

Skagit Watershed Council Technical Work Group (TWG)

April 20, 2017, 1:00 – 4:00PM, SWC Office, Mount Vernon

Final Notes

(* indicates action item; __ indicates decision)

Attendance: Alison Studley, (SFEG, Chair) Bob Warinner (WDFW), Devin Smith (Skagit River System Cooperative), Jeff McGowan (Skagit County), Chris Vondrasek (SWC), Rick Hartson (Upper Skagit Indian Tribe), Erin Lowery (Seattle City Light), Jane Zillig (SLT), Ed Connor (Seattle City Light), Jeremy Gillman (USFS)

Absent: Tom Slocum (Skagit Conservation District), Doug Bruland (PSE), Leah Kintner (PSP)

Guests: Richard Brocksmith (SWC), Nathan Rice (note taker, Kulshan Services), Jenny Baker (TNC), Jenna Friebel (WDFW), Polly Hicks (NOAA)

Introductions were skipped. Review Draft Agenda. Convened 1:11 pm

Approve February and March Meeting Notes. February notes approved. Request for SWC staff to address comments and make edits in March notes and then re-comment to show that specific comments have been approved; ***this will be done and sent out next week.**

SWC Committee and Program Reports

- Board of Directors - Richard Brocksmith

The Board discussed the Protection Strategy, which will be reviewed later in this meeting. They approved returned PSAR funding for three projects as discussed in the last meeting but there is still a lot of work to get it done. The Board also approved a small contract amendment to SFEG for a planting project. The M&AM contract to Natural Systems Design was approved by the Board contingent on TWG's approval. There is also a small addition to riparian project contract for ESA. The nominating committee is looking to expand the Board. Carolyn Kelly is remaining active through June, but she will need to be replaced. ***Ideas or suggestions for board nominations should be forwarded to the nominating committee care of Richard.** Board members must be members of a member organization, not a staff member, but at least a member.

- Protection Subcommittee - Bob Warinner

At their April meeting the Subcommittee discussed the new Assessment results and new Protection Strategy language. Seattle City Light proposed an acquisition in Snohomish (Bob Warinner showed the habitat map of it) which was greenlighted. However, their initial offer was turned down by the seller.

- M&AM Subcommittee – Richard Brocksmith

The subcommittee reviewed the draft monitoring report. They reviewed status and trends data and outlined the trends and conclusions. They reviewed Eric Beamer's work in estuary to capture his

conclusions and share them. They're also working to layout a framework for what additional indicators and metrics might be in the future, as well as a more formal decision-making framework. The committee is making great progress on nearshore and estuary side with rich data to work with. Maybe that topic can come to the committee soon before freshwater and riparian indicators, since we have quite a bit more work to do there.

The committee released the RFP for monitoring proposals. We received a monitoring proposal for the Cascade and Sauk River reach from SRSC. SRSC advanced a proposal LOI but didn't resubmit an application.

The committee also received another smaller, short-term proposal to help build an explicit rationale for wood and floodplain processes to help build a foundation for monitoring plan. That will be done by June and was approved contingent on TWG approval. This would be a rationale and framework that could be included in the recovery plan; now working with M&AM committee to develop monitoring protocols. In the Chinook Recovery Plan, LWD is an implicit component in watershed recovery but it doesn't have an empirical basis or metrics. There is an emphasis on status and trends monitoring around LWD. The concern was that we don't have a decision framework on why and how that should happen. There's a strong sense that it's a good thing to do and makes sense. Research shows LWD is important in rivers and for Chinook in the Skagit as well. Nooksack recovery is much more explicitly focused on wood.

TWG approved the LWD & floodplain rationale proposal/idea monitoring proposal. Jeremy Gilman abstained.

***As some TWG members missed locating all the advance meeting materials, particularly those linked to within the agenda there was a request for a more consistent way to share materials so that some materials aren't missed. The request discouraged that materials are linked to within the agenda. Materials should be attached to the agenda email whenever possible. The group should have a week to review materials, and/or two meetings to review before making a decision.**

- Habitat Work Schedule Program – Alison

A college student wanted to monitor birds at restoration sites, so the work schedule is being used!

- Lead Entity Program – Chris Vondrasek

Applications have been submitted. TRC members have been confirmed. Kevin Aitkins will replace Rich Carlson from USFWS. Polly Hicks from NOAA will be unable to participate.

Skagit Hydrodynamic Model Update – Polly Hicks (NOAA), Jenny Baker (TNC), Jenna Friebe (WDFW)

The Skagit HDM project involves populating criteria and parameters in the comprehensive scorecard to account for stakeholders within the farming, flood management, and salmon recovery constituencies.

The project is part of the Farm, Fish, & Flood Initiative and consistent with Chinook Recovery plan and SWC approach. This project also feeds into the Tidegate Fish Initiative.

The team reviewed methods for fish indicators and results looking at 22 habitat restoration concepts. They also reviewed objectives in Farm, Fish, and Flood areas, as well as the modeling process in an in-depth presentation.

The next step in the project is Phase 2 of the modeling. There will also be a cumulative impact analysis and an initial climate change analysis. The report will be done in October.

The team wanted input on the weighting of indicators and objectives, comparing habitat scoring and smolt production predictions. These are initial results and indicator weightings, can be altered based on comments.

Questions

How were footprints derived for each project? Assumptions about dike removals, etc.

The team identified all projects and pulled GIS files from Eric. They smoothed out where existing levee was and assumed how far on landward side, with a buffer. Refined grid resolution in some areas. Footprints are intended to be conceptual, not design-level.

Did you do any sensitivity analysis on benefit v. impact data? The scales seem a bit arbitrary. Is there any other structure for this? Could impacts just be subtracted from benefit scores?

We tinkered with it a lot and didn't see a lot of change. Equal weighting didn't seem right.

Could you just could net increase or decrease in wetted area?

We subtracted impact from benefit, but it masked what the benefit was and it was harder to conceptualize. We are still thinking about how to analyze benefit – impact relationship. Suggestions?

The acre-hour calculation is an interesting tool. Do you have a map of the area in acre-hours? You could find hot spots and cool spots spatially throughout the basin.

No, we did not make a map but that's an interesting idea.

What about salinity?

Salinity calculations crashed the supercomputer. There were too many nodes.

This is an early introduction to this project. TWG should think about this before next grant round. Fish numbers are now changing and being improved – how does that standard apply to projects not included here?

SWC Protection Strategy Update – Richard Brocksmith and Chris Vondrasek

TWG discussed draft and comments received. There was strong support for several improvements to strategy update in the last meeting. Protection Subcommittee advised on language as well. The Board suggested some improvements in Table 3. The new document reflects all of those recommendations.

Chris has been working on revising the mainstem floodplain assessments based on feedback from the Protection Subcommittee, and Kate Ramsden and Devin Smith at SRSC. The revisions include reassessing parcels downstream of SR9, adding side channel and backwater aquatic habitats that were excluded, improving the way hydromods were accounted for, and cleaning up some remaining issues with multi-polygon parcels. That's why you haven't been able to see those outputs until now.

There was concern expressed about the availability of data for review before meetings, and a hope there will be enough time so that shapefiles can be reviewed.

Discussion ensued about how much habitat degradation is acceptable in the Protection Strategy. Can, should we reduce degraded area weightings further? Did we down-weight them enough? How are those thresholds defined? How are gray areas reviewed? Board said this is built on trust, we need flexibility, but we need a process in place.

Questions / Discussion

Are mainstem and tribs handled independently?

Board recognition that we haven't been assessing and possibly acquiring parcels in the tributaries before. The tributary riparian corridors generally have less impairment. Perhaps there should be different thresholds in the tribs versus the mainstem. It's an open question. It would probably reshuffle mainstem parcels above trib parcels.

How much restoration is too much restoration? A lot of mainstem parcels have been heavily impacted by agriculture and could take a lot of work. Protection is about protecting the best intact habitat (rather than heavily impacted lands).

How to define "too degraded?" "Intact"? "Intrinsic"?

The mechanism is quantifying both intrinsic and intact habitat. Do we want to only look at intact, or is there some degree of potential included? We are not saying no restoration. We need an objective assessment to find that balance. SRFB allows for certain percentage of cost to go toward restoration ~10% -- That would be one way to define it. A dozen other ways to skin the cat. Amount of forest cover is another possible metric.

There was an extended discussion on how to weight parcels based on degradation.

The new methodology shows restoration sites with hydromods being recommended. This seems better than the first go round but the weights don't seem right in some cases.

What about great restoration opportunities that could be acquired by protection money?

Treeplanting needs are easier to address than hydromods.

We could overlay hydromod layer and remove every parcel with hydro mods in it?

We could create a fourth color – a new layer – for restoration parcels that are high ranking but don't qualify for block grants because they are too degraded (by hydromods). Leave some flexibility at bottom of spectrum for restoration potential parcels.

There was a discussion about how perfect the map needs to be. There will always be anomalies. The river will continue to move. We can tweak and fiddle with it, but how right do we need to be? 95% of parcels are right and then we manually fix 5% of them? That seems ok. At some point the GIS work is done and local experts need to discuss the merits of particular parcels.

Small parcels can be really important for connectivity.

***Chris will look at hydromods and how they overlap with parcels (and create a new layer for those)**

***Expand review process for greenlighted parcels beyond just two people – whole will be TWG informed. At least two TWG members attend review, but everyone is invited.**

***For next fiscal year review restoration reach level grants and how they partner with protection grants.**

4:05 PM Adjourn

Next TWG Meeting

- May 18, 2017?

Next TRC Meetings

- May 8 and 9, 2017 (site visits)
- June 28, 2017 (final technical review and ranking)