

Final Notes
Skagit Watershed Council, Technical Work Group (TWG)
January 15, 2015, 2 – 4pm, SWC Conference Room

(* indicates action item; indicates decision)

Attendance: Alison Studley, (SFEG, Chair) Bob Warinner (WDFW), Devin Smith (Skagit River System Cooperative), Ed Connor (Seattle City Light), Erik Andersen (Aspect Consulting), Jeff McGowan (Skagit County), Kari Odden (Skagit Land Trust), Richard Brocksmith (SWC), Rick Hartson (Upper Skagit Indian Tribe), Tom Slocum (Skagit Conservation District), Phil Kincare (US Forest Service)

Guests – Polly Hicks (NOAA Restoration Center), Doug Hennick (Wild Fish Conservancy), Erin Lowery (Seattle City Light), Chris Vondrasek (SWC), Leah Kintner (PSP), Terry Carten (Kulshan Services)

The meeting was called to order at 2:10 pm. Next TWG meeting - February 19, 2015, 2 - 4 pm.

Introductions, Agenda, Notes

- Introductions: Terry Carten, Kulshan Services, will be providing administrative services for TWG such as meeting notes and logistics.
- Richard briefly discussed the initiation of the Steelhead and Bull Trout subcommittee.
- Approved agenda unanimously after broadening the first agenda topic to include preparations for the 2015 grant round
- Approved December meeting notes unanimously with one minor modification: Ed Connor was not in attendance at that meeting.
- A short discussion focused on how to handle action items from prior meetings. ***This will be done as agenda items at future meetings.**

2015 Strategic Approach Update

Ed Connor and Erin Lowery provided a discussion on their use of both Intrinsic Potential (IP) and multiple regression models to determining Chinook performance at the large watershed scale.

- Ed discussed large scale variables that support Chinook and a Tier 2 ranking of tributary spawning and production. The variables included basin area, length of stream available for spawning, forest cover and average basin slope.
- A multiple regression analysis was then completed to predict abundance and spawning numbers. The model runs indicated that the #1 variable was watershed area with length of stream suitable for spawning another key variable.
- Using these four variables explained 88% of variability in spawning abundance. This matched up with spawning numbers including those in Illabot Creek but not so well with “under-performers” like the Nookachamps, for example.

- The White Chuck River was discussed. This system is lacking spawning data but the model shows that it should be productive.
- It was noted that Spring Chinook are the least understood life history form and weren't well represented in standard IP models. They use different areas and can spawn in higher gradient streams.
- Stream widths less than 20' wide and watersheds less than 10 miles² don't support much Chinook. This concept was used as a threshold for these studies.
- Using the information from this approach, Ed developed a list of the top 10 ranked streams for performance. Most match well with current information although the Nookachamps should be in better condition for salmon performance.
- ***The model will continue to be refined as new data becomes available.**
- ***Staff will send out a copy of the report from this effort to TWG.**

Devin and Erin discussed the working group's next GIS analysis of remotely sensed rearing habitat quantification as guided by conclusions from the yearling study, given the lack of existing, site-scale data for juvenile Chinook rearing habitat. There is some USGS topographic information but is of limited quality. He suggested that the group may want to provide resources to collect data on rearing habitat. Some thoughts on this topic included:

- Running a screen for the 14 tributaries in Ed Connor's IP results.
- Using Ed's top 10 for potential spawning as well as the rearing habitat analysis in the same watershed.
- Also interested in areas outside of the floodplain, with a question of how far up the tributaries to be determined.
- ***Devin and the working group will continue developing this information and provide documentation and their recommendations to the group prior to the next meeting.**
- This work would provide recommendations for the RFP/funding process that begins on March 5.

A discussion continued from previous meetings about Tier 2 information with the focus on rearing potential. Two critical uncertainties came up during the working group's discussions, which were reviewed with TWG. The first question wondered if all six populations are rearing habitat constrained, or if the Suiattle springers in particular may also be constrained by spawning success. The working group proposed a spawning limitations study in this area. The second question discussed was whether or not all populations are similarly critical to recovery and are of similar condition, and if not, whether there should be some sequencing of focus populations. It was noted that Puget Sound recovery is dependent upon this important population. Both of these are now captured in the updated draft strategic approach.

Our analysis so far has confirmed that four major tributaries in the current Strategic Approach are important for rearing habitat.

Richard reviewed (on screen) a second draft of the 2015 Strategic Approach. It will include named priority streams after the working group wraps up the analysis in less than 2 weeks. It has not yet been determined how far down on the technically ranked list of tributaries to go in

developing the priorities. The TWG and Board of Directors will have time to critically review and make decisions prior to adoption, as this is both a technical and policy decision. For example, while Nookachamps, and to a lesser degree Hansen Creek, have high intrinsic potential for juvenile Chinook rearing, the amount of work to realize that potential may be relatively high and seen as diluting existing focus on Tier 1 floodplains and estuary.

Devin is continuing to work on the alluvial fan language the group agreed to address. He relayed to the TWG that these areas referenced in the 2010 Strategic Approach appear to be mapped within the current floodplain boundaries, and that it didn't also refer to non-mainstem floodplain adjacent alluvial fans (e.g. higher up in the Hansen Creek system coming off Lyman Hill). TWG generally agreed with this assessment, and ***language to this affect will be incorporated into the next draft for TWG review.**

The TWG discussed the main changes to the Strategic Approach from the 2010 version.

- Inclusion of new Tier 2 tributaries (above)
- Discussion about adjacent alluvial fans (above)
- Riparian classifications
 - The question of whether riparian actions should be included into Tier 3 streams was discussed. ***The TWG concluded that this would be included in the narrative as valuable but that it needs to be sequential and that it will not be a priority objective.**
- Mapping updates
- Questions for the Critical Uncertainties section (above)
- Richard asked whether the stewardship/community support strategies within the 2015 Strategic Approach should be priority objectives or discussed in another section of the document. Discussion on this topic included:
 - Habitat stewardship and community engagement are two separate things.
 - SRFB will support stewardship now and has always supported community engagement, but the latter only as a minority percentage of a project.
 - Community engagement is more of a policy and strategic component than technical, though from TWG's perspective it is imperative to be included in many project types/locations. The Strategic Approach document is primarily technical in nature.
 - The Lead Entity Citizen Committee also considers community support/educational components in their final decision. ***Richard will ask the Board whether they want to include supplemental questions related to this topic for the LECC to consider.**
 - Is community engagement a technical aspect of the Strategic Approach? A discussion ensued on both sides of this concept. Devin felt that it should be included in the 2015 Strategic Approach but not in the Priority Objectives section. A general consensus formed that community engagement is important but should not be prescriptive and that it should be placed outside of the Priority Objectives section of the document.
 - ***TWG feels that Board should weigh in on and decide how community engagement fits into the 2015 Strategic Approach from a policy perspective.**

- ***Similarly, habitat stewardship was identified as an important action related to achieving our priority objectives, though it likely deserves being addressed globally rather than as a priority objective.**
- Next steps for draft Strategic Approach:
 - **Richard will email current draft 2015 Strategic Approach to group members with a 2 week deadline.** There will be a two week deadline for TWG members to provide feedback.
 - ***Map products and Tier 2 information will also be forthcoming but not for 2 weeks.**

2015 Lead Entity Program Guide

There was discussion on Skagit Lead Entity projects that overlap multiple tiers. The discussion focused on the following:

- Consideration of a new section that provides affirmation that projects can overlap multiple tiers.
- If Tier 3 project components are included, the match will have to be increased. Who makes the decision on this?
- Project sponsor would have to include a justification.
- The Board and/or LECC make final decisions.
- One of the main concerns expressed was the appearance of subjective decision making.
- The question came up of whether this applies to acquisition projects only or to restoration projects as well.
- ***Richard will include draft language that discusses the eligibility for projects that have minor components in Tier 3. How to handle protection projects seemed fairly straightforward while the need for this to be eligible for restoration projects wasn't clear.**

Short Updates

- **SBT subcommittee**
Board provided direction to subcommittee asking how steelhead might fit into our strategic approach, including 2015. The subcommittee just met and agreed this could be done if kept very simple and highly integrated into the existing approach. ***There will be a recommendation coming from them ASAP.** They do not feel it would be feasible to include the Samish watershed this round given the tight timeline, or bull trout given their relatively healthy status.
- **Funding/RFP process**
The grant round usually includes 3 days of presentations. The first day has been in the office followed by 2 days of on-site field presentations. This process may be modified so that all presentations will be provided on-site to improve continuity between office/field components. Concerns about the lack of office presentations were discussed and

included the potential lack of community involvement if there are no office based presentations and that some potential projects may not be suitable for field visits (modeling, assessments, etc.). One of the lessons learned from prior field visit components is that project proponents need to be prepared and bring a minimum level of presentation materials (maps, budgets, etc.). ***Richard will draft the operational specifics as guided by the TWG, including moving towards more field time (with more guidance on presentation needs), keeping open possibility of office presentations for certain project types, and bringing citizen involvement up with an additional July meeting just for them before their final decision meeting.**

Hydrodynamic Model (HDM) Project Concept Review

Polly Hicks provide an update on the HDM project.

- LIDAR data from 2014 is now being incorporated into the project capturing recent changes.
- A new concept list was developed after field work was completed for the project areas. There are now 11 draft project areas identified. This is in addition to existing conceptual measures from the salmon recovery plan.
- The project team is continuing to review if the draft projects meet objective criteria for moving forward.
- The focus of the model is for areas with tidal flow vs. freshwater flows so some of the concepts related more to freshwater flows will drop out (e.g. Britt Slough).
- The project team is still looking to model the Avon Bypass concept. They are working with Skagit County on this.
- It was noted that the SWC project areas for the Skagit delta as defined in the Strategic Approach extends to the Bayview area, and additional projects there may be included.
- One objective discussed was getting the “biggest bang for the buck” with the least impact to the agriculture community recognizing that some projects may not be feasible.
- Polly discussed that funding constraints will dictate the amount of model runs that can be completed.
- Updates were provided on specific projects
- ***Richard will continue coordination with appropriate folks on information needs. Richard will also attend/engage in HDM meetings at Board request.**

Fir Island Farms 90% Design Review of Vegetation Plans

- 90% planting plans have been revised and are nearing completion.
- ***TWG group members should provide any comments to Richard by January 20.**
- ***A question was asked regarding the TWG comments provided last month re: budget for the project. The budget questions will be addressed in the final document that will be distributed to TWG members to close that loop.**

Adjourn 4:02 pm