

Skagit Watershed Council – Final Notes

Meeting of the Board of Directors, via Zoom – April 1, 2021

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

Attending: Richard Brocksmit, Andrew Bearlin, John Stein, Michael Kirshenbaum, Peter Browning (guest), Bill Blake, Devin Smith, Jon-Paul Shannahan (late 10:45), Holli Watne (notes)

Not in attendance: Jon Vanderheyden, Brendan Brokes, Aundrea McBride.

Call to Order 10:17 am

- Introductions, Determine Quorum, and Approved Agenda
- Approve Board Notes: March 11, 2020. Motioned by Michael, second by Bill, approved unanimously.

Executive Director's Report

- Approved February Financial Reports. Motioned by Andrew, second by Bill, approved unanimously.
- Committee and Staff Reports
 - TWG reviewed SRFB 2021 letters of intent. The two projects (Skagit Forks and Ovenell Slough) for PSAR returned funds were reviewed and approved, splitting financial shortfall evenly. Currently reviewing request for chinook/Orca barrier report and preparing for discussion around Sauk plan.
 - Protection subcommittee
 - M&AM subcommittee – Final approval of 2020 Skagit Monitoring Report. Reviewed and approved SRSC monitoring proposal to advance into draft application.
 - CEC is preparing for Skagit Water Weeks, reviewing what we've learned from virtual engagement in 2020, and discussing how to deliver more content in Spanish.

Old Business

- State House and Senate capital budgets are looking pretty good, though Senate better.
 - We want to get ESRP funding up to the \$20 million mark, like Senate.
 - Fish barrier removal board (6 Skagit projects) funding stops well short of our projects in both budgets.
 - One of our two local project requests was included in House budget to improve riparian implementation tools to address Lower Skagit Tributary Temperature TMDL.
 - Bill - Disappointed that CREP is not well funded.

- John – Update from PSP Project Olga meeting: revenue forecast numbers are good, drastically improved from where it was, making up all ground lost during covid. Wanted to know when they can spend federal dollars. Mostly working with State dollars now.
 - The Wiley Slough dike raise project is in both the house and senate budgets. Even so, it is still not a 100% done deal.
 - Peter working with governor’s office regarding concerns about regionalization, keeping county work focused on the county.
 - ***SWC to write letter and reach out to state electeds re: these last priorities.**
- Skagit Estuary Project Development Concept
- Lead Entity Program Letters of Intent Update – Five projects moving into draft application: 3 from SRSC, 1 land acquisitions from the Skagit Land Trust and Seattle City Light, and the Island Unit project by DFW.
 - Concept of this name is not advancing into SRFB grant round.
 - ***Co-managers are scheduling time to discuss common perspectives and some next steps.** But there is a spark that has been inspiring lots of good conversations.
 - ***We heard we need to keep building relationships.**
- Giant Copper – Local Government Resolutions
- A copper mine is being considered in the area called “the doughnut hole” in the BC portion of our watershed. There has been an open permit for couple of years and the government hasn’t taken action yet, so it is still open to comment.
 - Richard has been trying to get more local government awareness on the issue in hopes that they will speak out in opposition. He has been communicating with cities, the county, and water purveyors about this issue. He’s been getting “head nods” from many of them, if there is a coordinated effort to oppose.
 - If multiple government groups were willing to make similar statements against the mines, we could package it and deliver it to the BC government.
 - We have not yet formalized a resolution. Devin would like to run it by SRSC tribal members before voting.
 - ***Staff will send out a draft resolution. Voting will happen at the next meeting.**

New Business

- ***Richard will share email with board about south fork permit process.**

- The board was presented with three different Puget Sound Partnership Sign-on Letters. These can be signed as individuals or as organizations. Look like good federal priorities, but the board needed more time to review. ***Richard will follow up on letters via email.**
- Land Acquisitions:
 - SLT and SWC members have been working on acquiring a parcel of land by Skiyou Slough that is currently degraded so would require SWC Board review, but the landowner just decided that she was not prepared to move forward at this time.
 - This is an illustration of the need for rapid response in land acquisitions, although the need for restoration to ensure acquired lands provide habitat value creates a challenge.
 - The process for acquiring degraded land is less straight-forward than the process of acquiring pristine land, since management and restoration implications are important to consider in advance.
 - The Board discussed the need to develop a predictable process for moving forward with key acquisitions that are in need of restoration but would not work well as stand alone grant requests. ***Some ideas discussed included: 1) asking acquisition and restoration partners to assess restoration needs more thoroughly upfront and then identifying what they can commit to. 2) Completing assessments in advance of project review, and a more detailed restoration plan presented to TWG. 3) Asking for a commitment to habitat restoration goals for the property via letters or stewardship plans, identifying the support of a partner or consultant with experience implementing restoration projects, and a commitment to pursuing grants or other funding to implement the restoration goals.**
 - JP – This is one of the most important conversations this board could be having. We've already purchased the best, biggest habitat lands. We need to better prepare for more compromised land that need restoration. Part of our strategy might need to be a "buy and transfer" policy, so we acquire the land as quick as possible, then transfer it to the responsible party later.
 - Devin – Who owns conservation land is a question that the tribes are very interested in. We may want to think more broadly about who the best owner of conservation land should be. Is it better for complicated projects to be owned by a public entity? This is a risk management question.
 - Michael – SLT has always been open to that approach.
 - What currently are "exception projects" may become the norm.
 - Bill – We need to prioritize protecting areas that are going to be important for ecological processes – it doesn't matter if it will take a long time to restore these

areas. It's on us to emphasize the importance of what the river needs to be able to restore itself. Our priority should be acquiring land that can provide the most smolt production – not acquiring the land that needs the least work, which is how the 2017 Protection Strategy is focused, and why more examples are coming up recently.

- Developing acquisition strategies for degraded lands is already in process, including through Sauk Habitat Plan and Skiyou/Ross Island Reach Assessment. ***Need to report out on these and engage joint committee work.**
- Concerns expressed by some members of the Board about recent letters from local government downplaying the importance of land acquisition in salmon restoration. ***This will be on next agenda for broader discussion and response comments. Everyone should be given enough info to be prepared to discuss this next meeting.**

➤ Discussion on SWC's role in the Skagit Hydropower Relicensing Process

- Richard: the SWC is a non-regulatory body and represents a lot of different opinions. We've always tried to work on the things that are agreed upon by our members and stay out of the fray. However, there is a lot of change in the air, and there are some heated disagreements between members of the council. Even in the face of those disagreements, many related topics that we need to keep communicating with the public, so it's complicated. I need clear guidance and then support to do the job.
- For example, what is our role in communicating about controversial topics on social platforms? It is not uncommon to get questions about harvest management on Facebook. We don't have a regulatory role in that, but it is very common for us to educate people about this topic, as we couldn't do the habitat work without that.
- John Stein – we have no active role in the relicensing. No one disagreed when given the opportunity to rebut that. What is ok to talk about or not talk about, specifically about the relicensing process? Is it to discuss the larger work of the Council and to avoid areas of disagreement or weighing in on relicensing directly, for instance?
- JP – The SWC does have an educational role in the relicensing and beyond.
- Andrew – I'm happy to answer questions about what the PR firm is asking. They want to talk to Richard over someone from SCL because they think Richard is less biased than us. They are interested in trying to understand what SCL is a partner of. It would not bother me if the board wanted to stay more independent – or get more involved. He would recuse himself in any discussion-making votes on

the matter. SWC has a role in communicating the state of our combined understanding of the watershed.

- JP – It's important to communicate where the watershed is, but it's a difficult dance to know what's going to be fairly representing a large and diverse sets of interest. When we can't identify the 'hot points' upfront, there is a risk.
 - ***Richard will try to steer clear of conversations about areas where we don't agree and focus on areas where we do.**
 - ***John suggests regular check-ins on areas of agreement and disagreement in the board meetings.**
 - Devin – I support Richard giving info on behalf of the SWC, I think that's great. But the relicensing is complicated and members likely have divergent views on the subject. The spirit of the SWC is on volunteer restoration with 45 member organizations and delving into regulatory processes is outside the mission of the SWC. And in the case of relicensing, there are lots of risks in unintentionally favoring the views of some members over others.
 - In full disclosure, Richard is also now on the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission relicensing committee. ***The Board can discuss SEEC in more detail at the next meeting.**
- US House of Reps 2021 [Community Project Funding Requests](#)
- The House is moving back to something more like earmarks. Each US rep can put forth their top 10 community project funding requests.
 - Several people asked if there would be a salmon recovery earmarks. WDFW is trying to get some estuary projects on the list. The Milltown project that's 60% designed is being added by WDFW. This project in particular is well supported and ripe for federal funding. ***We could all send individual support letters for these projects. *Richard will submit a SWC letter of support for the Milltown project.**
 - McGlenn Causeway was discussed as a project associated with a US Army Corps of Engineers project facility; one that will cost many millions of dollars potentially. It is not ready yet, but some work in progress. May be presented next year.
- Salmon Recovery Council
- Recent retreat agreed to work on a process of who and how to ask for "mega projects" (over \$100 million). Telegraph Slough might fit in this package. Suggests we deal with these differently than other projects.
 - And how to develop a 10-year business plan for selling our normal, large PSAR projects to different funders with guaranteed sequencing and outcomes. Several

of our larger estuary projects will fit in this package. Align with projects for Orcas and for weak stocks limiting fisheries (e.g. Stillaguamish estuary).

- Bill: Richard did a good job representing Skagit at the event last Friday. ***More to follow on this topic next meeting.**

➤ Communicating research with the public:

- Richard mentioned his idea to co-host a half-day research summit as part of this year's annual lunch, if researchers are ready to share. The board generally supported that idea.
 - John suggested a panel discussion after several short research presentations.
 - Devin: we've talked about that internally. Would like to do some additional education. Just needs to be clear on who the audience is.
 - ***We will add a discussion of this to the next meeting after staff talk to researchers.**
 - Holli would love to make a videos and other tools to make research more publicly available.
 - Peter: we can make this available on our county channel, which does get watched by lots of people.

For the Good of the Order and Adjourn 12:15pm