

Skagit Watershed Council Technical Work Group (TWG)

January 17, 2019, 1:00 – 4:00PM, SWC Office, Mount Vernon

(numbered attachments in parentheses),

decisions underlined,

action items bold

Attendees: Alison Studley (SFEG, Chair), Kari Odden (Skagit Land Trust), Erin Lowery (Seattle City Light), Rick Hartson (Upper Skagit Indian Tribe), Devin Smith (Skagit River System Cooperative), Tom Slocum (Skagit Conservation District), Aundrea McBride (SWC), Bob Warinner (WDFW)

Absent: Erik Anderson (Aspect Consulting), Emily Derenne (Skagit County),

Guests: Steve Hinton (Skagit River System Cooperative), Rick Haley, substituting for Emily Derenne (Skagit County), Erin Murray (ex-officio member PSP, note taker), Catey Ritchie (new project manager at SRSC)

1. Beginning Business

- ❖ Introductions
- ❖ Reviewed Draft Agenda (#1) (Alison Studley, Chair)
- ❖ Review December TWG Meeting Notes (#2): Erin M. made a comment that future TWG meeting notes should specify which Erin (Lowery or Murray) the notes refer to.
Notes from the December meeting were approved.

2. Committee Reports

- ❖ Protection Subcommittee (Bob Warinner, Chair)
The Protection Subcommittee did not meet in January.
- ❖ Board Meeting Update (Steve Hinton, Board member)
 - We reviewed the Governor's budget as it related to salmon and orca recovery. We saw an opportunity for collaboration with state, county, and public land holders regarding the culvert strategy.
 - Colleen is leaving the Board due to her retirement from SCL this summer. Her official Board term is up in September.

3. Project Implementation Review and Support

- ❖ Lower Cascade Floodplain (Bob Warinner)
[\[Bob, do you want to attach your slides?\]](#)
 - The project first aimed to re-occupy a historic channel near the hatchery, but now they are planning to expand to occupy the whole floodplain.
 - In anticipation of modifications and updates to the hatchery, it might be a good time to come up with some ideas of what kind of habitat or improvements could happen in conjunction with

hatchery improvements. The timing of this project may depend on the timing of hatchery improvements since some funding comes from that.

- The project area includes public, private, and protected land ownership, though all the work will take place in stream.
- R2 consultants (Paul Devries) completed the initial feasibility work. They modeled flood risk at years 2/10/100 years and recommended in-stream structures to achieve project goals. The current proposal includes 30% design to:
 - Add flood fencing at 2 sites within the floodplain to reengage the historic channel and regain floodplain channel complexity;
 - Protect the eroding property near the campground with stream bank improvements to slow erosion;
 - Identified opportunities to replace culverts where there are barriers.

4. Presentations

- ❖ Coordinated Culvert Strategy (Steve Hinton, SRSC)
 - The project goal is to identify the universe of public Skagit Basin culverts blocking anadromous fish habitat (not including Samish, but including Snohomish and Whatcom counties). This is mostly about Steelhead habitat, though a few of the blocking culverts will benefit Chinook.
 - SRSC did a lot of work to clean up old culvert inventory data sets. The 2001 product had to be reconciled with state database as a result of the culvert case. They deleted any barriers removed, added any new barriers, and reconcile with WDFW database using remote sensing methods. They found:
 - 385 known problem culverts owned by counties in Skagit basin
 - 80 were of unknown status-total or partial barriers (classified Level B)
 - 182 known total barriers (classified Level A)
 - 123 known partial barriers (Level A)
 - Of 385, 70 are in Skagit county anadromous zone, and not blocked by tide gate or pump station
 - 37 of those 70 are county owned barriers (the universe). The rest are privately owned. SRSC will have completed 27 habitat surveys out of 37 by this spring. The remaining 10 known barriers are not presently scheduled for survey because they have no predicted habitat gain, have no hydro arc, or are unlikely to have steelhead presence
 - Only 2 WSDOT culverts have synergy with county culverts (Fruitdale Rd & Hull Rd)
 - Estimate 40,000 sq. meters of habitat can be gained
 - Remaining tasks
 - Complete level B analysis
 - With county representatives, initiate discussions with WSDOT to build collaborative synergies
 - **SRSC is looking for feedback from TWG on how to prioritize restoration efforts**
 - Comments:
 - Fish Barrier Removal Board – coordinate with them

- Tricky piece is that from a county perspective – not a lot of synergy except for WSDOT and private. Enhancement group has worked on private culverts. 50% private culvert owners are unresponsive.
- Many culverts do not have chinook gains. Chinook barriers have had a head start. Funding source has expanded to beyond that funding source’s goals to include Steelhead.
- How to prioritize partial barriers – look at cost? Advantages of PI is it sets culverts in context—know where a culvert ranks in the world of culverts in the Skagit.

(Steve Hinton left at 2:11pm)

5. Approve 4 Year Work Plan.

We compared the draft presented with the previous on. Richard had filled in some blanks and clarified some amounts with sponsors.

The TWG accepted the 4YWP as is with the assumption that LOIs for the 2019 SRFB round are consistent with this plan.

6. Approve 2019 Lead Entity Program Guide.

Appendix E- added to this document

Aundrea noticed there are no scoring points for whether a project includes climate change adaptability. Though it is not scored, climate change is addressed in SRFB app process. **Maybe discuss next year.**

The TWG approved the 2019 Lead Entity Program Guide as is.

7. Recruit Technical Committee Members

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- ❖ If members have any thoughts, please share information with Aundrea.
 - ❖ It was pointed out that last year we had the TWG meeting on the heels of the TRC meeting and didn’t have a quorum b/c non-TRC members didn’t get there at the right time. The key decisions we discussed were that there would be a placeholder for a TWG meeting in conjunction with the TRC scoring meeting in case any votes are needed in the summer, and that TWG would be first thing in the morning.

8. Recommend Allocation of PSAR Returned Funds.

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- ❖ Summary: Returned funds are now \$1,050,000 and need to be spent or billed by end of June 2019. TWG members who can vote (not conflicted): Tom, Rick, Bob, Aundrea. Three projects under consideration are:

- Pressentin: \$350,000 -> now \$362,182 Final design not complete – under contract since 1st of December. New estimate ~\$362,000 90% final design including channel work on track to be done by Feb 13, 2019. Final design, including park design, etc. anticipated by March 20, 2019.
- Hansen: \$368,348 Has always been a Tier 2
- Acquisition: \$500,000 -> reduced the request to \$400,000 Mix of Tier of 1 and Tier 2 properties.

Total needed: \$1,130,530, Gap of \$80,530

- ❖ Discussion and Process:

- Starting Proposal (Bob): Do a ranking. First two projects totally funded and the third partially funded.
 - Kari – Ranking is what TRC does and it has already been done. The SLT is less concerned about getting full amount of \$ since some projects can be completed and Whitmore is not currently on the table. However, in the future, we want to make sure acquisition does not always get the remainder. When considering prioritization in the future, the strategy indicates protection is top priority in terms of TRC ranking.
 - Erin L—The TWG’s main purpose is to come to an agreement that is technically sound: Identify technical issues and risks. Policy decision about how money is spent is done by the Board. Having minimum voting parties because of conflict of interest is unprecedented. Erin has questions about the COI policy.
 - Aundrea – The Board has asked us for a recommendation on how to allocate the funds.
 - Tom – How do we rank projects? Criteria for evaluating projects under the ‘refund’ scenario have not been established. Do we use TRC methodology?
 - Allison: The TRC ranking has already been done. TWG did address technical justification and risk assessment in December 2018. The lack of a process is a problem, especially considering how much money is on the table (similar to a SRFB round).
 - Devin: In the past, we’ve never had to rank, never had a set of criteria b/c we have never had a refund this large. If we expect more large refunds in the future, maybe we need to develop a review process.
 - Erin L: Putting money towards construction projects first is in conflict with the strategic plan of the SWC. Protection is first priority.
- Test for agreement on trying to rank projects: The vote is split 2-2 for this starting proposal. We continue discussion with an alternate proposal.
- **Ask the Board – in the future, what do they want to see from TWG? Should we propose a process for proposal ranking in the event of returned funds?**
- Alternate Proposal (Bob? Tom?) Split the total amount 3 ways (\$350,000 each), leaving each project with a shortfall, but avoiding developing a pseudo-ranking system on the fly.
 - Aundrea is concerned because she feels a 3-way split does not take into account the investment already made in Pressintin and Hansen, and she doesn’t want to risk those projects failing so close to the end. Also, with Whitmore not on available for purchase currently, Protection projects are not immediately in need of the funds.
 - Bob agrees with Aundrea.
 - Rick Harston and Tom think the three-way split is best.
 - Do any of the three projects have other funding sources or timing constraints that would make it so that a three-way split of the funding would preclude the projects getting done?
 - Presentin: ALEA, National Fish and Wild Life match needs to be used. Getting money this year is hard at this time. The shortfall is manageable.
 - Hansen is likely going to be done no matter what, but timing of additional funding could delay the timing of construction actions. The shortfall is manageable.
 - Acquisition is not comparable to construction projects because it depends on opportunity.

- Acquisition is not comparable to construction projects because it depends on opportunity.
- In this case, the split 3 ways is close to each request.
- ❖ Consensus of all present (both voting and abstaining):
Because we have no pre-existing process for allocating returned funds; and these funds are almost as much money as a regular SRFB round and therefore need a transparent and fair process for allocation; and none of the three projects would fail to be completed if awarded \$350,000 instead of their requested amounts, the TWG recommends that PSAR RT be allocated evenly between the 3 projects in the amount of \$350,000 each. Also, In the unlikely situation that within the next month – any of these 3 projects can't spend funds by June 2019 those funds will be applied toward Protection acquisitions.

9. Draft Puget Sound Steelhead Recovery Plan

We discussed the regional Steelhead Plan. Comments are due February 11th. We reached consensus to NOT write a joint SWC comment letter on the Plan because each member organization plans to submit comments individually. SWC Board will decide if the SWC will submit comments as well, and how those should be framed in terms of not speaking for all members. The Skagit Steelhead Plan from the co-managers (State and Tribes) will be out soon for review.