

Skagit Watershed Council, Technical Work Group (TWG)
September 18, 2014, 1:00 – 4:00pm, SWC Conference Room

Final Notes

(* indicates action item)

Introductions began at 1pm, including Alison Studley, Bob Warinner, Rick Hartson, Devin Smith, Tom Slocum, Jeff McGowan, Ed Connor, Richard Brocksmith, and Martha Bray. Guests included Leah Kintner and Kari Odden. Kari has been working with the Skagit Land Trust and Marine Resources Committee (MRC) and is likely to assist in Martha's transition. The September draft agenda and notes from July were approved.

Short Updates

Richard provided Board and Council updates, including:

- Re-electing 2 Board members (Ken Dahlstedt and Steve Hinton) and welcoming 6 new Watershed Council members (Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, Wildcat Steelhead Club, Washington Water Trust, Port of Skagit, Town of La Conner, and Aspect Consulting).
- Adopted new bylaws and articles of incorporation
- Adopted new budget and work plan. Part of that includes funding earmarked for contract obligations including updating the strategic approach and supporting development of additional capital projects. ***The process for identifying which capital projects to allocate funding towards will be discussed at the October TWG meeting. We will also review materials developed in fall of 2013 on this topic.**
- Launched a new Watershed Council website.
- Direction provided on strategic approach update, to be discussed later in agenda.
- Status of lead entity program and specific projects on this year's list.
- The hiring process for replacing our Watershed Coordinator has run its course and though we offered the position to two different candidates we weren't in the end successful. Richard will start over with a new advertising round in October.

Leah provided updates, including Large Capital PSAR projects have been ranked regionally and Illabot Alluvial Fan Phase 2 placed fairly well, and is likely to be funded if the Salmon Recovery Council approves the list as is at their meeting next week and the legislature approves at least a similar amount of funding as in the last biennium. Leah noted that the Partnership is working on a biennium update process that will likely change the three year work planning process, but details are still being developed. Leah also noted that she would like more input on the ranking of 76 BMPs relevant to salmon recovery, and the outcomes would initially be used to inform the Puget Sound Starts Here campaign. ***She will resend to the TWG for their input.**

There were no recent Monitoring and Adaptive Management Subcommittee meetings since the TWG's last briefing, so no updates were available. The Protection Subcommittee did recently meet and had a mapping meeting that was meant to assess progress to date on parcels that would achieve the protection strategy criteria and lay out a new list of parcels for contacting, all as an interim process until the update to the protection strategy was completed.

Project updates started with Alison relaying excellent progress on Davis Slough bridge with Skagit County and on two Day Creek projects. The Lower Day Creek Slough bridge and riparian planting is nearing completion, though she is bringing forward a 10% cost increase (~\$8200) due to higher than anticipated construction costs for the bridge that was needed to ensure it could withstand periodic overtopping from the Skagit River floodwaters. The TWG generally felt this was within reason and should be supported. ***Alison will follow up with an official request and Richard will follow lead entity procedures on next steps for authorizing it.** Alison also noted that the long-anticipated Thatcher Bay project would soon be releasing a contract to proceed to construction.

Richard asked the TWG how we should go about doing a more thorough project update process in anticipation of our next 3 year work plan update. Devin relayed this function was one of the main reasons the TWG was pulled together again in 2013. ***This should be one of our primary focuses in the remaining months of 2014, and annually thereafter.**

Kari relayed that the MRC has recently completed a nearshore assessment, which will be available on their website shortly. ***The new assessment could be very helpful to fill in identified gaps in the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan.**

Floodplains by Design

The TWG was asked by the Board to review two projects for their input and recommendation on writing letters of support for applications submitted to Ecology's Floodplains by Design grant program. The first was The Nature Conservancy's Skagit Hydrodynamic Model (SHDM). This project proposed to conduct modeling in the lower river just as the project recently submitted and ranked in the local lead entity process, but also added components that included a climate change analysis in the modeling and a significant landowner outreach task as a next step following modeling. ***After some discussion, and review of a draft letter, the TWG supported submittal of the letter with the added point that if both project proposals (SRFB and FbD) were successful that the Watershed Council looked forward to participating in how the funds would be assigned.**

The second proposal was the Town of Hamilton's Alder Slough Floodplain Restoration Phase 1 project. The TWG noted that it had been identified conceptually in the Middle Skagit Assessment as a priority project, and that the proposal seemed to have good salmon potential. At the same time, the TWG noted some weaknesses in the proposal including the aggressive nature of design going from conceptual

to final design in just two years and one funding package (when usually it takes more to be fairly accurate with costing) and proposing to construct two 35' bridges without yet doing a hydraulic analysis. The TWG also wondered about the Town's ability to successfully implement all the aspects of the proposal, though Richard noted there was a search for a replacement project sponsor underway. The TWG also noted that it appears that at least one of the areas to be assessed for riparian projects would be limited to less than 100' of planting width, thus potentially becoming inconsistent with the SWC Habitat Protection & Restoration Strategy (1998) and NOAA's guidance for financial incentives. Also, the TWG doesn't have guidance on evaluating flood hazard reduction and multiple benefits projects, making analysis difficult and subjective. It was uncertain what those benefits would be and at least one member questioned the level of flood reduction benefits. Given the lack of guidance and time, the TWG wasn't prepared to complete a full technical review, but said that if it was funded they would look forward to a more substantive review of relevant elements of the proposal. In the end, the concept has the potential to meet the intent of the Watershed Council guidance documents, but given the points noted above, ***the TWG recommended that a very simple "milk toast" letter be submitted in support of the concept while noting our lack of a thorough technical analysis at this point.**

Updating the 2010 Strategic Approach (SA)

Richard relayed that there is now clear technical and policy direction to do some housekeeping on the current, Chinook-centric SA before launching our next grant round while in a parallel path beginning the development of a steelhead and bull trout-focused SA over a longer period. It was asked if there was enough information to develop a steelhead and bull trout SA and Ed's response was that, yes, in Skagit there is given the huge amount of recently completed research specific to this topic. The status of steelhead recovery planning was relayed, noting that Ed is on the team working with NOAA to start that process. Skagit is a primary area of diversity and abundance of both species. The discussion began to explore the implications for lands in Canada, in the Forest Service, and in the Park Service and what types of coordination and recommended actions might be needed. There was also an initial discussion on whether to approach steelhead and bull trout in different plans or through multispecies approach. It seems appropriate to start by developing basic data for each species and then asking questions of overlap, synergy, and differences at that point before deciding the final approach. There was a recognition that our job isn't recovery planning, but instead strategic habitat focus only. We should build an initial strategy with what is currently known and once recovery plans are in place we can update. After some discussion on trade-offs and efficiencies of how we structure developing an SA for new species, ***it was agreed that forming a new subcommittee is most appropriate (mostly since some TWG folks won't want to be as heavily engaged and we'll need more than just TWG folks to be engaged), piggybacking where possible with TWG meetings to be efficient. Next steps include scoping out an initial trout team, setting up a meeting schedule, and beginning data compilation, as outlined in the attached document below.**

Richard and Bob met recently to review comments received from the TWG by email in the last month on specific components to be updated in the 2010 SA, and Richard presented that short list of five bullets shown in the attached document below. ***The TWG agreed they would take responsibility to complete these housekeeping items to update the 2010 SA, and identified specific members for each action. A small subcommittee, including Ed, Bob, Richard and hopefully a couple of others, consulting with key partners, would come back with a proposal for how to improve clarity around Tier 2 areas according to new information. Richard will work with SRSC on the mapping updates under their existing contract. And Richard will take a stab at a simple adjustment for the perceived omissions on Tier 1 riparian areas, stewardship and outreach/education, and determining how to deal with overlapping target area/tiers. Devin suggested, and the TWG agreed, that he would suggest some clarifying language on what floodplain adjacent alluvial fans & tributary junctions means (making it six bullets).**

The meeting adjourned about 4pm.

SWC Strategic Approach Update, TWG draft 9.19.2014

Chinook early actions/housekeeping by January 2015:

- Improve clarity around Tier 2 areas according to new information, focused on identifying objective rearing habitat criteria and thresholds
 - E.g. yearling studies and other new data
 - Address lack of clarity around areas such as Goodell, Hansen and Nookachamps basins
- Address the omission of riparian priorities in tier 1 areas
- Address the omission of stewardship and Outreach & Education strategies
 - Would initially likely be reference to the importance of these as strategies or objectives
- Clarify what floodplain adjacent alluvial fans and tributary junctions mean
- Updated map products
 - Better resolution for geographic priorities
 - Update and refine populations mapping and fish distribution
- Determine how to deal with projects in overlapping tiers like Illabot protection project (In the RFP)

Chinook et al. longer term needs:

- Create an updated list of tier 3 sub-watershed priorities
 - Update sub-watershed analysis
 - Consider Curt Veldhuisen's comments on screen of tier 3 being too coarse

- Determine which tier 3 sub-watersheds can be de-listed
- Climate change consideration
 - Engage SC² to help with this
- Continue development of social guiding principals
 - Consider multi-benefit projects
- Better define the nearshore area
 - Look for data to inform this section and/or get new data?

Steelhead and bull trout actions by January 2016:

- Convene new temporary subcommittee as the best structure, including non-TWG members, piggybacking with TWG meeting dates/times when possible for efficiency
- Compile and assess fish/population distribution and abundance and priority
- Compile and assess habitat factors for decline
- Identify priority habitat actions known at this time and approach to develop remaining actions
- Compare and contrast between steelhead and bull trout and determine if they should be handled together as multi-species or separately
- Compare and contrast to Chinook approach; determine how to align with Chinook approach