

Skagit Watershed Council – Final Notes
Meeting of the Board of Directors, via Zoom
March 2nd, 2023, 11:00am to 1:00pm

(Underline indicates decision point; ***Bold indicates action item**)

Attending: John Stein (Chair), Bill Blake, Michael Kirshenbaum, Devin Smith, Brendan Brokes, Brian Lanouette (11:15), Andrew Bearlin, Peter Browning, Richard Brocksmith (Executive Director)

Guests: Aundrea McBride, Holli Watne, Jenn Johnson, Alison Studley

Call to Order 11:05am

Introduced Jenn Johnson. Quorum achieved.

Motion by Brendan, seconded by Michael, to approve the agenda. Approved unanimously.

Motion by Peter, seconded by Devin, to approve the February notes. Approved unanimously.

Executive Director and Committee Reports

January financials in the black in spite of a 15% indirect, taking no cut of contracts, and no inflation increases in grants. Motion to approve the financial reports by Brendan, seconded by Peter.

When Richard started at the Watershed Council there was a surplus of PSAR funds that SWC has been gradually spending down year after year. Those are spent now, resulting in a small shortfall for this year. SWC has asked Stillaguamish LE for a gift of funds that they can't spend before they expire in June of this year. He will need contract approval to proceed with that transaction.

Brief Committee Reports (due to packed agenda):

- CEC is working with the PUD to create a resource database for educators about environmental education opportunities.
- M&AM had a presentation from Mike LeMoine regarding an Integrated Population Model tool being developed for evaluating action effects of the Chinook Recovery Plan.
- Protection Subcommittee greenlighted 1 property for purchase in Day Slough area and discussed the question from the TWG about match policy being subject to the Approval Process for Acquiring Restorable Lands (later agenda item).
- TWG approved the 2023 Protection Strategy (later agenda item).

Old Business

Swinomish Channel Phase 3 Smolt Capacity Estimate Letter: John and Richard wrote a cover letter as decided at the last Board meeting, addressed to SRFB and ESRP with a cc to SRSC as a courtesy. The TWG started working on a list of questions for SRSC to address in the requested presentation on how the smolt model works.

Discussion:

- USIT would like more information about the process. Response—today John and Richard will entertain edits to the letter by the Board. Then it will be sent via email to the LE committees that originally reviewed the project and the current LE committees and the funders to which it is addressed.
- Was there any input by SRSC into the writing of the letter? Response—no. Devin will abstain from participating in this discussion.
- What changes will be made to the review process to minimize this happening again? Response—SRSC will engage with TWG on training and they will implement QC processes. Things like this will happen sometimes. The important thing is to correct it.
- It was clarified that the project would have been funded even if it had scored much lower with accurate information being available at the time.
- Brian and Peter would like until Monday to review the letter.
- ***A new packet with the cover letter, SRSC letter, ESRP letter, and TWG memo all together will be sent out. Board members will respond by early next week to finalize letter.**

4S: Richard sent out calendar invites for the next 2 sessions and an agenda for this month's meeting. He will also be inviting forest industry representatives explicitly.

Meeting in person: We plan to have the annual lunch in September in person and have reserved Hillcrest. We will revisit having Board meetings in person later in the spring.

New Business

Protection Strategy update: The first Strategy was written in 1998 based on cost effectiveness of acquisitions. In 2015-2017 SWC did a landscape assessment by parcel and wrote the 2017 update based on habitat characteristics. 2023 proposed updates include 2 key changes: addition of the Snohomish County parcels along the Sauk to the landscape analysis and the already approved Approval Process for Acquiring Restorable Lands (APARL). The TWG asked some questions about the match process and if it should go through the APARL process. The Protection Subcommittee recommended no changes to the match process (they will advise the TWG when they come up as they have done) and briefed the TWG on how changes would

affect the ability to provide match. The TWG then also recommended final approval by the Board of Directors, though included a recommendation to better define how much structural improvements on parcels drive cost (criteria f).

Discussion:

- The County wants to know that the funding source for acquisitions does not violate their law regarding outside mitigation funds being used to buy property in Skagit County.
***Peter requested Richard speak with Will Honea about that to confirm.** Response—acquisitions are made using SRFB funds. Match funds come from SLT dollars or SCL ESA fund (not mitigation). This is voluntary work. RCO doesn't allow mitigation funds to be used for match.
- Will addition of the E.F. Nookachamps parcels (currently not part of the Protection Strategy assessment but is the next priority work item for Aundrea) require another update?
- There is a whole, detailed strategy for spending SRFB money. The match criteria are separate and conservation landowners are spending their own money on match so the criteria are less quantitative while still ensuring valuable habitat as match.
- Should we add a specific percent of improvements as a threshold to the match policy?
- The amount of improvement on a property is what drives up the cost. Habitat is cheap. We have moved away from cost being the driver toward habitat benefits being the driver for prioritizing parcels.
- Match is already required to pay for significant upland portions of properties.
- Sometimes there is a boundary line adjustment to subdivide the built part of a parcel from the habitat so we are conserving both habitat and human housing/land uses.
- We want to be as flexible as possible to maximize options for match.
- The SWC committees are the ones deciding which properties get purchased with SRFB dollars and non-mitigation match dollars. SCL mitigation money purchases are guided by the license partners (tribes, federal agencies, etc.).
- Can we delete the statement about improvements (“f”) in the match criteria?
- ***Aundrea will send out a track changes version of the 2023 Protection Strategy, including new proposed language for “f”.**
- ***The Board will be ready to approve the Protection Strategy next month.**

Review 2021 Summary Report of Voluntary Riparian Habitat Restoration: This is a deliverable to the County for their capacity grant to SWC and can be and is made available to others.

MOA to implement some of the recommendations from the 2021 Summary Report regarding the database: The Conservation District has a DOE grant to implement some work in the Lower Skagit TMDL streams that will provide \$7,500 to SWC to improve the riparian database (develop

a scope of work, manage contractors, coordinate between Riparian Work Group and contractors), with SCD paying for the contractors separately. One of the main goals is to bring in more data while protecting privacy of data, to develop a public facing dashboard for wider understanding of the work, and to improve functionality of the database to simplify things for users. Motion to approve the MOA between SWC and SCD by Devin, seconded by Peter. All in favor except Brian and Bill abstain.

Riparian Proviso Draft Report and “Phase 2” Proposed Work: The latest Proviso report has been sent out with revisions from County and the Skagit Drainage and Irrigation Districts Consortium. It is still shown as draft and being reviewed by others. Phase 2 includes recommended database improvements, reach and site prioritization, establishing ID teams (multidisciplinary), and building relationships with landowners, among others.

Discussion:

- SITC is still reviewing the report and has concerns it doesn't adequately state essential technical information.
- Phase 2 is written from the perspective of the County and the CD—how they move ahead on private lands.
- Devin has concerns about whether this belongs at the Watershed Council if it is a regulatory thing.
- The CD doesn't think it is regulatory.
- The ID teams specifying/recommending buffer widths has a regulatory feel, while at the same time it is seen as providing that essential technical information to inform a voluntary decision by the landowner.
- Expert capacity is an issue. Who would participate on these ID teams?

Appointing Pat Stevenson to the TWG and TRC: Motion to appoint Pat Stevenson to the TWG and TRC once Alison leaves the TWG by Devin, seconded by Bill. All approve, Brian abstains.

Good of the Order

Jenny Baker, WDFW, joined the TWG last meeting. She said Marcus Reeves and she would tag team as the WDFW representative with only one vote. Brendan will discuss with them and evaluate if tag teaming will work.

Governor Inslee appointed two new members to the WDFW Board—Woody Meyers (at large) who is a former WDFW employee, and Steve Parker, a former Yakima Nation fisheries manager (eastern WA rep). Barbara Baker was reappointed.

Adjourn 12:55