

Skagit Watershed Council
Technical Work Group – Notes Final Approved
August 18, 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), Kari Odden (SLT)

Guests: Jeremy Gilman (USFS) Leah Kintner (PSP, by phone), Nathan Rice (Kulshan Services)

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

Draft Agenda approved. March meeting notes approved.

SWC Protection Subcommittee Report – Bob Warinner

Bob provided a list of SRFB-funded acquisitions in the Skagit watershed east of Sedro-Woolley. They total 85 acquisitions of a total of 3,089.06 acres (included both open and closed grants). There have been a total of 6 completed acquisitions for 128.56 acres since October 2015.

Bob also reviewed the results of the recent Protection Subcommittee meeting. 10 parcels in Hamilton near Muddy Creek and Carey Slough scored very highly, and were greenlighted by the Subcommittee.

SCL is going after several parcels in the Marblemount area that may become available due to a bankruptcy. Denise is being strategic in thinking about how to make this happen. This property will not be purchased with SRFB funds.

Michael Kirshenbaum will work with town of Hamilton to develop stewardship plan for their properties.

Protection Strategy Update Workshop – Bob Warinner, Chris Vondrasek

Chris and Bob re-introduced the updated draft Decision Support Framework for the 2016 SWC Protection Strategy Update. They also showed the results from the recently completed evaluation and ranking of all of the available parcels in the 8 key Tier 1 and Tier 2 tributaries.

The main change is mostly that the current formula is driven by both habitat and cost, whereas habitat is the primary factor in the proposed updated formula. A revised handout of the decision support framework was provided. The stepwise approach to parcel evaluation starts with the Habitat/Area rankings, then is followed by a consideration of connectivity, and then a consideration of threat. The revised handout illustrated the threat factor relative to the habitat rankings, and how to incorporate it into two potential pathways in the framework depending on whether it's a "known imminent threat" or a "potential threat."

The stepwise approach to parcel evaluation starts with Habitat/Area rankings. For Habitat/Area analysis, Chris delineated modeled reach level habitat areas, floodplain forest functional areas, and riparian forest functional areas in the available parcels. These categories and metrics have been reviewed in previous TWG meeting, and generally correspond to the current formula's habitat classifications with some additional measures of subtributary inputs and riparian area. The total habitat area calculation number (computed for reach level, floodplain and riparian habitats) gets divided by parcel size. Of the 194 parcels in the tributaries, the top habitat parcel scored 7.833. The top 1/3 (or top 64) scored above 1.910, and the top half scored above 1.157.

The top third properties are greenlighted, and should be acquired. If the habitat ranking score is below 50% threshold it's not considered further. The top 50%-66% are then evaluated for connectivity. Of 194 parcels potentially available, 33-34 are between 50 to 66%. Within this range, we considered connectivity in two different ways. One approach multiplied the habitat score by the adjacency factor and a factor based on the total area already protected in the tributary or reach. The other method gave the parcel a discrete connectivity score based on these two factors completed distinct from the habitat score. In the direct connectivity scoring method, those parcels with adjacency multipliers 1.2, 1.25, and 1.3 rose to the top of the list for connectivity. Lower Illabot parcels were shown as an example. The parcels that score in the top tier (third) for connectivity, about 11 parcels, are identified for protection.

The middle 33% of ranked parcels in terms of connectivity are also then considered for potential threats via Path #1. If a known imminent threat is shown to significantly impact the Habitat/Area score, then that parcel is green-lighted for acquisition via Path #2. The handout provided illustrated the threat factor relative to the habitat rankings, and how to incorporate it into two potential pathways in the framework depending on whether it's a "known imminent threat" or a "potential threat."

The importance of hydromodifications along the streams and in the way the floodplain will be measured when they're present was discussed. Should they be considered explicitly, as in the previous protection formula? At what point can we call it out as non-functioning habitat? The model might not pick up hydromodifications, but it should. The hydraulic model in theory didn't create floodplain behind a dike or road based on lidar data as the water wouldn't flow there. But we should check on that. Perhaps an inventory of dikes would help. We will look at it.

***Chris will check on whether hydromodifications are detected by the model and perhaps include an inventory of dikes to improve floodplain delineation.**

The habitat analysis considered parcels along all the tributary river edges rather than to the edge of their floodplains. It was shown there were areas of overlap in the floodplain of the mainstem Skagit, and acknowledged that it will be possible to compare results from the mainstem model in these parcels that overlap.

Process and timeline for finalizing the Protection Strategy Update were discussed. We are close. We've come a long ways and it's making sense. With two more meetings and board review, it will take until the end of the year to have it all approved. If it's not done by March, it won't be available for the next round of evaluation for funding.

***Edge habitat information from SRSC is still needed.** The Protection Subcommittee discussed that we could hand-delineate it so we could run a couple of the mainstem reaches.

The TWG discussed how the mainstem and tributary models will work together. Mainstem properties might be better habitat but we still need to run numbers on the mainstem floodplain. Should the mainstem be rated higher? We hope to make something that can work across the whole watershed. It could take some tweaking. We hope this will stand alone and work across watersheds. Then we can sell it! Ha ha.

***The Protection Subcommittee noted a document has been shared this month with TWG members, that explains what has been done and what's in the spreadsheet. Please comment.**

SWC Riparian Strategy Project – Chris Vondrasek

The Request for Proposals for the Riparian Restoration & Stewardship Plan development and remote sensing of status and trends (current conditions assessment) has been published. A few consultants have called with questions.

Still waiting on a couple of key implementers to provide data on past project work for the Riparian Actions and Maintenance Geodatabase.

Do folks want to be involved in an advisory committee to vet consultants? People asked about being part of the interview process. No takers.

***Determine who will be on the advisory committee**

TWG member groups could work on this project, but SWC can't do it internally.

The RFP leaves a lot of latitude for the consultant to develop its own methods. It would be great to inform that process since we've all built various methods for a riparian conditions inventory.

RFP Task 2 is developing a plan with the goal of working better together rather than 5 or 6 shops working separately. One concern is that the plan could be too prescriptive rather than focusing on assisting member groups. The more prescriptive it is the less helpful it becomes. There's no problem with collaboration here, but consultant may have new ideas.

The maintenance strategy will depend on site conditions. When is maintenance justified?

Collection of data for riparian information sounds great. Developing a plan for all sites with a committee sounds like a big time commitment and we feel like we already work together well. Having a consultant come in and tell us how to do that may not be helpful.

***We should have further discussion with Richard regarding plan development.**

SWC likely will not do a webinar.

Habitat Work Schedule – Alison Studley

SWC contracted with Skagit Fisheries to work on the habitat work schedule (HWS). Projects that were funded in 2014 didn't have a 2015 update so the work schedule is missing data entries.

The Habitat Work Schedule Review document has a list of projects that need various HWS updates based on color coding. Richard would like folks to start thinking about this and set aside time to do it. If you are doing a progress report in Prism, work these updates into that process.

SWC has limited capacity to work on Habitat Work Schedule since our funding is passed through to SFEG and because only the sponsors have project-specific information.

Lead entities have been asked to take everything in the 4-year plan and add it into the work schedule. Richard wanted to make sure that everything that's listed to be public is ok to be public. That needs to be entered by the end of the month – actually no need for this, but RCO would love that. RCO is just looking for a big round number to see conceptual projects around the region to formulate their budget.

It's unfortunate that there are two different reporting mechanisms. Public sees more of the HWS, which is poorly maintained.

This is an initial call to action. This is something we need to do. We aren't asking you to do it now. We will send out an email in the fall as a reminder. An updated cheat sheet would be helpful too. We have a list from Michelle of staff members in the different shops who she worked with on this. They should be able to help with this.

PSP has a consultant who can help migrate info from 4ywp to HWS.

***Sponsors should review the 4ywp and let Alison know if there's anything that shouldn't go public. Sponsors should also update their projects in the work schedule.**

Fish Barrier Removal Board – Coordinated Pathway Outcomes – Alison Studley

The Fish Passage Removal Board did recommend a few barriers to remove: Cedardale Rd, Fisher Creek and Red Cabin Creek. WDFW is requesting money from the state but a sponsor will do the work.

This has been a bumpy road and it's confusing. Recommendations don't seem to jive with past input from TWG members.

These recommendations will go into a request to the legislature to ask for additional funds. But funds will probably come from elsewhere.

Hopefully now that we are funded to collect some data, we can help influence how this process works.

Davis Slough funds are left over but we can't use them here because of the process.

How did they determine the funding? \$60 million figure, not sure how it was developed.

Cedar Grove Fish Passage Project Update – Sue Madsen

This site has been a lot more difficult than we anticipated. There have been multiple meetings with WDFW, County, and the Cedar Grove community on site, and we finally got everyone to agree on a preferred alternative. WDFW was telling us they'd only consider a drivable access.

The property was purchased with Land and Water Conservation Funds. Part of purchase was donated by the Ovenells with the caveat that there would be vehicle access. WDFW wants the least maintenance cost option available. The culvert is that option. WDFW may be able to consider a pedestrian bridge but the County is concerned about maintenance costs. Sue is seeking a formal TWG response on what options would be acceptable for SRFB funding. LWCF funds require vehicle access.

If we are going to stop this process now, we still have funding and time to come up with something else. If not, we need to come up with a design by the end of the year. If they won't consider using SRFB funding for a culvert, or if TWG says you won't rank it, we can go back to them.

The preferred option that was submitted is a 22-ft culvert. Dirt removal will cost \$250,000. Culvert would cost around \$350,000. A culvert isn't restoration, but it would be passable by fish. If we do a culvert, it needs to be as big as possible. It's going to be expensive. All bridge options are expensive.

Question 1 – All stakeholders would accept a 22-ft culvert with a road being open at times. But the local community doesn't want that. SRFB doesn't like the culvert alternative since fish passage and floodplain restoration are the goals of SRFB funding. Is it a good use of our funds to design a culvert?

Discussion:

Would culvert do anything to restore floodplain processes? Culvert would not reduce current footprint. It would restore connectivity with several acres of upstream habitat. Complete removal is the only thing that will restore floodplain processes, but the main impact is blocked fish passage. If you have a bridge, you will have to inspect it often. A pedestrian bridge would reduce footprint some.

If TWG can't support a culvert, Sue will ask stakeholders if they want to go forward with this. We will see if WDFW are willing to consider a footbridge. Costs between \$469,000 and \$600,000.

LWCF are ok with pedestrian access. Someone would have to buy a parcel with vehicular access if you want to use these funds. We would like to see complete removal but we can't take this out of LWCF. If it goes forward, you probably won't get salmon money to do it.

Would you approve spending an additional \$50,000 to put a culvert in?

Does it meet state stream standards? Jeremy noted that this would not meet FS design standards.

It's hard to support a less than channel-width culvert.

SFEG doesn't really like the culvert, but a pedestrian bridge still has impacts. Culvert is expensive, so in addition to not being floodplain restoration it's a tough sell.

Is there risk of it being silted in? No, it would clear out a bit. There's quite a bit of backwater that gets in there now. Water does flow over top of terrace at a five-year flood. Spring-fed beaver pond habitat.

There are some regulatory and policy issues, and restoration funds shouldn't be used for culverts.

One worry is what would happen if culvert is denied? County doesn't want the property.

What's the best pedestrian bridge we can put in? If they say no thanks we don't want a pedestrian bridge, County will have to do something.

Sue will report that the TWG members present today didn't like it. Sue won't say that TWG officially disapproved of this project since Doug, Ed, and Kari aren't here to vote.

Lead Entity Program Review and Feedback – Allison Studley

Feedback is good now rather than waiting. Steve Hinton is withdrawing Smokehouse Tidal Marsh Restoration. There was a suite of comments and concerns about Smokehouse. Public process on tribal land for one. Various SWC documents for TRC and LECC reviews were submitted late. There may be \$600,000 more available for Hansen.

Feedback:

Late changes at the request of the LECC seemed odd. We got comments four days before submitting asking for more information. How do you do that? Usually LECC is pass/fail.

It's hard to find information for technical reviewers and there's a lot of it. Allison talked to Richard about an Island County approach that was a lot clearer. Perhaps that can be adopted.

There was a condition that came up in the Steelhead Fish Passage Prioritization project at the very end from the LECC. That's frustrating to have to answer it again. We need a template that shows which questions need answering, or have already been answered. There should be a clear rule for this process. No harm done, but the process is onerous.

LECC can put a condition on a project at the last meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 3:52.

Next TWG Meetings

- September 15, 2016
- October 20, 2016
- November 17, 2016
- December 15, 2016
- January 19, 2017
- February 16, 2017
- March 16, 2017