

Chehalis Basin / Grays Harbor Lead Entity

Habitat Work Group Meeting

February 12, 2016

9:30 am – 12:00 pm

Lewis Conservation District Office - USDA Service Center
1554 Bishop Road
Chehalis, Washington

In attendance:

Alice Rubin, RCO
Ann Weckback, *Lewis County*
Brett DeMond, *Streamworks*
Bruce Treichler, *Citizen*
Bob Amrine, *Lewis County Conservation*
Caitlin Guthrie, *Capitol Land Trust*
Dustin Bilhimer, *Ecology*
Garret Dalan, *The Nature Conservancy*
Jamie Glasgow, *Wild Fish Conservancy*

Jessica Helsley, *WCSSP*
Kirsten Harma, *Lead Entity Coordinator*
Lonnie Crumley, *CBFETF*
Michelle Cramer, *WDFW*
Miles Batchelder, *Citizen*
Omroa Bhagwandin, *Onalaska Citizen*
Rich Osborne, *WCSSP*
Steve Hallstrom, *Chehalis River Basin Land Trust*
Tom Kollasch, *Grays Harbor Conservation Dist.*

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome and Introductions.

Everyone provided self-introductions.

2. Landowner Outreach in Newaukum

Bob provided a summary of the February 2nd CRM meeting in Onalaska. He reported that 100 people were present at the meeting and it was a success: “very positive”. Lots of people from South and North Fork of the Newaukum were present. Fewer from the Mainstem.

At the meeting, people who were interested in having a project done on their land signed up to talk further with the Conservation District. Bob has since done 5 site visits as a result.

One outcome: people were interested in forming a volunteer stream team. These would likely be volunteers to work with Onalaska Alliance any time an opportunity comes up to plant trees, etc. Some landowners were interested in doing projects that could be permitted (wood placement projects as early as this summer) and there was talk of developing a pot of money besides CREP to just plant trees. Bob suggested the stream

team might also provide citizens an avenue for being the “eyes on the ground” and alert agencies to potential violations. Bob is currently the contact for the potential stream team. Omroa will likely work to organize the team(s).

Through conversation with Jim Kramer, the Conservation District decided to develop spatial data about landowner who are willing to have work done on their land. They will look for stretches of streams where there is about a mile of property owned by willing landowners, and then overlaid with information about fish. The purpose of this will be to identify restoration opportunities. They are eventually going to do this for the entire basin.

At the second CRM meeting (likely mid-April), they will aim to put landowners who want to do a project in touch with people who have money. This could include WCSSP, Land Trusts, etc. Bob suggested that a presentation by the Wild Fish Conservancy about their watertyping work would not be as welcome because it can be considered “anti-development.” Bob cautioned that regulators, e.g. Department of Ecology, would not be welcome. Dustin replied that Ecology will focus on positive outreach, work with the landowners that are interested, and tell people where they can get technical assistance. Bob replied that a basic presentation from Dustin about the rules, how to get ahold of stream monitoring data, etc. would likely be more well received.

Relation to Chehalis Strategy outreach work: Penny Mabie is still planning on doing focus groups throughout the basin. Conservation Districts won't be involved in those meetings.

3. Fish Barrier Removal Board/ Culvert Inventory Update

Stacy Polkowske was unavailable to provide this update. She e-mailed a summary to Kirsten, who presented the information to the group.

The FBRB team is still working to identify “focus reaches” for barrier removal. Thus far they have identified focus reaches in the Middle Fork Newaukum and Lower South Fork Newaukum.

A brief discussion regarding the FBRB's “focus watersheds”: It appears that some of the identified projects in the “focus reaches” in the Newaukum are already being funded through existing funding sources. That means that there won't be a need for much of an additional ask to the legislature to get these completed. Rich suggested that this way of doing things in the Newaukum could define a path for how to implement the FBRB request.

There will be a new WDFW biologist who will be taking over a lot of the FBRB and Chehalis inventory supervision. This person will likely be attending future HWG meetings.

4. Chehalis Basin Strategy/ Aquatic Species Restoration Plan/ Habitat Restoration and Protection

a) Update on HRP Process/Ranking

Kirsten provided a summary of the Habitat Restoration and Protection (HRP) ranking process. It included site visits with members of the review team, note-taking, developing a new ranking criteria (based on Lead Entity criteria), holding two ranking meetings, developing a ranked list, and then handing it to Dave Price (WDFW).

Miles provided further details on the review process. There was an option in the ranking to choose not to evaluate projects that aren't ready to implement. Some projects came in that were poorly written, so the review team had to make the choice to not evaluate these. They may have been good projects, but did not provide enough information.

Also, the projects that were bundled were all evaluated together. There needs to be a benefit to "the process" for bundling, not just to the sponsors. It would have been too time-consuming for the reviewers to evaluate each in the bundle individually. The projects that were bundled had the drawback that if one project was poor, it would bring the whole package down in score. The take-home for project sponsors is to keep everything in the bundle at the same high standard.

Overall, it has been and will be a "Herculean" effort for everyone.

Kirsten presented the ranked list to the group.

Alice reported that Dave Price said putting aside funding for "contingency" as part of the \$6 million will be acceptable (for unanticipated cost increases). Projects will be managed at RCO. Alice reported that sponsors will get a letter from RCO next week. Projects will be managed similar to WCRI. Dave Caudell will be the grant manager at RCO. He does FFFPP so knows how to manage passage projects. Alice reported that the "start of project" can be predated back to July 9th, 2015, as long as project activities are in the scope of work. PRISM will be ready by March 1st. Project management will be simpler than SRFB. RCO and WDFW will divide the work needed for cultural resources review. Once project sponsors enter information into PRISM, those agencies will initiate cultural resources review. WDFW staff can help with technical review and design.

Kirsten said that detailed notes about each project will be sent out to sponsors next week. Several will have conditions.

b) Summary of January 21st meeting in Lacey re: ASRP.

Members present at this meeting provided a brief summary to the rest of the group. The meeting was meant to be information-sharing and call for local knowledge. But the majority of the time was information-sharing with no time for gleaning local knowledge. Kirsten sent their “Get Involved” one-pager handed out at that meeting electronically to the LE mailing list. Carol Cloen (WDFW) told people to contact her, but didn’t define any plans for future meetings on this topic.

Rich suggested writing to Chip (Anchor QEA) with information about the subbasins that could be put into EDT. Bob had hoped to have a meeting with Chip and Carol to see what data they already have. Rich suggested another workshop for the other sub-basins. Bob suggested a series of workshops for people with knowledge about other sub-basins. Rich will coordinate with Carol to get those started.

Kirsten passed on the request from NOAA to get data on past benthic surveys. Bob mentioned that Chehalis River Council may have done some of these on the South Fork. Thurston County Stream team might have data for tributaries in Thurston County. Most of this work has been school kids going out doing work for educational purposes – not to produce high quality data.

c) Outreach

Kirsten reported on what she’d heard from the Chehalis Strategy’s consultant doing outreach work that he is producing video in the basin. She then presented an idea for what the Lead Entity could do for outreach: contracting a writer/photographer who is currently doing freelancing for the Chronical to do some “restoration success stories.”

d) Legislative Update

A House Bill is being proposed in regards to creating a Chehalis Basin flood and restoration office to the Department of Ecology. Alice reported she had heard that if this passed, RCO would maintain the active projects, and any future projects would be at Ecology. The model would be different than SRFB. Another bill is being proposed related to flooding statewide. Kirsten will send the two bill numbers to the group.

Concerns expressed: Inefficiency from shift in gears; moving a process that has already been established to another agency.

If anyone is concerned, it would make sense to go to a hearing on the bill.

e) Upcoming: Feb 19th Chehalis Basin Partnership meeting will be on these theme.

5. SRFB

The total amount of SRFB funding available for the state in 2016 will be less than over the past 5 years. Likely close to 14 Million. This translates to about \$500,000 for the Basin. The official amount will not be known until remaining funds from last year are returned

Bob suggested that unsuccessful HRP applicants put effort into submitting conceptual projects for this SRFB round. At least this will help us develop a list and demonstrate need.

Kirsten will send a draft press release “Call for Projects” to the group for review. She welcomes other ideas on how to distribute this call.

The March HWG meeting will include the first round of project presentations.

Dustin asked the group: *Why are we just seeing culvert projects proposed in the Chehalis? Why aren't there more habitat restoration and protection projects? E.g., riparian restoration, rechannelization, bank stabilization, in general, creating good quality habitat that these passage projects will provide access to.*

Answers: Bob said that for bank stabilization projects, there are just too many requests from landowners and he doesn't know how to proceed – which to address first? Bob is looking forward to guidance from the Chehalis Strategy Bank Stabilization plan. Also, permitting is expensive for bank stabilization projects. In areas with eroding banks, you can't plant trees to improve the riparian area because it's just going to keep eroding if erosion is not addressed first. You have to do a reach analysis, evaluating upstream causes and potential downstream impacts, before these can even be considered – which is expensive and time consuming. Another hurdle is that larger scale restoration often needs to happen on private land. Often these need to happen as scaled projects: acquisition, then restoration. All of this takes time, relationship building, working with landowners, etc. Other watersheds in the State are further along on this than the Chehalis is – they have more money and have been doing this longer. Additionally, there are restraints for grants to do these kinds of projects – the money has to be spent in one year, but these projects take longer, need monitoring, etc. Until we change that structure, doing restoration will be constrained. A diversity of funding sources is needed. \$500,000 for the whole basin from SRFB is not enough to do any of these kinds of projects.

In conclusion, the message that should get out from this group after the HRP grant round is that culverts are the “low-hanging fruit” – it will take a lot more time and money to get full-scale habitat restoration accomplished. If there is going to be more money coming for habitat restoration and protection, we need a longer notification, and a portion of that money to be put aside for project development.

Dustin was asked about the status of the Programmatic EIS. He answered that sections are being reviewed, but the full draft is not ready yet. The timeframe for getting this out is May or June.

Dustin was asked Ecology's perspective on building a dam, with a complex answer.

6. PRISM Training – Alice Rubin

Alice introduced the group to how to find the Chehalis Strategy grants in PRISM. She provided a handout, which is available upon request.

Next HWG meeting: March 11th 2016 --