

Meeting Notes Final
Skagit Watershed Council, Technical Work Group (TWG)
February 19, 2015, 2 – 4pm, SWC Conference Room

(* indicates action item; indicates decision)

Attendance: Alison Studley, (SFEG, Chair) Bob Warinner (WDFW), Devin Smith (Skagit River System Cooperative), Ed Connor (Seattle City Light), Jeff McGowan (Skagit County), Kari Odden (Skagit Land Trust), Chris Vondrasek (SWC), Rick Hartson (Upper Skagit Indian Tribe), Tom Slocum (Skagit Conservation District), Phil Kincare (US Forest Service)

Guests – Doug Hennick (Wild Fish Conservancy), Erin Lowery (Seattle City Light), Richard Brocksmith (SWC), Leah Kintner (PSP), Loren Everest (US Forest Service)

The meeting was called to order at 2:05pm. Next TWG meeting – March 19, 2015, 2 – 4 pm. The March meeting will be the last TWG meeting until the TRC convenes for consideration of 2015 project proposals April 28, 29, and 30.

Introductions, Agenda, Notes

- Approved meeting agenda unanimously.
- Approved January meeting notes (as written) unanimously

2015 Strategic Approach Update

Richard provided an update on the results and recommendations of the Tier 2 Tributary Working Group. The assessment document was released for review 10 days prior. Erin Lowery provided a presentation on the topic at the SWC Council of Members meeting on February 11, 2015. Four methods were used to identify, estimate and rank the ability of tributaries in the Skagit River basin to support Chinook salmon spawning and rearing habitat. Fourteen tributaries were identified that fit the Tier 2 criteria, with diminishing returns in remaining tributaries. Estimated relative rearing habitat was identified for each.

The following recommendations were developed by TWG to provide to SWC Board of Directors (BOD) for inclusion in the 2015 Strategic Approach:

1. Include ten (10) new Tier 2 tributaries that are eligible for floodplain related projects. The other four identified were already in the 2010 Strategic Approach;
2. Tier 2 will include the extent of Chinook distribution in the “mainstems” of the identified tributary (not smaller side tributaries) if the floodplain meets the two channel width (CW) criteria as defined by Pleus & Schuett-Hames, 1998;
3. The Tier 2 tributary map will be updated accordingly based on best available information (new maps are expected any day from WDFW/NWIFC but if they are not available in time then previous accepted map products will be used).

A motion was made to approve these recommendations. The motion was made by Tom Slocum with a second by Bob Warinner. The motion was passed unanimously.

Richard provided additional review of proposed revisions in the fourth redraft of the 2015 Strategic Approach. General discussion revolved around the following topics:

- The lack of good floodplain maps for all fourteen of the Tier 2 tributaries is a data gap that needs to be addressed. Site visits will verify floodplain boundaries on a case by case basis. ***Project sponsors will have to provide evidence in their applications for how floodplain boundaries were determined if they are currently undefined.** SWC can provide technical assistance if sponsors have eligibility questions/concerns during the pre-application phase.
- ***The Strategic Approach and to some degree RFP should include an explanation of eligible tributaries in the narrative to prevent any potential confusion to sponsors from information contained on the map.**
- Concern was expressed about Walker Creek being depicted on the draft map given the apparent conflict that it isn't the mainstem of the East Fork Nookachamps. ***Chris will review and revise as necessary.**
- ***Martha Bray requested that the TFW floodplain references be provided for review.**

Beyond minor clarification and grammatical revisions, the following were reviewed and discussed:

- Figure 2 map needs to be updated when information becomes available in time for the RFP to be released on March 5. Devin agreed to provide the final maps;
- Target Area Description for the Floodplain target area will include "floodplain-adjacent alluvial fans" language developed by Devin;
- Inclusion of the section on critical uncertainties including rearing limitations;
- Inclusion of the section on "Interrelated Strategies and Actions"

A motion was made to approve the fourth redraft of the 2015 SWC Strategic Approach as modified by Richard during discussion. The motion was made by Phil Kincare with a second by Bob Warinner. The motion passed unanimously.

2015 Interim Steelhead Strategy

Richard provided a review of the Foundation for Skagit Watershed Council 2015 Interim Steelhead Strategy document. One of the main concepts discussed is that the 2015 Interim Strategy should be conservative and simple recognizing that broader outlines of a steelhead recovery plan won't be developed until sometime in 2016. The group reviewed the main bullet points that had been developed by their subcommittee and generally agreed with them.

A few details remained for Steelhead and Bull Trout Subcommittee (SBT) to work out. These options were captured with four alternatives for the 2015 Interim Steelhead Strategy that were reviewed by the SBT subcommittee at their meeting immediately prior to this TWG meeting. Due to limited time and consideration of the ongoing steelhead recovery planning process, all options build on the proposed 2015 Strategic Approach. The preferred alternative chose by the SBT and provided to TWG for consideration was to expand the “geographic box” upstream through steelhead distributions. This system would include all Tier 2 tributaries to the extent of Chinook and steelhead presence, and would keep the currently proposed floodplain criteria (>2CW). For proposed projects that only benefit steelhead because they are located upstream of documented Chinook presence a score of 8 points rather than 12 would be provided for the scoring questions about Target Area. While these projects would have a relatively low priority, it will be the first time that steelhead specific projects will be considered for funding.

A motion was made to approve the “expanded geographic box” and point scoring (alternative #3) recommendation provided by the SBT subcommittee for the 2015 Interim Steelhead Strategy. The motion was made by Bob Warinner with a second by Phil Kincare. The motion passed unanimously.

2015 Lead Entity Program Guide

Richard provided an on-screen review of proposed revisions to this document which was distributed previously. Most of the proposed revisions are minor.

Proposed substantive changes include:

1. Open Public Meetings Act – Language was incorporated so that activities under the Lead Entity Program Guide will follow public meeting and disclosure rules. Alison inquired about whether inclusion of this applies to BOD and subcommittee meetings that include BOD members. Richard provided that his understanding is that since SWC is a small organization (less than 10 employees), most of the requirements don’t apply including that SWC does not have to formally announce meetings (though all meetings are already noticed on the website). Richard explained that the requirements of this rule only pertain to Lead Entity programs and decisions and not to the non-profit. There is a bill currently before the legislature that would require all non-profit organizations to abide by this rule.
2. Lead Entity Citizens Committee Supplemental Questions for Prioritization Criteria – Appendix D – This is a new requirement proposed for the Lead Entity Guide. The BOD decided that project sponsors need to answer the community questions outlined in Appendix D, but not the cost questions. The Citizen’s Committee will incorporate the information from this questionnaire during project review.
3. Conflict of Interest Matrix – Discussion on this topic focused on the idea that the matrix should be provided to committee members with the final application materials so that any potential conflicts of interest do not enter into the decision making process late.

The matrix will eliminate inconsistencies in how potential conflicts of interest will be applied to the review process.

4. Appendix A - This list needs to be updated since it reflects folks invited to participate on the TRC last year, but an invitation to participate hasn't been distributed yet this year. ***SWC will send an email request out to the potential TRC members to get confirmation, and will include the list of dates.**
5. Appendix B – Request For Proposals – There are several proposed revisions to this appendix:
 - The intent is to allocate PSAR funding in the first year as opposed to spreading it out over 2 years. Likely PSAR funding for 2015-17 is \$4.2+ million and SRFB is \$1.2+ million. SRFB funding for 2016-2017 would likely be \$1.2 million. Thus, this year is the big year for about \$5.5M and next year could potentially only be \$1.2M
 - SRFB is considering a regional policy to provide up to 10% of SRFB funding for monitoring projects, though it would come from habitat project funding. While still in discussion phase at the state level, the SWC M&AM subcommittee and Board have noted their desire to consider how best to utilize this discretionary approach.
 - No funding allocation for Tier 3 projects again this year, but we have clarified that project areas can include these upland areas if sponsors bring that as match.
 - Incorporation of steelhead projects which are consistent with 2015 Interim Steelhead Strategy.
 - Updates to timeline, tables and maps as shown in review document. A question was raised related to this that in past years the Lead Entity Citizen Committee (LECC) has only met once. The updated timeline provides that the LECC will meet twice annually, consistent with the two meeting rule.

Kari Odden and others expressed concern that the restriction on allocating funds for Tier 3 projects would impact opportunities for land acquisition using SRFB funds. Tier 3 areas along Finney Creek were brought up as an example, and that significant protections in the riparian corridor would be very difficult given the large blocks of land and limited external funding sources. A limited discussion ensued about different opportunities for funding land acquisition projects in this type of situation. Changing the restrictions on funding Tier 3 projects was not recommended. ***It was felt that this issue should be raised to policy committees and the TWG would like it to be addressed, if not this year then next.**

The TWG reviewed the proposed changes to the 2015 Lead Entity Guide, made some of their own changes as noted above, and unanimously agreed that the technical aspects are consistent with other modifications adopted earlier in the meeting. There was not a vote taken on this.

Skagit Capacity Fund

Three Skagit Capacity Fund applications were reviewed. Applications were submitted by Skagit River System Cooperative, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group and Upper Skagit Indian Tribe.

Richard noted that the capacity fund is available to assist in project development or implementation that would likely not qualify (or at least not easily qualify) for grants as stand-alone projects. SWC would like to have money allocated for approved projects spent by the end of June, 2015. Funding can roll over through the end of December 2015 but the fiscal year ends at the end of June thus the interest in completing the projects by then.

Project Review and decision:

- Skagit River System Cooperative – This project will review and digitize river and side channels for 6 year sets of aerial photos. The information would be available to SWC partners for research and restoration planning in the Skagit River watershed.
 - Requested funding - \$10,000
 - Approved unanimously – Devin Smith abstained
- Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group - This funding request will assist in the development and submittal of grant applications for the 2015 SRFB grant round. Project goals include support for the Alder Slough/Hamilton Floodplain Restoration and Presentin Park side channel restoration, along with 2 other projects. It would retain consultant support for 2015 SRFB grant round and to train junior staff.
 - Requested funding - The estimated project budget was noted as \$11,495. Tom Slocum proposed that TWG limit the funding, if approved, to \$10,000 as described in the “Available Resources” section of the Skagit Capacity Fund RFP document.
 - Approved unanimously at \$10,000 – Alison Studley abstained
- Upper Skagit Indian Tribe – This project would conduct a topographic/bathymetric survey to assess change within the Hansen Creek restoration site in the fifth year after construction.
 - Requested funding - \$10,000
 - Denied unanimously – There was concern that collecting survey data would not lead to future projects in these reaches, as required to receive funding. It was also unclear how staff would assess the survey data provided. Rick Hartson and Jeff McGowan abstained.

Returned PSAR Funds – Fir Island Farm project

PSAR funding in the amount of \$133,159 for this project will be unused and returned since they did not need to implement all of their contingency/response studies. The money needs to be

re-obligated by the end of June 2015, and for the most part spent given it is 2011-2013 funding. An additional \$777 of PSAR funds is also available for allocation that was unallocated in the 2014 grant round. There was discussion on potential opportunities for spending the money though it is a short timeline and an existing project that requires funding would likely be best.

Skagit County may consider submitting a request for allocation of approximately \$115,000 to complete final design of the Minkler Bridge which is in Reach 5 of Hansen Creek. The channel work for this project is funded for 100% design but the final bridge design was underfunded because the original project budget was low. County is proceeding with preliminary design with the funding provided. ***The group advised that a widely distributed formal request to current project sponsors would be most appropriate.** Devin suggested an email proposal/request due to the short timeframe for decision making and project completion. This would allow the TWG to make a decision at the next meeting with enough information. It was also noted that TWG should look into any shortages for other existing projects that have been funded.

Adjourn 4:10 pm