**Skagit Watershed Council**

**Technical Work Group – Final Notes**

**December 17, 2015, 1 – 4:00 pm, SWC Office, Mount Vernon, WA**

(**\* indicates action item**; \_\_ indicates decision)

Attendance: Chris Vondrasek (SWC), Devin Smith (Skagit River Systems Cooperative), Alison Studley, Chair (Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group), Jeff McGowan (Skagit County), Tom Slocum (Skagit Conservation District), Rick Hartson (Upper Skagit Tribe), Erin Lowery (SCL), Eric Andersen (Aspect), Bob Warinner (WDFW)

Guests: Richard Brocksmith (SWC), Jenna Friebel (WDFW), Dave Cline (Shannon & Wilson), Nathan Rice (Kulshan Services), Leah Kintner (PSP)

*Agenda and Meeting Notes*

The draft agenda was accepted as proposed.The group reviewed meeting notes from November. With the transition to a new note-taker from Kulshan Services, the level of detail increased. **\*While the group likes detail, it was felt they could be more condensed in the future.** Devin moved to approve the notes with minor amendments and the motion passed unanimously.

*Committee Reports*

Richard provided a brief update from the December 3 Board Meeting. The Board of Directors approved four packages to be submitted to the Fish Barrier Removal Board: Gilligan, Mannzer/Red Cabin, Walker, and Fisher Creeks. **\*At the upcoming retreat, the Board will consider questions about how that process doesn’t fit our current strategy well and opportunities to continue a steady evolution if necessary.** The Board also adopted the Community Engagement Plan Framework and is looking forward to next steps. The Board appointed Jon Paul Shannahan as the new Chair of the Steelhead Bull Trout Subcommittee and **\*will discuss that subcommittee’s recommendations to amend the Interim Steelhead Strategy at their retreat on January 27.**

*Nominating committee*

Board nominees were discussed, including a slate of existing Board members who have been renominated (Colleen McShane, Michael Kirshenbaum and Carolyn Kelly) and one new nomination (Brendan Brokes, WDFW). An agricultural representative approached by the Nominating Committee did not have time to join the Board at this point, but maybe in the future. **\*The Committee is exploring at least one more nominee.**

*Protection subcommittee*

Had a short phone call meeting in early December for one topic. A property acquisition was approved up on the Sauk as match property for Seattle City Light’s SRFB grant. Located at Forest Road 26 and North Sauk Road. Adjacent properties joined into a larger parcel.

*Steelhead subcommittee*

Subcommittee met recently as agreed at the last meeting to consider whether adjustments are warranted and appropriate for 2016. The committee is looking into new data approved by co-managers with which we can update our steelhead (and Chinook) strategy maps. Devin reviewed a set of criteria the group developed to identify potential priority culvert barriers as a low risk, high benefit interim approach. **\*Another meeting is set for January 11 to continue the discussion on how to update our steelhead approach, if at all, with report out to TWG to follow.**

Bull Trout Recovery Plan for Puget Sound is done. Erin Lowery encouraged members to read it. Find it at USFWS Bull Trout recovery site (www.fws.gov/pacific/bulltrout). There aren't a lot of prescribed actions and it is up to each watershed but USFWS is available and can consult (Jeff Chan). It would be good to capitalize on that offer and get that input soon, if subcommittee decides that's appropriate.

**\*What is current status of the forthcoming steelhead plan at NOAA?**

*North Fork Skagit Acquisition / Levee Setback – Jeff McGowan, David Cline*

The agenda included an action item to meet a locally-approved condition: to recommend to the Board that the feasibility study has been completed with a recommended alternative supported by stakeholders prior to funding any acquisition elements. Jeff reviewed the project history. After reviewing feasibility study, the proponents hope to get property purchase authorized, perhaps at the next TWG meeting.

David Cline presented on the feasibility study of the North Fork Skagit Acquisition and Levee Setback project on the property upstream of N Fork Bridge on Fir Island. The real estate situation is complex and might be relevant to other projects.

Cultural resources found at site. Need to integrate this area into design to avoid impacts. Some water seepage coming out behind levee. New bathymetric survey used to update model. Calibrated model includes four feet of sedimentation, which means freeboard and existing level of protection of levees and dikes is fluctuating. This could impact design decisions on other projects going forward. Sedimentation is probably raising the flood flows. Used SRH2D model, with a combination of LIDAR and bathymetry. Results showed nothing too surprising or concerning in terms of velocities/scour. Baseline ground water model was calibrated based on borings and data loggers. Baseline takeaways: 3-4 feet sedimentation, Fohn property flooded from levee seepage, sensitive cultural resources.

Two levee setback alternatives were analyzed. Tidal channels using Hood’s allometric model were laid out in a preliminary design; multiple channels provide for better habitat and access. Hydrodynamic model shows that the property fills from levee back toward river.

Plant communities near levee setback will be palustrine emergent, sedges. Different from bayside areas in silts and clays since there's more sand. It will look similar to exterior areas adjacent to the site.

Channel locations may need to be more thought out if PSNERP project goes forward. We will need to think about how they will interact.

The bridge was on top priority list for upgrading stability, now it’s not. No current plans to work on bridge but also no new concerns about bridge related to the setback project. We would need to look at it together with PSNERP project to be sure.

Discussion about ponding, grading, and vegetation. Similar situation to Fisher Slough. Short fill berm at the toe of the levee possibly. From a stability perspective, it shouldn't affect it because the levee is designed for steady state. It can handle a little water at the toe.

Fish benefits of the project include an estimated 13,000 juvenile smolts per year using Skagit Chinook Model (Beamer 2005). **\*Bob to share that estimate with Eric Beamer.**

*Levee Setback Alternatives Analysis -* Cost came down when modeling showed little flow, velocity, allowing removal of rock protection from design. If the road was put on top of the setback levee it would cost an extra million just to get an extra acre of habitat. Proponents thought that wasn’t worth it. Project proponents recommended Alternative 1 due to much lower cost and just one less acre habitat.

*Levee Setback Seepage Impacts -* Dike District had some concerns that seepage would continue under new levee. Setback levee model also shows potential for seepage due to the sand layers and connectivity. Three mitigation alternatives for seepage control were investigated: internal drain, pressure relief wells, cutoff wall. Diking District initially prefers 40 foot deep cutoff wall, but Dave believes it will be more cost effective to look at pressure relief wells.

Design phase will further analyze what kind of seepage mitigation is needed. Initial look suggests it would cost about $25,000 per well for 40 wells totaling about $1 million, though that number may be reduced with further engineering. The cutoff wall would cost $2-3 million.

There was a comment that matching existing levee groundwater elevation by optimizing seepage control measures could lower cost.

*Geotechnical Design -* Need geosynthetic reinforcement. Can confirm soil reuse from tidal channel excavation. Consider regrading marsh towards river to remove ponding at levee toe. A new grading plan and habitat implications should be considered with biologists. Coordinate TFI credits with the Diking District.

Remaining challenges include seepage mitigation, cultural resources, real estate/easements, integration and coordination with other projects, revised and updated floodplain mapping.

*Questions*

Jenna will coordinate with other projects by sharing data, and will model how one project affects another through 3FI and HDM. PSNERP is still conceptual and in process which makes coordination difficult.

Will the PSNERP project affect removal of road fill prism under the bridge approach? Just the upper end of dike that would change, not lower end, so no according to 10% design.

Is the recommended alternative agreed on by stakeholders? What is agreement? What kind of agreement? DD hasn’t agreed to seepage mitigation details or other design details yet. The risk is that they might go hard for the cut off wall and you might not be able to make it cost effective. If they can accept the relief wells, it will be better. Last meeting went well, with DD support to proceed with design.

Is the property owner still on board? Yes.

If this is funded by SRFB, what is the TFI credit? There's a formula for it. There would be a handful of credits. Wetted area. Another process is in place to discuss SRFB and TFI interaction.

This is a really important site. It's been on the list since 2005 and it's in the recovery plan. Purchasing property doesn’t tie our hands to do anything else. That can be decided later.

**\*Feasibility report should be finalized in coming weeks and will be provided to TWG for further review, also allowing each TWG member to communicate with others in their organization. A formal recommendation to the Board will proceed subsequent to that.**

*Lead Entity Program Guide and Process Updates*

Richard reviewed written comments and recommendations he has heard on improving the LE Program Guide. \***Richard made a few changes in the Program Guide with track changes as a result of that input and would like feedback.** Ideally the Lead Entity Program Guide will be finished in February, worst case March.

Discussion: Lead Entity program guide track changes is very time consuming. We should focus on TRC process deliberations first rather than the LECC process. TRC stuff is well within our purview. But it’s also important that we express what we’d like to see different in the LECC process.

Discussion about project decisions made by TRC and LECC: TRC used to remove projects all the time at the committee level. It was occasionally contentious, so we often just rated those projects lower, but **\*LECC said we should just reject them if they are deemed inadequate.**

The green light, yellow light, red light process gave proponents plenty of time to fix their project. Now we have critical comments. So if a critical comment is not addressed, then a project shouldn’t move forward. If we really want to reject projects, there should be a way to say that in comments, and if they are not addressed they can be removed before ranking.

Discussion about critical comments on projects: \***We need to codify how and when comments are critical and which aren’t.** The process of determining which are critical comments will happen on site during the TRC site visits, but can also be confirmed or elaborated on afterward if TRC members have further comments due to the complexity of a project.

Can critical comments come from people not on the TRC? No, not technical critical comments. **\*LECC needs to communicate concerns earlier in the process.** LE Coordinator could get technical feedback and hear which are critical, and then take non-technical comments from the LECC.

Shouldn’t we clarify that technical comments are not part of LECC’s decisions?LECC is already not supposed to revisit technical process. How to get LECC feedback to TRC earlier? \***Maybe we need a joint meeting to discuss these issues?**

Should there be more LECC participation? Three days in a row is tough to get for site visits. LECC members could get site visits on their own if they can’t make it, plus we have the required June presentations to the SWC Council of Members now. Skeptical that LECC will show up even if we change the schedule.

What to do if project funding is unclear, or there are other late changes? Is there a way to establish a process rather than set a precedent? Does there need to be a deadline? Open ended? It seems to come down to the significance of the change. If it’s a change in scope or increase in cost, it shouldn’t go forward. **\*There should be a Iine item in the process guide to say that no significant changes are expected after this time.** No changes should occur after the scoring meeting – only late changes should be accepted if they don’t affect ranking and scoring.

How to score climate change criteria? How to be sure we are thoroughly assessing cost to benefit? **\*Needs further discussion in the future.**

How to normalize scores and put them in the same distribution? Or change ranking at the end? **\*All but one member are for both normalizing and providing TRC ability to re-rank at end.**

*Four Year Work Plan*

The 4-year work plan is an important and required document from the Partnership’s perspective and allows us at all levels to see what’s coming and advocate for necessary resources. Richard has taken the 2014 three year work plan and updated it with project progress and added what the different sponsors thought they could do in the next four years consistent with priorities in the 2015 Strategic Approach. This captures what can be done in four years rather than the entire lifespan of each project. We will update this every two years. **\*Potential steelhead projects are TBD.**

Does TWG need to approve this? It was proposed that the **\*TWG** **look at the final draft for technical adequacy and recommend it for approval at next month’s meeting.**

Meeting adjourned: 4:07