

Final Notes, Skagit Watershed Council Technical Work Group (TWG)
May 18th, 2023 1:00-3:00pm, Hybrid Meeting at Skagit Watershed Council

(decisions underlined, *action items in bold)

Attendees: Rick Hartson (Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, acting chair), Aundrea McBride (SWC), Regina Wandler (Skagit Land Trust), Jeff Fisher (Seattle City Light), Taylor Scott (Conservation District), Pat Stevenson (Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group)

Guests: Richard Brocksmith (SWC), Jenny Baker (WDFW)

Convened 1:11

Beginning Business

Introductions and check-in: Quorum achieved.

Agenda review: Approved the agenda by consent.

Notes: Motion to approve March notes by Jeff, seconded by Aundrea, all approve. (Note the TWG did not meet in April)

Committee Updates

Board: Met 5/4/23. Nominated John Stein for another term. Discussed the Council of Members meeting agenda. Discussed Martin Road Community letters regarding O'Brian Reach and Barnaby projects and the Board's role in responding. Decided that SWC needs to get involved if a sponsor is not implementing their work plan as intended or if the sponsor asks for support. Discussed the misinformation in the letters and how that needs to be addressed through public education and outreach. Discussed adaptive response for projects: could there be a state-wide bonding process? **Richard will get back with the SRFB about moving this agenda item along.**

Protection: Met 4/11/23 and 5/9/23. Greenlighted one parcel and conditionally greenlighted a second parcel pending rescoring.

Riparian: Did not meet

M&AM: Met 3/27/23 and 4/24/23. Received a presentation in March by Catherine Austin about SRSC's monitoring project proposal. Discussed and approved the project for funding based on technical merit for the full amount of \$59,158, noting that \$50,000 will be funded if the project passes the Regional and State processes as stated in the RFP and that the additional \$9,153 requested will have to go to the LECC for ranking with the rest of the grant round projects. The proposal separates the budget into separate work items for those amounts so that the \$50,000 portion of the project can move ahead with or without the additional component. In April the M&AM heard responses from Catherine to comments on her proposal and heard a presentation from Jen O'Neal about a yearling study she did looking at habitat preferences. **The presentation will be posted on Box.**

Membership

Rick volunteers to take on chair ship of this committee and resign as co-chair of the M&AM Subcommittee, and continue as chair of the Protection Subcommittee. Motion by Jeff to recommend to the Board that Rick be appointed permanent chair of the Technical Work Group, seconded by Taylor. All agree.

Kevik cannot participate in the TWG due to other work obligations. He will let us know if another staff person from PSE can participate.

Sauk Plan Update

This grant was awarded in 2019 to SWC. With COVID delays, work started in 2021 to replicate the best parts of the Middle Skagit Assessment. Natural Systems Design was contracted to complete geomorphic technical reports, viewed by TWG in November 2022. From this a comprehensive list of project ideas was generated by Richard and sent to the Steering Committee in March. Still in review. **Comments are needed back by the end of May.**

Summary of Chapter 3:

- 3 high priority reaches for protection and restoration were identified.
- Chapter 3 includes an assessment of Chinook demographics. Lower Sauk Summers are in poorest shape of six populations (due to low incubation success?).
- Channel instability is hypothesized to be a habitat and fish issue.
- The Sauk has low water problems as well.
- The Sauk is likely both rearing and spawning limited.

Discussion:

- Has the Sauk Report strengthened the above arguments?
- What are agreed strategies to address these issues?
- The grant expired in December and SWC and SCL have been supporting the project since then. A final submittal is due to RCO by the end of June.
- Continued outreach will be necessary, but this is a separate task/discussion.
- This report needs the approval of the comanagers. A question was raised about this report's relationship to the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan. That's up to the comanagers.
- The steering committee has not provided final comments since the draft in March (relicensing is a competing priority). The committee is Scott Morris, Rick Hartson, Colin Wahl, Devin Smith, Bob Warinner (followed by Marcus Reaves when Bob left), Jeff Fisher, Frank Leonetti and John Riedel.

Summary of Chapter 6:

- This follows the same geomorphic assessment hierarchy as the Middle Skagit Assessment, but uses different approach and criteria for putting restoration projects into low, medium, and high bins.
- Highest ranked actions are reconnecting isolated, high quality habitat.

- Habitat gain is based on best professional judgement for areas of potential effect of proposed actions. Low, medium and high classification based on natural breaks (described in the methods).
- Criteria includes impacts on community and weighs benefit vs. community impact like the estuary study done previously.
- NSD created a GIS project that includes existing data. The 36 stressor-based habitat concepts are also mapped.
- NSD developed 14 strategic opportunities to improve side channel connectivity and enhance habitat.
- NSD proposed large wood installation across the whole channel to address identified channel stability and complexity limitations.
- The Plan also adopts the addition of Protection Strategy ranking of parcels for previously unranked parcels in Snohomish County.
- Fourteen unique sites are identified for reforestation.

Discussion:

- In addition to high, medium and low ratings, there is a category of project currently identified as “protect” that may need a better name. These are sites that didn’t rise to high or medium ratings but should be identified because of their public ownership status (SCL, Snohomish County, or WSDOT) to be potentially restored in the future as opposed to further hardened.
- Community impact = # of parcels and roads and scale of current use impact.
- Report has several next assessment steps identified. See page 57.
- SRSC and others are asking several questions about large wood proposal to address channel instability. The Recovery Plan didn’t address restoring floodplain processes through engineered log jams, rather focused on restoring upstream watershed processes. For example, putting wood in a stream is less effective without having upstream processes like hydrology and wood recruitment working.
- NSD digitized wood over time and ELJs that are there are not staying in place. Need stability first or wood won’t stick.
- How successful and at what scale has this kind of LWD placement been in the past?
- How does this report relate to the Recovery Plan? What is predicted fish response?
- Sauk River seems to be in such good shape, but the fish there are not. Why?
- Richard identified the conceptual project sites from remote sensing and field confirmation.
- Where possible, checked the existing data through field confirmation.

Riparian Proviso Phase 1 Report

Phase 1 of this project has a deadline of June. The project arose as a strategy for addressing the Lower Skagit TMDL streams, to work with and incentivize landowners to voluntarily plant buffers. SWC, SCD and the Conservation Commission have been working on it. The report lists barriers to landowners and ideas for incentives to support landowners in their stewardship

decisions. It is not a scientific report/review. Phase 2 is already being implemented in part. For example, Taylor is pulling together a website of resources (scientific) that people can link to.

Discussion:

- SITC wants the report to refer to science-based standards for riparian replanting, so have not currently supported the draft. The Drainage and Irrigation District doesn't like the report because it does not say how much riparian habitat in what locations is enough.
Richard can share both sets of organizational comments upon request.
- This report was not meant to address these technical and higher-level policy issues. It is a social science study recommending ways to address landowner barriers to participation in voluntary riparian planting.
- How do we move the report ahead? It needs SWC Board approval if the SWC logo is going to be on the report. It is beneficial for the watershed to show broad-based efforts moving forward.
- Who is the audience of the report? Answer: landowners, practitioners, the legislature, agencies.
- VSP Advisory Board and Ag Advisory Board had no red flags with the Phase 1 report.
- Consensus opinion by the TWG: The TWG has reviewed the report and recommendations and note that they are consistent with the voluntary incentivization for restoration encouraged by and through the SRFB and SWC. Given the policy nature of the recommendations in the report, the TWG considers it appropriate that the Board form its own position in regard to approval of the report and its findings.

Adjourn 3:15

Upcoming TWG Meetings:

June 15

July 13, 9:00-4:00, TRC meeting followed by a short TWG meeting

No meeting in August for summer break