

## Skagit Watershed Council Technical Work Group (TWG)

March 23, 2017, 1:00 – 4:00PM, SWC Office, Mount Vernon

### Final Notes

\*(numbered attachments in parentheses, actions underlined)

**Attendance:** Alison Studley, (SFEG, Chair) Bob Warinner (WDFW), Devin Smith (Skagit River System Cooperative), Jeff McGowan (Skagit County), Kari Odden (Skagit Land Trust), Chris Vondrasek (SWC), Rick Hartson (Upper Skagit Indian Tribe), Doug Bruland (PSE), and Erin Lowery (Seattle City Light)

**Absent:** Jeremy Gillman (USFS), Ed Connor (Seattle City Light), Tom Slocum (Skagit Conservation District)

**Guests:** Leah Kintner, (PSP), Richard Brocksmith (SWC) by phone until 2:20pm and in person after 2:20 pm, and Allison Roberts (note taker, Kulshan Services)

#### Introductions. Review Draft Agenda (#1) Convened 1:05 pm

**Approve February Meeting Notes\_#2)** – The TWG did not approve the minutes as they still lack the names of the projects discussed in January. The TWG didn't recall getting the redited February minutes back electronically. Regarding the status of the Protection Subcommittee's review of the floodplain areas adjacent to riparian areas, the notes should reflect that they reviewed the issue but did not make a decision.

#### SWC Committee Reports

- Board of Directors – Richard indicated the citizen's committee came up with new supplemental questions for habitat proposals, but they aren't in the manual. **\*Richard will make sure they get distributed to project sponsors who complete draft applications. He also noted that the questions can be incorporated into the document next year.** Bob Warinner and Chris Vondrasek will brief the Board on April 13<sup>th</sup> on the Protection Strategy Update, and there was an open call for another person or two to join us.
- Protection Subcommittee – Bob Warinner indicated the subcommittee hasn't met since the last TWG meeting. They have had ad hoc meetings during this time. More information on the Subcommittee Strategy Update work will be provided later in this meeting.
- M & AM Subcommittee – Richard indicated that the subcommittee discussed monitoring proposals in February. The M & AM subcommittee will review the letters of support. This should come along with the draft. Appendix A will be modified. Richard noted that \$35,000 in capacity grant funding remains unallocated. This presents an opportunity to fund some small projects and keep them out of the SRFB grant.
- Habitat Work Schedule (HWS) Program – Alison Studley noted per the SRFB contract that the Lead Entity is contractually obligated to get project status updates by all project sponsors including past and present projects. The group noted that it's time consuming that data they enter into PRISM doesn't transfer to the HWS. Alison indicated that the time it takes to update the HWS can be charged to the project. She recommended that they do it at the same time sponsors do the biannual progress report.

#### 2017 Lead Entity Program – Chris Vondrasek

- Review submitted LOIs and their eligibility ([link available 3/22](#))

- TWG is tasked with reconciling any grey areas of the eight LOI's recently received. All LOI's have been reviewed for meeting all necessary requirements and are ready to go to the next step of the application. The following project summaries were provided by sponsors. While the requests together total \$1,289,990, only \$800,000-\$900,000 is available.
- **Skagit Forks Design and Permitting (SFEG)** – Bob Warinner noted this is a product of the Skagit Forks Feasibility project. It involves an isolated 15-acre surface water wetland that will be reconnected. Request: \$155,120
- **Martin Ranch Road Culvert Fish Passage (SC)** – Jeff McGowan noted that two culverts are barriers to fish passage. The one-way road presents some complications requiring a detour of the road. The money is for the contractor to complete the project. Devin provided some background information from the Fish Passage Prioritization work. Request: \$300,000
- **Carey Slough Restoration Preliminary Design and Permitting (SFEG)** – Alison Studley indicated this is mostly a design project with some acquisition. It will take what's been funded as feasibility and will identify a couple restoration components for design and engineering. Opportunities to move a levy back may be opened up by this project. Request: \$352,000
- **Deepwater Slough Phase 2. Alternatives Analysis (WDFW)** – Bob indicated they did an initial project in this area in about 2000. WDFW purchased it in the 1950's and maintained this island property as a farm. Only half of the property was restored due to opposition at the time. This request is for preliminary design as well as a significant public outreach component with the hunting community. Bob doesn't anticipate any controversy with Federal agencies. The group expressed concern that this issue could be volatile and should be dealt with carefully during the legislative session. Request: \$TBD
- **2017 Skagit Riparian Stewardship (SFEG)** – Alison noted this is a mostly riparian maintenance and stewardship project with some planting in selected sites. Request: \$138,000
- **Similk Beach Restoration Design (SRSC)** – Devin Smith provided some background. Swinomish Tribe purchased this estuarine property awhile ago. Swinomish sponsored this proposal and previously went through an extensive planning process. They made a large commitment to habitat restoration with some preliminary design. The tribe is committed to work on the lower wetland area. Exhibit A in the packet illustrates the project. Request: \$225,000
- **Sauk to Cascade Monitoring Framework (SRSC)** – Devin outlined this proposal focused on status and trends monitoring information and basin-wide indicators. It could include several restoration projects. Erin Lowery provided some clarification that it's consistent with the new monitoring and also biological response. Devin expressed confidence in addressing any questions. Request: \$100,000
- **Large Wood Functional Assessment and Inventory Planning (NSD)** – This is a second monitoring proposal. Erin Lowery and Richard Brocksmitth discussed how the project addresses wood as an indicator of geomorphic processes, status, and distribution in relation to the floodplain. It will pull together a survey of monitoring protocols that are already available. **\*In response to Devin's question, Richard will clarify who the sponsor is. The subcommittee meeting will determine if it's supportable. If it's problematic, then it will go back to TWG. The M & AM Committee needs to move to endorse this proposal and the 'Sauk to Cascade' monitoring proposal at their next meeting on 3/30.** Request: \$19,860
- All of these projects appear on the four-year work plan except for the Large Wood Functional Assessment and Inventory Planning and the Sauk to Cascade Monitoring

Framework. **\*Pending their review at their meeting next week, these two projects need to be presented to the M & AM for a letter of support.**

- **Erin moved that the top non-monitoring projects are consistent with the four-year list and meet all other conditions as to Tier 1 and Tier 2 and Bob seconded. Motion approved.**
- Review Technical Review Committee (TRC) membership – Alison read the list of TRC members as included in the packet. All people on the list committed to participating. Everyone is confirmed, except Polly Hicks of NOAA who has conflicts with the dates.
- Review TWG and TRC schedules – by next week all LOI's will be finalized. Applications are due April 14; Site visits are on May 8 and 9 (not the 10<sup>th</sup> as previously indicated); Final applications are due June 9. Project sponsors will present to the SWC Council of members on June 19. June 28 marks the final review and technical scoring. On July 11, the citizens will review the projects with tech reps and sponsors in attendance. August 1 will be the day of the LECC Prioritization.

**\*Chris will send out a clarification to his earlier calendar invite narrowing the field tours to the May 8 and 9 (and will not include the 10<sup>th</sup>).**

Logistical question from Leah regarding dogs: Since the Skagit Riparian Stewardship project is on private property, Alison noted to be prepared that dogs might not be allowed.

- Review recent developments with PSAR returned funds and determine next steps  
Richard provided context on the returned funds including the sources of the returned funds and the amounts. Steve Hinton indicated in his memo to Richard and the SWC as outlined in the meeting packet that as part of the whole amount that \$50K wasn't needed on the Hansen project. They agreed there isn't enough time to add an RFP to apply this money, so they discussed current projects and their ability to use the money effectively and complete the work by end of June, 2017. So, the TWG explored many options for using the returned money by the deadline of June 2017.  
**\*Now that money is available, they should be able to start spending money. Richard will confirm this with Mark.**

**The conclusion was to reallocate the money on existing projects with a spend-down of the money on projects from the 2016 list of approved projects. Three projects were identified that could be provided more funds using this spend-down approach: 1) SFEG's collaborative riparian project; 2) SRSC / SLT Nookachamps riparian project, and 3) possibly SRSC's steelhead project.**

One key question to answer is whether a formal contract could be in place this spring on the SFEG riparian project. Additionally, the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe (a project partner) needs to determine if they can get legal review in time to get started and complete the project by the deadline. Jeff will need to close his project first. While the work must be completed by June 30, 2017, the project can be billed up to 60 days after the deadline.

#### **SWC Protection Strategy Update – Chris**

- The Protection Strategy Update is almost done.
- The TWG reviewed the Final Draft Report ([link here; same as emailed](#)) and the comments received. The group discussed three Problem Statements (I, J, and K in the current text) listed below. After considerable discussion, **\*the group agreed that these statements would be better to list under a 'Future Goals' category following the list of Problem Statements (A-H).** They felt these three statements felt more like aspirational goals for the future.
  - Statement I – *"Not all floodplain habitats are of equal value to Skagit salmonids, yet the current data and method for quantifying them is overly simplistic to discern all relative*

*habitat values.*” It was felt that this problem statement is vague and tends to shed some doubt on the past process and should be discussed. Richard suggested adding more specificity. **\*Richard will add an example on Statement I.**

- Statement J - *“Restoration needs and potential are not evaluated through the current CE scoring process. Modest site degradation such as vegetation clearing may impact relative ranking rather than valuing the site’s intrinsic potential for aquatic habitat.”* Concern that low-cost efforts can be done to improve a site. There’s grey area about level of degradation and whether that should disqualify a project.
- Statement K - *“Current guidance is mute with respect to marine nearshore habitats outside of the tidal delta.”*
- Follow-up on discussions from February TWG  
Alison suggested modifying the review process. Rather than the Protection Subcommittee providing sole review, she suggested the TWG could weigh in on more complex properties, especially those with restoration needs. At issue is how to discern the right level of review and the level of detail to feel comfortable with the projects. This might lengthen the process by a couple weeks, but it would ensure the property has been vetted sufficiently. She expressed concern that the Protection Subcommittee has approval authority on acquisitions they are also proposing and the new assessment and parcel scoring makes approval too facile. She proposed the Protection Committee would make a recommendation to the TWG which would in turn move it forward to the Board.
- Discussion on remaining needs, next steps, and comment period  
The TWG discussed the importance of ensuring all details are vetted regarding property acquisition, and especially possible restoration needs on a property. The Protection Subcommittee is already responsible for reporting to the TWG and to the Board greenlighted property decisions on a periodic basis. Protection Subcommittee members encouraged more TWG members to attend Protection meetings when possible. Additional participation and review could be difficult for two reasons: the TWG doesn’t meet during the summer and decisions can’t be done by email. The TWG acknowledged that it’s not realistic to invite other organizations to join the Protection Subcommittee due to the time commitment. **\* The TWG recommended that more details be captured in the notes provided to them by the Protection Subcommittee.**
- Review results via web map and “threat factor” assessment  
**\* This section of the Protection Strategy Update will be drafted again for TWG to look at again next month.** However, the TWG did not get to the point where it could recommend approval to the Board of Directors. A Board vote isn’t expected now until June.

In reviewing the assessments and the results with Kate Ramsden and Devin from SRSC, Chris has identified issues with the accounting for the habitat values of backwaters and places impacted by hydro-mods. His plan to correct these issues with backwaters and hydro-mods includes:

- Reduce the area metric on edge habitats impacted by hydro-mods by 2/3 to more accurately reflect their value to fish as measured in the field and reported in the Chinook Recovery Plan. Add backwater and side-channel polygons for these habitats to get a more complete and accurate assessment of reach-level habitat.
- Address the erroneous inclusion of some public lands that aren’t protected conservation lands, and adjust the subsequent adjacency issues which then affects their connectivity calculations.

#### Threats

The 1998 Protection Strategy gave an inflation factor for high-density properties that could add relatively high amounts of impervious surfaces. The current draft update maintains that policy, however

the outputs of the model identified about 34 parcels in medium and high density zoning that are mostly developed already or under a building moratorium in Hamilton. As such, the threat assessment results did not yield a significant number of parcels where acquisition appears appropriate, and the Protection Subcommittee and staff will review alternative approaches. Richard will share with the TWG a couple of ideas that Tom Slocum shared in a previous TWG meeting regarding threat assessment.

#### Snohomish County

- Chris has not yet completed scoring of maps showing the possibly 100 parcels that flow into Skagit County from Snohomish County. This assessment work has been set aside until the update is completed. Some concern was expressed that addition of these could substantively alter the list of properties by adding in new scores from these parcels.

#### Riparian Buffer question (from January and February TWG meetings)

- Alison asked for clarification about what's happened with the riparian buffers along the floodplains. Only about 17% have been confirmed as not isolated or adjacent to aquatic habitats. If there are concerns, members need to express them ASAP. In regards to addressing this question, there exist additional, more impactful improvements to focus on with the currently limited time.

#### **SWC Riparian Habitat Protection and Restoration Strategy Project (Cover Classification and Next Steps)**

- Review conceptual models and riparian function – ranking matrix – and timeline  
Instead of being done in April, the consultant will present to the TWG the final cover classification and their initial riparian function analysis then. They will also meet informally in May for a workshop with riparian practitioners on how to use the data, before wrapping up the project in June. Erin noted that the riparian assessments SWC has done are on par with what NOAA has developed.  
**\* Richard asked if members would provide sites to be evaluated for planting plans.**

Riparian habitat – Richard asked that within the next 10–14 days people are needed to add information to the field validation efforts, particularly conifer and deciduous calls. Some areas of the data are good and some need more data. **\*Richard will send out a notice regarding priorities about where to identify conifer and deciduous layers.**

#### **Adjourn 4:11 pm**

#### **Next TWG/TRC Meetings**

- April 20, 2017 – TWG (no other TWG meeting until October 2107)
- May 8 and 9 and June 28, 2017 (TRC Meetings)