

**Skagit Watershed Council**  
**Technical Work Group –Meeting Notes Final**  
**March 24, 2016, 1:00 – 4:00PM, SWC Office, Mount Vernon**

(\* indicates action item;        indicates decision)

Attendance: Chris Vondrasek (SWC), Devin Smith (SRSC), Alison Studley, Chair (SFEG), Jeff McGowan (Skagit County), Rick Hartson (Upper Skagit Tribe), Bob Warinner (WDFW), Ed Connor (SCL), Kari Odden (SLT), Doug Bruland (PSE), Tom Slocum (SCD), Erin Lowery (SCL).

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

Meeting called to order at 1:02 pm by chair Alison Studley.

Draft Agenda approved. February meeting notes approved.

***2016 SRFB Habitat Project Letters of Intent (LOI)***

Review projects for consistency with SWC documents and Four-Year Work Plan (4ywp). LOIs and a summary of LOIs were distributed via email.

*Steelhead Fish Passage Prioritization project*

- All culverts in the database that are in Skagit and not on state or federal land are included in this proposal. Sponsor SRSC is open to suggestions about which to include, meaning even those above the area of steelhead distribution. There was a question about whether all the culverts would be eligible. Field verification will help refine the list of eligible culverts and also allow for documentation of other barriers for other species as well.
- This proposal includes private and county culverts; city-owned culverts should be included in the county data.
- The broader list of culverts will then be scoped down to a specific and prioritized list of steelhead-only culverts. That will then be assessed for consistency with the SWC steelhead strategy and Steelhead Recovery Plan in the future.
- Baker is funded outside of this project already.
- Didn't we want to broaden our horizons beyond our interim strategy?
- No gray areas were identified by SWC staff.
- TWG determined that this project is consistent with SWC documents.

*Nookachamps Forks Restoration project*

- This project is in the main floodplain so it's basically a Tier 1 proposal even though it's in the Nookachamps.
- There are concerns about the nexus with mitigation work in the Clear Valley mitigation bank. The details of this kind of nexus can get very complicated. In-stream wood placements could change the hydrology of the mitigation bank and make it difficult to determine who is responsible for the downstream benefits. It's a complicated regulatory environment.
- SRSC is aware of the risks. They will address these issues in a feasibility study. Clear Valley has a pretty robust flow model, which will lessen the expense of feasibility study. SRSC will also look at the whole reach for potential projects. There's enough opportunity here to spend money answering that question, and there may be multiple benefits. It could be that the complexities with the Corps are overwhelming but we should not throw in the towel because of the complexity.
- It will be a very difficult task for the SRFB to review the interactions with the mitigation bank. What triggers ineligibility?
- Should work on the Clear Valley property be avoided?
- Land ownership maps were reviewed by TWG. Both forks of the Nookachamps will be assessed for in-stream projects. Plantings are on SLT land and will not be an issue.
- SRSC is also contracting with Clear Valley mitigation bank to complete mitigation work separately.
- On a technical basis, this project is consistent with our strategic approach. Other concerns can be discussed later down the road.
- This project fits into Tier 1 floodplain area feasibility for instream work.
- TWG determined that this project is consistent with SWC documents and **\*should be added to the 4ywp as a separate line item.**

*Kukatali Preserve Tombolo Restoration project*

- They are way under budget on the previously funded design project.
- On 4/18, Tom Slocum commented via email that the project scope should include "removing the derelict culvert from the lagoon on the north side of the tombolo". The project sponsor was informed via email, so that the comment might be addressed in the draft application which was also due 4/18.
- **\*The LOI needs a map.**
- TWG determined that this project is consistent with SWC documents.

*North Fork Levee Setback project*

- WDFW is pursuing this as a partner with the County due to potential future land purchase and ownership. County has purchase funding from the

previous grant. WDFW has to go through their lands program and then use County funds to purchase it.

- Part of this proposal is to think through the interaction with the PSNERP project.
- TWG determined that this project is consistent with SWC documents.

#### *Smokehouse Tribal Marsh project*

- It would be nice to expand the footprint of the concept.
- TWG determined that this project is consistent with SWC documents and **\*needs to be added to 4ywp.**

#### *Skagit Watershed Habitat Acquisition*

- Most funding will be used for acquisitions. Sponsor has done some outreach in the Nookachamps to landowners to see if there are eligible properties that would be good to purchase and already have a couple of lands with landowner acknowledgements. More info to come with specific descriptions of parcels.
- Sponsor wants to work with other organizations that have relationships to landowners in the Nookachamps to help identify opportunities and address barriers to restoration. For example:
  - Restoration could be an option on lands that aren't eligible for acquisition via block grants, so by working with SFEG lower quality lands could be proposed in other pathways for restoration.
  - Andrew Fowler at WDFW may have insight as to opportunities; he has talked to folks in that area.
- TWG determined that this project is consistent with SWC documents.

#### *Lower Cascade Floodplain Restoration Feasibility*

- Two major parts of project are already being worked on and others are associated with the hatchery operations, so WDFW is a logical sponsor with USIT and SRSC.
- TWG determined that this project is consistent with SWC documents and **\*should be added to 4ywp.**

#### *Collaborative Riparian Stewardship*

- We have worked with potential partners to develop this proposal.
- TWG concurs with SWC staff that this is consistent with SWC documents.

#### *Hansen Creek Reach 5 Restoration*

- Tier 2 area
- Skagit County Public Works and SRSC will also submit a Floodplains by Design proposal for this project.
- TWG decided this project is consistent with SWC documents

#### *South Fork Delta Channel Final Design*

- This project doesn't fit everyone's clear mandates so we'll need to shop this project around to find a sponsor for eventual implementation. County did previous two phases but doesn't want to do the final construction.
- There may be an issue with tide gate credits that have already been acquired. Are there mitigation issues with that?
- TWG determined that this project is consistent with SWC documents.

TWG unanimously approves final 4ywp list of projects to pass to the board, including new projects as provided in briefing materials and adding Nookachamps as a separate line item.

#### *Monitoring set-aside projects?*

RFP says Board may set aside ten percent – as much as \$90,000. M&AM Subcommittee will discuss this and pass it on to TWG. What work has been done on the past set aside and how will this relate to that?

#### ***SRFB vs PSAR outlook and next steps***

*Discuss information needed and considerations for allocating SRFB \$ (in December 2016) versus less certain PSAR \$ (in July 2017).*

For these letters of intent that total \$7 million, \$900,000 will be awarded in December 2016 and another \$4.5M will hopefully be awarded in July 2017. We need to consider these constraints when we develop our list of priority projects. Phased projects funded between the two sources are not an issue and can be dealt with under a contract amendment if proposed proactively.

- Are there questions we can ask sponsors about how funding allocations can be considered? What questions need to be asked of sponsors so committees can make decisions this summer? We should encourage sponsors to think about phasing during draft application process and let them know that these questions are coming. We don't need this info for technical scoring of projects.
  - Possible questions related to timing and logistics:

- Timing of match?
- PSAR is only state match; SRFB is state and federal match. What does sponsor need? Does sponsor care?
- How would timing of funding affect your project?
- Do you need funding right away?
- Can you break it up into distinct phases for December and July funding?
- What's the impact to the project of this funding timing issue?

Should SWC ask sponsors what works best for them in terms of timing of these questions? Sponsors can collectively come to a consensus about this timing, but they won't make the final decision.

Other discussion topics:

- Is there a situation when we would fund a project far down the list for timing/logistical reasons at the expense of more beneficial projects higher on the list? Will people be comfortable with that in terms of less benefit to fish?
  - Some folks said that fish benefit is more important [than these timing issues].
  - If a project isn't funded by PSAR, does that move it up the priority list?
  - If it's a benefit-based project, why waste sponsor's time with more questions? Some thought many organizations would want to stay true to our ranking regardless of timing/logistical reasons.
  - There may be projects that would lose out if they sat around for a long time, and other projects that don't need funding immediately, even though they are ranked higher.
  - The three set asides add another layer of complexity.
  - The technical priority of projects should not determine the timing of funding.
- Some projects have other moneys. Can money used to match a project be spent before July? Waiver of retroactivity?
- If there's a monitoring project, it would fit under the December \$900,000. Monitoring money has to come from SRFB.
- There are three projects with planting components as well, which may be a timing issue if they want to proceed immediately.

**Comment [rb1]:** Scratching my head on this statement in this location. Maybe TWG can comment on what to do with it but seems very dogmatic, not to mention counter to the flow of conversation when the tenor of the conversation was more exploratory than declaratory?

The large PSAR projects (over \$1 million) are awarded through a regional competition. Funds are awarded in July 2017 but they have a lower match threshold. There are only two SWC 2016 letters of intent eligible for the large PSAR pot. Also, \$2 million was set aside by SRFB for Intensively Monitored Watershed (IMW) projects. Some projects would be eligible for that in the delta. They will be ranked at the state level.

**\*SWC will email sponsors to notify them of the funding timeline variation this year. Staff will send out to TWG to comment on the short list of questions regarding funding timing needs, phasing opportunities, etc. This list of questions wouldn't potentially go out to sponsors to answer until finalized and wouldn't be necessary to answer until final applications are due.**

Other Skagit funding issues:

SFEG has requested SWC support to ask SRFB for an amendment to allocate about \$9800 in additional A&E funds to a recently funded riparian project. Richard authorized that request and he and Alison are providing this to TWG FYI.

DOE funds (for additional riparian and acquisition project work) are now under contract for RCO process, and didn't need to go through SWC. Kari Odden noted that \$50,000 is coming to wetlands project for surveying and acquisition. SLT closed on the Lake Creek parcel recently. SLT has also acquired NAWCA funds.

### ***SWC Protection Strategy Update***

Chris presented the additions to the step-wise approach in the tributaries designed to capture metrics on sub-tributary and riparian habitats. He reviewed the modeled 2-year flows for tributary reach level habitat areas and 100-year flows for tributary floodplain habitat areas (shown in past TWG meetings). He explained a methodology to capture the area of habitat responses at subtributary junctions (fish use, nutrient availability, LWD, beneficial substrate sorting) described in the Kiffney (2006) paper. The methodology measures the subtributary influence on a tributary downstream of the subtributary junction and adds it to the reach level habitat area in the parcels. This is a habitat quality metric specifically designed to capture these subtributary additions to the reach-level area scoring as a measure of climate resiliency.

Questions and discussion:

- Why use two-year flow? It could exaggerate the amount of available habitat in the tributaries. It doesn't seem consistent with the low-flow edge habitat metric on the mainstem, and may not be an accurate comparison. **\*Devin will provide written questions to Chris about this approach.**
  - Tribes are a different type of habitat than mainstem habitat. They are very dynamic, moving more often across the bankfull width so it makes ecological sense in some ways that they may have a different metric.
- Chris shared recently acquired drone imagery that showed that the modeling accurately describes high flow habitat availability in Day Creek (as an example)
- The 100-year flow model is used to determine the floodplain area, which is used to determine functioning or impaired riparian forest. Two site potential

tree heights (300' in the Skagit) outside of floodplain area will be used to determine riparian area.

- Finney Creek modeled 100-year flow seems like a smaller area than what may be the actual floodplain. This approach may underestimate floodplain area. Perhaps all island areas (without major outcroppings that clearly limit flow, etc) should be included in the floodplain area.
- This may be due to the 10-year-old old LiDAR layer that doesn't show topography so well. Flow data may also be too low.
- Could we look at these metrics case by case to improve accuracy?
- **\*Can folks look at these results and share expert opinion / questions / concerns?**
- Another approach could be to overlay the channel migration zone from a Forest Practices perspective. But how to identify that? There's not a comprehensive layer for that, and is different than what has been done in the past. Maybe DNR has more info? This has not been done for Finney Creek.

TWG can talk more about the protection strategy in April. SWC got an extension until end of the year. The big remaining questions are the availability of edge habitat data, some floodplain questions, and the different ways to quantify riparian forest function.

Note that SRFB TRC site visit dates have changed to May 9, 10, 11.

Meeting adjourned at 3:57 PM

Next TWG meeting

- April 21, 2016

Site visit dates:

- May 9, 10, 11, 2016