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Columbia Basin GWMA takes center stage at international geological conference

Annual meeting is symposium on Columbia River Basalt, prominently featuring the GWMA's science team and the results of their recently completed basalt mapping study and aquifer assessment

What: Geological Society of America's Annual Conference: Sixth Columbia River Basalt Symposium II: Volcanism, Tectonics, Petrology, and Hydrogeology 2009.

Where: Oregon Convention Center, Portland Oregon, October 18-21st

Website: <http://www.geosociety.org/meetings/2009/>

Othello – The nearly decade long geologic mapping and aquifer assessment work by the Columbia Basin Ground Water Management Area (*GWMA*) will be highlighted at the Geological Society of America's annual conference in Portland next week.

“This is a great honor and a testament to the integrity of the *GWMA*'s research. We have generated an important view of this complex, multi-layered ground water system and I'm looking forward to our scientific research being showcased at this prestigious academic event,” commented Executive Director Paul Stoker at the organization's Administrative Board meeting in Othello on September 24th. Stoker will be the lead off speaker for the Monday afternoon session with his presentation, *Aquifer Declines and Scant Modern Recharge in the Columbia Basin Ground Water Management Area*.

GWMA science team leaders joining Stoker at the conference and providing presentations will be four scientists with GSI Water Solutions, Inc.; hydrogeologists Dr. Kevin Lindsey, John Porcello and Walt Burt; and basalt geologist Terry Tolan, and Dr. Dimitri Vlassopoulos, geochemist with S.S. Papadopoulos. In addition, the team has submitted seven scientific papers summarizing the study's research methodology and key findings.

(More)

This year the state Legislature appropriated \$2.5 million for the *GWMA* to create a working hydrologic ground water model and assess the feasibility of aquifer storage and rehydration of the depleting ground water table in the Columbia Basin. The organization has to complete the model and submit a report to the legislature by July 1, 2011.

The *GWMA* is currently finalizing project planning and work scope documents with Ecology for conducting the hydrology study, which will build on the organization's subsurface mapping and aquifer assessment research.

Dr. Lindsey, who is leading the modeling effort, summed up the new legislative directive in stating, "Our job is to create a working ground water hydrologic model and determine the potential for rehydrating the aquifers and creating ground water storage. The results of our research to date reveal ground water in the Columbia Basin is mostly ancient with only minor recharge occurring in particular ground water sub-basins. The aquifer assessment research identified the existence of geologic structures that can influence the movement and presence of ground water and create sub-basins."

Remarking on the importance and use of a working hydrologic model, Stoker added, "The ground water model will be a tool to aid decision-making for land use and building permits, aquifer storage and recharge projects, evaluating water permit management and regulation, economic and resource development, water use, well permits and water transfers."

Providing the Board with a proposed outline of preliminary sub-basins, Stoker continued, "Our research indicates the four counties can be segregated into eleven potential ground water sub-basins. I would remind the Board that these are preliminary and based on current data, and therefore, subject to change. That being said, this is our best estimate and provides us an important starting point in coordinating public input and data collection."

GWMA ground water sub-basins are defined as areas where geologic structures and conditions influence ground water and create a hydrologic boundary between ground water areas and users.

In describing the work plans and schedule for the project, Stoker noted “the *GWMA* will be hiring an experienced, Master’s level hydrogeologist, and a trained GIS analyst to begin ground water sub-basin mapping in the next few months. We anticipate starting field work in January, 2010.”

“At that time, we will encourage ground water users in the Columbia Basin, in particular municipalities and deep well irrigators, to contact us regarding the modeling research, well use and field tests, and how they fit into these ground water sub-basins. As you know local interest and participation is critical to the success of our research,” stated Stoker.

“Essentially, we’re offering well owners and ground water users an opportunity to learn more about their ground water, including how old it is, where is it coming from, and importantly, is it being recharged,” continued Stoker.

“The Legislature requests the *GWMA* report to describe ground water conditions, water balance and recharge, and how much water is needed to address the aquifer decline. The hydrologic model will demonstrate how the system works and the feasibility of recharge – how deep, where, when and how fast,” added Stoker.

Regarding likely recharge locations, Stoker said, “The *GWMA* mapping study suggests where the basalt zones surface are the likely target areas for artificial recharge, so those locations are where we will want to focus our attention.”

Information about the *Columbia Basin GWMA* and the mapping study can be found on their website: <http://www.cbgwma.org>. Well owners and operators in Adams, Grant, Franklin and Lincoln counties are encouraged to contact the *GWMA* Project Office in Othello at (509) 488-3409 for more information.