

**CHEHALIS BASIN PARTNERSHIP
HABITAT WORK GROUP – PROJECT REVIEW
Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife
600 Capitol Way
Olympia, WA**

June 11, 2010

Meeting Summary

PRESENT:

Lee Napier, Grays Harbor County

Bob Burkle, WA Department of Fish Wildlife (WDFW)

Brett DeMond, StreamWorks Consulting

Mark Swartout, Thurston County

Birdie Davenport, WA State Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

Jamie Glasgow, Wildlife Fish Conservancy

William Gow, Puget Sound Meeting Services

Bruce Treichler, Trout Unlimited

Micah Wait, Wild Fish Conservancy

Janel Spaulding, Chehalis Basin Partnership

Welcome & Introductions

Lee Napier convened the meeting at 11:00 a.m.

Project Review – Grays Harbor Juvenile Fish Use Assessment

Ms. Napier reported several comments were received on the Grays Harbor Juvenile Fish Use Assessment project including some from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) that indicated the project has been flagged. It likely appears that although the project is a good project, it wasn't clearly articulated in the project proposal. The review is to assist the project sponsors about those concerns and offer assistance and recommendations on how to strengthen the proposal as it moves forward. Two review panel members from the SRFB provided feedback. The entire review board of the SRFB is meeting later in the day and will be discussing this project. There will be another set of comments released on the project. Jason Lundgren has indicated the comments will likely just be more informative and include additional guidance.

Jamie Glasgow asked about the purpose of the SRFB review board's meeting. Ms. Napier advised that the board is regrouping and meeting to check on projects. There are three flagged projects, but Mr. Lundgren has indicated that the board will likely only review this project, which she interprets as the Board believing the project is worth additional clarification to strengthen the project.

Micah Wait said one of the main comments received from the Habitat Work Group (HWG) technical group and the SRFB team was a recommendation to work more with the Habitat Work Group in the development of the project. This review is an opportunity to receive feedback from the HWG and address questions.

Ms. Napier said one of the first questions was the literature search and that it should have been included within the proposal. Mr. Swartout added that during the review discussion, he envisioned the project as a Phase 2 element of a larger project. Typically, because not much is known about the estuary, a literature search or an assessment should be completed to document and consolidate all the information on the estuary. That helps to evaluate and determine data gaps. The next step is the fish survey to find out what areas of the estuary fish are using. In the end that should lead to some type of restoration project.

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Mr. Glasgow said he believes the board was addressing similar concerns within the comments that were forwarded about the literature search and the need to document current conditions. There will be an effort to collect as much information that is available and use it to guide where sampling occurs. The feedback was that the project application wasn't explicit about that information.

Mr. Wait said the literature search came up during the review meeting. The proposal was modeled after some work in Island County. In that project, the intent was to identify where fish were located, which initiated a number of assessments and quite a bit of research of both Skagit Bay and the west side of the islands in northern Puget Sound. The original intent was to pattern this effort after that project. There was no initial literature search in that project. However, after hearing from the group it makes sense to know more about the basin in terms of identifying the areas of the estuary juvenile fish might be using.

Bob Burkle commented on some technical reports that might be available through the U.S Army Corps of Engineers in the early 1990s as part of beach sanding and salmon assessment work for a deepening and widening project. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service completed some beach sanding and was using a large size mesh, which was documented as well. Steve Martin would be a good person to contact to obtain some of the information. A recent beach study was completed at Half Moon Bay that might be helpful as part of the south jetty work by the Corps. Mr. Burkle is also working with the Corps on the potential south jetty landward extension and possibility taking out a remnant of the north jetty. Fish utilization in that particular area is very important. He said he may discuss some work with the Corps that is related to this project that might provide more information. There is information available that the study could tie in with or even funded as part of the Corps project.

Mr. Wait said it sounds like a suggestion to conduct an interview process with the Corps and some of the individuals involved in the projects. Mr. Burkle said Steve Martin can be reached at 206-764-3631.

Birdie Davenport arrived at the meeting.

Mr. Glasgow said the suggestion is to be more explicit on the coordination of the work with previous and future efforts. Mr. Burkle offered his assistance in contacting individuals. Mr. Glasgow agreed it is good advice and easily addressed in the proposal.

Mr. Treichler said it's important to document what's discovered and then outline where the efforts should be concentrated. There should be some formal process included for others to comment on where the efforts should be concentrated. Mr. Swartout cautioned about describing a project with a limited amount of money. The effort could be phased that leads to more sampling projects to secure subsequent funding from the SRFB.

Mr. Wait asked the group for feedback on one of the SRFB comments involving the length of time for sampling given the limited funding available within the basin. This kind of effort should encompass several years to paint an accurate picture, such as four to five years involving several life cycles of fish. It's important to document where fish are using habitat. If sampling occurs during a year where there are a high number of out-migrants it's generally possible to capture the places that fish like to go. That might not occur until subsequent years rather than the first year. It makes more sense to approach the proposal as a yearly request. Ms. Napier advised that as a non-capital project, the funding is only for a two-year cycle. She said she'll send out the information on the parameters for projects to all reviewers as non-capital projects must be completed within two years unless additional time is necessary and adjusted by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO).

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Brett DeMond questioned whether a literature search the first year followed by sampling would satisfy the requirement. Ms. Napier advised that the assumption is that once the contract is executed the two-year timeline begins.

Mr. Burkle suggested concentrating on the known high abundance of out-migrant salmonids and then spend the remaining time on the literature search as it likely would satisfy the project requirements. The Grays Harbor system is basically a healthy system than in Puget Sound. Even in bad years, Grays Harbor has fish. Concentrating on peak times will guarantee finding fish and the other part of the proposal involves the survey work, which in Grays Harbor is not easy because of the substrate, the beach, wave climate, and tidal differentials. Mr. Wait responded that the team has surveying and sampling experience in similar environments. Mr. Burkle commented on the difficulties of navigating in Grays Harbor.

Mr. Swartout asked what the study will provide. Mr. Wait said it will begin to document where efforts should be on in prioritizing restoration and conservation projects in the estuary. It will document distribution of fish in space and time. One of the unintended consequences of the agency's work in Whidbey was work windows. There are still personnel from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and WDFW who call to obtain information about permitting some actions and wanting to know what data are available on juvenile Chinook or other fish species at specific sites. It's dependent upon the species. In northern Puget Sound, there is approximately one month between May and June when most species are present for sampling. Mr. Glasgow added that kind of information can also be obtained from previous work completed that lends itself to that question. Ideally, the goal is to bracket the expected peak unless the study was specifically designed to identify the peak for multiple species, which is not this proposal's intent. Mr. Swartout said it's dependent upon the kind of details that can be obtained with this funding phase. There is also the issue of fish located in places that they are not typically found and during a time they typically wouldn't be located. Identifying those instances will be important as well. For example, there is specific life history of coho in Grays Harbor Willapa Bay and other places. In those occurrences, fish are transported during storms as fry and begin evading wetlands, seeps, and springs in the winter where they eventually find themselves back in marine waters in late summer and early fall when they shouldn't be there. He said he's encountered many juvenile coho in the middle of pile driving projects when the permit indicated juvenile out-migration was completed. It would be helpful to document that information, which will require a phased approach.

Mr. Swartout asked how far into the river sampling will occur. Mr. Wait said they are open to suggestions as to where sampling should occur. Mr. Swartout referred to a conversation with Andy Olson who indicated that passage of juveniles past Aberdeen within the tidal influence of the river is problematic. Mr. Wait said sampling could be located within the tidal influence past Montesano. Mr. Wait invited suggestions. Because the agency is not as familiar with sites of importance and because there may be opportunities to purchase easements or pursue protection efforts and restoration projects, it's important for the HWG to identify some locations. Mr. Swartout said stormwater could be a contributing factor that could be identified for jurisdictions to initiate projects.

Ms. DeMond asked whether mortality studies have been completed as a result of sampling techniques. Mr. Wait said fish are generally held after sampling for a period of time. Long-term holds are generally not done. Ms. DeMond shared information on her experiences in holding fish. Mr. Wait said samplers have found that there is more direct mortality when fish are held on site during sampling. It generally was under 1% of the fish held, which often was in the first hot days of sampling. As soon as the temperature

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reaches 80 degrees, a person must be assigned bucket duty to replenish the water. Scale loss is dependent on the size of fish and number of fish in the net.

Ms. Davenport asked about sampling methods. Mr. Wait said the agency uses beach seining and fyke nets, which are nets equipped with wings and leaders. Mr. Wait described how fyke nets are used over a tidal cycle. The nets were originally designed for fresh lakes and ponds. There are different sizes and variations of the nets.

Ms. Davenport encouraged the team to sample some of her sites of interest as she could use some assistance with her project involving installation of a bridge at Preacher's Slough. DNR no longer has sampling expertise on staff. She offered to provide some funding support, which could serve as a match. She noted that Randy Lehr had some data from sampling but she hasn't been able to obtain the data and has no baseline data. Janel Spaulding offered to follow up with Mr. Lehr's successor, Joel Green, to determine if he knows where the data might be located.

Ms. Napier said the project proposal was flagged by the SRFB review panel to obtain more information. Flagging was an option several years ago. However some lead entities and project sponsors were upset that projects were flagged because it was too early in the process. Last year, flagging didn't occur until many projects were flagged later in the process. Subsequently, the policy was changed to flag projects earlier in the process to enable project sponsors to provide additional information.

Ms. Davenport committed to submitting a form to provide some project contributions by the end of June. Mr. Burkle advised Mr. Wait and Mr. Glasgow to contact Mr. Martin with the Corps to find out what might be available in terms of reports.

Discussion followed on the fact that when the Chehalis Tribe conducted the limiting factor analysis, the harbor wasn't included. Mr. Burkle said there may have been some basic information such as how much intertidal area is either under cities or behind dikes. Mr. Swartout asked whether the project could lead to limiting factors for a bottleneck associated with the harbor. Mr. Burkle said it would be more difficult as fish would need to be quantified. Mr. Wait said it is possible to quantify the presence of fish, but not determine limiting factors without more studies, such as mortality studies in each of the river basins, in the ocean, and in the estuary.

Ms. Napier asked whether a specific report determined that the estuary was the bottleneck. Mr. Burkle said the bottleneck identified pulp mills as the problem as the discharge was killing fish, which led directly to eliminating the process, which led to the closure of pulp mills.

Ms. Napier said it might be another reason to include that information as justification. Mr. Burkle said the population around the harbor has decreased as well as industry. Ms. Davenport commented that Aberdeen has lost 500 people. Mr. Burkle said many industries have left the area, which offers some restoration opportunities. The Port of Grays Harbor is trying different things and is discussing with the Corps the possibility of dredging the channel.

Ms. Napier said although there are opportunities for restoration there also has been a decline in industries. There is focus on attracting industries using best available science to address impacts from incoming development. She asked about the status of the pontoon project.

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Mr. Burkle reported the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is constructing a graving dock or a casting basin consisting of a large concrete structure for building pontoons for Lake Washington/State Route 520. After the pontoons are built, the gate is opened to float the pontoons out. The gate is then closed and water pumped out to retrieve fish. There is a fish removal protocol that is required. The goal is to be as self-mitigating as possible, but some mitigation will be necessary for shoreline impacts. He commented on the importance of knowing the type of fish that might be present when the gates are opened for better preparation in dealing with the situation. The gates will be opened irrespective of salmon migration because of the timeline associated with the pontoon project. It's preferable not to open the gates during peak salmon migration, but because of the project schedule, it may not be possible. The concrete structure is filled with river water and screens are installed to prevent the passage of fish into the structure at the front end of the process. However, at the end of the construction project, the gates are opened to transfer the pontoons from the structure. Before the gates are closed, fish manage to enter the structure and become trapped. The fish screens must be designed to meet WDFW guidelines for velocity and screen size. Not only are salmon impacted, but other fish, such as forage fish. He recommended contacting Bill Rehe at WDFW, the habitat biologist working on the project with WSDOT. The project may be an opportunity for matching money. However, the timeline would need to be reviewed.

Ms. Napier commented on the funding timeline for the juvenile fish assessment project and WSDOT's schedule. Mr. Burkle recommended contacting Mr. Rehe regarding the timeline.

Mr. Wait said the agency has been looking at other projects involving nearshore habitat for potential conservation easements or wetland restoration projects. The restoration work in Whidbey created interest in nearshore habitats. Open water sampling might be appropriate if the HWG believes there a need for that information, such as whether there is a need to know how fish are using open water areas in Grays Harbor. Mr. Burkle said pontoons will be anchored and stored in Grays Harbor until they can be transported to the project site. The problem with the location is the potential of impacting fish. WDFW is working to identify sites with the least potential to impact fish. Pontoons are made from reinforced concrete and steel. There are some sites that are controversial or may become controversial might be beneficial for WFC to sample to detect the presence of salmon.

Mr. Swartout commented on the importance of the project as there isn't enough information available about the harbor. There would be problems with restoration efforts occurring upstream in the basin if the fish are not making it out of the harbor. Mr. Burkle agreed the project must be accomplished. It's important to package the proposal to compete for SRFB funds as well as pulling in other funds from some of the other projects where fish information is lacking.

Mr. Wait suggested the proposal's approach should be a multi-year effort. Mr. Burkle suggested a major component of the first year's effort is assessing the feasibility of the projects that have been discussed. Mr. Wait agreed the first year would be a pilot program in trying to determine where to sample effectively. Mr. Burkle said the effort should also include determining who to contact and who to work with as well as looking for partners. Identifying all the project proposals now and in the future will be important, such as visiting the Port and reviewing its comprehensive scheme of harbor improvements. Having the ability of working with the Port to help them identify areas of where some of the projects should be located by providing data on fish utilization could be helpful to the Port.

Bruce Treichler asked whether there are shoreline projects proposed by Hoquiam or Aberdeen. Mr. Burkle said the cities and private developers should also be contacted.

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Mr. Treichler commented on a project involving condominiums in Aberdeen along the harbor. There may also be a golf course associated with the project. The group commented on the ability to track those types of projects where there may be impacts to fish. Ms. Davenport suggested also contacting conservation land owners such as Cascade Land Conservancy, land trusts, DNR, WDFW, and others because fish assessment information is desperately needed.

Mr. Glasgow said identifying the primary objective along with a host of secondary objectives within the project proposal is logical. The objective that makes the most sense to the SRFB is collecting data that will help identify and prioritize restoration and protection activities in the harbor. Other categories include monitoring, such as Preacher's Slough, identifying anomalies, distribution and timing, and species composition. Other objectives could include obtaining information that will inform work windows and timing of construction activities in the context of permitting. Mr. Swartout said the data could be used for planning for the cities and the county.

Mr. Glasgow said limiting factor analysis would be a future objective. However, understanding where fish are located and what habitat fish are using and when it is utilized is fundamental.

Mr. Burkle suggested another potential partner to contact is the Grays Harbor Marine Resources Committee. The proposal could be reviewed at the committee's next meeting.

Ms. DeMond expressed interest in studies related to mortality during sampling. She asked if the fish are marked or anesthetized. Mr. Wait said generally, WFC does not anesthetize. However, any coded wired tag fish obtained will be euthanized to read the tags. The sampling includes measuring of the first 20 fish of each net set. The problem is identifying the mortality associated with sampling versus the holding of fish.

Mr. Wait said it appears the group believes the project is positive and should move forward. He's less concerned about the SRFB as similar projects have been funded. Often, the SRFB is uncomfortable with assessment projects but with the support of the HWG and acknowledgement that the project is filling an important data gap, it's likely the project would be un-flagged.

Mr. Swartout commented that the purpose of the assessment element is to document what's unknown. That will increase the importance of the project. Without that context it will be difficult to demonstrate the importance of the project to the SRFB. Ms. Napier added that this is the first assessment for Grays Harbor and because of that it's an extremely important project.

Mr. Glasgow said the discussion and questions have been very helpful to modify the proposal to be more specific in demonstrating the coordination aspect of the project and the primary and secondary objectives.

Mr. Wait said the timing could work well for the literature search as the SRFB is allowing back billing of projects. That search could be initiated in November and December and if the project is funded in early 2011, some of the initial literature search has been completed for compiling a report to present to the HWG that identifies some study sites in February.

Ms. Napier said the concept supports efforts in developing a work plan for the Partnership. Mr. Glasgow is scheduled to present the stream typing project to the HWG in August. Green Diamond will also

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provide information on its Wynoochee project during the August meeting. John Klein is assisting in developing a work plan. This effort feeds nicely into those efforts.

Ms. Napier reviewed the SRFB's timeline for funding proposals. Members of the SRFB review team requested attending the HWG technical team's review of SRFB proposals. Typically, sponsors do not attend the review but are asked to be available by phone. During the site visits, questions are addressed to sponsors and sponsors then have the opportunity to address issues within their respective proposals prior to the last review by the technical review team. During the technical review, the group decides how each application will be scored for each question. After the ranked list is completed, the group determines if the ranked list is appropriate for submission.

Mr. Glasgow commented on other WRIA ranking processes and how fortunate the Grays Harbor Lead Entity is because of the involvement of so many people who are willing to spend the time and have the expertise to review and rank projects. Often in other WRIsAs, project sponsors are involved in the ranking process which results in an awkward and uncomfortable process.

Ms. Napier said the HWG's technical review is scheduled on July 9 followed by the Partnership's review of the project list on July 23. Previously, only the projects that were considered for funding were presented to the Partnership. Last year, the Partnership requested a review of all project proposals, which will be presented at its July meeting. Because of the technical review of the project proposals, it's easier to address any questions from the Partnership on why some projects were recommended and others were not.

Mr. Wait and Mr. Glasgow thanked the group for their time and feedback.

Ms. Davenport asked whether WFC is available for contracting. Mr. Wait said the organization is available for contracting.

Ms. Napier reported project sponsors will submit final project applications on June 25. Project reviewers should receive the applications by June 28 by mail. The review team will meet on July 9 at the Lewis Conservation District office.

Adjournment

With there being no further business, Ms. Napier adjourned the meeting at 12:15 p.m.

Prepared by Valerie Gow, Recording Secretary/President
Puget Sound Meeting Services