

Final Agenda, Skagit Watershed Council Technical Work Group (TWG)

October 18, 2018, 1:00 – 4:00PM, SWC Office, Mount Vernon

*(numbered attachments in parentheses, actions underlined)

Attendees: Alison Studley (SFEG, Chair), Rick Hartson (Upper Skagit Indian Tribe), Tom Slocum (Skagit Conservation District), and Devin Smith (Skagit River System Cooperative),

Absent: Eric Anderson (Aspect Consulting), Doug Bruland (PSE), Ed Connor (Seattle City Light), Jeremy Gilman (USFS), Kari Odden (Skagit Land Trust), Bob Warinner (WDFW), Emily Derenne (Skagit County)

Guests: Richard Brocksmith (SWC), Erin Murray (ex-officio member PSP), Catey Ritchie (new project manager at SRSC), Sue Madsen (SFEG)

Start: 1:15 pm

1. Introductions. Review Draft Agenda (#1) (Alison Studley, Chair)

There was not a quorum, which was the second low attendance meeting in a row (unusual for TWG), so group discussed how to improve attendance. ***Let Richard know of ideas.**

Approved September TWG Meeting Notes (#2) – On page 3, suggested change under the Milltown Project: Jenna has since left and WDFW is in process to fill position (not “waiting”).

2. Committee Reports (Richard Brocksmith)

- Board of Directors – The Board is back to its regular meeting schedule. Regarding SWC Budget, Richard reported that after recent staff departure SWC has decided to drop the riparian monitoring proposal and the funding that came with it, with that \$31,280 moving down the approved list. He reported and got feedback on letters to the Governor and Orca Task Force advocating for SWC funding priorities and for increases in habitat funding.
- SWC Watershed Coordinator Hiring Status – The ad on Indeed and through our partners garnered an excellent response. Several applicants had local experience and the list was narrowed down to four to interview. The hiring subcommittee is conducting interviews next Monday. Alison, Denise, Bob W will be asked to participate in the 2nd candidate interviews to confirm the best technical skills and fit. ***Richard will set up a meeting of these individuals for the last week in October.**
- Protection Subcommittee – Protection sponsors looking for a cost-increase with returned PSAR funds. Smaller parcels are on hold and waiting for larger parcels to be confirmed.
 - Draft protection reporting form and process (#3) – A simple, standard, internal form is being developed for tracking parcels through the process. Protection Subcommittee has seen early drafts but still hasn't met in person yet to discuss. TWG members supported the need to ensure consistent information is available to all without breaking any confidentiality on projects. Additionally, lengthy timelines and staff changes such as the recent one point to the need to keep project status information in one place.

- TWG members felt that waiting until a meeting for project proponents to share information is problematic, rather info should be provided in advance. Currently, prior notification is required to be at least 7 days. They felt that a secure way to share project information would facilitate informed review ahead of the discussion at the TWG meeting. Regarding confidentiality, TWG members want projects identified by parcel number and shared securely – either in hard copy or on a protected system like Box. They noted that if a member works for the federal or state government, then they are subject to public disclosure unless related to a real estate transaction.
- Some expressed concern about the form having a checkbox indicating restoration impact, but members felt it's better to know ahead of time if this is an issue, so it can be discussed openly.

***Richard will convey to the Protection Subcommittee the following suggestions:**

- Add the word justification in the Parcel Description and Attachments section: If site is degraded, please describe current site conditions and justification.
- Add words – Not for distribution.
- Using the Assessors value is ok.
- Change the title of the form to reflect it is info sharing and tracking.

3. Review RCO LEAN Study Current State Analysis of SRFB Grant Program (#4) – Richard is meeting in November in Walla Walla regarding the LEAN project to reduce process in grant rounds statewide. He asked for TWG input to share their recommendations which will be compiled for RCO. The timing is too tight for the next grant round, but for 2020 it could be implemented. RCO spent the last few months documenting how the SRFB Grant Program is implemented across the state, and they developed themes and recommendations. Richard recommended reading pages 84-92 for the best summary of their findings. Next, they will explore efficiencies in the process.

Discussion: The TWG members voiced that the inefficiency is the lag time – sometimes 2-3 years between the process and the awards. Projects could move faster if the funds were awarded and distributed quickly and more efficiently perhaps awarding money in phases with preapproval for the next phase of funding triggered if the project is completed.

RCO discussed offering an elective biennial cycle. It would be better for Skagit projects if there was more continuity with a constant program of funding more frequently as projects are completed.

The TWG provided input on themes and opportunities (page 84-92 of report):

- RE: Instead of three, do two review panel visits. By cutting off the 3rd the TWG felt that if contracts are funded in September, and if SWC does its LOI in March, then we could complete an entire design process in those 18 months. The drawback is if a proposal gets a POC, then the proponent could lose one chance to fix it.
- RE: Starting in winter instead of spring. This would supposedly reduce overlap in summer when projects are gobbling up staff time. However, TWG members noted that advancing forward would likely interfere with riparian work and project planning time.

They strongly encouraged actually keeping the process shorter with beginning consistent with current timeline but ending in September.

- RE: Capacity. While there is always room for more capacity, this seems generally less relevant to Skagit.
- RE: Focused investment program. This is for big, audacious projects with Legislative funding (like a large PSAR but statewide). This could be good for Skagit, but also raises question of other ways to spend any additional resources allocated such as via allocation formula.

4. Review SWC 2000-2018 project statuses –

Barnaby Reach Restoration Feasibility (Devin) – Initially, the goals of the project were to provide habitat benefits, flood and erosion protection, and wildlife and recreation opportunities. Folks downstream were very worried about flood and erosion that might result from this project. So proponents responded by expanding project goals to include that community and by improving their data collection and analysis to address flooding concerns. Devin shared six next steps involving culvert upgrades, removing Barnaby infrastructure, looking at project alternatives, continued outreach, and phased construction – with expectation of the first phase starting in 2020. Start time for construction really is unknown, depending on outreach process and acceptance. Now, they are working with project sponsors to identify alternatives and continue project outreach.

Devin showed images and maps of this extensive and broad portion of the Skagit system with oxbows and sloughs historically used for the hatchery. This hatchery facility was in place for 50 years, but stopped in 2007 leaving the infrastructure largely intact, but it's been taken over by beavers creating fish passage barriers. Predation and temperature were a problem for the steelhead and flat, calm water wasn't their best habitat.

Lessons Learned: They hired a facilitator, hired technical teams to collect data, and set up several committees, implemented a review process, garnered representation from the various stakeholders, and met with focus groups. They have quarterly informational meetings that the public can attend. They have expanded the data collection and broadened the study area to include the Sauk River and WSDOT project. Their models now include 9-10 surface and groundwater monitoring sites. They also looked at the influence of Highway 530, extreme conditions as caused by climate change, drainage analysis/culverts, and validated actual flood level measurements. He has obtained nine letters of support from private landowners in the area.

Conclusions:

- Channel migration will alter the terrain and is getting worse.
- S. Rockport community is at high risk for flooding currently. Flooding is expected to increase in severity and frequency without the project.
- Their data shows that Sauk River is influencing floods in this area – especially above the bridge and upstream confluence – and even more so than the Skagit.

Project Updates:

- Cottonwood Slough– WDFW wildlife area at the forks – Tom Slocum discussed that the slough has evolved into a wetland and we are looking at ways to open it up since it hasn't reopen on its own in the past two years. We are considering the value of dredging rearing habitat vs the value of the current type of wetland. The idea is to consider removing sediment and connecting the wetlands to the river. Potentially, it would provide 5,000 feet of backchannel. It could fill back in but that could take the next 20 years. It could be planted and provide useful habitat, particularly short-term which might be necessary given Orca problem. ***Tom could set up a site visit to walk down the dike to get folks out there ahead of the LOI time. People are welcome to provide input for spring 2019 LOIs.**
- Pressentin Park Phase 3 –Sue provided input on the status of engineering: The new side channel puts water in the channel at a 90-degree angle with consequences to no-rise requirements. She doesn't know if the County floodplain manager will approve this if there is .06 feet of rise. There are no buildings on the property that could be affected, and the landowner's representative has verbally said they are OK with the change. If it flies, they could go out to bid in February; otherwise, a long delay. FEMA may or may not accept this, and the risk is they are already behind on schedule and their NFWF money goes away at the end of next year.

The Pressentin Project has already been delayed a year due to lack of Capital budget and need to align this with the County's successful ALEA grant. In that time many factors that will increase costs have occurred – steel tariffs (footbridges), prevailing wage increases, busy economy. As a result we are expecting to request \$300,000+ in additional funds for this project from funds left over from Illabot.

- Carey's Slough Fish Passage Final Design – Sue Madsen and Anne Struefert (KPF) provided an update. SFEG and Skagit County have been working to get an engineering firm under contract to do design. KPF was selected, and after reviewing the previous work had concerns about buildability/cost of a 50-foot modular bridge. Geotechnical subconsultant believes it is likely that deep pilings would be required for any bridge structure, which would drastically increase costs. Public roads REQUIRE that state seismic standards are met. Ann explained that a bridge is anything over 20 feet. But a crossing over 20 feet triggers federal highway inspection and reporting requirements. Requirements include training, reports, timelines for inspection every 24 months. While the Town of Hamilton said it was not necessary to consult their on-call engineer in the early phases, but now that they have they have concerns about taking on the inspection/maintenance responsibility. The city of Hamilton doesn't want the responsibility to keep up with the documentation.
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- As a result of the issues described above, SFEG and the County considered options:
 - Option 1: Build a 50-foot bridge using modular pieces. Modular bridges require that each piece be inspected. They must withstand being under water possibly every five years. A modular bridge puts them in a poor position.

- Option 2: With a non-modular option, the inspection process could be pretty easy for the County to complete. However, due to geotechnical reasons and the width of the bridge, the footings would need to be very deep. Big deep pilings can be half of the cost of the project. If they can limit the size of the pilings, they can save money. This is the bridge that has two off-set culverts in place now. Hamilton has a fish barrier they need to deal with as well as moving the city out of harms way from flooding over next few decades, so they are concerned about taking on responsibility for a big bridge that requires meeting the requirements.
- Option3: Rather than doing a 50-foot span, they could install up to three smaller box culverts (16 or 18-feet) which would keep the city out of the federal requirements and simplifies the footing required. If the structures are shorter, the channel won't have a traditional shape due to some fill around the footings. It's not a difficult site to meet NOAA fish passage requirements given lack of velocity. But we want water to flush through and sweep the sediment out. Either way, they'll have fill. Debris transport may be an issue, although there isn't a lot of wood coming down. The shorter spans allow for less freeboard below the bridge. But it would be overtopped anyway. These structures could still be removed if the need for the road went away in the future. They discussed this option at length with the TWG members.
- Option 4: They could look at an engineering analysis on a 18-foot culvert instead of a building a bridge. There is concern about sediment build-up in the slough which could cut off habitat. Sue has no problem going with a single 18-foot culvert if the constituents on the TWG approve within the next two weeks. Draft design would include modeling to see if that would allow sufficient sediment transport.

***The group seemed to support looking at putting in a culvert to address the fish passage issues as a shorter-term solution which meets NOAA fish passage requirements, but they will discuss with their organizations and get back to Sue with their conclusions.**

***Devin asked Sue to provide some talking points regarding options and how they meet fish passage. Sue will provide a map and bullet points.**

***Sue and Alison will follow up with each other if a scope change is required, it will still have to go through the TWG for approval of the scope change.**

Sue concluded that they don't have a lot of time to play with. Lessons learned: consider what the county engineer and the city would need to consider. Make sure you get the city involved early on. If the project doesn't go ahead, they would give the money back. They cannot go back for extra match money. Losing a month may delay the project enough to make it impossible. She would like to come to a conclusion/resolution in the next couple weeks.

- Britt Slough (Sue Madsen, SFEG). This project is going pretty well, but suggestion is to do the outreach during feasibility and to reassure concerned community members that there won't be flooding impacts. They are moving forward now and have plenty of time left to complete the project. She will be bringing it forward for next spring LOI's. Sue noted that NFWF doesn't have a process for doing NEPA. US Fish doesn't do the NEPA for this, so right now it's a fight between feds and regional entities. This is an example of losing one and a half years. If there were some other kind of mechanism to proceed after a phase is completed and access pre-approved funds, it would be more effective.

5. TWG Priority Agenda Item Review and Feedback (#5) – TWG members reviewed this. No further comments.
6. PSAR Returned Funds RFP Questions? (#6) – Devin’s project money – more than \$500K – is coming back and the TWG is looking for projects that could be ready now to use that money. RFP lays out eligibility requirements. Richard notes that he has only heard of three that are in a position to use this money effectively. Funds need to be used by June 2019. The TWG suggested that projects ready now for this money may not need to cap at a certain cost. The result is to create a prioritized list and fund them as we go. Some will find it difficult to nail this down by November 9. Richard indicated that the actual due date is subject to change (November 9) at SWC discretion.

Adjourn: 4:15pm

Next TWG Meetings:

- November 15
- December 13
- January 17