

Final Notes, Skagit Watershed Council Technical Work Group (TWG)
September 21, 1:00pm-3:00pm
Hybrid Meeting at Skagit Watershed Council and via Zoom

(decisions underlined, action items *bold)

Attendees: Rick Hartson (USIT, Chair), Colin Wahl (SRSC), Aundrea McBride (SWC), Regina Wandler (SLT), Emily Derenne (Skagit County), Taylor Scott (SCD)

Absent: Jeff Fisher (SCL), Pat Stevens (SFEG)

Guests: Richard Brocksmith (SWC), Holli Watne (SWC), Catherine Austin (SRSC), Jenny Baker (WDFW), Jess Lange (SLT), Alex Richard (WDFW)

Convened 1:05pm

Beginning Business

Reviewed the agenda. Approved the agenda unanimously.

Approved the July notes. Motion by Emily. Taylor seconded. Unanimous.

New committee assignments

- Recommend Alex Richard to the Board for appointment to this committee. Motion by Aundrea, seconded by Taylor. Unanimous.
- Recommend Jess Lange to the Board for appointment to this committee to replace Regina Wandler who is resigning. Motion by Emily, seconded by Taylor. Unanimous.
- ***Aundrea will add both to the email list and send the box link, etc.**

Committee Reports

Board of Directors – Met on 8/3/23 to discuss succession and the annual lunch. Met on 9/7/23 to approve the succession plan, which includes the hiring committee recommending candidates, the chairs from each SWC committee and staff acting in an advisory capacity. The Board has final decision. The board is expecting to approve a job announcement and advertising plan. Riparian funds policy just updated by RCO (see below). Discussed PSAR Large Cap RFP (see below). Monitoring project letter to RCO tabled to go back to M&AM.

Protection Subcommittee – Met on 8/8/23. They looked at one parcel on the delta that Emily had told them was for sale. Tabled until Emily could give feedback about if there is a restoration plan. May not be a good use of block funds. Emily says supports purchasing this property. Dike District owns surrounding properties and should probably be the one to purchase this property. SLT will check with the Dike District. There is no restoration plan currently according to Emily.

M&AM subcommittee – Met on 8/28/23 to discuss rescoping Alluvial Fan Monitoring Project for submission to new funding source. The original project was part of this year’s grant round and was disqualified by the Monitoring Panel. The grant round process was problematic. SWC is working on a letter to RCO about that.

Riparian Work Group – Met on 9/6/23 to work on the upcoming North Sound Riparian Conference January 23, which will focus on noxious weed control. An agenda is coming together nicely.

SRFB – met on 9/13/23, Aundrea represented Washington Salmon Coalition

- Match Policy: 2 proposals so far. Nick Norton was given direction to develop a draft policy for no match for projects. SRFB would require outside funding to be documented, but not in a detailed way, so that the total real cost of projects is known and the burden on sponsors is minimal.
- Next Year’s Grant Round: There’s going to be more money coming into grant round. \$25M in riparian specific funds (less overhead) will go directly to the regions, which will give at least \$300k to Lead Entities and then allocate the balance probably according to the usual formula. Still needs to be approved by the Salmon Recovery Council. Could be as much as \$1.4M or as little as \$1mil to Skagit to spend this year (2023 projects) and next depending on how the SRC interprets the SRFB decision. Timing depends on how the region (PSP) gets the program implemented. We still need to discuss the set aside for riparian for next year. As for how the money will be applied, the LECC already approved the 2023 project list, so we can fund down that list. We need to go to the board to verify about Tenas. Collin needs to verify if he still needs the full amount that he’s asked for. ***We will send info to Board and TWG once facts have been gathered.**
- Carryover Funds: \$4M in state-wide carryover funds will go to 2024 grant round via the usual allocation formula.
- RCO is also seeking a \$20M supplemental funding. Up in the air now.

RCO Riparian funding update

Policy summary on what was presented at the SRFB is in box (new since agenda went out). Timing is not in there, but eligible project types are. The proposal includes longer grant terms to allow for follow-up stewardship. Stewardship and weed control projects are allowed (different from original state-wide proposal). Acquisitions are also eligible for this money. No Match requirement. The dike road property may be eligible for this funding.

Grant round wrap up and state

Shared final ranking from PRISM (in box). PSAR dollars are not official yet. Program Guide revisions will be coming in October. Those will include the schedule, RFP, and 4 Year Work Plan process revisions.

Sauk Plan update

Technical committee met last week. Richard had addressed final comments. Talked about strategic enhancements and projects that improve connectivity of side channels. Plan Priorities: 1) Protect the best habitat - In the Sauk, there is lots of protected riparian habitat. 2) Connect isolated habitat - Side channels are not being connected on their own due to the lack of old growth trees. Identifying channel destabilization is something that the comanagers are wanting. 3) Fix side channel connectivity. 4) Restore floodplain processes, focusing on riparian areas. Some restoration target areas are privately owned. Current process to get approval for purchase is too long to be effective. Proposal to, if certain conditions are met, allow purchase with block grant. Richard shared 3 examples that don't meet requirements for reach-level grants (Protection Strategy), like just downstream of Darrington, an area that's open farmland with no road or dikes in the floodplain. Lack of vegetation is one of the main reasons this wouldn't get greenlit. These would be "no brainers" to acquire for habitat restoration if they became available. Goal: respond more quickly to do big restoration projects.

Discussion:

- There's definitely interest in reconnecting habitat. Each project would be looked at on a case by case basis to evaluate how to approach.
- We've seen this kind of approach for quickly buying areas that are good contenders for restoration. We'd want to set up a list of specific sites to buy as soon as they are available. The planning document itself would be the rationale/support for buying these lands with block grants.
- Approving the 8-10 parcels is great, but I'm not comfortable with expanding this conversation beyond the Sauk at this time.
- Research from the dam relicensing projects will provide more info that we will need to bring this conversation to the bigger watershed .
- The new riparian funding could be applied for acquiring areas like this.
- Richard: I'm hoping the Board will approve for me to submit a final report to SRFB. Would like to wrap this up before I officially step down from SWC.

***Aundrea will put the info Richard shared in box.**

PSAR RFP comments and 10 Year Plan/ 15 Year Review update

The Salmon Recovery Council is reviewing new proposals for criteria for PSAR Large Cap projects. Their initial proposal for the next RFP had been to award projects impacting weak stocks an extra 20 points. They are now reconsidering 3 proposals. We will hear more from future meetings. The latest draft has 3 options: 1) no target criteria, 2) targeting weak stocks at a finer scale that would include some Skagit stocks, or 3) going with their original proposal.

4 Year Work Plan discussion

The following is a proposal for an improved and inclusive 4YWP review process:

1. Any fish passage barrier can be included on the list because tribes have prioritized removing all fish passage barriers.
2. Other projects not in Tier 1, 2, or 2s areas can be approved on a case by case basis by the TWG qualitatively using the scoring criteria for SRFB grant round projects (process based restoration, scale and benefit, cost effectiveness).
3. All projects in SRP and on the 4YWP will be coded by tier, with Samish and non-Chinook projects getting a 'null' or 'NA' tier designation.
4. Samish and non-Chinook projects are not included on the PPFL (per coding in SRP).
5. We follow the Program Guide process as already laid out, with some updates and adding the above specifications.

Discussion:

- We need more time set aside to talk about this.
- Samish projects can be on 4ywp but not a PPFL. This means we can write letters of support. With all the riparian money coming in, this will be beneficial.

***Audrea will update the program guide going in this direction, for review at our next meeting.**

Alluvial Fans monitoring project presentation by Catherine

This is a new grant opportunity. The project is similar to what has been presented in the past, with more sampling sites and model testing.

Basis: Illabot creek met all habitat metrics for increased channel complexity and more. However, it did not meet juvenile fish goals. There may be differences across alluvial fans. They will be testing hypotheses about fish community differences in upper vs. middle, vs. lower fan. This this work will guide us in future restoration projects by providing juvenal Chinook density predications based on reach location. We will compare fish results to 3-4 models for predicting fish density to determine which is the best tool to predict outcomes of future projects.

Catherine needs help picking reference sites for this study. Recommendations for Fisher Creek/Fisher Slough, restored for quite a while. Nookachamps could be used as an impacted site. Colony Creek too.

Rick: what are the criteria for funding this project? Does this inform future work?

***Audrea will share the funding announcement with Rick.**

The grant is due Oct 12. Planning on announcing successful applicants in late October. Last year, there were 7 applications and 5 or 6 were funded. Looking for a statement of support from us today. Motion by Taylor to approve scope change and recommend the Board approve it, with a promise to check in on site selection. Emily seconds. Unanimous.

Announcements

Yuki is applying for a NOAA grant for culverts and encourages other applicants to contact her to coordinate.

Emily: the Cedar Grove project is having to add ADA back-in

***We will add time for project updates in our next meeting**

Upcoming TWG Meetings:

October 19

November 16

December 21 (??)