

**Skagit Watershed Council**  
**Technical Working Group – February 20, 2014**  
**Meeting Notes - Final**

**\*Action Items are bolded.**

Members in Attendance: Rick Hartson, Devin Smith, Doug Bruland, Richard Brocksmitth, Bob Warinner, Jeff McGowan, Ed Connor, Martha Bray, Tom Slocum, and Alison Studley.

Guests in Attendance: Leah Kintner

Agenda and January meeting notes are approved by consensus.

Subcommittee Reports

Subcommittee reports were short given the size of the agenda, and included an overview of Protection Subcommittee (several acquisitions have closed recently; 2009 and 2010 reach-level grants have closed successfully; 2011 and 2013 funds remain though enough properties are now identified to expend them in short order; recent field visit to see several new sites; and a proposal for TWG's review later today) and Adaptive Management and Monitoring Subcommittee (has been meeting monthly with work sessions in between; yesterday's meeting was very productive as we've completed early sections of the framework and moved on to results chains; and now we are starting to see how the tools can be used to identify gaps in the recovery plan and develop a systematic monitoring program).

SWC Support for Non-Priority Actions

Richard relayed the Board of Directors' conversation about the Town of Concrete's request for support and TWG response. The Board explored the concept and generally agreed that SWC should continue to expand support for implementing science-based actions for salmon recovery even if they may not be the highest priority Chinook Salmon actions we've been so focused on lately. TWG discussed how some of the early SWC foundational documents (e.g. 1998 Strategy) guide these types of actions and can be a starting point for beginning that assessment. TWG also discussed working with certain funding sources and organizational support that might be more appropriate for these other priority actions. **\*More effort will be put into this question in future months when time allows.**

Large Capital PSAR

The TWG discussed the upcoming Large Capital Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration (PSAR) grant opportunity coming up that is proposed to be implemented in conjunction with the typical 2014 SRFB grant round. Final projects would be submitted to PSP by August 2014, ranked regionally, and submitted to the legislature for potential funding in July 2015. While it will be fairly difficult to accurately propose big projects this far in the future of funding given they are still being designed, analyzed and vetted, the grant timeline has already been set for us and we need to meet that timeline

or just miss the opportunity (which no one wants). The TWG did discuss breaking Large Capital PSAR into a separate funding process that could be delayed by 2-4 months with a truncated review process in summer, but that would not provide enough time to be that much more certain of the project details and would require another “process” in the middle of the summer. Several projects were discussed that could fit this category, including Illabot Floodplain, Barnaby Slough, Cottonwood Slough, South Skagit Highway Realignment, and Goodell Creek Floodplain Restoration. The latter two did not seem at first glance to have enough detail to propose construction activities through Large Capital PSAR this round. Each watershed can submit up to 3 projects, but most if not all watersheds got only 1 project funded in the last grant round in 2013.

### Project Review

TWG discussed Similk Beach project which has been updated since the 2013 proposal, with the sponsor changing from Skagit County to SRSC. The previous TWG meeting agreed to expedite the project for review and potential funding this spring. It was noted that match amounts and sources were unclear in the current proposal and that this must be confirmed and meet minimum 15%. SRSC indicated that the project budget provided was for the total cost of the project and that a 15% match would be secured and the County noted they were committed to at least some portion of that match. It was noted that it was unclear which aspects of the site investigations would be done in-house or with consultants, but that some thought should be put into making sure the most critical investigations associated with increased liability should be completed by qualified technologists. TWG recommends conditioning the project to implement it in a phased approach that conducts critical elements of coastal engineering robustly (e.g. for beach inlet stability and tidal inundation) and that then the landowners and significant stakeholders would formally agree on a go/no go decision before expending remaining resources on completing the design as proposed. **\*The TWG unanimously recommends to the Board to authorize the project for full funding with the conditions outlined above.** Jeff and Devin recused themselves from evaluation and decision-making. **\*Richard will work with Steve to refine proposal and bring to the Board on March 6, 2014.**

TWG discussed Goodell Creek Floodplain Design and Restoration in the upper watershed (proposed by the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe) and their request for a letter of support. The intent is natural process restoration to remove hydromodifications within rearing areas to reconnect an isolated floodplain. It was noted that the expense of the project could be very significant particularly if it involved infrastructure under SR20. **\*After some discussion, there was unanimous agreement that the project was consistent with the 1998 SWC Habitat Protection and Restoration Strategy and that the TWG recommends to the Board supporting the project with a support letter.** The conversation next turned to what priority the project would be within the 2010 Strategic Approach. It appears that at least part of the project site is within the floodplain of the upper Skagit River, qualifying it for Tier 2 status. It was not clear whether the whole project site qualified for Tier 2 status as that depended on the definition and intent of the phrase “floodplain-adjacent...alluvial fans.” It was noted that part of the original intent of adding smaller tributary floodplains, unstable slopes, alluvial fans, and riparian areas was that they may serve as refuges from mainstem disturbances such as flooding and erosion. **\*TWG agreed the 2010**

**Strategic Approach could benefit from refinement in this area and carrying it to the next stage of analysis in the future.** Rick recused himself from evaluation and decision-making.

TWG was presented with a Protection Subcommittee recommendation to authorize an exception to the formula-driven process for green-lighting specific parcels for acquisition. A large, active cattle farm in lower Illabott Creek is interested in selling development rights, and the Protection Subcommittee recommended that to proceed the project also needed to both permanently protect 40m of riparian area width and create a solid path for riparian restoration to occur. The TWG first discussed and had consensus on the high value of restoration and protection along Illabot Creek. The TWG also noted that 40m was consistent with the 1998 SWC Habitat Protection and Restoration Strategy. The TWG then went around the table person by person to discuss the process question of supporting an exception to the formula-driven acquisition strategy. At least two members did not initially support the exception since it required restoration to make the acquisition worthwhile (in some members' opinions). All members agreed that restoration had to be a condition of the project proceeding as recommended, and the pathway to doing that was discussed including potentially working with an existing or new SRFB grant, Conservation District's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), or County's Natural Resource Stewardship Program. **\*All but one TWG member (who did not want to block the consensus) came to the consensus of support for the recommendation to be made to the Board for final decision, re-emphasizing the critical aspect and condition of the 40m riparian restoration component.** Martha recused herself from evaluation and decision-making.

#### 2014 Grant Cycle

TWG briefly reviewed the refined draft timeline developed with previous TWG and Board input. TWG discussed how to address cumbersome nature of completing a "final technical review" and the scoring at the same meeting in 2013. **\*After significant discussion on trade-offs of expanding the steps and time required, there was agreement that the TWG supported the schedule as proposed but that the June 19<sup>th</sup> ranking meeting would have a morning component to invite in all project sponsors to complete a final technical review and then reconvening in the afternoon to complete evaluation and ranking.**

TWG generally supported keeping the separate riparian mini-grant of 15% and no more than \$200,000, while noting that riparian projects beyond that cap could continue to complete within the main grant process.

TWG briefly discussed conflict of interest and **\*generally recommended that the definition should continue to include family members specifically.** There was no dissent to the recommendation to allow potentially conflicted project Technical Review Committee (TRC) members to stay in the room during deliberations to improved informed decision-making while assuring they could not advocate for their projects.

Richard recommended that TRC be given authority to adjust project rankings themselves in addition to changing their initial technical scores and just seeing how that affected rankings. The TWG relayed that that is not how business has been conducted in the past, and they felt the Board would not be

supportive of that as it wasn't objective enough. This would need to be elevated to the Board's discussion.

**\*TWG also noted that the RFP and Program Guide needed to incorporate the new Large Capital PSAR grant opportunity more clearly.**

**\*The draft 2014 Program Guide and RFP are open for comments through February 27<sup>th</sup> for individuals to provide input. Those will be compiled and a new set of documents forwarded to the Board for a final decision before initiating the RFP on March 7.**

At least one TWG member indicated that the Program Guide draft was not provided with enough time for review and that it may not even be necessary to update the Program Guide before the upcoming grant round. It should also be noted that no formal recommendation was made by the TWG with respect to approving the Program Guide given the time limitation.

### 3 Year Work Plan Update

The meeting was now running late and so there was limited time to discuss the 3 year work plan (3ywp) update. Richard relayed that he had worked with each major project sponsor to update each of the projects in the habitat and assessment portions of the 3ywp. The TWG then focused on reviewing the "new" projects that were proposed to be added in 2014. Those projects included Blake's Bottleneck, Lower Baker Delta Restoration, Bowman Bay Beach Restoration, Estuarine Delta Riparian Stewardship, Day Creek Habitat Restoration @ Kosbab, Goodell Creek Floodplain Restoration, and Riparian Strategy and Tracking. **\*Each project was briefly reviewed and specific edits made, particularly to their tiering.**

A programmatic question raised was whether or not the 3ywp was focused on just those highest priority projects in Tier 1 and Tier 2 areas that met the eligibility requirements in the RFP for priority Chinook Salmon projects or alternatively incorporate all actions important for broader salmon recovery (e.g. Samish coho or Chinook). For example Bowman Bay lies outside of Skagit Bay geographically and outside of the 2010 Strategic Approach thematically, but the NW Straits Foundation is potentially seeking support to conduct process-based restoration there that could benefit salmon recovery and is it possible that being recognized on our list could support them? **\*This will be discussed into the future.**

**\*Final edits to the 3ywp are requested by February 27<sup>th</sup> so they can be compiled and turned around to the Board for final approval.**

It should also be noted that no formal recommendation was made by the TWG with respect to approving the 3ywp given the time limitation, although there has been no dissent on that topic.