

Skagit Watershed Council, Technical Work Group (TWG)
October 16, 2014, 1:00 – 4:00pm, SWC Conference Room
Final Notes

(* indicates action item)

Introductions began at 1pm, including Alison Studley, Rick Hartson, Tom Slocum, Jeff McGowan, Ed Connor, Richard Brocksmith, and Doug Bruland. Guests included Leah Kintner and Kari Odden. The September draft notes and October draft agenda were approved.

Short Updates

The TWG agreed that the next meeting date would be November 21 at 9am.

Richard provided Board and Council updates, including:

- Jon Paul Shannahan has been nominated to be on the Board of Directors and will likely be elected at next Council of Members on November 12.
- Proposed 2015 meeting dates are out. Richard handed out dates for the Board, Council, TWG, new strategic approach subcommittee, as well as the TRC and LECC. He also handed out a Gantt-style timeline for the 2015 lead entity process and asked for ***TWG members to put these 2015 dates into their calendars and let him know if there are any unforeseen conflicts.**
- The Board is discussing establishing legislative priorities to further our work on capital habitat projects.
- The Board began a discussion about our role in Puget Sound recovery and how we can be as effective as possible in meeting our mission.
- The Watershed Council has re-advertised the Watershed Coordinator position and Richard asked ***TWG members to share with folks who may be interested and qualified.**
- The Council has also released an RFQQ for consultant services for administrative support to provide more capacity until a coordinator is hired. ***Please share as appropriate.**
- The Board requested ***a proposal to establish a new Steelhead & Bull Trout Strategic Approach Subcommittee (SBTSA) to the TWG**, which will be covered later on the agenda.
- Richard will also ***propose additional committee members** for the TWG (Kari, Rick and Eric Anderson, Aspect Consulting), Protection Subcommittee (Kari, Rick and Scott Heller, PSE), and possibly others. ***The TWG asked Richard to work with Phil to consider his transition**, hopefully sometime far in the future!

There weren't any Monitoring and Adaptive Management Subcommittee meetings recently to report out. Richard did relay the Protection Subcommittee report that there were a few properties just closing with Seattle City Light since the last report. However, most activity is with due diligence with previously identified parcels as well as a new round of communications with parcels that were recently identified in a mapping exercise conducted in July.

Richard relayed status of the 2014 lead entity project proposals, with several funded by PSAR in September and the remaining moving toward funding in December. This latter batch still has 2 "needs more information" projects (Barnaby Preliminary Design and Illabot Alluvial Fan Phase 2), and the Kukutali Design project has gone from conditioned to NMI. Responses to these information requests are available in PRISM for interested folks. Martin Slough Fish Passage (scope refined) and Skagit HDM have been cleared. Final draft Review Panel findings will be out in next week, hopefully clearing the way for these projects to be funded. Richard also noted that the ***TWG would be receiving a request for reviewing the Fir Island Farms Estuary Restoration project construction grant conditions, namely Operations & Maintenance plan and 90% design.**

Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group's Lower Day Creek Slough 10% cost increase for reinforcing a bridge project in Skagit's floodplain was approved since the last meeting.

Strategic Approach

The "housekeeping" items we are moving forward to update the 2010 chinook strategic approach are in process, and should be presented as draft in November and December. A small team of folks (Ed Conner, Erin Lowery, Brett Barkdull, Richard Brocksmith, maybe others) are pulling together the most complex item, refining Tier 2 tributary areas. Ed reported on work he has started, captured in a one-page handout. The existing four major tributaries (Day, Finney, Bacon, and Illabot) in the 2010 priorities are still easily discernable as important as they are the only tributaries that support at least five miles of spawning habitat. ***Ed and others are working on a more robust model with new information, proposing to develop an intrinsic potential approach and minimum threshold for inclusion in Tier 2.** This involves multiplying total spawning and/or rearing habitat by a measure of habitat quality. One measure of quality is likely redds/mile, which hopefully WDFW will populate for us. The handout captured a number of other factors that are being considered as well.

A TWG member suggested that we also try to improve how we define floodplains in this process. While the 2010 Strategic Approach clearly focuses on current existing or potential future Chinook rearing areas within floodplains of the mainstem and major tributaries, the map

in the document suggests historic floodplain areas that may be forever lost to natural processes or at least heavily shadowed by human stressors are just as important as existing off channel areas. The middle reaches of Hansen Creek were cited as one example that lent confusion.

***The discussion didn't conclude with a solid plan as to whether this can be improved in 2014 or if this was a longer-term need, but improvements are needed.**

Richard handed out a one-page summary of proposed membership, external reviewers, and schedule for the new SBTSA Subcommittee and ***asked for input on membership. *He will ask the Board to establish this committee at their next meeting in November.**

***It was also recognized that the question of how we will handle the addition of many new steelhead priorities late in 2015 could be complicated and will take technical and policy concurrence.**

Skagit Capacity Fund

The group reviewed relevant, past discussions of this topic, as well as the basic proposal that was drafted and distributed to the group before the meeting. Several ideas were generated in the group discussion, including:

- It would be valuable to have small amounts of funding available consistently to do little stuff like collecting GPS points or survey data (i.e. pre-project data collection) that would help further project concept development.
- It would be valuable to have larger amounts of funding to bridge gaps between design and construction. An example was given where projects were funded as design/build but the cost estimate was lower than the final cost.
- Having simplified contracting procedures would be helpful and save time and money.
- We could achieve higher certainty and effectiveness if these funds were added to existing projects in motion rather than to uncertain concepts.

Tom moved and Doug seconded a motion to recommend the process as drafted to the Board for approval, with the friendly amendment to have funds not allocated in the initial round roll over. The motion passed by consensus.

Comprehensive Project Updates

The group agreed at the last meeting to tackle an extensive but not necessarily intensive review of recent projects funded for the purpose of verifying our understanding of outcomes of each project, sharing lessons learned, supporting remaining implementation, and continuing to develop the next generation of projects. Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group agreed to tackle their construction (i.e. not

including riparian) projects, from feasibility to design, funded since 2008. Alison presented these using powerpoint slides and the Habitat Work Schedule.

Floodplain/Off-channel Projects

Presentin Park Side Channel Feasibility & Preliminary Design was funded in 2013. There will be a design team meeting November 10. It appears that groundwater effects from a new, potential side channel likely will not affect the existing side channel used by chum salmon for spawning. The project continues to move towards a selected alternative and development of preliminary designs, which should be reflected in the 3 year work plan (3ywp).

Davis Slough Preliminary, Final Design, and Construction is near completion with this summer's effort to replace the lower crossing with a new bridge done in-water but a few details remaining such as riparian planting. Also, the upper culver replacement remains. It was clarified that the final project didn't include a third culvert that was in the initial concepts. Alison relayed a lesson learned that Corps permits can't be transferred to new sponsors, though all the other permits did when the project went from SFEG to the county. This should be considered in any future projects that might be transferred.

Howard Miller Steelhead Park off-channel enhancement has been completed as scoped, yielding about 11.7 acres of off-channel habitat and lots of riparian planting/control. The site could use more signage along the trail for interpretation. The group discussed the old railroad berm perpendicular to the mainstem between the developed and undeveloped portions of the park, though the history of discussions regarding its removal for floodplain restoration was unclear. *Alison and/or Richard will discuss with Sue and Jeff will inquire with County Parks. Alison relayed a few lessons learned, including the potential problems with design/build grants, lack of monitoring as a result of ESA compliance and potential impacts to fish resources, and outreach to demonstrate the effectiveness of these projects.

Hobbit Corners Floodplain Restoration is mostly complete (house demo, plantings). The woody debris addition component in the Sauk side channel no longer seems feasible due to needed complexity of design driving costs higher than available budget, though that area is still in need due to a lack of existing cover. SFEG is still working with the landowners (Seattle City Light) on contingency plans, with the latest concept being a beaver fence. ***The TWG expressed interest in a site visit to assess options.**

Skagit River Floodplain Restoration/Larsen was mostly riparian improvements, but SFEG worked with Phil from the Forest Service to vacate and remove road fill and three culverts.

Tributary Projects

Lower Day Slough Habitat Enhancement/Faber is the recently completed bridge installation and riparian planting between Day and Morgan Creeks. There are several additional project components that can be done in this area if more landowners come on board, including some potential acquisitions in the works.

Lower Day Creek Restoration Phases 1&2 included an assessment of need above the South Skagit Highway. Landowner concerns and liability forced SFEG to abandon wood placement in the reaches above the bridge and to instead focus on adding woody debris to a floodplain channel connecting the

mainstem and lower Day Creek. There were lessons learned about liability and complexities of adding woody debris in more developed areas.

Lower Finney Supplemental Instream project was completed, adding more woody debris structures in the lower reaches of this important but highly impacted stream beyond what the Forest Service completed. Designs, permitting and construction were fairly simplistic and cost effective compared to the standard seen today, so a lot of benefit was derived by this collective effort. This is one of those few cases where significant pre and post project monitoring was funded and occurred, and a conclusive story can be relayed about positive outcomes for a fairly degraded but important tributary. ***The committee thought this could be an excellent story map for publishing to the web, which is a product the Governor's Salmon Recovery Office is working on related to the State of the Salmon in Watersheds update in coming months. *Michelle could add several attachments from PRISM into HWS for this project.**

The committee discussed whether this approach to project review was effective at meeting identified purposes. They generally agreed it was really good to do these quick reviews occasionally, particularly around the lessons learned, and ***we should proceed with more sponsors at this level of detail. If more details are needed, we can request that on a case by case basis.** Little, and sometimes bigger, glitches do come up on these projects, and utilizing each other's knowledge helps with the outcome and by eliminating confusion in the long run.