

Skagit Watershed Council Technical Work Group (TWG)

Final Notes

November 16, 2017, 1:00 – 4:00PM, SWC Office, Mount Vernon

*(numbered attachments in parentheses, actions underlined)

Attendance: Alison Studley, (SFEG, Chair), (in alphabetical order) Jeremy Gillman (USFS), Rick Hartson (Upper Skagit Indian Tribe), Doug Bruland (PSE), Kari Odden (Skagit Land Trust), Devin Smith (Skagit River System Cooperative), Chris Vondrasek (SWC), Emily Derenne (Skagit County), and Tom Slocum (Skagit Conservation District).

Absent: Ed Connor (Seattle City Light), Eric Anderson (Aspect Consulting), Erin Lowery (Seattle City Light), and Bob Warinner (WDFW).

Guests: Richard Brocksmitth (SWC), Jeff Richardson (Skagit Public Works Voluntary Stewardship Program), and Allison Roberts (note taker, Kulshan Services)

Start: 1:09 pm

Introductions. Review Draft Agenda (#1)

1. Approve October Meeting Notes (#2) (Alison Studley, Chair)

No changes proposed to the agenda.

Chris moved and Doug seconded approval of the October 2017 meeting notes with the one change: regarding proposed changes to LE project review scoring system – remove Devon’s suggestion that was in bold.

2. Subcommittee and Board Reports (Richard Brocksmitth)

- Update on Capital Budget: The vote on Election Day won’t change much regarding the capital budget impasse because of the 60% approval requirement. ***Richard intends to write a letter to our Skagit area Legislators expressing the difficulty of operating with lack of funds and requesting a resolution to this issue. He will warn that pieces of the larger salmon recovery program will start to fall apart.** He noted that \$5.3 million in grants is waiting for a capital budget resolution. If no budget is passed by end of session in March, there is a risk that SWC (and other Lead entities around the State) won’t be able to run a grant program in 2018.
- SWC Protection Strategy Update:
The Board continues to discuss policy differences. A Board ad hoc committee is drafting a consensus proposal for Board consideration in December. Policy issues under discussion:
 - 1) The definition of what qualifies as conservation protected property (for use in the connectivity step in the Habitat Assessment). They are working on an agreement to focus properties with more permanent and more formal protections.
 - 2) The definition as to how implementation of the new strategy will be monitored, what kind of data products will be developed, and when they will be updated.
 - 3) The inclusion and consideration of degraded parcels for possible acquisition. The ad hoc policy committee lowered the thresholds and revisited the original staff proposal with a provision for Board approval on potentially eligible parcels that have isolation or significant degradation drawbacks.

While it is not expected to delay approval of the Strategy, the ***TWG will need to review the new conservation and protected properties layer. Next steps: develop an implementation strategy and comprehensive outreach plan for the Protection Strategy.**

- 2018 draft calendar dates for TWG and lead entity process (#3 & #4)
The calendar includes meeting dates for all committees including the TWG as well as quarterly SWC Council meetings and the lead entity process dates. For the lead entity process, the committee noted that it is possible that the process may start without any resolution on the capital budget. ***Richard asked the TWG and various committees to notify him of any issues or problem dates on the schedule.**
 - Protection Subcommittee – did not meet this month.
 - M and AM – The subcommittee met again early this week and is making progress. A draft will be fleshed out by January to share with the TWG first part of next year.
 - SWC Council Member meeting is Wednesday, November 29. Eric Beamer will present status and trends M and AM work on the estuary. Richard will present community engagement efforts and an update on the riparian assessment.
 - SWC Communication Policy (#5) – Richard shared the approved document. No discussion.
3. SWC Riparian Assessment & Strategy Update (Richard and Chris Vondrasek)
- The Board had a full briefing on the assessment update. There were no new policies, so there is no need to do a formal adoption. As a matter of protocol, the TWG doesn't need to adopt the Strategy Update. Richard shared a document showing formal comments received from SRSC on the Riparian Assessment. ESA, the consultant, and SWC staff will be responsible for addressing the comments, and the initial response.
 - Richard outlined details about the final steps in the riparian document preparation:
 - The results section of the report presents empirical information, but no analysis.
 - Staff and ESA have been working on adding more analysis of the results and creating more maps which will be sent to implementers. (For example: maps where replanting work might be focused such as on publicly owned properties with shrubs or fields, and maps where solar radiation and shade might guide either acquisition or replanting actions.)
 - Some 'strategies' became 'recommendations' in the final document.
 - In the final section in the document, a simple table was added with brief descriptions about ideas for future implementation.
 - Next Steps: ***Richard agreed to consider a suggestion to format this report as two stand-alone documents – one with the tools and one with the strategies. Richard will speak with a few TWG members about how this might look. Richard will get the replies to their comments information to SRSC. Richard will make the changes and get it packaged as a deliverable for SRFB, and then present it to the TWG in December with all final tweaks and packaging/changes incorporated. *Richard will present a quick summary on this at the November 29 SWC Council meeting.**
 - Richard pointed out that information about many riparian area plantings in recent years is dovetailing well into the M and AM process: how effective have the plantings been; level of maintenance; and what the elk have done to it.
***Richard will report the results on monitoring to the Board as a next step. This information will be shared with project implementers.**

- Richard noted there is a new publicly-available version of the ArcGIS Online map dedicated to Skagit riparian project work, in addition to the online maps for the riparian assessment.

4. Lead Entity Program Guide and Strategic Approach (Alison Studley and Richard)

- Only minor changes have been made to the Guide; however several aspects related to the Strategic Approach require review. There are improvements to make, but not enough time to fix it. Any additions/changes need to be done by January for the Board to approve it in time for a new grant round. Improvements in mapping will take more than two months to complete so this will be updated over the next year and incorporated. The TWG discussed what should be prioritized into the next grant round and future grant rounds.
- The TWG discussed the possibility of adjusting the multipliers on target areas criteria and project benefits criteria to best reflect projects with the most benefit to salmon. The crux of the issue is that not all habitats are created equal and the project review scoresheet doesn't address the issue of how good the project is for the habitat type that is being scored. Outcome: The TWG discussed developing different target area scores and also a watershed processes point threshold that would help to prioritize projects using professional judgment when the issue arises. This gives individual reviewers the opportunity to review the nuances. The downside is that applicants want hard and fast numbers that favor their project and extra review inserts uncertainty into the process.
- Agreement seemed to coalesce around the following: adding a gradient on Tier 1 weighting; increasing Tier 2 scores to 4; and providing a way for the watershed processes' score to have more influence.

***Richard and Chris will run several past projects through a "test" to detect the impact of these suggested weighting adaptations to see how they affect the final scoring. The TWG agreed that this will be a temporary fix and needs to be reviewed again in the future.**

- The TWG reviewed the "Summary of Future Needs Identified in/for the SWC Strategic Approach" paper that had been provided in the meeting documents. A road sediment analysis could be eliminated. Relating back to the discussion (above) on the target areas and the variability of different floodplain habitats work should be done to develop criteria to distinguish among floodplain reaches.
- Draft Project Cost-Effectiveness Proposal

The TWG engaged in considerable discussion in their review of this proposal. Some discussion focused on the range of benefits vs. project cost and feasibility study costs and benefits. Regarding the issue of investing more time into cost-benefit in this round, ***Richard agreed to develop a range of questions to be asked based in the review process on the project if this is an issue and to share it with the TWG for feedback. Devon agreed to help with this.**

5. Four Year Work Plan (4YWP) & Project Planning (Richard) (#6)

- The TWG reviewed the status of ongoing or planned projects to remain on 4YWP knowing a new 4-year work plan deliverable will be due in January 2018. Richard spoke to the desire to put more effort into feasibility and scoping. The recently completed Skagit Hydrodynamic Modeling Project offers an abundance of new information regarding work planning in the estuary and future opportunities. Chris shared a map of the HDM projects in the report. Richard distributed a chart about this and presented the analysis of the multiple benefits in the HDM report for projects in the estuary and delta. Turning to the mainstem river upstream, Richard also handed out maps 2 and 4, and Table 14, from the Appendix C 'Plan for Habitat Protection and Restoration in the Middle Reach of the Skagit River' map packet of potential project sites. Map 2

shows priority restoration sites for reconnecting isolated habitats and Map 4 for restoring floodplain processes.

There are groups moving forward on many of the projects in the 4YWP, but there was some discussion about who will be the champion for the Cottonwood Island outlet.

- Large-scale restoration planning, including estuary and middle Skagit. Chris showed a GoogleEarth map of the area. The following discussion ensued:
 - The Skiyou Rock Removal – Is it worth the cost and effort? The county, WDOE, and the landowner want the riprap gone. The landowner believes that the presence of the rock is causing a lot of land erosion. The committee agreed to leave it on, but feasibility needs to be determined. Planting may not be possible without the rock removal given the landowner's desires. **Keep on the list.**
 - Gilligan project could use additional feasibility planning. More alternative analysis needed through NEPA process. **Keep on the list.**
 - Tier One Floodplain projects – Presentin Park Channel Restoration will stay on for this season as the project is implemented. **Keep on the list.**
 - They discussed a project labeled #4 (Skiyou Slough upstream connectivity project) regarding whether the triangle of land is showing any signs of erosion that would lead to a connection to the slough to the west. Consider having a geomorphologist look at this.

Short-term Project review (numbers from Appendix C 'Plan for Habitat Protection and Restoration in the Middle Reach of the Skagit River' :

- **#8 (Ross Isl. Off-channel reconnection), 11 (Black Slough floodplain restoration), 14 (Day Creek Slough floodplain restoration), 17 (Ross Isl. Slough inlet improvement) – * At the next TWG, Alison will provide more information.**
- **#5 (Etach Slough interim reconnection) – *Tom can get a copy of the feasibility study.** This is a long-term project. Some previous feasibility work done by the County; more needs to be done regarding an acquisition strategy. It has culverts and landowner issues, and a blueberry farm. There is an illegal part of the levee.
- **#11 (Black Slough floodplain restoration) – Regarding riprap removal at Utopia, Kari will update TWG at the next meeting.** Maybe it will be worth adding to the work plan.
- **#7 (Davis Slough), #12(Robinson RD Park), #13 (Day Slough), #20 (Cumberland Creek) (done); #21 discussed but appears to be connected now – *Take the done ones off the list.**
- Other notes:
 - #4 (Skiyou Slough upstream connectivity project)– Tom provided some information.
 - #8 (Ross Isl. Off-channel reconnection)– Has riprap. Not able to connect with landowner, so no project until then.
 - #10 (Savage-Mill Creek off-channel reconnection complex)– Devon had info. Feasibility on S Skagit Highway work pointed to an expensive project. More of a long-term project. Mill Creek avulsed.
 - #12 (Robinson Rd floodplain) – Rip Rap – not yes or no. Land adjacent downstream now scores highly in protection strategy.
 - #14 (Day Creek Slough floodplain restoration)– Need more information. Riprap present. Land Trust may own the property.
 - #17 (Ross Island Slough inlet improvement)–Need more information.
 - #21 (Lyman side channel habitat improvement)– Looks like Skiyou. Wood enhancement and a feasibility study possible.
- ***Take a final look at the 4YWP list at the December TWG meeting. Bring new information to make final decisions about what's on or off.**

- ***Richard will send out a call to let others know that TWG is considering projects for the 4YWP and to get their ideas to consider in December at the TWG.** Due date for projects to be added to the list – 3 weeks from now to be ready for a December decision.

Adjourn: 4:00 pm

Upcoming TWG Meetings

December 14, 2017, January 18, 2018, February 15, 2018, and March 15, 2018,