



Chehalis Basin Partnership

Meeting Summary – February 25, 2000

Introduction

Mayor Spahr welcomed members and opened the meeting. Grays Harbor County has appointed Jim Welch and Floyd Ruggles to the Citizen Advisory Committee. This brings Grays Harbor County up to a full contingent of four citizens on the Advisory Committee. Mason County and Thurston County also have four members appointed. Lewis County has three due to the recent death of Ed Moerke. Arnold Samuels introduced himself as the new Ocean Shores representative. Arnold is a member of the City Council.

Attendance: Nineteen designated members or their alternates signed the attendance roster at this meeting. There were twenty-five additional partners, citizens, or visitors that attended.

2514 Assessment Project Status Report (Agenda Item #1)

Grays Harbor County is acting on behalf of the Partnership in administering this contract with Envirovision. Lewis County handled this role until November 1999. The transition from Lewis County to Grays Harbor County is progressing but it is not yet complete. Ecology has received the final billing information from Lewis County and will move to close out that contract. A new contract with Grays Harbor County is under development. All remaining funds for Phase 1 (organization of the Partnership) and Phase 2 (gathering existing information, identifying gaps in the information needed to accomplish water planning, and gathering new information to fill the highest priority gaps) will be included in the new contract with Grays Harbor County.

Envirovision has drafted a scope of work for the remainder of the work the Partnership selected them to do. The first portion of the work (identifying existing information) has been completed under the proposed budget. The scope of work we are working on now will result in a evaluation of existing information and identification of gaps in existing information that need to be filled before we can develop a meaningful plan to manage water in the Chehalis Basin. Original budget estimates for the scope of work under consideration were higher than anticipated due to the addition of several work tasks. Grays Harbor County (acting as Lead Agency for the Partnership), the TAC, and Envirovision have reviewed the increases and scaled them back. We are now within a couple of thousand dollars of the original budget proposed. Much of those costs are related to the delays that have occurred due to the transition in lead agencies, which is something that no one could anticipate.

Grays Harbor County asked the Partnership to approve its moving forward to negotiate a contract with Envirovision for the remaining work. This led to a discussion by

Partnership members about how they would like more information before they are asked to make decisions so they can think about it and discuss it with their respective staff. There should also be a way to track progress on our work and how much of our budget has been expended. There was agreement by all that this should be done. It clearly shows the need for an overall work plan – something that has never been done by the Partnership. Work has started on a 2514 project work plan. This will be an important piece of our overall work plan, which will correlate all the activities the Partnership has taken on. A draft 2514 work plan should be ready to discuss at the March Partnership meeting. Agreement was reached that the work plan include a summary of the budget and that time be set aside regularly at Partnership meetings for a review of the budget and a progress report.

The Partnership directed Grays Harbor County to negotiate a contract with Envirovision for the remainder of the Level 1 Assessment work.

Salmon Recovery Project Update (Agenda Item # 2)

When the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) announced the availability of funds for salmon habitat protection and/or restoration it also announced that in basins where a lead entity had been designated all applications must be evaluated and ranked by the lead entity before they could be considered for funding. The Partnership agreed to take on this responsibility so that salmon habitat restoration groups would be eligible for these funds. The Partnership also adopted the Early 2000 grant application developed for the SRFB as the application form we would use for this grant cycle.

Grays Harbor County, as the newly designated administrator for Partnership activities under 2514 and 2496, worked with the Partnership Technical Advisory Committee to solicit for projects, set up a review process and committee, and establish a ranked list of projects. All this was done between December 3 and January 28 so the applications could be submitted to the SRFB by the January 31 deadline. The SRFB was very clear in its guidance that they wanted to see projects that had a high probability of success, projects where the benefit to salmon could be documented, and projects that focused on protecting or restoring high quality habitat. They wanted to see a “strategic” list that was based on an analysis of impaired stocks and the habitat factors that were most critical to the recovery of those stocks. They were also clear that they didn’t want a list of projects that was “opportunistic” -- a list developed without the benefit of a salmon recovery strategy just to take advantage of the availability of funding. Because of this guidance from the SRFB the review committee working on behalf of the Partnership was encouraged to be conservative in its recommendations.

The SRFB appointed a review panel that was charged with evaluating the process used by the Partnership to identify and rank projects to be funded. Representatives of Grays Harbor County and the TAC made a mandatory presentation to this panel on February 16th, and answered questions about the process used to rank projects for an hour after the presentation. Many of the questions asked were about individual projects. After interviewing all the lead entities across that state, the SRFB review panel made recommendations to the SRFB. These recommendations were very conservative.

Preliminary feedback is that even though we tried to present a package high-quality projects we felt we could defend, the SRFB panel felt that our list was more “opportunistic” than “strategic.” The panel will recommend that only some of the projects we submitted be funded. This is consistent with the panel’s recommendations for most other basins across the state. A few basins have invested a lot of time and resources over the last few years into developing a comprehensive salmon recovery strategy. Some of those basins fared somewhat better in terms of overall funding recommendations. Outright acquisition of salmon habitat was a definite priority for the panel.

Several Partnership members expressed their disappointment in the outcome. Much of this was directed towards the SRFB panel, but some was directed at the Partnership review/ranking process. Some groups who submitted projects are openly challenging the way things were done locally. Concerns were also raised about the amount of time and resources that the review/ranking process took. There are currently no provisions for reimbursing those costs.

The SRFB will make its final decisions on which projects to fund in mid-March.

Caspian Tern Relocation (Agenda Item #3)

Bob Burke from the Montesano office of the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) provided an overview of the Caspian Tern problem on the Columbia River, the US Army Corps of Engineer’s (ACOE) Environmental Assessment, and current thought about the issue at WDFW.

Basically the tern population at Rice Island in the Columbia River is an artificial condition created when the ACOE created the island with dredge spoils. The terns love the nesting habitat created by Rice Island and feed heavily on salmon smolts migrating out of the river to the ocean. Smaller populations of terns from Grays Harbor and other areas have moved to Rice Island due to the attractiveness of the large number of birds and the loss of suitable nesting habitat in these areas.

The Environmental Assessment proposes to change conditions on Rice Island so that it is no longer attractive to the terns. The goal is to spread the terns currently using Rice Island out among several areas so that the impacts on Columbia River salmon are reduced without creating problems for sensitive stocks in other areas. An effort will be made to attract them to islands further out towards the ocean where they can’t do as much harm, and to other areas. Willapa Bay has its own limitations as a site leaving Grays Harbor as the primary “other” location for attracting some of the terns.

WDFW feels that terns could safely be attracted back to Grays Harbor, but wants to control the number of terns in the harbor so they don’t exceed historical levels. High populations of fish species such as herring, sand lance, and surf smelt exist in the harbor, and are preferred by the terns as a source of food. This would minimize the loss of Grays Harbor salmon smolts to the terns. The terns would have a much lower impact on Grays Harbor salmon than they would on salmon in Willapa Bay.

Oyster growers at the meeting expressed concerns about the possible loss of oyster bed habitat when improvements intended to attract the terns are made. Oyster growers face a number of threats and they need to be protected too. Grays Harbor County, the Port Commission, the City of Aberdeen, the Chehalis Basin Fisheries Task Force, and the Quinault Tribe have expressed opposition to the proposal to relocate the Caspian Terns.

In closing, the speaker explained that the number of Terns in Grays Harbor are much lower than historical levels, and when they left the harbor in the 90's there was no noticeable increase in the number of salmon. There doesn't appear to be a correlation between the presence of a reasonable number of terns in Grays Harbor and the number of salmon.

GIS Pilot Project (Agenda Item #4)

J. Roach introduced this presentation by DNR on two separate but closely related Geographical Information System (GIS) projects that they are involved in. The first is called the Framework Project. The Framework Project is a state level effort to coordinate the technology used by agencies to store and manage all the information (data) that they collect. It is a long-term project that is meant to ensure compatibility between the agencies. It will make it easier for agencies to share information and for people to have access to the information.

The second project is a pilot to demonstrate the usefulness of making existing information accessible to local planning groups like the Chehalis Basin Partnership. Under this project DNR has gathered available map-based (GIS) information and built in a common set of reference points so that the different information sources can be displayed on a common background map. The result is a compact disk (CD) that allows a person with a copy of the CD to create various combinations of information that is displayed on a map. The pilot CD is set up to run on most computers without additional software. DNR representatives demonstrated the usefulness of the software by projecting a variety of maps created using information suggested by Partnership members in the audience.

DNR intends to make this pilot GIS CD available to Partnership members once it has been completed. In return, they would like suggestions on how it could be improved. The pilot CD only covers the lower basin (WRIA 22) but DNR hopes to use the pilot CD to demonstrate its effectiveness and gain support (funding) to prepare similar CDs for all WRIsAs in the state.

There was considerable interest in the pilot CD and another presentation was scheduled for the March 8 Citizen's Advisory Committee meeting.

CCWF/SRF Grant Proposal Local Ranking (Agenda Item #5)

Current guidelines for the Washington State Centennial Clean Water Fund (CCWF) and State Revolving Loan Fund (SRF) allow for additional points to be awarded to projects that have been ranked in priority order by a local planning group within each WRIA. Last year a subcommittee of the Partnership evaluated all projects submitted from WRIAs 22 and 23 so that they could benefit from having the additional local prioritization points when they are ranked at the state level. It is time for the local ranking to be done for the projects submitted to the state for funding in state fiscal year 2001. In order for the additional points to be allowed a letter of agreed priority must be received by the Department of Ecology no later than 5:00 on April 14th.

A sub-committee was appointed to recommend how to proceed with the local ranking. Brian Shea (Aberdeen), Jim Starks (Elma), John Penberth (Chehalis Basin Fisheries Task Force) and Dave Campbell (Chehalis) were named. Kahle Jennings will help coordinate the work of the sub-committee, but he can not participate in the actual ranking since he works for Ecology and this is meant to be a local process.

Jobs for the Environment (Agenda Item # 6)

Jim Walls (Columbia Pacific RC&D) reviewed the information on Jobs for the Environment (JFE) that was mailed out with the agenda for today's meeting. Jim is asking the Partnership for a letter supporting the application CPRC&D has prepared for the lower basin (WRIA 22). No other group has approached the Partnership about applying for this funding. Jim encouraged other qualified groups to consider applying for JFE funds for work in the upper basin (WRIA 23). After discussion, the Partnership members present agreed to provide a letter of support for CPRC&D and any qualified group from the upper basin (WRIA 23) that decides to submit a JFE application.

Report from Citizen's Advisory Committee (Agenda item #7)

This report was sent out with the agenda for today's meeting.

Flood Control Projects (Agenda item #8)

Nothing new was reported.

Wrap-up/Adjourn

The next Chehalis Basin Partnership meeting will be held on **Friday March 24, 2000 at the Chehalis Tribal Center from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m.**