

**Chehalis Basin Lead Entity -- Habitat Work Group
January 9, 2023 -- Minutes**

Zoom

~ 9:00 am – 12:00 pm ~

<p>Ann Weckback, <i>Lewis County Public Works</i> Anthony Waldrop, <i>Grays Harbor Cons Dist.</i> Alex Gustafson, <i>Trout Unlimited</i> Ben Amidon, <i>Chehalis Tribe</i> Brad Murphy, <i>Thurston County Planning</i> Brett DeMond, <i>Streamworks</i> Brian Stewart, <i>Conservation Northwest</i> Bob Russell, <i>Lewis County Citizen</i> Caprice Fasano, <i>Quinault Indian Nation</i> Drew Mealar, <i>ASRP Implementation</i> Elena Fernandez, <i>Thurston County</i> Garrett Dalan, <i>The Nature Conservancy</i> Greg Green, <i>Ducks Unlimited</i> Jacob Murray, <i>Mason Conservation Dist.</i> Jan Robinson, <i>Chehalis River Basin Land T.</i> Jerilyn Walley, <i>Grays Harbor Cons. Dist.</i></p>	<p>Karen Adams, <i>WDFW Region 5</i> Kathy Jacobson, <i>Outreach Coordinator</i> Kelly Verd, <i>Lewis Conservation District</i> Kendall Barrameda, <i>RCO</i> Key McMurray, <i>Grays Harbor Citizen</i> Kirsten Harma, <i>Lead Entity Coordinator</i> Luc Vedder, <i>Citizen</i> Mara Zimmerman, <i>Coast Salmon Partnership</i> Martin McCallum, <i>Citizen</i> Megan Tuttle, <i>WDFW Habitat Bio</i> Miranda Plumb, <i>US Fish and Wildlife Service</i> Ned Pittman, <i>Coast Salmon Partnership</i> Sarah Watkins, <i>Grays Harbor Citizen</i> Sasha Medlen, <i>RCO</i> Tom Kollasch, <i>Grays Harbor Conservation Dist.</i> Victoria Knorr, <i>ASRP Management</i></p>
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1. Welcome, Breakout Rooms

Key, Vice Chair, convened the meeting

2. Minutes Approval

Kirsten did not finish the December minutes in time for this meeting.

3. Organizational Business

a. Newaukum Subcommittee

Alex reminded the group that the committee is currently writing the Newaukum plan.

Kirsten reported on the previous subcommittee meeting, where the group learned about Ann Weckback’s prioritization of the remaining barriers on the Newaukum. The sub-committee will help prioritize the top 10. Ann will come later in the meeting to request a letter of support for one of these culverts later in this meeting.

Bob Russell provided a citizen perspective – he has learned about all of the good restoration work happening through participation, that he wasn’t aware of previously. He would like to see more citizens learn the same things. Sharing Ann’s map in the Centralia Chronicle was presented as an idea.

b. Outreach Updates

Kathy has been providing community education using the River Table. She provided a training to 5th graders at Washington Elementary School in Centralia. She trained Kenna from Lewis County Stream Team on set up and training using the table, along with Americorps Grady Grahm from Mason Conservation District, who also hopes to use the table with students in Mason County. She shared the tool with a school in Toledo Middle School. Although Toledo is outside the basin, they have strong STEM programs. This is a great tool for showcasing the work of beaver as ecosystem engineers, and modeling river processes.

There will be an environmental film festival held at Centralia and Hoquiam at the end of February/early March. The planning team will start promoting the event once dates are confirmed. Before each event, there will be an opportunity for groups to have a table with information about their organization.

Ned shared that there will be a climate workshop put on by the Coast Salmon Partnership in January.

c. Coast Salmon Partnership – Support Letter for Legislative Funding

Mara is preparing a letter supporting the different state budget line items for funding programs that would advance salmon habitat restoration work on the Washington Coast. She shared a list of programs that they will include in the letter. She asked if anyone was interested in reviewing the letter, and if anyone has any specific input to include. The letter will be ready today or tomorrow.

Bob Russell made a motion to support Mara to write this letter. Alex seconded. All in favor.

d. Lead Entity Focus and Direction - Recap

Kirsten provided a summary of this discussion that was held at Habitat Work Group last month. She recommended that we have a more intensive conversation at one of our in person meetings after the bulk of the SRFB. The conversation focused on consider adjusting the Lead Entity focus to use the SRFB funds more strategically in light of the other funding sources available to the basin. This could be an adjustment of use of funds, or using the Lead Entity process to vet projects being considered for other programs.

Q) Is “no-change” an option?

A) No-change is always an option. We can also try a new approach for just one grant round, and go back to our old approach if we aren't happy with the results.

No other comments or discussion.

4. Salmon Recovery Funding Board

The draft SRFB schedule is now final. Site visits will be April 10-12. Kirsten reserved 3 days for site visits in case we have lots of projects this year.

Kirsten is preparing a press release to invite local community members to join our SRFB project review team. This will be a good outreach opportunity, to get people aware of our work in the basin, even if it doesn't result in any new volunteers. Kirsten asked existing citizen members Sarah and Bob to provide quotes for the press release.

RCO will be opening PRISM for SRFB applications today (January 9)

RCO will be holding an application workshop on Tuesday, January 24th at 10am. There will be some updates to Manual 18 presented.

The SRFB may receive additional funding to use towards the 2023 grant round through Infrastructure Act funds being applied to PCSRF. If that occurs, the additional funds will mean a maximum of about \$876,000 for the Chehalis.

Kirsten presented the list of conceptual projects she is aware of that might evolve into a SRFB application. These include one each respectively by Lewis Conservation District, Thurston Conservation District, Chehalis Basin Fisheries Task Force, Lewis County and Mason County.

The February and March meetings of the Habitat Work Group will have plenty of time for project presentations.

Kirsten demonstrated the new features in the Salmon Recovery Portal. The portal is now able to show two data layers for each Lead Entity. The Chehalis will house a layer of the GSUs (geographic unit being used for the ASRP). Kirsten asked Work Group members what other layer they might want to have on there. She is proposing an old "WAU" layer that outlines the watersheds used to define limiting factors in the Chehalis Lead Entity's restoration and preservation strategy. The layer is close to, but different from, a HUC12 layer already in SRP. The benefit of the layer is it will allow project sponsors to know the limiting factors of the sub-basin of their proposed projects. No one provided any different ideas of what layers to include. The Lead Entity will have a chance to propose a different layer again in May.

As sponsors put together projects, please consider what other layers might be useful.

Bob Russell was excited about the SRP as a way to show local residents what type of habitat work is occurring in their community. He suggested that a SRP training be provided to the Lewis County Stream Team.

5. Presentation: Harris Creek Barrier Removal

Ben shared the Chehalis Tribe's work this last fall to completely remove a culvert that was acting as a fish barrier on Harris Creek (Bramer Culvert Removal). The culvert had blocked even the woody debris coming down. It was 33% passable culvert. They were able to completely remove the culvert since the road was for agriculture and there is no longer any agriculture occurring on the other side. Permitting from the Army Corps and waiting for the JARPA took a long time. Last minute, they learned they needed a permit from the Chehalis Tribe itself. They removed the culvert in 2.5 days. Overall, the project cost less than \$9,000 to complete, not including Tribe staff time. Costs were just for rental equipment. They have since planted the area about 20-ft on site.

Q) What will happen to pond lily now that the flow has change?

A) Beaver Dams are maintaining the water level. I wouldn't be surprised if a beaver dam appears where the old culvert was.

Lessons Ben passed on to other sponsors included:

-Don't plant stakes under 6 feet long in reed canary grass

-Relocate ash trees on site – they worked like bare-root plants they could just plant!

Work Group members enthusiastically applauded Ben's work on this project.

6. Presentation: Allen Creek Culvert Ann Weckback, Lewis County

Ann provided information for a proposed fish passage project on Allen Creek at Newaukum valley in hopes of receiving a letter of support from the HWG. They are applying to the Aquatic Organism Passage through the federal highways infrastructure grant program. The culvert is located in the lower Newaukum, below the confluence of the south and north forks. The issue is 0% passability due to velocity. High flows restrict upstream migration of coho and steelhead. The goal is to provide a design for a structure that is passable to all life stages of fish. 2.43 miles of coho habitat will be restored to the next barrier. Eventually, they could open 16.97 miles of habitat if all barriers corrected. There is high quality rearing habitat through the lower reach and wetlands, and a tributary upstream. Lewis County would plan future work to focus on replacing barriers downstream of I-5 since that is where better habitat is.

Karen commented that the culvert ranks highly and thinks it's a good project. The ability to access it at this time also provides motivation to correct it in the near term. Megan Tuttle also supports the project. Bob noted that a lot of development will be happening in that area in the coming years. This is a good opportunity to showcase co-existence of good habitat and development. It's a good location for signs.

Motion: To approve a letter of support from the Habitat Work Group. Bob made the motion. Sarah seconded. All in favor.

7. Presentation: WDFW Fish Program Update. Casey Costello and Adam Fleming, WDFW

Casey updated the group on the status of the FBRB process. The Governor's request to fund this program is for \$48.1 million. Last year they only got \$29.9 million overall. The Chehalis Basin has the #1 ranked project on the whole FBRB list. There are an additional 4 projects above the Governor's requested budget. 4 are above the \$29 M mark.

Casey updated the group on the status of the fish passage prioritization tool created for the Chehalis. They recognize that the prioritization tool is a few years out of date. They are looking for ways to update based on barriers that have been correct. Ryan and Rachel at WDFW's GIS division tried to rerun the prioritization. It appears that there is an issue in the programming script, so their attempt was unsuccessful. They don't have time or resources to look for the breakdown or otherwise do the update. They suggest using Python Script instead. For a work-around, Casey pulled out the updated culvert repair forms since 2020. They found 85 corrections. Their final list is 44 corrections on prioritized streams. They updated our webmap to show the correction – with a green circle around the barrier symbol. This isn't a full re-shuffling of the deck. But it's a workaround.

Q) What are you calling a prioritized stream?

A) It's all the streams on your map. FPDSI includes all potential stream including roadside ditches. This includes all tiers of barriers.

Q) Is this going to be useful to practitioners? Is there any problem with not being able to reshuffle the deck?

Casey shared that any barrier on webmap meets FBRB requirements for being on a “Planned Project Forecast List.” The FBRB criteria also includes being a “statewide approved watershed” – for this group it’s still the Newaukum. FBRB wants Lead Entities to tell them what the highest priority culverts are in that focus watershed.

Work Group members are disappointed that this can’t be updated, since each culvert depends on the others. Multiple people suggested that the program be owned by the Lead Entity so that we can update it as needed.

Q) Can we get that update of what has been replaced annually? (static data pull)

A) Yes. This only took a few hours.

Q) Can you get an estimate of what it would cost to run the full prioritization every 5 years? Plus a scope of work?

A) Yes. Getting an estimate from a consultant would be best so you can see if you can do this. Casey will do this.

Mara proposed that the Coast Salmon Partnership take over this tool. They are holding the prioritized database and have the GIS tool for the North Coast and South Coast. They have the training to do this work and have Aspect under contract to do the update. All we need is for WDFW to give responsibility for data and oversight to the Coast Salmon Partnership. There is still an issue with data that are confidential to WDFW and can’t be shared. Staff will look into ways to deal with this.

Brett provided another work-around option for updating the spreadsheet manually when looking at individual projects. Chris Dwight, formerly of WDFW, provided a method to do this and did so for a few. The benefit of the information was showing whether the culverts are in the top 1/3rd or not.

The prioritization tool will be talked about more at future meetings.

Adam presented information on the Stream Health Assessment, which is a collaboration of WDFW and the Chehalis Tribe and will be wrapped up in the spring. The assessment is taking place in 31 streams and rivers in all of the ASRP near-term priority areas. The assessment protocol is based on “SVAP.” The end tool will be a webtool produced by the Chehalis Tribe. Findings: They are seeing lots of lack of woody debris in the surveyed reaches. A side benefit of their survey work is that they get to talk to adjacent landowners about habitat. They are able to tell them that although conditions may look degraded on their land, habitat conditions in the forested headwaters are often great for fish. Survey crew are keeping a list of landowners who would be receptive to talking further about restoration on their lands. Most are not interested.

Q) Have you surveyed the tributaries to Decker Creek?

A) Yes, but just Dry Bed Creek and Dry Creek. Adam noted that some GIS layers show Dry Creek as being longer than it is. There may have been a channel shift at some point.

8. Associated Program Updates

a. Aquatic Species Restoration Plan

The Steering Committee is currently looking at updating the funding guidance for the upcoming biennium. An Oregon Spotted Frog working group has convened to look at long term strategies for protecting the frogs. New sponsor RFQ – applicants still being reviewed. For current sponsors, the ASRP is still accepting new project proposals. There is still sizable amount of funding available. For folks with large projects over half million, you will have to get your application in by Feb. Drew isn't aware of any pending projects of this size. The Steering Committee may encourage project funds to be spent before the end of the biennium, in case the funds can't be rolled over. That policy decision has not been made yet.

Anthony encourages any interested parties to attend the Regional Implementation Team meetings to hear more project updates. The next meeting is Feb 16. Even if you're not an approved project sponsor there is the potential to partner with existing sponsors. Lessons learned workshop will be Wednesday, Feb 15—likely to be in person at Centralia College. Will be in morning. Can be an opportunity for a meet and greet as well as sharing lesson learned.

b. Coast Salmon Partnership

The technical workshop for discussing climate resiliency and habitat restoration will be in person in Hoquiam on January 25.

Key encouraged interested parties to provide support letters for the WCRRI legislative ask, either individually, or by signing on to a group letter, by the end of the month. Ideally, get your County Commissioners to sign on to group letter or write own letter. Non-profits and Tribes are also encouraged to sign on individually. The legislative ask is \$17.6 million, but Key stressed that all projects on the list are good this year.

c. Federal Funding Updates

Kirsten presented a list of projects currently seeking funding from the Federal funding programs. She will send the list to relevant project sponsors to make sure the information is up to date. Notably, between several projects, the Coast region was successful in obtaining \$18 million in federal funding through the NOAA fish passage grant. This is a huge win for coast salmon!

For the Good of the Order

Adjourned. (12:00)