

Community Engagement Committee Notes

Skagit Watershed Council, June 30, 2020, 9:30 am – 11:30 am (ZOOM)

Present: Scott Bohling (DOE), Richard Brocksmith (SWC), Kristi Carpenter(SCD), Stacy Dahl (SLT), Lucy DeGrace (SFEG), Pete Haase (SMRC), Codi Hamblin (NCI), Cindy Pierce (SCD), Michelle Quast (ECY), Allison Robers (Kulshan Services), Scottie Schneider (SWC), Sylvi Thorstenson (WSU Skagit Extension), Holli Watne (SWC), Abby Weaver (SLT)

Not Present: Susan Wood (Padilla Bay), Karen Summers (SCEA and ECONet), Wayne Watne (WDFW)

- 1) Welcome, approve May meeting notes: Cindy motioned to approve the May meeting notes as presented and Allison seconded with unanimous approval.
- 2) Member updates/what are you working on this summer?
 - a) Skagit Watershed Council
 - i) Holli is keeping up social media, working on educator resources, reaching out to school districts, working on an update to community engagement plan.
 - ii) Scottie is working at the office on weekends. As a board member of the Salmon Festival, she is planning for next year (no festival this year)
 - iii) Richard is working on LEED Entity project development. He is having conversations with other entities to broaden the SWC network and advancing long-term climate and shoreline resiliency projects.
 - b) Skagit Land Trust
 - i) Changing education focus from working with youth to online engagement.
 - ii) They are doing a monthly online book club. The first meeting involved the author and had 15-20 participants.
 - iii) Abby is about ready to finish her education position with AmeriCorps. This fall she will be back, but with a stewardship focus. Stacy will also be changing her focus to stewardship.
 - c) Skagit Conservation District
 - i) Cindy is working on end of biennium records and checking projects for CREP program. The WADE Conference was virtual and was involved in that.
 - ii) Kristi is working on the Marine Biotxin volunteer program which is now up and running. Also getting the Poop Fairy campaign kicked off. This is a social marketing campaign to encourage people to pick up their pest waste.
 - d) Department of Ecology
 - i) Michelle is working on the video project and has been attending CBSM trainings.

- ii) Scott is working on the TMDL (fecal coliform) Report for Padilla Bay. Also working on South Skagit Bay fecal coliform testing.
 - e) Allison – Accepted into the Climate Reality Leadership Training with Al Gore this July. Finished the Whatcom County Master Gardener program this spring and is volunteering regularly. A lot of Zooming.
 - f) Codi – At NCI she is taking time to work on Mountain School curriculum development. Trying to figure out how and whether they can do school programs this fall. Youth Leadership Adventure program adapting for this summer. Will involve day trips if both counties are allowed into Phase 3 – virtual trips otherwise. Family Getaway Boxes – virtual packages that families can bring to their homes.
 - g) Lucy – Stewardship efforts involving hikes into sites she has never been to. They are creating a guide for volunteers at Bowman and Cornet Bay to help identify weeds vs. desirable plants and to water areas that need it. Seeking volunteers to work independently - 3 shifts weekly for 6 weeks – at plant nursery (mostly watering). Also recruiting three work parties with no more than 4 volunteers each at a time working at a restoration site to maintain plantings. Enrolling three new AmeriCorps members. Planning for Plan B for schools with focus on outside school grounds or virtual presentations.
 - h) Pete – At MRC, he is in early stages of planning for families to participate in the Fidalgo Bay Day which will be done virtually over a week’s time. Also promoting the iNaturalist app as a means for citizen science
 - i) Silvi – WSU Skagit County Extension – Tasked to increase the number of subscribers to WSU/Skagit County Shore Stewards program. She’s open to suggestions on how to do this. She took a job on a boat in Alaska. Plug in for the Pasture Management program with website with recorded webinars.
 - j) Karen – Letterbox launched on three sites. Join the Letterbox Trail Facebook Group. Walker Bay Discovery Classroom coming in August.
- 3) K-12 Discussion:
- a) Update from Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction webpage (www.k12.wa.us) about the upcoming school year: Washington will be prioritizing getting students into schools, but acknowledges that most schools will not be able to have all students in the school at the same time while maintaining new safety rules (cloth mask, social distancing, daily health screenings). Many schools may not be allowing field trips and/or visiting educators. Teachers are being trained in Social Emotional Learning to help them deal with students who may be dealing with trauma caused by COVID-19 (dealing with loss of family, fear of safety, increased suicide risk).
 - b) Holli reached out to the Skagit County school districts adapt STEAM Train program for next school year. So far, only Burlington has replied. At this point they don’t know if they will allow guest teacher next year. Holli will contact them again in August about setting up a meeting in September to discuss the STEAM Train.

- c) In the meantime, it is a good idea to adapt STEAM Train programs so that students can engage with the material virtually and/or from home. These resources are more likely to be used if they involve minimal effort on the teacher's part. This may mean making videos or creating material that students can do on their own from home.
- d) The group came up with an idea for community engagement next school year that would be appropriate for general public as well as school groups: the CEC could put together a regular (weekly?) video update in the form of a local news program (or print in the Skagit Valley Herald).
 - i) The name "Nature News" was suggested.
 - ii) This could focus on phenological changes in the watershed as well as other local happenings. Perhaps there could be a mini-science lesson with each program?
 - iii) Something like this could be a good back-up plan for connecting people to places like Padilla Bay, which may not see many school trips next school year. We could link existing programs to the Nature News topics. ***Holli will get in touch with Susan Woods to see if Padilla Bay would be interested in something like this approach.**
 - iv) We could seek a business sponsor to help pay for the effort.
 - v) We could use the Letterbox Trail approach where information is presented online with activities.
 - vi) ***Explore the potential of discussing this internally and next meeting.**

4) Messaging Discussion:

- a) Presentation by Allison Roberts about the past five years of history and research regarding messaging in the Skagit. This presentation was meant to familiarize the committee with past work and the resources used to inform the Community Engagement Plan approved in late 2015. Here are some highlights:
 - i) Key messages should be used consistently and repetitively to speak on behalf of the watershed to remind the audience that "Skagit thrives when we unite people to solve problems together".
 - ii) Messages should support landowners, our local economy, and our wildlife.
 - iii) Examples of "sound bites":
 - (1) Disagreements should not overshadow common ground
 - (2) Solutions can benefit the economy and the environment
 - (3) While challenging, we can create solutions together.
 - (4) There are challenges facing the watershed and this land
 - (5) Some challenges are pressing and require us to act quickly
 - (6) Our watershed is changing: we can act together to protect this Skagit life.
 - iv) Profile of a Skagit landowner (from 2005 Elway Survey)

- (1) Values: scenic beauty, being close to nature, outdoor recreation, small local farms, living near family, access to Puget Sound and rivers.
 - (2) Views: conserving farmland and conserving wildlife are important, new housing developments are taking too much space, most believe that it's unrealistic for all the different groups of people that live here (farmers, tribes, etc) to agree on how the river should be used, most would pay a small tax or take restrictions on their land use for the protection of salmon, most view that these things are inevitable: loss of farmland/timberland, loss of salmon/wildlife.
 - (3) A strong majority supported: riparian plantings, projects to restore salmon runs, protecting farmland, farmers working with environmentalists, engaging the whole community in salmon recovery
- v) Themes developed in 2017:
- (1) Protecting natural resources, including farms and fish
 - (2) Investing in watershed health and salmon recovery
 - (3) Working together as a strong community
 - (4) Creating a resilient built environment
 - (5) Keeping the economic value of our watershed
 - (6) Ensuring access to outdoor recreation and leisure
 - (7) Using water resources wisely
 - (8) Adapting to climate change
 - (9) Preserving quality of life now and for future generations
 - (10) Acting for nearshore health and coastal resilience
 - (11) Celebration cultural heritage
 - (12) Celebrating scenic beauty as a community value
- vi) Values (2017):
- (1) Skagit beauty inspires us
 - (2) Solutions start with conversations and listening
 - (3) The best environmental solutions also make economic sense
 - (4) Time and timing is a powerful tool
 - (5) New solutions can come from our neighbors
 - (6) Science and data inform opportunities
 - (7) Change starts in our communities
 - (8) Substantial action is needed today

(9) We protect what we love

vii) Benefits of the Skagit Valley

(1) Ecological

- (a) Air and water filtration
- (b) Clean water supply
- (c) Healthy wildlife habitat, migration routes, breeding grounds
- (d) Plant and animal diversity
- (e) Fertile soils

(2) Economic

- (a) Multi-million dollar outdoor recreation economy provides thousands of direct jobs
- (b) Natural resources (timber, fish, etc.)
- (c) Renewable energy
- (d) Clean tech is a promising new sector

(3) Social

- (a) Diverse recreational opportunities support wellbeing for individuals, groups, and families
- (b) Educational opportunities that support nature-based and experiential learning
- (c) The ability to build and enhance community through connection to place

(4) Cultural

- (a) Indigenous peoples' spiritual and sacred connection to the land and the protection of accustomed places for harvest of Earth's bounty
- (b) Connection to a way of life that land make possible
- (c) Pride in community and feeling lucky to live here and preserve it for our future generations

viii) Ideas/tools that may be helpful in getting landowners to change behaviors:

- (1) Maps or other visuals to provide a river system perspective
- (2) Reduce perceived barriers
- (3) Incentive to encourage "early adapters"
- (4) Evidence showing benefits of past projects
- (5) Opportunities to participate in data gathering to inform trends over time
- (6) Data showing relationships between different parameters

- ix) What works best with landowners
 - (1) Get to know them – build relationships and trust
 - (2) Make communications about them and their needs
 - (3) Draw a strategy based on their values and what drives their decision making
 - (4) Approach in a non-threatening way
 - (5) Highlight success stories of other landowners in the Skagit area
- b) Can we agree on some common, consistent, and really useful messages to inspire the community to voluntarily act for the benefit of the watershed? The following discussion was fruitful although we didn't decide upon messages. Further discussion revolved around the following:
- c) Allison suggested doing a SurveyMonkey asking members of the committee to prioritize key messages from her presentation. This could be a way to narrow down the messages that most agree on.
- d) Conversation about actions:
 - i) Perhaps a starting point is with actions we want people to take and then think about messages. Incentives are helpful and effective. Brainstorm of actions most of our organizations would like to see (messaging would be different for different audiences):
 - (1) Learn about noxious weeds/ invasive species and take action to limit them
 - (2) Home-based conservation (e.g. planting for wildlife, reducing single-use plastics)
 - (3) protecting riparian habitats
 - ii) Perhaps more important than finding the perfect messaging in creating change is building desired actions as social norms so people will encourage their neighbors to do the actions by sharing what they did. This could be where a hashtag or signage (e.g. Backyard Wildlife Certification signs/plaque) could be useful.
 - (1) People are more likely to do an action if it perceived as "normal"
 - (2) People are more likely to do a conservation action after having a positive conversation about it with a peer.
 - (3) Scott mentioned the Protected Farm Ground Signage which works also to advertise the program and those who are championing the behavior.
 - (4) People need to feel proud of their action and that people will respect them for it.
 - (5) Kristi noted that many of our local landowners who have done CREP projects do have large signs on their property identifying it as a CREP project.
- e) Conversation about audience:
 - i) Is it better to create very focused messages specific to a given audience and desired outcome, or a general message that apply to many situations? Specific messaging may have more direct impact for targeted actions, but broad messaging can be more

- generally useful for the group (e.g. hashtag-able) as a platform for starting conversations about actions.
- ii) Benefits to tailoring the message to a specific audience:
 - (1) Messages specifically directed to them are more likely to be noticed
 - (2) If the message appeals to their values, they are more likely to listen
 - iii) Some messages may need to be tailor-made for individuals. For example, if we want landowners in specific neighborhoods to make specific actions (like riparian fencing/planting), the conversation we have with them could be vary landowner by landowner.
 - (1) Silvi noted riparian planting got pushback from farmers because they perceived it creating a lot of hardship for them. The Pasture Management program has a handout talking about pasture weeds and ways to eradicate them. She's still learning and not sure how to move forward.
 - (2) Pete – Shore Stewards has been aimed at beach property owners. Are they looking for more subscribers up the river? Silvi said no, while they may not be the same target audience, PSP team is hoping to use the Shore Stewards' platform to extend the reach. The PSP grant's goal is to reduce fecal coliform. The focus was deemed by the project team to be a more acceptable way to message.
 - f) What about the use of demonstration plots or gardens to promote knowledge and behavior? Alger Community Hall also has a community garden which includes a stream restoration project, native plants garden, and pollinator garden. The gardening for wildlife and gardening for pollinators concepts have resonated with a lot of folks in our community. WSU demonstration gardens on Memorial Highway. Are there others in Skagit that could target behaviors we want to encourage? Richard noted they proposed but didn't get funding for a rain garden education/tour program.
 - g) Richard suggested we adopt a broader construct starting with Allison's summary of what we've been doing the past few years as a framework from which to start. Then, we could add to this list with master themes to see where they cross reference.
 - h) Pete gave an example of a program that had great use of messaging: the "Catch More Crab" program by the Northwest Straits Foundation (more info [here](#)). The program started by educating crabbers at boat launches at the opening of the season on good places to crab, how to measure, and how to use traps correctly. The ultimate goal was to reduce lost crab pots (and hundreds of needlessly killed crabs), but it was framed in a very fisherman-friendly way. Virtual workshops by this project garnered many more participants. Based on this experience, going virtual might get more people to tune in. Michelle noted that we could eventually do virtual tours using Pete's concept. Using the past research is a great place for us to find alignments.
 - i) Where do we want to take this conversation next? What are our goals next month?

- i) Pete – Are we trying to focus on geographic landscapes or are we focusing on a couple of key issues/problems? What would the messaging be for these? **Pete made a motion to focus on the areas outlined in the Ecology Video Project. No one had a chance to second it.**
 - ii) Michelle – update on temperature project for the lower Skagit tributaries. There will be four videos: 1) introduction to the issue with general public messaging, 2) focused on specific actions for the general public, 3) focused on specific actions for riparian landowners (non-ag), 3) focus on specific actions for riparian agricultural land owners. They also plan to conduct additional research regarding data gaps before developing the final messages.
 - iii) Scott noted Ecology’s focus is still the larger Skagit community emphasizing sense of place and the watershed’s uniqueness. He spoke about validating the issues of the ag, timber, and fish sectors as well. They are looking to impact the places where we need to improve. He is coming from a place where they feel there is still a lot of value in raising awareness and improving health in the Skagit in this broader sense.
 - iv) Kristi mentioned that it would be nice to have dike/drainage districts involved in the conversations and most definitely the tribal entities before we do any broad communication. Richard replied that they are and will be engaged, but not in this committee. He said that we all will be better messengers if they are in the know and have been included.
- 5) Richard – CEC group is moving into a place where we can create an enabling environment to enable grassroots work. He likes the concept of a library of messages and a framework. Each organization is on message on the broader topics.
- 6) Holli and Richard are updating the implementation plan for the communication framework. ***Richard and Holli will create a draft communication framework for the next meeting.**
- 7) Michelle – Down the road in August or so, they will want to get names of people who could be ambassadors in the videos. People should start to think about potential ambassadors for the August or September meeting.

Adjourn: 11:32 am

Next Meeting: July 28, 2020, 9:30-11:30 by Zoom invitation.