

# WRIA 9 Watershed Ecosystem Forum Meeting Summary

*Tukwila Community Center || February 28, 2019, 4:00 – 6:30pm*

Members Present		Affiliation
1.	Josh Baldi	King County
2.	Al Barrie	Mid-Sound Fisheries Enhancement Group (MSFEG)
3.	Weston Brinkley	GD-UWP
4.	Councilmember (CM) Bob Edgar	City of Burien
5.	CM Lisa Herbold	City of Seattle
6.	Steve Lee	Covington Water District
7.	Katie Moxley	Boeing Company
8.	Brandon Parsons	American Rivers
9.	Tyler Patterson	Tacoma Public Utilities
10.	CM Bill Pelozza, Meeting Chair	City of Auburn
11.	James Rasmussen	Green/Duwamish Watershed Alliance
12.	Brandy Reed	King Conservation District
13.	Stewart Reinbold	WA Department of Fish & Wildlife
14.	CM Dennis Robertson	City of Tukwila

Alternates Present		Affiliation
15.	Maiya Andrews	City of Burien
16.	Jeanette Dorner	Mid-Sound Fisheries Enhancement Group
17.	Mike Mactutis	City of Kent
18.	Kathy Minsch	City of Seattle
19.	Jessica Olmstead	WA Department of Natural Resources
20.	Jon Sloan	Port of Seattle
21.	Theresa Thurlow	City of Federal Way

Other Attendees Present		Affiliation
22.	Brian Anderson	Boeing Company
23.	Katie Beaver	King County
24.	Peter Donaldson	Sustainability Ambassadors
25.	Matt Goehring	WRIA 9 Planning and Technical Coordinator
26.	Chris Gregersen	King County
27.	Kollin Higgins	King County
28.	Joan Lee	King County
29.	Tim O'Leary	King County
30.	Doug Osterman	WRIA 9 Salmon Recovery Manager
31.	Don Scanlon	Tukwila Parks
32.	Suzanna Smith	WRIA 9 Habitat Projects Coordinator
33.	Will Stelle	Previous NOAA Fisheries Regional Director
34.	Laura West	WRIA 9 Administrative Coordinator

## I) Welcome and Introductions

Meeting Chair Bill Pelozza called the Watershed Ecosystem Forum (WEF) meeting to order at approximately 4:10pm and led introductions. Doug Osterman noted that portions of the meeting will be recorded.

## II) Public Comment

Tyler Patterson announced that NOAA Fisheries issued a Biological Opinion (BiOp) on February 15 requiring the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to complete a downstream fish passage facility at Howard Hanson Dam. The tentative schedule for design and construction is about 12 years. The BiOp requires an interim measure of moderating flows in the Middle Green River to reduce scour. Josh Baldi asked if WRIA 9 was planning to send a comment letter. King County will be writing a letter to urge a quicker timeline as well as show support. While there isn't a formal comment period, King County felt that given how long this has been in the works and the importance to WRIA 9's work, a letter would be useful. Tyler added that Tacoma reviewed the final draft for accuracy and similarly supported the concept but hoped for a quicker timeline. The Corps has 60 days to reply to the letter, but Tyler doesn't expect a surprising response. Dennis Robertson made a motion to follow King County and

# WRIA 9 WEF Meeting Summary

February 28, 2019

Tacoma's leadership and send a letter to NOAA thanking them for the BiOp and requesting a condensed timeline given how crucial that extra habitat above the dam is to the urgency of salmon and orcas. James Rasmussen seconded the motion.

*The Watershed Ecosystem Forum unanimously approved sending a letter to NOAA supporting the BiOp and urging a quicker timeline for completion of the downstream fish passage facility at Howard Hanson Dam.*

### III) Approval of Meeting Summary

*The Watershed Ecosystem Forum unanimously approved the meeting summary for the November 8, 2018 meeting.*

### IV) WRIA 9 Leadership Transition Planning

WRIA 9 Management Committee Chair Dennis Robertson announced that he and WEF Co-Chair Bill Pelozza are not running for re-election this fall. WRIA 9 is looking for elected official volunteers to replace them starting in 2020. Dennis walked through the time requirements and benefits.

### V) WRIA 9 Legislative & Congressional Priorities; Habitat Project Highlights

Suzanna Smith, WRIA 9 Habitat Project Coordinator, provided the WEF with a brief overview of WRIA 9's legislative outreach efforts and habitat project highlights. Suzanna and Greg Wingard, Green River Coalition President, met with legislators in Olympia recently to discuss WRIA 9's priorities. They focused their legislative efforts on projects in need of funding and informed legislators of the funding gaps between the agencies' requests and the Governor's budget. Suzanna explained that Doug Osterman and Marlla Mhoon were in Olympia in early February and were met with positive feedback. However, more recently, legislators have been faced with a \$3-4 Billion budget revenue shortfall. Suzanna and Greg saw general support and recognition of the value and urgency of our work, but legislators tempered their expectations given the shortfall. Suzanna offered support and information for anyone who wanted to go to Olympia in the next few weeks. Suzanna also announced WRIA 9's active requests for proposals for the Re-Green the Green and 1 Million Trees grant programs. Suzanna walked through WRIA 9's pots of funding for 2019, totaling \$2,494,568, with requests of \$3,249,310. WRIA 9 staff will provide more details on the 2019 grant round at the May WEF meeting.

Kathy Minsch asked Suzanna about her perception of legislators understanding the link between salmon and orcas. Suzanna explained that legislators seemed to be aware of the Orca Task Force recommendations but didn't seem to be taking the top priority of funding the grant programs as seriously. Suzanna reminded the legislators of that top recommendation from the Orca Task Force. Brandon Parsons asked when the capital budget would be released. Suzanna replied that over next two weeks, the House and Senate would be releasing their own budgets, followed by a period of reconciliation of the three budgets over the next few months. Jeanette Dorner emphasized that this week and next are critical weeks to discuss the budget. The next revenue forecast will come out on March 20 and budgets will be refined based on that.

### VI) People, Watersheds, Salmon and Orca: Ensuring the Puget Sound ecosystem is healthy and resilient...because of our actions in WRIA 9

Dennis Robertson introduced Will Stelle, former Regional Director of NOAA Fisheries. Will thanked WRIA 9 for the invitation to speak. Will shared his experience of running the salmon program for NOAA on the West Coast and connected it to WRIA 9's challenges. Will focused on three lessons: scale, connectivity, and opportunism. Will explained how important it is to embrace the fact that we have choices that we make and we need to own our choices. As a Federal agency, NOAA dealt with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Will noted, however, that the ESA doesn't give Federal agencies authority over water and land use at the local level, which is why it falls to WRIA 9 and other watersheds to do this at the local level. Pointing to the salmon life cycle, Will stated there is a need to improve habitat productivity where salmon are born and where they rear. Investing in restoration provides multiple benefits, including storm/flood protection. Will explained that salmon populations interbreed and intermingle over time. Distinct populations exist, but they are not isolated from one another. Eliminating major populations interferes with the connectivity and productivity of the species as a whole. Will also noted that Tribes depend on salmon in the Green/Duwamish and have rights to the fish here. Will spoke to the economic implications of a healthy watershed. Legislators sitting down to prepare budgets want to know why they should make decisions that might affect their revenue streams. Therefore it is important to understand implications for property values and tax revenues with a healthy watershed. A healthy, restored watershed can increase land and real estate values and increase tax revenues. As humans, we are pigeon-holed into different sectors with different goals and we need to rethink how to do business to recognize the multiple benefits for the values we want to enhance.

# WRIA 9 WEF Meeting Summary

February 28, 2019

---

James Rasmussen commented that all of this information is part of the original Green/Duwamish Salmon Habitat Plan and it is sad that we have to be reminded of this so many years later. We're not moving fast enough. Al Barrie commented that while there is more variety of habitat on the Duwamish River than any other place in the urban area, the impact on salmon hasn't been great enough.

Will Stelle encouraged WRIA 9 to think about how to approach local elected officials and frame a credible story about how doing the right thing for the watershed is actually doing the right thing for the community in all areas and communicate that our strategy achieves multiple objectives. Will commented that the success of WRIA 9's work depends on continually educating local electeds in the choices they can make. Dennis Robertson acknowledged that elected officials feel pressure from competing budget needs in all areas: public safety, public works, infrastructure, parks & recreation, etc. In the City of Tukwila, Dennis summarized that costs typically increase about 3% a year, while revenue only increases 1-1.5% a year. Dennis hypothesized that a local elected official might struggle with the decision to support increasing habitat if it meant cutting into Costco's parking lot, which contributes to city tax revenue, especially if the elected official's main goal is to get re-elected. Will suggested focusing on the multi-benefit paradigm and mapping out the prospective ecological value of the habitat restoration project, looking at potential changes in real estate value that will accrue over the next 5-10 years with a healthier and more productive area that has been opened up for recreation. Will suggested reaching out to jurisdictions that have done similar analyses with their own habitat restoration projects and then building public education and support for why these are good choices for the community. Dennis suggested appealing to the fact that many elected officials have children and grandchildren and using them as a motivating factor to make the right choices.

James Rasmussen commented that WRIA 9 has been attempting to move forward with habitat restoration projects at the Desimone Oxbow and with Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) settlements for the last 20 years. Both would result in major habitat restorations for the river, but due to funding issues, neither has moved forward yet.

## **VII) Salmon Habitat Plan Update**

Matt Goehring provided an update on the WRIA 9 Salmon Habitat Plan (SHP) Update. The original SHP hasn't been a static document; there have been many addendums since the adoption of the Plan in 2005. In 2016, the WEF decided to do a strategic Plan Update, focusing on new science, a revised project list, updated programs and policies, and an adaptive management plan. Matt walked through timeline and what still needs to be done. Matt expects the Update will be completed in early 2020. Josh Baldi asked if the Lower Green subwatershed will be included in the subwatershed workshop process. Matt replied that WRIA 9's plan update would probably be finalized before the Lower Green EIS and he is still unsure on timing and coordination between the two. WRIA 9 will invite the King County Flood Control District to discussions, while recognizing the different time frames in the two plans. Don Scanlon commented that back channel projects aren't being maintained, such as North Winds Weir, which has been overtaken by cottonwoods. Don asked if cottonwoods are good habitat and expressed concern about maintenance for habitat projects. Matt acknowledged there is a need for maintenance. Kollin Higgins added that Earth Corps has been doing maintenance and cottonwoods are great from a habitat perspective. Doug Osterman added that long term maintenance of projects can be a barrier and this is one of the policy issues being looked at in the Plan Update. James Rasmussen commented that Duwamish Alive does maintenance all up and down the Duwamish River and there needs to be better coordination between these volunteer groups and WRIA 9.

## **VIII) Juvenile Chinook use of non-natal tributaries in the Lower Green River**

Chris Gregersen, Fisheries Ecologist with King County Water and Land Resources Division, presented on a study he did with funding through the WRIA 9 Cooperative Watershed Management monitoring & technical assistance grant program. Chris explained that non-natal tributaries refer to tributaries where the fish were not born, for example juvenile Chinook who were born in the Middle Green River and are using tributaries in the Lower Green for rearing and refuge habitat. Chris explained that we know adult Chinook returning to the Green River are spawning almost exclusively in the Middle Green subwatershed. We also know that rearing habitat in the Middle Green is a limiting factor and juveniles who leave the river system too early aren't coming back as adults. We know we need more rearing habitat to produce fish that will survive and return to spawn. What we don't know is if there are habitat areas in the Lower Green subwatershed that provide that rearing habitat that we should be focused on restoring and monitoring. Historically, tributaries in the Lower Green did provide a lot of habitat for fish. Similarly, in other watersheds, non-natal tributaries are important for juvenile rearing. However, no one has done an in depth search in Lower Green. Tributary restoration tends to be less expensive and could complement work done in the mainstem. Chris' project purpose was to see if juvenile Chinook are found in those tributaries and if there any patterns associated with their use, in terms of timing, or specific tributary locations. Chris chose to sample nine streams, representing a subset of streams in the subwatershed. Chris found juvenile Chinook in eight of the nine tributaries and caught over 200 juvenile Chinook over three

# WRIA 9 WEF Meeting Summary

February 28, 2019

---

days of sampling. Chris found more juveniles earlier in the season and more in some streams than others. Three of the nine tributaries Chris sampled had flap gates, which are very common in lower green. Chris walked through differences in flap gate locations and elevations and hypothesized why juveniles might like certain tributary access points. It turned out the most recently installed flap gate, which was designed for fish use, wasn't actually helpful for juveniles and none were found above it. This study provides some of the first hard evidence that long term rearing is happening in the Lower Green and tributaries might provide some of the parr rearing habitat we need. Chris analyzed rainfall data and found that juveniles could only access some of the tributaries behind flap gates during high flow events, and the juveniles chose to stay in the tributary for a few months. Chris saw large groups of juveniles waiting outside flap gates, trying to get past them into tributaries. This proves that the juveniles were actively trying to find tributary habitat as opposed to heading straight out to the ocean. Lower Green tributaries might not provide spawning or summer habitat, but they are functioning to provide rearing habitat and the fish aren't being picky. Chris walked through the implications of the study findings, including redefining what fish passage means, assessing flap gate performance, and identifying potential retrofits. This study raised further questions that need to be studied, including flap gate design, tagging studies to determine survival and further trace locations and patterns, additional sampling earlier and later in the season and in other sub-basins, and performing temperature studies. We know temperature is an issue in the Lower Green and a future study could look for the threshold for limitation.

James Rasmussen commented that Pierce County replaced a series of culvert for less than \$300K and saw a huge benefit. We know that juveniles use tributaries for rearing and refuge in the Duwamish too. James recommends we continue this work and look at other studies that back this up so we can move more quickly. Don Scanlon asked if these findings will change policy implications and suggested distributing this information. Josh Baldi asked if Chris performed a full inventory or if there are other streams with flap gates. Chris replied that there are other flap gates. Dennis Robertson suggested applying for a grant to tackle multiple flap gates in multiple jurisdictions. Josh Baldi added that WRIA 9 could bundle something like that for the State Fish Passage Board. Josh also expressed excitement for this work as King County is currently performing their own inventory of fish barriers as part of their Fish Passage Program. Brandon Parsons asked if the next step would be to inventory and continue to collect data and how far Chris' team is from developing design standards. Chris confirmed that doing an inventory is the next step and he's looking at applying for CWM funds to do this and continue looking at how barriers are or aren't functioning.

## **IX) Wrap up/Next Steps**

Doug Osterman listed the next steps of writing a letter in reply to NOAA Fisheries' BiOp and scheduling a series of workshops to identify policies, programs, projects for SHP Update.

Al Barrie commented that to cap off Will Stelle's point on the economic value of salmon to the region, there is a proven economic value of a healthy watershed. David Batker of Earth Economics worked with the WEF a few years ago to do a valuation of a restoration project. In WRIA 9's 2005 Salmon Habitat Plan, there was a chapter that looked at the economic value of fully implementing the Plan, totaling billions of dollars per year, as well as a few case studies, including North Winds Weir. As cost is a barrier to do projects in urban areas, especially in the Duwamish compared to other systems like the Skagit, WRIA 9 wanted to provide a rationale to provide funding to the Green/Duwamish watershed. Our evaluations showed that the rarer the habitat, the more value restoring it has. There is only 2% of the historic estuarine habitat area left, which means that every two-acre restoration to that rare resource is worth a lot.

Jeanette Dorner announced that Mid-Sound Fisheries Enhancement Group is hosting a planting project on the Green River on Saturday 3/2.

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 pm. The next WEF meeting is on May 9, 2019 from 4-6:30pm at Tukwila Community Center.