

**Skagit Watershed Council, Technical Work Group (TWG)**  
**October 15, 2015, 1 – 3:15pm, SWC Conference Room**

(\* indicates action item;            indicates decision)

**Attendance:** Alison Studley, (SFEG, Chair) Bob Warinner (WDFW) – via phone, Jeff McGowan (Skagit County), Kari Odden (Skagit Land Trust), Rick Hartson (Upper Skagit Indian Tribe), Ed Connor (SCL), Tom Slocum (Skagit Conservation District)

Guests – Leah Kintner (PSP), Richard Brocksmith (SWC), Erin Lowery (SCL)

The meeting was called to order at 1:08 pm. Next TWG meeting – scheduled for November 19, 2015, 12 – 4 pm.

**Introductions, Agenda, Notes**

- The agenda was deemed adequate.
- Comments from Devin Smith were incorporated into the May 21, 2015 meeting notes. The May 2015 meeting notes, as revised, were approved unanimously.
- September 17, 2015 meeting notes with revisions submitted by Alison were reviewed for consideration. The September 2015 meeting notes were approved unanimously with the inclusion of Alison’s revisions.

**Committee Reports**

- **Board Updates**

Margaret Fleek will be retiring from Burlington and the SWC Board of Directors (BOD) likely in early 2016. A nominating committee has been established for several positions.

The BOD approved the SWC support letter regarding the Goodell Creek project. A second letter will follow to SRFB regarding process.

The community engagement planning effort continues. This topic, along with local survey of perspectives on climate change, will potentially be discussed at the November 18 Council of Members meeting.

PSP is encouraging lead entities to develop project lists for PSAR funding in 2016 versus 2017 to facilitate more concrete understanding of project needs by the legislature. This will essentially require us to produce two “big funding rounds” of projects back to back (2015 and 2016) with 2017 being the smaller, SRFB funding round only. All sponsors should be aware of this as early as possible.

The 2016 grant round will adhere to the same timeframe as 2015, roughly. PSAR funding will be distributed in July 2017, nine months later than normal.

The BOD approved funding for the five Skagit Capacity Fund (SCF) projects with conditions:

- USIT Tier 2 tributary stream flow and temperature assessment – This project was approved based on USIT being committed to collecting more than one year of data and identifying non - SCF funding for future data collection.
- SRSC – Suiattle LWD analysis – approval based on TWG approving the technical merits of the project. **\*Answers to the TWG technical questions on the project will be provided soon for deliberation at a future meeting.**
- Skagit County, SRSC and SFEG culvert projects (3) – approved for Tier 1, 2 and Tier 2 steelhead only areas but not for Tier 3.

The BOD will discuss among other topics the potential for using Skagit Capacity Funds for Tier 3 projects and other opportunities at their January 2016 BOD retreat.

- The Protection Subcommittee met last week and conducted a work session that reviewed the outputs of different models for the Protection Strategy Update:
  - Current process = benefit/(cost \* area)
  - Option #1 = benefit/area
  - Options #2 = benefit solely

The SRFB project deadline for the Protection Strategy update has been extended to March 2016.

A recommended scope change for the existing Protection Strategy was provided for discussion and consideration. The scope change would remove references and deliverables related to development of nearshore protection strategies. Inclusion of nearshore areas in the current Protection Strategy was mainly derived from deliberations regarding pocket estuary acquisition in Similk Bay in 2013. Justification for the scope change was provided in a document “Appendix F, SRFB Grant Amendment Request Form” and based primarily on revisions in the 2015 Strategic Approach that focused expanded protection efforts on newly included tributaries and the Protection Strategy update process. TWC recommends approval of the scope change to the BOD. Discussion included that other areas (Westsound/San Juan) have been completing acquisitions based on nearshore considerations. While the decision to approve this recommendation to the BOD was unanimous, a rhetorical question was raised about when it could be further considered. One potential approach to this could be to refine the definition of nearshore to Tier 2 pocket estuaries, which made the topic more manageable under current policy (as opposed to all of the nearshore which isn’t currently supported). Discussion also focused on how to prioritize potential opportunities and define benefits of nearshore restoration projects vs. those in floodplains, etc.

## Lead Entity Program

- **North Fork Levee Setback Feasibility/Acquisition**

Jeff McGowan provided an update on this project. Skagit County hired Shannon & Wilson, Inc. to complete feasibility and design studies for the parcel upstream of the North Fork bridge. After hearing from the project proponents on likely options, the diking district is concerned about the potential for increased groundwater onto farm land from this project. Funds for the project are allocated through 2017, but acquisition cannot proceed until a feasible and beneficial project has been identified. Skagit County will re-engage with the diking district on the best path forward while working to alleviate their concerns. Cultural artifacts have been identified on the site and the project has been revised to account for this. Skagit County will conduct additional monitoring of wells on the site. The current property owners are anxious to complete the transaction process. **\*Skagit County will provide a presentation on the North Fork project to TWG in the future prior to any request for acquisition funding release.**

- **South Fork DD#3 Site**

Jeff provided a preliminary review of the project. Skagit County has project documents available for review. The estimated cost for the project is \$850K+. Project modeling identifies an increase of 53K smolts as a benefit of the project. Skagit County will have to go through an internal prioritization process for which of their projects to move forward on based on funding and staff constraints.

- **Hansen Creek restoration project**

Skagit County and partners will be requesting funding for implementation of this project. Modeling has been completed that identifies feasible restoration options and no impacts to downstream private property owners from the project.

- **Skagit Forks project**

Bob Warinner (via phone) provided an update on this project. The effort to design a project to remove the plug in the outlet to Cottonwood Slough has been completed. WDFW is currently working to develop preliminary details for alternatives to opening the left bank wetlands to the Skagit River, possibly via a system that reconnects Britt Slough as well. Preliminary design work is scheduled to be done in 2016.

### **Fish Barrier Removal Board (FBRB) Nominations**

The FBRB would like to receive project proposals by November for culvert replacement projects that use a “coordinated pathway”. Funds for these projects would potentially be available in July 2017. Cade Roler from WDFW helped develop maps and associated site information for a couple of ideas on what a coordinated approach could look like, not as proposals but to facilitate a discussion about next steps in an analysis. The subgroup that developed the watershed pathway nominations also proposed a general approach for the coordinated pathway that would consider culvert replacements for areas downstream of completed culvert replacement projects first.

Culverts upstream of completed replacement projects where significant habitat occurs could also be considered as well. Target sites for Fisher Creek and Walker Creek were identified and provided on maps for discussion. Several culverts in these drainages exist between culverts that have already been replaced or are scheduled for replacement. Site assessments are available in the target sites documents. Cade suggested submitting 5-6 culvert “packages” to be considered at the state level. Bob indicated that he thought 2-3 may be more feasible, depending on their size. It was noted that FBRB is trying to fund projects that would otherwise not have or not be eligible for other funding. A question was raised about what areas can be considered – Tier 1, 2 and/or 3? Discussion ensued about what areas to choose, how to choose them and assurances of funding. **\*It was decided to develop a list of options and then prioritize from that list at the next TWG meeting for potential submission.** Initial ideas for the list included:

- Walker Creek...or expand to include whole Nookachamps
- Carpenter/Fisher Creek
- Upper Hansen\Red Creek
- Samish (if no policy constraints?)
- Red Cabin
- Sauk Prairie
- White Creek
- Lorenzan Creek

A request was made for TWG to consider others for inclusion after members have had some time to identify other options. **\*Seattle City Light, Skagit County, and Upper Skagit Tribe indicated that they could provide some level of GIS support for the process,** which would offset WDFW’s time to some degree. The WDFW database would be used for mapping and culvert identification for now since SRSC reps were not present to provide their data. This exercise would include mapping, culvert status, ownership and how actions would provide fish benefit (and how much). **\*TWG will make a recommendation at its 11/19 to provide on this topic to the BOD for the 12/3 meeting.** It was recognized that extending the development of these project packets into December does not meet the desired FBRB timeline but was more realistic for SWC members.

### **TWG Work Planning for Fall/Winter**

Richard developed a draft work planning document for a period through the March 4, 2016 BOD meeting which is the last date before the lead entity process has to be approved if it maintains the same schedule as previous years.

Discussion on fall/winter work planning focused on:

- No Strategic Approach update work is scheduled during this time.
- Potential to tweak the Interim Steelhead Strategy and include “low hanging fruit” steelhead projects. The question of whether to do this or wait until there was further information available from the Steelhead Recovery Planning process was discussed. If taking action to tweak the strategy, it should be drafted by December 2015. Any TWG proposals related to modifying the interim strategy should be provided to the BOD by

February and no later than the March 2016 meeting for consideration. **\*Erin and Loren will take the lead in coordinating the effort for this work and Rick will identify folks from his group to assist.**

Erin identified that the plan is to have a draft Steelhead Recovery Plan by March 2016 but that this is highly “optimistic”. Erin also identified that the planning group is trying to develop recovery goals which would lead to actions.

- A 4-year work plan update needs to be completed by TWG by February 18 for the March 4 BOD meeting. The current 3-year work plan hasn’t been updated since 2014. A 4-year work plan is needed to assist PSP with biennial budgeting needs and to ensure locally-proposed projects are consistent with recovery plans. Lead Entity Program Guide updating work will occur in Nov./Dec. 2015. The work plan is to be updated every two years with minor adjustments made on an annual basis as needed.

Discussion ensued about whether the 4-year plan is a proactive or reactive document, i.e. is it a strategic planning tool or an effort at documenting decisions that have been made?

### **Climate Science Questions**

The Protection Subcommittee has some questions about the influence of climate change and how to incorporate that topic into the Protection Strategy Update. Richard provided a previously-distributed letter sent to the Skagit Climate Science Consortium (SC<sup>2</sup>) from August 12, 2015 that outlined some of these initial questions on the subject. **\*The group discussed their desire and agreement to have a joint Protection Subcommittee and TWG meeting to consider additional questions and other relevant information.** Ed, a member of SC<sup>2</sup>, discussed “where we are, where we’re going” in relation to the 5 identified questions in the letter to SC<sup>2</sup> with additional major concerns being sediment loading and associated impacts to the lower river. Material (ash?) from Glacier Peak has been migrating downstream and coating good steelhead habitat in the lower river over the last several months. Ed also noted that Tier 2 areas may take on more Tier 1 characteristics over time with climate change.

Discussion and additional questions on the topic of climate change included:

- What has SC<sup>2</sup> learned since the last time we met in 2013?
- Potential benefits of beaver restoration would be a “cheap way to keep water on the landscape” though it appears state law prohibits beaver transplanting.
- Sediment impacts to priority target areas and both protection and restoration projects.
- How to receive and incorporate the likely high volume of information related to climate change in strategies and approaches for future planning efforts?
- How to evolve revegetation efforts in the context of changing water levels and likely impacts to survivorship for the long term?

**\*Next TWG meeting – Thursday, November 19, 2015 – noon – 4 pm**

- **Noon – 2:30 pm - SC<sup>2</sup> presentation on recent work and climate change Q & A session (focus on Protection Strategy and fish distribution, behavior and habitat implications).**

- **2:30 – 4 pm - Project Reviews – Suiattle, FBRB, culvert projects, etc.**

Adjourn 3:10 pm