

Skagit Watershed Council
Technical Work Group – Final Notes
January 21, 2016, 1 – 4:00 pm, SWC Office, Mount Vernon, WA

(* indicates action item; indicates decision)

Attendance: Chris Vondrasek (SWC), Devin Smith (Skagit River System Cooperative), Alison Studley, Chair (Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group), Jeff McGowan (Skagit County), Tom Slocum (Skagit Conservation District), Rick Hartson (Upper Skagit Tribe), Erin Lowery (SCL), Bob Warinner (WDFW), Ed Connor (SCL), Kari Odden (SLT)

Guests: Richard Brocksmith (SWC), Leah Kintner (PSP), Nathan Rice (Kulshan Services)

Agenda and Meeting Notes

December meeting notes approved with one change submitted by Alison Studley regarding one TWG member dissenting on allowing TRC to change project prioritization in Lead Entity process.

Meeting agenda approved.

***SWC ball caps are available for TWG members. Let Richard know if you want one.**

Committee Reports

Steelhead and Bull Trout Subcommittee

Devin provided an update on the subcommittee meeting last week. The committee continued their discussion on ideas for expanding interim steelhead strategy and updating or improving fish distribution data from their December meeting. Pursuing the idea of developing high return steelhead-focused culvert projects (low hanging fruit), SRSC screened potential culverts in GIS by looking at culvert data, habitat values, and steelhead-only culverts and ended up with 14-15 potential culverts. However, the subcommittee members identified several key culverts that were missing from this initial group, and there was concern about the quality of the information used in the initial screening process. In addition many of the culverts identified would be expensive to address. The subcommittee concluded to add additional inventory work in 2016 to improve steelhead-focused information, but not recommend any specific construction projects. The subcommittee also supported updating fish distribution maps when that data has been reviewed by co-managers and becomes available.

The TWG discussed 2 inventory project questions for how the work might be accomplished, either a set-aside to fund the work or a competitive project with the other proposals in the coming grant round:

- Should the SWC provide set-aside funding for this project or let it compete with other projects? The group felt that the answer should be left up to the board with the caveat that the project will struggle to compete with other Tier 1 & 2 projects due to how they are scored since it will be scored as a 'Tier 2 steelhead only' or 'Tier 3' project, and that's a risk.
- Should the concept be developed as a standalone proposal by a sponsor or sponsors like usual or via subcommittee consensus proposal? It's unclear who would sponsor this project. There's a risk of not getting exactly what subcommittee recommended, but on the other hand we are talking essentially the same individuals involved either way.
- There are not enough PSAR capacity funds to complete this project.
- Ballpark estimate for set-aside funding is between \$150,000 and \$200,000 split between 5 groups, plus preliminary design costs.
- Include funding for design of the highest priority projects?

TWG unanimously recommended the subcommittee recommendation and leaving decision for either the set-aside or competitive approach to the Board (with the note that one carries more risk than the other).

North Fork Skagit Acquisition & Feasibility – Project Condition

The last TWG meeting had a presentation on the project feasibility study from Skagit County and their engineering consultant Dave Cline. The feasibility study must be complete with a recommended alternative agreed upon by stakeholders for the TWG to recommend that the condition has been met.

Seepage into farmland was discussed. Wells are probably preferred; how many and spacing needs further analysis. Seepage mitigation will be looked at in further design per an understanding with landowner.

Discussion: How will this project align with the PSNERP North Fork project?

- PSNERP project doesn't constrain buying the land since both project concepts need the same area.
- Desire for better communication and coordination with the Corps, WDFW, and County between these projects.
- WDFW is not prepared to have this discussion for awhile. We are not going to get much more info on the PSNERP project until they advance to the next stage.
- PSNERP doesn't allow infrastructure projects, but can you build the project without affecting the bridge? Yes, and the bridge can be built later.
- Could the land acquisition for the County project provide matching funds for the PSNERP project? Could we time the acquisition to coordinate that? Yes, land in public ownership regardless of purchase time appears to meet Corps match needs.
- Discussion of buying an option and/or right of first refusal on the land.

- If we did purchase it, how long can we hold onto it before restoration happen?
***Discuss with WDFW about land ownership.**

SRSC, Swinomish, and USIT still have questions. The main concern has to do with connectivity with bridge and adjacent projects, and consistency with a very similar PSNERP project. The project is feasible but there are concerns about cost effectiveness and integration with PSNERP project. Clear, tangible, written direction is needed from concerned parties about how the project moves forward. Questions need to be solidified soon, and need to be answerable.

***Jeff should talk to concerned parties' organizations to get specific information. Devin will talk to Steve and Larry at SRSC and Rick will talk to John Paul at USIT regarding concerns about the project before it goes to the board. The TWG expressed this communication was critical.**

TWG decided to recommend approval of the acquisition funding to the board with one dissenting vote. The group felt that there wasn't much value to be gained by bringing the conversation back to the TWG again.

Four Year Work Plan Final Draft

Richard reviewed 4-year work plan and its purposes. A few new projects have been added since the last work plan was approved. Recent project additions have been reviewed by SWC staff and individual sponsors. These discussions improved the accuracy of project descriptions as far as scope and cost.

Gilligan Floodplain and Blake's Bottleneck have the most constraints to feasibility. Otherwise, everything else could move forward in next 4 years.

It was clarified that the work plan is more than just a planning document and that PSP expects, and will independently confirm, that these projects are consistent with the strategy and recovery plan(s).

The group noted that their main concern at this point was to ensure that the 4 or 5 new projects proposed for addition were technically adequate and consistent with plans/strategies. ***For that to happen, more documentation is necessary for the TWG.** Discussion of 5 new projects that have not yet been reviewed by the TWG:

- Marblemount Hatchery – Co-managers proposed doing a bigger project but it wasn't completely aligned with all decision makers. Not enough coordination with WDFW to move forward on it last year. WDFW is replacing barriers. The tribes have seen other floodplain modifications they want to work with landowners on. Feasibility is the next step. They submitted an LOI for this project last year, so isn't that adequate?
- Hobbit Corners – Skagit County (different from SFEG project). Needs more documentation.

- Suiattle Confluence and Tenas - USIT – Needs more documentation.
- Utopia – In PSE process. Needs more documentation?

There was interest expressed in having LOIs for these projects. Alternatively, several TWG members requested simpler documentation (perhaps a paragraph and a map) so that the TWG could better review them for inclusion in the 4ywp.

There was a discussion about reviewing projects for inclusion on the 4 year work plan at the same time TWG reviews project Letters of Intent in March.

***Richard will send out a current draft of the 4ywp and get documentation on the five new projects for the next TWG meeting.**

TWG did not recommend the plan for board approval at this time. The 4-year work plan will be considered again at the next TWG meeting.

Lead Entity Program Guide and Process Updates

Discussion of how to best capture critical comments:

- During project site visits, only the technical team will make critical comments, and in the format described in the program guide.
- Clarify that we want LECC comments early enough to be able to address them. This is essential.
- Any LECC member comments during the site visits should go under the non-critical comment list and not be documented as LECC comments (since the whole body isn't present likely).
- Make clear that LECC members are expected to come to project presentations June 15 and comments will be documented.

Discussion of Step 6 – Final technical review.

- TWG members want normalized scores.
- Discussion of how to normalize scores.
 - Observer bias can significantly skew scores.
 - Ed Connor and staff developed past coefficient of variation approach since not all data has a normal distribution.
 - Should move to using either normalized scores to avoid potential biases, though whether it is normalizing or coefficient of variation depends on the data's distribution.
- All but one TWG member agreed that TWG should be able to move projects around by consensus. However all TWG members agreed they would like to recommend to the board that they would like to also be able to provide qualitative recommendations about how well an empirically-ranked list aligned or not with their professional opinions of project benefits, etc.

Discussion of LECC role:

- LECC does have authority to remove projects; this was added to document.
- LECC will do what they do. The guide can suggest some sidebars but itemizing what their criteria should be may not be helpful.
- LECC should only remove projects at their second meeting if concerns are raised at their first meeting and project sponsor has a chance to respond
- We should encourage them to communicate with sponsors and get feedback. Better and more timely and effective communication.
- They are not supposed to re-litigate technical decisions.
- At least three members of TRC should be present at the information-sharing meeting to improve communication.
- The LECC may have questions, concerns for the TRC.

TWG agreed to recommend the lead entity guide to the board after the discussed changes are added and the draft is reviewed. *Richard will add changes to the document and send out to TWG members for final review.

Final note: There's a draft of the new protection method and it will be presented to the Protection Committee next week, and TWG after that.

Adjourned 4:07

Next TWG meetings

- February 18, 2016
- March 24, 2016 (4th Thursday - allows for review of SRFB Letters of Intent)
- April 21, 2016