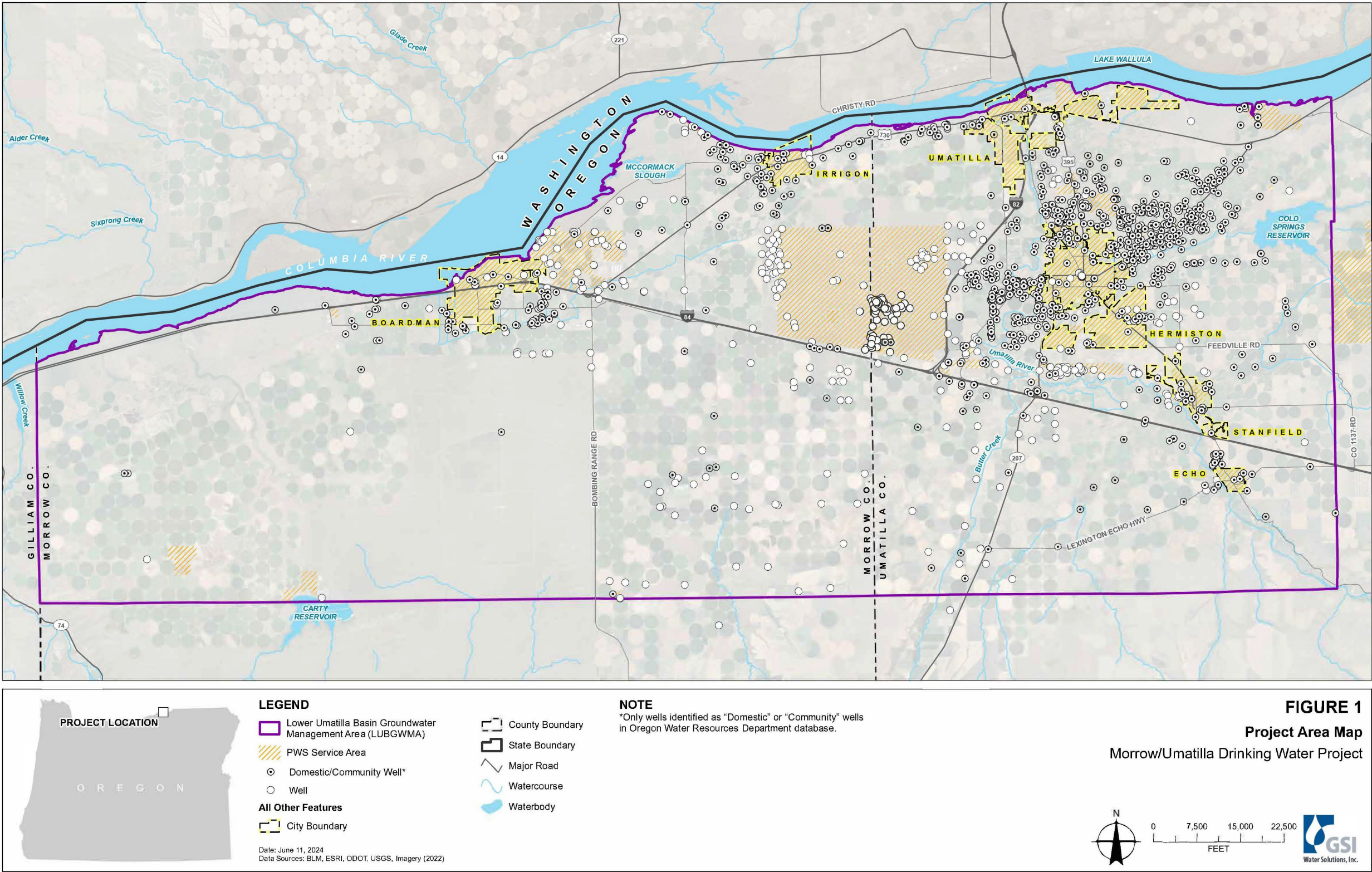
**See note above regarding project goals. .*

In addition to the Project-specific goals, the Steering Committee directed the communications team to work in a manner that is consistent with the following guidance:

- This Project should complement the other work being done in the area to address the nitrate contamination problem.
- The Project's communications should clearly address stakeholders' concerns, biases, and fears.
- Enable priority audiences and stakeholders to set realistic expectations for this Project.
- Reflect an appropriate degree of urgency while emphasizing solutions overlaid with realistic expectations due to available resources and other factors.

Project Area

Figure 1. Project Area Map



Project Communications Team Organizational Chart

Figure 2 shows the Project's communications team and its connection with the Prime Consultant (GSI) and Client (Morrow and Umatilla Counties).

Figure 2. Project Communications Team

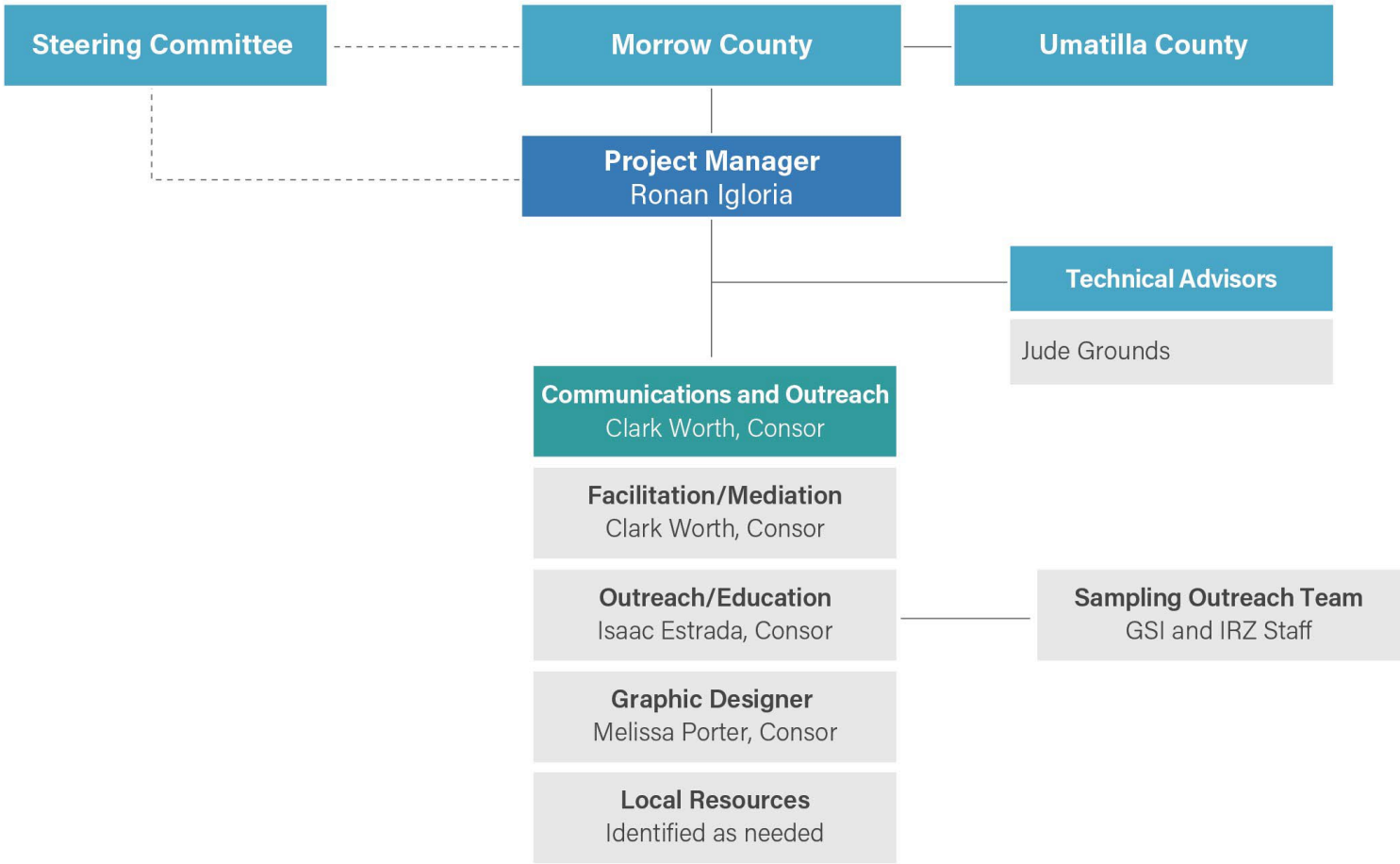


Table 1. Roles and Responsibilities

Entity	Roles/Responsibilities	Notes
Project Steering Committee	Provides overarching guidance and represents the client.	The Steering Committee can designate a member agency or individual to represent them for deliverable review/management.
GSI	Prime consultant and formal liaison to the Steering Committee/Client. Responsible for sub-consultant resource allocation and overall Project deliverable management.	None.
Conсор	Leads communication and engagement-related Project work. Provides on-site logistical support for public events and training; ensures Spanish language support for external events.	The team includes Project Manager and Communications Lead. Conсор's on-site work can be augmented by other stakeholders as directed by the Steering Committee or GSI.

Decision Making, Deliverable Review, and Deliverable Management Protocols

Decision Making—The Steering Committee provides Project guidance and task prioritization. Steering Committee decisions will be communicated through GSI to the consultant team.

Internal Deliverable Review—Each entity will adhere to its Quality Assurance/Quality Control Review processes. Formal deliverables will be sent to GSI and retained in accordance with GSI's Project Management Plan. Feedback on deliverables will flow through GSI, and the number of reviews is identified in the scope. During deliverable development, GSI can direct a sub-consultant to work directly with the Steering Committee Co-Chairs.

Deliverable Management—GSI shares formal deliverables with the Steering Committee Co-Chairs. Each consultant team will retain its deliverables following each firm's processes, but GSI will lead Project-wide deliverable management.

Key Project Messages Themes (for Stage 1)

Below are key Project messages to be shared with external stakeholders. These talking points may be updated in future communications workplan revisions and should be used selectively based on the situation.

- The Project is focused on identifying clean drinking water sources within the LUBGWMA boundaries for domestic well users impacted by high concentrations of nitrate in groundwater.
- The Project (Stage 1) outcome is a prioritization for data gap sampling and for recommended alternatives to provide drinking water to impacted domestic well users.
- Data gap sampling (Stage 1) will be used to confirm the impacts to domestic wells and help select and plan the appropriate drinking water option for high priority areas.
- The Project will present the implications of connecting to a public water system and other drinking water alternatives to help property owners/residents make informed decisions. This includes preliminary information on timing, cost, and owner responsibilities.
- Despite the differing objectives, the Project is being coordinated with other ongoing efforts in the LUBGWMA area. Together the projects are working towards clean water for the region.

Summary of Current External Communications and Engagement Efforts

To date (July 2024), this Project has not conducted any public-facing activities. Numerous efforts are underway within the LUBGWMA area, and the Steering Committee envisions this Project using some of these projects' communications-related materials and developing other customized resources. The specific pieces to reuse or replace will be decided in the near future (i.e., before fall 2024) and will be informed by a review of currently used external communications resources used by OHA, ORA, H2OEO, and other local organizations.

Project Website

Currently, information about this Project is on Morrow County's [website](#). At the May 2024 communications workshop, Morrow County agreed to continue hosting information in English and Spanish.

Identification of Primary Audiences and Stakeholders

At the May 2024 communications workshop, the Steering Committee identified the following:

Primary Project audience – Domestic well users within the LUBGWMA area.

Secondary Project audience(s) – General water users and other participating agencies.

[A list of Project stakeholders](#) is provided near the end of this workplan.

Public Events

In the scope for Stage 1 activities, the Project assumed two public “tabling” events during the summer of 2024 at local festivals, such as the Umatilla County Fair. However, at the May 2024 communications workshop, some participants questioned the value of doing this. The general sentiment was something other than tabling events was preferred, but there was not a consensus on another approach, nor was there a conversation about the resources needed to support other public activities. The following are three public event options for consideration:

1. Attending Summer 2024 Community Events

This option involves Project representatives attending two community events during the summer of 2024. Events such as these would expose the Project to the greatest number of people overall and can be accomplished with the available resources. The primary community events that align with the remaining Stage 1 schedule include:

- Irrigon Watermelon Festival. This one-day event is scheduled for July 27, 2024. This event likely attracts local residents in the Irrigon-Morrow County area. However, the available timing is likely too limited to effectively prepare for the event.
- Umatilla County Fair. This event is scheduled for August 7-10, 2024 in Hermiston, Oregon. The event attracts a broader geographic area than the Irrigon Watermelon Festival. There is sufficient time to coordinate and prepare for this event.

2. A Project Presence at Back-to-School Events

This option entails the Project capitalizing on back-to-school events in late summer/early fall of 2024. It's possible executing two such events could be completed with the available resources and could potentially reach dozens of people in the project area. However, these events would require coordination with the school districts, and their cooperation is not guaranteed. Schools are protective of their families and the negotiation process can be time-consuming and is not scoped. Another issue is choosing schools with the greatest potential for reaching the affected well users.

3. Independent Project-Focused Meetings

This option is organizing Project-specific informational events or meetings. These meetings could

be sponsored by multiple organizations and promoted via a multi-faceted (print, radio, accessing informal/formal networks, etc.) awareness effort. Alternatively, this meeting could be promoted to specific “influential” individuals with an invitation to participate. These individuals would be asked to share the information (“spread the word”) to their network or constituencies to broaden the reach to the target audiences. Events like this would likely attract (involve) the fewest number of participants of the three options. This option would require a total of 40-48 hours:

Publicity – 8 hrs.

Event design and program development 8-12 hrs.

Location logistics – 8-12 hrs.

Staff travel time (excluding technical experts) 16 hrs.

4. Combination of One Project-focused Meeting and One Community Event

This option combines community event tabling approach (Option 1 above) and an independent project-focused informational meeting (Option 3 above). This dual approach is intended to reach a broad cross-section of community members, as well as a targeted group of community leaders and “influential” individuals. In addition to providing opportunities for community leaders to be informed in the project-focused meeting, tabling at a community event, such as the Umatilla County Fair, can reach a wider audience that includes residents from the entire LUBGWMA region – including well owners. It may be possible to sign up volunteers for well testing during the event. Current resources allocated for Stage 1 can support the outreach at a community event. However, some additional resources will be needed to organize and publicize the informational meeting, and technical team members will be needed to participate in the program. This hybrid approach seeks to efficiently utilize available resources and helps determine the most efficient outreach method for the region.

Recommendation: Based on the available timing, resources and communications objectives, the Communications Team recommends Option 4. It provides a “broad brush” and “targeted” approach while addressing the limited timeframe available. It also provides an opportunity to develop longer-term connections that can be leveraged in later stages of the project.

Known Risks and Benefits

Every project exists within a larger context, which can bolster or hinder its ability to realize its objectives. The following summarizes this Project’s known risks and benefits, which can change during a project’s tenure and should inform specific Project messaging and tactics. Because of their inherently dynamic nature, these items should be continuously revisited as the Steering Committee works with GSI and the consultant team to implement communication priorities and allocate resources in preparation for each subsequent Stage.

Table 2. Known Project Benefits and Risks

Known Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Project is focused on identifying alternative drinking water sources; this is unique, inherently optimistic, and future-focused. ➤ The final DWAP deliverable sets this Project apart and could generate considerable goodwill. ➤ The Project complements other nitrate contamination-focused projects in the study area—the efforts have different focus areas, but all pull toward the same goal.
Known Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ “Study fatigue” among well users and others in the Project area; the issue has been known for more than 30 years. ➤ The Project will not define whether alternatives are fully feasible or provide cost estimates for the alternatives or individual connections. ➤ Potential that this Project does not provide a sufficient degree of user involvement. ➤ Some uncertainty remains about how this Project dovetails with other LUBGWMA area efforts. ➤ The overall budget for communications-related work is limited (7% of total Project time), which could render some stakeholders' expectations unfeasible. ➤ Previous communication/engagement efforts in this area have experienced varying degrees of success.

Key Project Stakeholders and “Influential” Individuals

The following individuals and organizations are potentially interested parties who could assist with conveying Project information and helping develop goodwill. Keeping influential individuals and parties informed can help minimize the likelihood of misinformation. This list was derived based on input received from participants of the communications workshop, and is considered a working list that will be modified as needed. The list deliberately does not include organizations/individuals involved in the current lawsuit.

The invitees to the project-focused meeting would be derived in part from, but not limited to parties on this list. Furthermore, invitees may also include specific domestic well owners and residents that are not on this list.

City, Local, and State Public Entities:

- City Council, City of Boardman
- City Council, City of Hermiston
- City Council, City of Irrigon
- City Council, City of Hermiston
- Boardman Community Development Association – holds monthly meetings and groups coordinated by The Boardman Chamber of Commerce
- City of Irrigon City Manager, Aaron Palmquist
- Oregon Health Authority
- Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
- Morrow County
- Umatilla County

State Elected officials:

- Benji Calvert, Mayor Pro Tem, City of Irrigon
- Bobby Levy – State Rep, from Echo
- Todd Nash, State Senate, District 29.

Local Chambers of Commerce:

- Boardman
- Hermiston
- Umatilla
- Torrie Griggs, [Boardman Chamber](#) of Commerce, hosts a podcast

Morrow County Public Water Systems

- City of Boardman

Other Stakeholders:

- Jane Hill and Robin Harkless, [Oregon Consensus](#)
- LUBGWMA Committee--coordinate through Laura Gleim
- Water for Eastern Oregon
- Eastern Oregon University
- Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials

Local Facebook Communities:

- The new Boardman community
- Uncensored Boardman community
- Boardman Oregon Community Info Page
- What's Happening Hermiston/Umatilla?
- What's Happening Hermiston?
- The NEW what's happening Hermiston!
- Hermiston Events and Activities
- What's Up Hermiston?

Faith Community Leaders:

- Father Luis, [Our Lady of Guadalupe](#), Boardman
- George Shimer, CEO [Boardman Parks and Recreation](#); Marie Shimer, [Morrow County School District](#), Director of Educational Services (ties to local Mormon community)
- Pastor Andy Hermans, [Boardman Community Church](#)

- City of Irrigon
- Port of Morrow
- OTE Boardman rest area

Umatilla County Public Water Systems

- City of Echo
- City of Hermiston
- City of Stanfield
- City of Umatilla
- OTE Stanfield rest stop

News Media:

- Berit Thorson, EO Media
- Andrew Cutler, Publisher EO Media
- Michael Kane, Northeast Oregon NOW – info@neonow.com
- North Morrow Times (free local paper based in Boardman; publishes third Friday of the month – northmtimes@gmail.com)
- Jose Garcia of Hermiston – via his role on LUBGWMA, has offered to serve as a conduit to local Hispanic media
- Pat Dooris, KGW
- Alex Baumhardt, Oregon Capital Chronicle
- Monica Samayoa, Oregon Public Broadcasting
- Alejandro Figueroa, Oregon Public Broadcasting
- Local radio – KZLY (Hermiston), KOHU (Hermiston), KQFM (Hermiston)

Other Local Influencers:

- Debbie Radie, Chief Operating Officer, [Boardman Foods](#) (board member of H2OEO)
- Community-based organizations working with the Oregon Health Authority (contact: Ana Maria Rodriguez of [ORA](#) (anamariar@oregonrural.org))
- David Boor, Athletic Director, [Riverside Jr./Sr. High School](#), Boardman
- John Christie, Principal [Riverside Jr./Sr. High School](#), Boardman
- Norma Ayala, [City of Boardman Parks and Rec Board](#)
- Yvonne Torres, Girls High School soccer coach, Riverside Jr./Sr. High School
- Lee and Pam Docken, [Mountain Valley Real Estate](#)
- Community Women's Club of Boardman and Irrigon
- Stokes Landing Senior Center, Irrigon
- Len Greer – Future Farmers of America lead in Irrigon, Chamber President
- [Eastern Oregon Women for Agriculture](#)
- Perla, [Boardman Food Pantry](#)
- Maria Richards, Recreation Center Instructor
- Jesse Roa, [Castle Rock Apartments](#), Boardman
- Stuart Dick, [Morrow County Citizens for Liberty and Justice](#), Irrigon

Proposed Activity Calendar

Table 3. Proposed Activity Calendar

Timeframe for Completion	Action	Primary Audience(s)	Essential Supporting Requirements
Early July 2024	Update and relocate Project website information and redesign Project pages to heighten prominence.	➤ General public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Morrow County to redesign pages ➤ Updated content from Consor

Timeframe for Completion	Action	Primary Audience(s)	Essential Supporting Requirements
	Activate the public comment database. (note: Public comments will be formally documented through the County's website and during public events.)	➤ General public	➤ Identify the process for responding to inquiries ➤ Excel database tool and training session from Consor (
Mid-July 2024	Review existing external communications materials from OHA, ORA, H2OEO, etc. to assess applicability to this Project	➤ General public	➤ Examples of externally focused materials currently in use
Early August 2024	Complete Project-specific informational items—introducing the Project, FAQs, myths/facts, etc., and then strategically promote via the Local Stakeholders	➤ Local stakeholders ➤ General public	➤ Agreement on key messages ➤ Marketing Plan ➤ Staffing support (material creation is Task 3.3; promotional activities are not scoped)
Mid/late-August 2024	To introduce the Project, hold two hybrid public informational events in the Project area (one per county). To raise the profile, multiple organizations could help sponsor and staff. (not scoped; may require modifying Task 3.6)	➤ Well users ➤ General public ➤ Local influencers	➤ Project handout ➤ Display boards ➤ Publicity materials ➤ Virtual platform ➤ After event summaries
September/October 2024	Hold communications training session to support well sampling session #1	➤ Well sampling staff	➤ Project key messages ➤ Training-specific materials (Task 3.3) ➤ After action summary
November 2024	Pre-Stage 2 Steering Committee Communications Planning Session (not scoped)	➤ Steering Committee ➤ Consultant team	--
December 2024	Update materials and training to support well sampling effort #2 (Task 3.3)	➤ Well users ➤ Well sampling staff	➤ Updates may not be needed; this is a placeholder to align with sampling.
Late January 2025	Steering Committee and Stakeholder update following Round #1 and #2 well samplings (not scoped)	➤ Steering Committee ➤ Targeted stakeholders ➤ Well users ➤ General public	--

Timeframe for Completion	Action	Primary Audience(s)	Essential Supporting Requirements
March 2025	Promote and explain draft DWAP via two hybrid events and mailings to the Project area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Well users ➤ General public ➤ Local influencers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Marketing Plan ➤ DWAP Executive summary ➤ Website updates ➤ Event materials ➤ Meeting platform
July 2025	Pre-Stage 3 Steering Committee Communications Planning Session (not scoped)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Steering Committee ➤ Consultant team 	➤ Knowledge of available communications resources aligned with Steering Committee priorities.
Mid-August 2025	Project update public events-- two public informational events in the Project area (one per county). To increase trust, the events could be hybrid and sponsored by multiple organizations. (not scoped; may require modifying Task 3.6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Well users ➤ General public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Project handout ➤ Display boards ➤ Publicity materials ➤ Virtual platform ➤ After event summaries
September/October 2025	Hold communications training session to support well sampling session	➤ Well sampling staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Handouts ➤ Training materials ➤ Actual training
	Public events around DWAP involving local organizations to reinforce legitimacy.	➤ Well users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Display boards ➤ DWAP Executive summary ➤ Mailer to Project area addresses ➤ Website updates ➤ Media component
December 2025	Pre-Stage 4 Steering Committee Communications Planning session (not scoped)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Steering Committee ➤ Consultant Team 	--
January 2026	Drinking water alternatives workshop public events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Well users ➤ Local elected officials 	➤ Publicity

Timeframe	Action	Primary Audience(s)	Essential Supporting Requirements
July 2026	Final DWAP Hybrid public events and associated promotion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Well users ➤ General public ➤ Local influencers ➤ Elected officials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mailing to the project area ➤ Marketing Plan ➤ DWAP Executive summary ➤ Website updates
September 2026	Project communications and engagement summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Steering Committee ➤ General Public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Website update

Note: All externally facing communication materials will be translated into Spanish.

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