

Skagit Watershed Council
Technical Work Group –Meeting Notes
February 18, 2016, 1 – 3:30 pm, SWC Office, Mount Vernon, WA

(* indicates action item; indicates decision)

Attendance: Chris Vondrasek (SWC), Devin Smith (Skagit River System Cooperative), Alison Studley, Chair (Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group), Jeff McGowan (Skagit County), Rick Hartson (Upper Skagit Tribe), Bob Warinner (WDFW), Ed Connor (SCL), Kari Odden (SLT), Doug Bruland (PSE)

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

Meeting called to order at 1:09 pm by chair Alison Studley.

January notes approved with a 4ywp comment deleted contingent on further discussion.

Four Year Work Plan Discussion

4ywp comment from January notes regarding whether and when TWG would approve the 4ywp was discussed. The 4ywp should be approved before RFP is released. There is no official, explicit requirement for TWG to approve 4ywp, but it helps with coordination and consistency. We are supposed to have all projects in the 4ywp that are going to the SRFB for review; however, the timing is funky. The RFP says projects need to be on the 4ywp or consistent with the 4ywp.

TWG decided to at least review the three new projects for consistency with SWC's Strategic Approach and add them if appropriate.

Review of three new projects

Marblemount hatchery project – co-managers

The co-managers have exchanged emails saying they want to push the feasibility stage of this project forward soon. The sponsors are still being confirmed. This 4ywp entry just puts it on the table. There were concerns expressed about unresolved issues in the LOI, but it was unclear what those issues were.

TWG agreed with SRSC's recommendation to leave this project off of the 4ywp for now and review the updated LOI next month.

Tenas Creek project - USIT

Rick Hartson explained some of the project details, including removal of hydromodifications and the enhancement of conveyance pathways/channels. One conveyance pathway was used in the late 90s. Removing the dike could cause water to flow over the road so there is some risk there to be addressed. USIT may not necessarily be the sponsor, they just want to get the project out there as a priority. The property was acquired by SCL for restoration. USIT sent communications to Jason Joseph at Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe and Peter Forbes at the Darrington Forest Service office to let them know of the project concept. Communication is good. USIT is using SWC capacity grant to set up stream gauges, in coordination with Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and Seattle City Light. The 4ywp is a way to get this project out there for consideration.

There was general agreement that this project is a high priority in the Suiattle watershed. The dike constrains the creek and alluvial fan processes and SFEG has already planted some trees in the alluvial fan. Removing the hydromodifications is last big step.

TWG unanimously approves this project to be added to the 4ywp.

Lower Suiattle Enhancements project – USIT

Rick Hartson explained that this project is in the preliminary stage of identifying some potential enhancements and he is seeking feedback.

The Darringer campground understory has been hammered and could benefit from some planting. Old swales with culverts may get flooded but it's unclear. It might be worth looking into the hydrology there and the amount of human activity in that area.

On the map provided, the Lower #3 hydromodification still has a scar after some riprap removal was done by DNR in the past. It may not need work. The Upper #3 hydromodification is definitely causing edge impacts. There's an old relic channel on the opposite side of the river, and it's possible the hydromodification is artificially straightening the stream and impacting activation of the relic channel. The hydromodification is protecting the abandoned road there, which is starting to erode. ***We should approach DNR and see what they think their responsibilities are in terms of the road before using SRFB money.** The DNR is most likely partner. Rick didn't notice any landslides in the area.

TWG unanimously agrees to add the Lower Suiattle Enhancements project to the 4ywp plan.

Utopia project – SFEG

Alison was unsure about publicizing the project without more details while it is still in the development phase.

***Richard will sort the 4ywp project list into geographic order within tiers.**

TWG approved 4ywp as-is to date with the assumption that new projects shall be added next month if they are consistent with the SWC Strategic Approach.

Lead Entity Program Guide and Process Updates

The Board indicated that working with SC2 on climate change questions is a good pathway forward as the organization assesses how to adapt to this emerging threat. For the first time, SRFB proposals will have a few questions about climate change regarding projects, which will trickle down into our evaluation processes.

Richard added language to the Program Guide to clearly state that significant late changes will not be accepted, and as directed by the Board, he also drafted a definition for the term “significant.” This should discourage changes as much as possible and allow TWG to consider if changes are “substantive.” Changing partners and tweaking line items is okay but big changes in budget amounts is not acceptable.

TWG accepted this new language in the draft program guide.

Consider Board request for TWG to look further at TRC cost effectiveness approach & criteria

Richard provided some project development vetting input and a framework for comprehensive planning in a handout. Most lead entities around the state look at cost effectiveness qualitatively – it’s just a gut check. One lead entity does a quantitative regression to analyze cost effectiveness, but it’s unclear whether that’s better than a qualitative approach (i.e. “garbage in/garbage out” as Ed Connor commented on the Lower Columbia approach).

Discussion:

- Let’s stay with a high-level gut check review for this year. It may be worth doing a regression later but the scoring needs to be in the RFP, so we would need to decide

this today. This warrants more discussion and there's not enough time to make a decision and publish it today.

- It's too late to make changes this year. This issue isn't as glaring as people think it is. If we are going to do something like this formally, maybe we should use a method that's used elsewhere rather than develop our own method.
- Are there better ways that we can have sponsors evaluate cost effectiveness? For an expensive project, we could require that a second engineer review it and work that into the scoring.
- We could set a threshold of project cost to trigger cost effectiveness review. A small fish passage project doesn't need it. Half a million to a million dollars, perhaps. Set threshold high enough to ensure sponsor can afford to hire an engineer.
- Reviewing engineers are unlikely to criticize their colleagues. To prevent that, we could make it more competitive by not always giving construction work to the design firm. The second engineer could do construction.
- We could have an engineer tell us where to look for cost effectiveness in projects. We can get some engineering review in house to review projects. It would be better if SWC hired one engineer to review all projects rather than have each sponsor hire.
 - Can we get SRFB to pay for this? A waiver of retroactivity to include engineer review?
 - We could use SWC internal capacity funds to do that review.
- There are really two questions involved in cost effectiveness: How good is the engineering v. how good is the project for fish?
- Figuring out the benefit to fish is hard. A model is great if your data inputs are good. We could come up with some real data metrics to measure fish benefit, etc, such as smolt output, but it's really difficult. That info exists in some places for some species, but not everywhere.
- It's hard to tell what's going on in a regression model. Low, medium or major impact to fish -- It's all relative. Some of these projects are really expensive but they are well-located (e.g. the estuary is a critical habitat and there are no other alternatives). Take a pragmatic approach to looking at the biological impacts and rank them low, medium, or high benefit to fish.
- Other SWC processes use semi quantitative approach – restoration, acquisition, assessments. We could break out cost effectiveness and consider different criteria to analyze cost effectiveness in different project types. This may help refine cost effectiveness. For example, Illabot Creek is costly, but it's a really important watershed for spatial, genetic, and life history diversity. How do you put that into a score?

- I want more guidance from the board. There are more costs than just money costs. Dollars per fish is too simple. There's an opportunity cost for each project that isn't necessarily reflected by dollars to fish. Estuary projects are an example of that.
- Hansen Creek is an example of how review cut cost in a major way through value engineering and just a plain old scrubbing.
- Project development, alternatives analysis processes can include cost measures.
- At what point in the process should sponsors do this?
- Another cost criteria should be creative funding, or finding other funding sources. We don't use match in our evaluation process because you are punished for it by SRFB. We could consider that. You should get more credit for bringing more resources to a project. Most grant processes reward you for match but we don't look at it.
- The Review Panel has recommended that SRFB work on how to use PRISM to analyze the range of costs for different kinds of projects, and provide this to sponsors as a resource. It could be difficult to compare across a large area considering varying costs, land values, etc.

Three criteria for evaluating project costs were discussed:

1. Cost benefit – based on life cycle of the project? Only based on salmon dollars or based on all dollars? (5 points)
 - a. Low – High cost relative to predicted benefit
 - b. Medium – costs reasonable relative to predicted benefit
 - c. High – Low cost relative to predicted benefit
2. Cost efficiency/containment – just based on proposal at the time. (5 points)
 - a. Low – costs unsubstantiated or unrealistic
 - b. Medium – third party review indicates areas for improvements
 - i. Appropriate costs included
 - ii. Cost efficiencies not included?
 - c. High – Documented third party review or plan for one.
 - i. Or for smaller projects, it should be consistent with similar local projects
3. Funding approach – “creative funding”. Non-salmon needs covered by non-salmon funding. Hard to be specific on the levels because match depends on the project type. Open trench gets a higher score than a culvert? (1 bonus point)
 - a. Brings more than 25% secured match to the table.
 - i. Depends on where that match is coming from... mitigation v. donation. It's subjective.
 - b. Non-salmon funding included in project.

- Cost efficiency wouldn't really apply to acquisition projects given the appraisal process. Sponsors would need to show fish benefit.
- Sponsors will have to put their best foot forward to show benefit with various metrics. In estuary – smolts. Up river – perhaps an area metric, etc. It's important to substantiate benefit, but it's hard to quantify.

***Richard will document evaluation criteria developed today and distribute this new matrix in next couple of days. TWG recommends adding these refinements this year after reviewing them by email, but more robust recommendations (e.g. best practices) will need to be developed over the coming year.**

Protection Update

It's time once again to bring the protection strategy update project from the Protection Subcommittee and staff to the TWG and the Board. ***Protection strategy should be on the agenda next month.**

There was a discussion of planting losses due to the drought last year on several SRFB-funded project sites. Planting mortality caused need to seek more funds for at least some of these sites, which luckily could be covered by Ecology end-of-year money. There may also be Ecology money for the Lake Creek acquisition project. If it doesn't involve SRFB money, it shouldn't require SWC approval.

Who will be on the TRC for this year? All TWG members answered affirmatively with the exception of Kari Odden. Richard asked Jeremy Gilman from USFS and Nick Chambers from Trout Unlimited already. ***Richard will also call Micah from Wild Fish Conservancy, Ginger Phalen from USFWS, Polly Hicks from NOAA, and Pat Stevenson from Stillaguamish Tribe.**

Site visit dates are now in question as SRFB Review Panel may not be available May 10-12. Should we move site visits a week forward to the first week of May, or later to third week of May? Both have implications. ***Either way it needs to be settled ASAP by SRFB, hopefully by date of RFP release.**

No TRC meeting until May, but next TWG meeting is March 24.

Doug Bruland noted that PSE pulled wood out of Lake Shannon. Huge pile of rootwads that someone could pick up for restoration projects. ***SRSC noted that it would helpful to know about the wood when there's an excavator already working there as that large wood could**

possibly be directly loaded to an end user's truck and transported. It's expensive to hire equipment and send it up there.

Anthony Weiss from DFW intends to publish salmon and trout distribution updates to Salmonscape at the end of March. ***If folks are interested, the draft data is available for review.**

Meeting Adjourned at around 4 pm.

Next TWG meetings

- March 24, 2016 (4th Thursday - allows for review of SRFB Letters of Intent)
- April 21, 2016