

**Chehalis Basin Partnership Water Quality Committee**  
**Grays Harbor Forestry Building**  
**Montesano, Washington**  
**February 14, 2008**  
**9:30 a.m.**

**Meeting Summary**

**PRESENT:**

Terry Willis, Citizen, Grays Harbor  
Teri Franklin, Citizen, Grays Harbor  
Bob Amrine, Lewis County Conservation District  
Dave Rountry, Department of Ecology  
Ann Wick, Department of Agriculture  
Chris Hempleman, Department of Ecology  
Ron Schillinger, City of Montesano  
Brian Thompson, Thurston Conservation District  
Mary Di Mattco, Thurston Conservation District  
Valerie Gow, Puget Sound Meeting Services

**Call to Order**

Terry Willis called the Chehalis Basin Partnership Water Quality Committee meeting to order at 9:36 a.m.

**Approval of Agenda**

A discussion on the Department of Ecology's Water Quality Program's public comment period was added to the agenda as well as a discussion on flood response.

*Ron Schillinger arrived at 9:43 a.m.*

**Thurston Conservation District Presentation**

Brian Thompson, Thurston Conservation District, displayed a map of the Chehalis Basin watershed in Thurston County and Thurston Conservation District project sites over the last 10 years. Computer access is only available to the district since 2002. Prior to that, records are in hard copy form and by landowner name. Mr. Thompson said based on the difficulty of working through the documentation approximately only 70% of the district's projects have been documented to date.

Mr. Thompson pointed out different project sites on the maps. Often when working with a landowner, neighbors become interested and request assistance. Approximately 208 parcels are represented on the map representing 33 different management practices. Management practices range from waste storage facility, animal mortality facility, composting, cover crops, critical area plantings, and waste transfer, etc. Numbers on the map represents the number of practices either underway or completed. All the practices pertain to water quality. Some practices are the result of a farm plan as well.

Ms. Willis offered the suggestion of Grays Harbor Conservation District developing a similar map to assist in coordinating efforts between the districts. Mr. Thompson offered the assistance of Mike Kuttel Jr. to help the district establish a similar mapping program.

Mr. Thompson provided a slide presentation on the different types of practices implemented. Bob Amrine asked about plans where no practices have been implemented. Mr. Thompson described what drives a

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conservation plan. Generally, there are two reasons. The district receives funding through grants, which is the primary source of funding for the district. Grants require a certain percentage of work with landowners. Landowners who voluntarily work with the district are generally enthusiastic and try to implement as many of the recommended practices as possible. Sometimes, the district is fortunate and receives a cost-share, which assists in implementing practices. Other contacts occur through referrals from DOE, Thurston County Environmental Health, or the Department of Agriculture as a result of a violation of county, state, or federal laws. Landowners who have violated laws are generally interested in complying with the law only to the extent that is necessary to eliminate the violation. Landowners in those circumstances will usually implement the recommended practice to adhere to the law but are not interested in other recommended practices for the site. In those cases, a relatively small percentage of practices for the site are actually implemented. The district also works on projects not involving a full farm plan.

Mr. Thompson noted that often one or several practices are implemented independently of a conservation plan. Ms. Willis asked about the percentage of the district's business in implementing practices. Mr. Thompson said the district has three departments – education outreach, landowner assistance (mostly with farmers and homeowners with lawns and gardens), and a habitat specialist group working on riparian habitat or with landowners who want to improve wildlife habitat or an eroding stream. For the landowner assistance group, approximately 60% of the work is implementation of individual practices. Approximately 40% of the work is with conservation plans. Conservation plans are very time consuming and can take an average of three months to develop. It's difficult to develop more than six or seven conservation plans annually for each assigned employee. Mr. Thompson noted the district has three employees working in the landowner assistance group. He described how follow up will usually take much of the employee's time after plans are implemented.

Mr. Thompson referred to the 33 practices and indicated they are the common practices that affect water quality that are implemented 99% of the time.

Mr. Thompson provided an orientation of the map in terms of the geographic areas. He pointed out the location of the Black River, Skookumchuck River, and the Chehalis River.

Ms. Willis inquired about any work occurring with municipalities. Mr. Thompson advised that there is some municipality work. The district has done some work with Tumwater. Bucoda is the only incorporated city within the Chehalis watershed in Thurston County. Most of the remaining area is within unincorporated Thurston County. He commented on the growth occurring in the Grand Mound and Rochester areas. There is a small water system, which the area wants to expand as well as constructing a sewage treatment plant because of tremendous growth the area is experiencing.

Mr. Rountry said it appears there are a number of projects located on the main stem of the Chehalis River as well as in the area of the Black Lake drainage. He asked about implementation activities on a watershed scale or a strategic focus on covering particular segments of rivers/tributaries. Mr. Thompson replied that conservation districts work entirely on a voluntarily basis. One of the areas not represented fully because the information has been archived is in the Scatter Creek area. Mr. Rountry commented that he's surprised that there are not as many projects in the Black River drainage areas because of the water quality and habitat values. Mr. Thompson responded that much of the land in the drainage area is tied up by Nature Conservancy and US Fish and Wildlife. Unless it's private property, the district does not get involved. He noted that if it was possible to display all the work underway along the Black River corridor, it would represent a solid line on the map.

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Chris Hempleman asked about Lewis County Conservation District's work on Scatter Creek. Mr. Amrine said the district administered the TMDL 3 grant in the Scatter Creek area. Mr. Thompson said Jenney Coffey worked on a habitat conservation plan for the entire watershed, but it didn't advance because it was based on the potential for a listing of salmonids in that system, which never happened. The plan was never completed.

Mr. Thompson reported much of the district's work is spent working in South Sound areas. On a weighted average, the district does less work on the Chehalis watershed than the South Sound because of the demand.

Mr. Thompson displayed a series of photos of projects implemented featuring fences along streams, riparian plantings, dam removal and habitat enhancement in Beatty Creek in the Eld Watershed, replacement of fish barrier culverts, manure compost facility, gutters and downspouts to carry water away from heavy use areas to reduce sedimentation and manure movement, rotation of grazing pastures, and riparian restoration especially the control of canary grass.

Discussion followed about the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), which is a voluntary land retirement program that helps agricultural producers protect environmentally sensitive land, decrease erosion, restore wildlife habitat, and safeguard ground and surface water. The minimum time commitment is 10 to 15 years. Ms. Willis commented that within the Grays Harbor Conservation District, many CREP participants have re-signed contracts to extend the program on their land.

Mr. Thompson reported Lewis County has the record for the highest yield of wheat per acre in the nation.

Mr. Thompson commented that one of the biggest problems associated with riparian restoration is controlling canary grass. Ms. Willis said often times, control measures include cutting the grass, which has been left on the ground. However, during the December flood, cut canary grass moved and destroyed many fences because it hung up in fences catching water and debris. Mr. Thompson said he finds the best way to control canary grass is with chemicals. They are the most cost effective and safest procedure. Teri Franklin shared she discovered how to kill canary grass by placing dead brackenferns on top of canary grass. Mr. Thompson said brackenfern has some interesting alkaloids. It's poisonous to livestock and it may have some properties that kill canary grass.

Mr. Rountry asked about the district's options for cost sharing for upland practices. Mr. Thompson said DOE funding allows for the district to conduct site visits and offer recommendations. However, more helpful is time spent helping landowners and farmers develop rotational grazing programs, which could be used as a match. Currently, the district can't use those programs for a match and must use county tax assessment funding

Mr. Thompson reported the district also works on many urban projects, such as urban stormwater retention ponds, which can become habitat for noxious weeds. Most of the ponds are under the responsibility of homeowner associations. The district often contacts homeowner associations and offers assistance.

The district also has a loan equipment program for landowners, such as a fertilizer spreader for pasture management or tools for removal of ivy.

Ms. Willis asked about the district's biggest struggle. Mr. Thompson said it's having the resources to address all the requests. More people want services than the district has in time and money to handle. Most of the commercial farmers who've been in business for some time know and implement good practices. What is occurring is many property owners are buying 5, 10, and 20-acre parcels who don't know anything

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about land management. It's helpful if they come to the district first to obtain assistance and it saves them trouble later on. Many problems are caused by property owners who buy five acres and move eight horses on the property without any facilities for shelter or fencing with mud holes located throughout the pasture.

### **Progress Review of Water Quality Protection in the Chehalis Basin**

Mr. Rountry reported in September 2007, efforts began for compiling information about implementation efforts. A template was developed of projected activities from the 2004 Detailed Implementation Clean-up Plan for the TMDLs in the Chehalis Basin to limit pollution by bacteria, improve dissolved oxygen conditions, and lowering temperatures. There was an expectation and/or agreement at that time that the Partnership largely through the Water Quality Committee would coordinate with DOE on reviewing progress on implementation activities on a routine basis. Of all the entities identified in the implementation activities, approximately twice that number attended a committee meeting in September 2007 to describe their work to date. Mr. Rountry shared how encouraged he was by that response and how much good stewardship is occurring. Today, the challenge is determining what to do with the information that has been obtained on implementation activities. There was an understanding that the Partnership and DOE would collaborate on a routine frequency to review the information and adapt planning or reprioritize areas of emphasis involving more activities deserving greater emphasis or subbasins or streams that deserved more or less emphasis. He suggested the conversation should revolve around what to do with the information obtained to date. He said he hopes that the committee can develop a short list of recommendations/wishes on what to do with the information. He said he anticipates implementation will identify actions for follow up.

Ms. Willis sought clarification on several factors. The original TMDL concerned the lower Chehalis and involved bacteria. She asked whether the DIP was the next step in that process. Mr. Rountry explained that the DIPs summarized the TMDLs that were done for bacteria in Grays Harbor in the lower Chehalis and for bacteria, temperature, and dissolved oxygen in the upper Chehalis. It's a water quality improvement plan for all TMDLs throughout the entire Chehalis basin.

Discussion ensued on the fact that more players have been involved in implementation activities than what was envisioned in the DIP as well as more implementation occurring.

Ron Schillinger said he believed the DIP was incorporated into the Chehalis Basin Watershed Management Plan that encompassed the 33 actions. There were DIPs to accomplish the goals in each category with assignments for implementation. It fed into the Partnership's greater plan. Mr. Rountry confirmed that it did. An important point to remember is that the issue isn't just about the TMDL. Mr. Rountry said he prefers not evaluating the activities strictly in the context of the TMDL and would like the template from the TMDL to include an expansion of the activities that have been implemented, such as habitat protection. Table 2 (status report) is a compilation of all the updates provided by all parties to show what work has been done. Randy Lehr will eventually display all the information within the GIS framework.

Ms. Hempleman asked whether there is water quality data available such as trend analysis to show where benefits are occurring or where focus is needed. Mr. Rountry confirmed availability of data as well as some improvement in water quality. However, it takes a concerted effort to obtain all the data for a specific location within a water body. He indicated he has undertaken some evaluation at a tributary level. The key to answering the question or the ideal link for facilitating that kind of review will be with the GIS tool Mr. Lehr is developing. The data at this time is too preliminary but some of the improvements throughout the Chehalis basin are amazing in terms of bacteria loading reductions, dissolved oxygen, and temperature. Mr. Amrine said ongoing monitoring is occurring by the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis as part of the

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Partnership's water quality monitoring program. Approximately 80 sites are monitored monthly for the basic parameters.

Mr. Schillinger asked whether Mr. Rountry has a copy of DOE's new 303(d) listed water bodies in the Chehalis basin. Mr. Rountry acknowledged he has some information to share later in the meeting.

Mr. Willis asked how Mr. Rountry perceives habitat missing from the table. Mr. Rountry referred to the implementation table listing under the Chehalis Basin Partnership as the responsible agency and noted the funding column indicates, "Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) unknown amounts." There is one project identified on the table as the large woody debris installation under a riparian grant. At a recent Partnership meeting there was some discussion about the destructive nature of large woody installation (LWD) and how it aggravates flooding conditions. The entity making the comment is the beneficiary of the Wishkah LWD installation. Mr. Amrine reported Mr. Lehr is creating a spreadsheet to include all funded projects by the SRFB and he is providing Mr. Lehr with project information from the Lewis County Conservation District. The list is up to 70 projects and includes the entities implementing the project.

Ms. Willis commented on the importance of gravel removal as part of habitat improvements. From a private landowner's view, she continues to pursue addressing silt along the river and its impact on fish and habitat. There are several pieces of legislation that moved out of committee this year in Olympia addressing removal of silt. The legislation is not particularly tied to the December storm, but is an ongoing issue. She stressed the importance of addressing the issue as part of the ongoing environment within the basin. It needs to be focused as part of the habitat issue because of its impact on fish. Gravel moves down the tributaries and drops into the river and into Grays Harbor. Grays Harbor dredges the harbor and uses the material for landfill. She referred to the Satsop River as an example of the impact caused by gravel. She mentioned that she recently met some USGS field workers at the Satsop River Bridge, who were adjusting USGS gauges because of the storm surge that created more gravel deposits as well as deposits of LWD. She asked them how many gauges will need to be changed. The representatives indicated that most of the gauges will be checked. They asked to be notified of any area within the system that dramatically changed because of LWD buildup or changes along the bank.

Ms. Hempleman commented on the difficulty associated with managing the natural process. Ms. Willis said it's an issue of determining how to manage it because of its holistic impact. Some years ago, there were efforts to measure but many entities withdrew from the project because of the expense and the time involved. Grays Harbor Conservation District began measuring the material moving down the river for approximately two years. When funding ran out, the project was discontinued. Before then, there were many landowners who maintained gravel bars. Mr. Thompson said that for many years in the 1950s through the 70s, farmers obtained permits from the Department of Natural Resources to remove gravel from gravel bars. Often, farmers didn't obtain permits and just removed the gravel. Ms. Willis commented about earlier efforts in grading the Satsop River, which has since lost maneuvering room because the grading has stopped. The goal is to maintain the maneuvering ability within the allocated space. Presently, the river can't with the current gravel buildup. Mr. Amrine agreed and indicated the issue is how to manage the system at the least cost.

Mr. Schillinger said he's aware of landowners who maintain their stretch of the river to protect their property. They also don't obtain permits. Mr. Amrine said it's a \$2,500 fine if landowners don't obtain a permit. Ms. Willis said with cooperation with the Department of Fish and Wildlife, landowners can remove a small amount of gravel. Gravel removal permits are expensive and cost \$1,200 in Grays Harbor. She said she purchased one at the end of the year because she knew they were increasing in cost. Landowners, who

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remove gravel regardless of the reason, such as for resale, still need a permit. Satsop River has a maximum removal limit of 10 yards a year system-wide.

Mr. Thompson commented about the requirement under the Growth Management Act for counties to maintain a percentage of land designated as agriculture land, yet it's impossible for landowners to maintain drainages and clean ditches. The issue is how to farm land if it can't be maintained. It's one of the frustrating things about working with landowners because the land is required to remain in agriculture use but there are conflicting laws that make it extremely difficult for farmers to maintain and keep land in production. Ms. Willis said the committee recognizes the importance of keeping both agriculture and timber lands viable because of its importance to water quality. She said it's time to include the issue on a list. The legislation (HB 2525) was referred to the Agriculture and Forestry Committee. One bill came out of the Senate and one came from the House. The bills are converging with some changes from each body. The issue does not involve commercial dredging but sand bar maintenance and channel maintenance. The bills address debris and gravel removal that causes erosion problems and how counties can handle the permitting process and whether the process can be expedited during a disaster.

Mr. Rountry distributed a copy of "A Progress Review of Water Quality Protection in the Chehalis Basin" summarizing the implementation review process and general findings. At the end of the document there are some questions/recommendations for further discussion. The updated table includes some gaps, such as habitat improvement projects and channel modifications. He noted how helpful the previous conversation was in terms of implementation activities. One of the reasons for formatting the table initially was to identify the entities that had a specific mandate, role, or responsibility for some type of water quality protection effort. Things such as gravel bar modifications and habitat improvements were not identified at that time. The table includes entities responsible for septic system management, livestock management, farm practice improvements and protection, riparian planting, protection for temperature improvements, and dissolved oxygen enhancement. The key lead and agencies were identified along with the responsibilities. That was the purpose of the original table. However, there are gaps. The process will continue to evolve, improve, and provide a comprehensive view of what is occurring so that the efforts can be related to water quality. One aspect of the TMDL cleanup plan is to monitor the implementation of activities as well as documenting water quality improvements to establish a pattern or trend to help identify how efforts have improved water quality.

Mr. Rountry referred to septic systems and indicated there is missing information in the table. Mr. Rountry said he requested input in September 2007 from all the lead entities to help update the table prior to the initial review. Many entities provided information while others did not. The table is a visual tool to show the status of efforts. The issue is whether the committee wants to follow up on the activities. The table was originally developed as an expectation. Stormwater protection is another weak link in terms of the information provided for implementation activities. There may be many implementation activities completed but no update to include in the table.

Mr. Schillinger said the entities are identified on the table. The issue is what the next step is. He asked whether it's a question to put before the Partnership or whether it's the committee's responsibility to pursue information on activities completed to date. Ms. Franklin suggested having the Partnership send a letter.

Discussion followed about the different responsibilities of each county. Thurston County, for instance, has an active septic system program. Mr. Thompson said Thurston County Health has a cost share program for homeowners who need to upgrade septic systems. Thurston Conservation District manages the cost-share program for the county because the county can't administer a cost-share program.

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Ms. Willis said Grays Harbor County Health requires a system check on each application for repair. She said the figure of 82 systems on the table appears to be too low. Mr. Rountry said Grays Harbor Health Department was the only county that provided input. There is work that is being completed by the counties through their different programs. Members commented that in all probability it's an issue of high workload and minimum resources for the non-response. Mr. Rountry said the issue is whether it's the role of the committee or the Partnership to follow up.

Ms. Hempleman commented about the possibility of providing a presentation to the Partnership on the status of water quality with the intent of Partnership members understanding the lack of data requires some follow-up by staff. Ms. Wick suggested presenting the information as a draft with a request for entities to follow up with information.

Discussion followed on to how to frame the request for providing additional information. Mr. Schillinger said the issue is about water quality improvement in the Chehalis basin, which is one reason for referring to the Washington State Water Quality Assessment draft. He said the draft has been released for public comment and review until March. The draft includes a statement that basically states that overall, 303(d) listings representing the candidate list has increased from the 2004 level by approximately 890 water body segments. He asked how many are within the Chehalis basin watershed, and if there are a significant number of them in the watershed, whether that is an indication that overall water quality is deteriorating rather than improving.

Ms. Willis asked how water bodies are removed from the 303(d) list. She asked if there is any evidence that there has been improvement in any of the areas that have been worked on for many years. She said the issue was raised at another meeting where the group has been working on a project for 10 years and now wants to know how to remove them from the 303(d) list. Mr. Schillinger replied it involves two years of consistent monitoring. Mr. Rountry added that it generally entails two separate, critical seasons of monitoring. Ms. Hempleman said theoretically, a water body can be removed from the 303(d) list through sampling. Having more listings doesn't mean worse water quality but could indicate more monitoring. There never is sufficient data and without a well-conceived monitoring plan, it's unknown what is occurring to water quality in the basin. Mr. Thompson said he's read articles on 303(d) listings where it was admitted that some streams in a natural state never met minimum water quality standards because they are slow moving and/or unprotected. After they were monitored they were added to the list, but that doesn't mean they worsened but only that they were monitored.

Discussion followed about the increase in the number of listings, whether there is a need for a TMDL for each new listing, and the impact to DOE resources based on the increase in listings.

Mr. Schillinger said he's worked on many projects for many years and is aware of the huge amount of funds invested in projects to improve water quality. Water quality has improved tremendously and he agreed the committee needs to demonstrate the progress. Mr. Amrine said providing a presentation to the Partnership on the information available to date is the best approach along with a request to receive information on missing data. He said he's somewhat surprised by the lack of information from many of the cities and counties.

Ms. Willis thanked Mr. Schillinger for attending the meeting. Mr. Schillinger is now Mayor-elect for the City of Montesano.

Mr. Rountry confirmed he will electronically provide the draft assessment report to Mr. Schillinger.

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*Mr. Schillinger departed the meeting at 11:48 p.m.*

Members discussed the format of a presentation to the Partnership. Mr. Rountry suggested a format of a panel presentation by the committee. Mr. Rountry mentioned Mr. Lehr's early version of the water quality presentation based on the monitoring program. He said he's willing to work on a panel presentation. Ms. Willis said she will work with Ms. Napier to schedule a presentation to the Partnership as well as speaking to her about the recommendation to include habitat. Mr. Amrine said the Habitat Work Group could also be part of the presentation. Mr. Amrine suggested the committee should have another meeting to discuss how to present the information to the Partnership.

Members discussed personal efforts to contact some of the entities to receive a status on implementation activities prior to the next meeting.

### **Update on Waster Quality Assessment Report**

Mr. Rountry said DOE's Water Quality Program is seeking input until March 21, 2008 on the draft of the 2008 Water Quality Assessment Report. He distributed some material and cited the link at DOE's internet site sorted by county. He said he sorted Thurston, Lewis, and Grays Harbor County lists. The higher priority sites of category 5, 4, and 2 are of some interest. It's possible for some of the sites to be restored before implementing a formal TMDL study. Local communities could take stewardship and work on improving the water bodies. There are 16 sites in the upper Chehalis basin that were proposed for listing as category 5 because of pH impairments in eight different streams or tributaries. He said he did some research in conjunction with Mr. Amrine and Thurston Conservation District to show how DOE should consider the sites as impaired by natural conditions. Lower pH soils and water are naturally occurring conditions in the upper Chehalis basin. The chance of human activities causing pH conditions in the 16 sites is extremely low. Most importantly because there are TMDL interventions or water quality protection activities underway in those areas, such as the conservation district working on Case Road to improve temperatures or reducing bacteria, it's unlikely that any additional TMDL work through a category 5 listing will lead to any improvement beyond what is currently being pursued. The proposal is to identify the sites as a natural occurrence in terms of pH. He asked members to review the 16 listings and ask whether it is appropriate to include them.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled March 13. Possible agenda topics could include:

- Follow-up on the presentation format to the Partnership on status of implementation activities for water quality.
- Flood responses

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Ms. Willis adjourned the meeting at 12:03 p.m.

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