

Skagit Watershed Council Community Engagement Committee – Final Notes

August 2, 2016 9 am – 12 noon, SWC offices

We started our first meeting with delicious food and coffee brought together by Scottie Schneider from Skagit Watershed Council.

Those attending included: Richard Brocksmith (SWC), Scottie Schneider (SWC), Kristi Carpenter (SCD), Lucy DeGrace (SFEG), Alex DuPont (WSE Extension), Cody Hamlin (NCI – for Jeff Giesen), Karen Summers (SCEA), Allison Roberts (Kulshan Services), Nate Rice (Kulshan Services). Leah Kintner (PSP) wasn't able to attend.

Attending committee members introduced themselves and shared their hopes, expectations, and challenges in their outreach and engagement work. (See page 2 and 3)

Richard provided an overview of the work of the committee and the vision for the work of the committee as approved by the SWC Board in late 2015. He explained that the SWC needs to expand its vision of community engagement from salmon to watershed health, cultural heritage, beauty, economic vitality, community resilience, and quality of life in the watershed as a whole. The goal is to build stronger relationships and partnerships and to broaden the constituency. The SWC could offer more training opportunities useful to the engagement committee as well.

Nate of Kulshan Services provided an overview of the purpose of awareness and engagement and the need to move messages beyond early adopters to the early and late majorities. The goal is to bring opportunities and learning to a broader audience. Engagement efforts will focus on community-based themes with an already demonstrated high-level of community agreement. This soft approach will prepare the campaign to move into discussions and conversations about natural resource challenges, building a resilient economy, and how to address and plan for common threats or challenges in the watershed.

Allison of Kulshan Services outlined a proposal for a coordinated Engagement Campaign for the next 6 – 12 months focusing on “Community” and the specialness of this place called Skagit. The committee liked a broader watershed health approach defined around community and launching the engagement campaign in September with a photo contest. The committee discussed the possible taglines for this engagement campaign. The committee members will discuss the campaign and tagline choice with their organizations and communicate that back to the SWC in the next two weeks. The SWC Board will need to review and approve the community campaign proposal and the tagline at their September 1 meeting. The branding firm next door to the SWC has offered their expertise in this project.

The committee agreed to meet monthly on the first Tuesday of the month from 9:30 – 11:30 am at SWC.

Observations:

- SFEG is already messaging to go beyond salmon with a focus on watershed health. They are incorporating this messaging into blogs, newsletters in an effort to broaden their constituency. Some members expressed concern that people may get overwhelmed by “big picture” outreach.
- While messaging is about overall watershed health, keep engagement opportunities local. Focus on things people care about – their neighborhood ditch, stream, and creek. Focus information on what they can do in their backyard. SCD has been doing this with their Shore Stewards, Backyard Short Course, and Samish Watershed outreach on Silver Creek and in Alger. These interest-focused courses brought in a large and eager audience because it caters to people’s interests first.
- Use maps. People like to locate their home and neighbors as related to the larger watershed. Maps are powerful in that they focus attention and provide context on where they live in relation to the watershed and its health.
- Develop a relationship based on specific interest groups – gardeners, photographers, birders, recreationists, hikers – and work with them from their place of interest.
- Reach out to unlikely partners and populations. These niches are areas of opportunity. Create workshops with cultural sensitivity to increase relationships with diverse populations in the watershed. Even gender-based approaches draw people in based on their specific interests. Reaching out to the museum and art interests can draw a new crowd to the watershed and community message. Examples of this focus are the Surge project at MoNA or Audubon’s mural and community-revitalization project highlighting birds affected by climate change.
- The religious community is starting to discuss stewardship and taking care of the earth with their parishioners. SCD is doing a project with Bayview Methodist Church rain garden demonstration project. Churches are a good audience and they are beginning to talk about stewardship.
- Consider the messengers. Your early adopters are good messengers to getting the early majority on board. Broader messages will resonate with broader audiences.
- Volunteer oriented agencies could be approached as a way to reach more audiences. The Skagit Community Action Agency and Volunteer Center could be approached to help with volunteer recruitment efforts. Currently, they are not environmentally-focused, but they could be. RSVP isn’t around anymore.

Challenges:

- How to avoid overlap on services with other organizations.
- How to use time and resources effectively with limited budgets.
- How to work with diverse areas in the valley and up valley to care about the whole watershed. Example: How do we get people who live up the valley to identify and care about marine areas?
- How to increase cross-collaboration to expand the audiences and volunteers for organizations.
- How to recruit more participants in education and outreach events.
- How to connect and engage more volunteers in meaningful opportunities.
- How can we help people think in terms of the watershed and make the connection to their neighborhood? People think in terms of their neighborhood, but not in terms of watersheds.
- Need for meeting more regularly for planning purposes. EcoNet only meets quarterly.

- How do we find and connect with and share knowledge with, and inspire the early majority? We've already reached the early adopters.
- How can we use common themes to unify the work of everyone while providing every organization to keep its identity and unique work, audiences, and messages.
- How to take people's interests from gardening (for instance) to a broader interest on water quality.
- There's a challenge with lots of groups doing school-based programs. How do these groups better coordinate and plan to avoid overlap?
- It's hard to educate as many people as you'd like. There's a need to reach a critical mass and expand. In some efforts, there are too few people on board.
- How do we connect folks who don't live on a waterway with waterways and water quality?

Opportunities:

- SFEG has volunteer opportunities for other groups. They need to know who needs opportunities and what other groups are offering. They want to avoid duplicating effort. Need to keep track of who's doing what and not overlap too much.
- NCI has a broad-based constituency. There are ways these constituents could be more involved locally. Groups could provide NCI with more information and materials. These could be organized around focus areas: Cultural, Economic, Conservation for instance.
- SCD program provides field trips through the Watershed Masters program. The backyard short courses are a great opportunity.
- SWC is contracting with SCEA to replace EcoNet funds for another year. We need to figure out this relationship. Will this committee be similar to EcoNet? How will it dovetail with and complement EcoNet? Will this duplicate it? Could this committee be a steering committee for EcoNet? Best to not duplicate efforts. Other EcoNets with steering committees work well together. If we are talking more generally than salmon, that could work.
- It would be great to have a common calendar or a handout with opportunities to volunteer, learn, and attend events that would be shared in one place. Would an online resource help with this? Perhaps there are ways to pool resources to create printed or online resource (stewardship opportunity package or a listing of volunteer opportunities) about other programs to distribute more broadly. Connect one organization's volunteers and participants with other organization opportunities – cross pollination and cross-connections build a broader audience.
- The Pioneer Society has collected and catalogued stories of the history in the watershed. These could be a great resource for stories about the watershed.

Quotable Quotes:

- "This is about way more than just salmon." "Everything is connected, not just salmon." (Lucy)
- "You don't have to live on a waterway to be affecting the water." (Alex)
- People care about "their backyard, their ditch, and the salmon living there." (Kristi)
- "We may draw people from Bellingham to Seattle, but the North Cascades are our classroom. We excite people and then they take that message home with them." (Cody)

The meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.