

Snoqualmie Watershed Forum
MEETING SUMMARY
May 16, 2012
Meeting 6:00-9:00 pm
City Hall, Carnation, WA

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Charles Peterson	City of Snoqualmie Councilmember, Forum Vice-Chair
Jim Berger	City of Carnation Mayor
Jason Walker	City of Duvall Councilmember (Alternate)
Kathy Lambert	King County Councilmember
Cindy Spiry	Snoqualmie Tribe (Alternate)
David Burger	Stewardship Partners, Non-profit Representative
Bill Knutsen	King Conservation District
Kent Renno	Citizen Representative
Isaac Cunningham	Citizen Representative
Derek Young	Citizen Representative

MEETING PROCEEDINGS

Introductions and Minutes

- Jason Walker introduced himself as the new Alternate representative for the City of Duvall.
- The Forum approved the March 21, 2012 meeting summary without changes.

Updates and Announcements

Yvette Lizée-Smith and Perry Falcone gave the following updates:

- *South Fork Skykomish Reach Assessment:* The US Forest Service has contracted with King County to conduct a reach assessment of the South Fork Skykomish River to identify opportunities for habitat restoration and protection. The funding comes from the Natural Resource Damage Assessment for decades-long groundwater contamination by Burlington Northern Santa Fe in the Town of Skykomish in King County. Perry will serve as the project manager for King County. The bulk of the technical work will be performed by consultants, overseen by King County staff. The project will be completed in late 2012 or first quarter of 2013.
- *Meeting announced to discuss response to KCD assessment cancellation:* Joan Lee, Rural and Regional Services Section Manager, King County Water & Land Resources Division, announced a meeting on June 12 to provide an opportunity for discussion about the cancellation of the KCD assessment and the county's response to that cancellation. Meeting date and time will be confirmed by Forum staff. Joan described the one-year decision by the Flood Control District to provide funding for watershed projects as a stop-gap measure and that there are ongoing discussions with KCD about unspent pre-2012 funds.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – “Snoqualmie Grown and Active” CANCELED

The scheduled presentation by “Snoqualmie Grown and Active Project” was canceled as the presenters experienced vehicle trouble on the way to the meeting.

2012 King County Flood Hazard Management Plan Update

[Powerpoint slideshow handout available by request]

King County Rivers and Floodplain Management staff gave an overview of the KC Flood Hazard Management Plan history, accomplishments to date, and proposed strategies/actions for the various reaches of our watershed. The presentation was intended to bring everyone up to speed on the Plan so they are better equipped to input on the update that is currently underway. Rivers staff advised that they will holding a special Basin Technical Committee (BTC) meeting on June 21 to get more direct input on the Plan Update and the proposed reach strategies/actions for our watershed. Forum members and government staff were invited to attend. Other stakeholder groups (Agriculture Commission etc) will also be invited.

Stakeholders, including the Forum, will be engaged through various meetings through September 2012, at which time a public review draft of the plan will be released. There are several opportunities to provide input into the Flood Plan:

- Snoqualmie Watershed Forum meeting: May 16
- FCD Snoqualmie/SF Skykomish Basin Technical Committee (BTC): June meeting, typically attended by jurisdictional public works staff
- FCD Advisory Committee: June/July meeting typically attended by mayors
- Flood Plan Public Review Draft Comment Period and Meetings: Fall 2012

Clint Loper explained that the plan serves multiple purposes as: a functional component of the county’s Comprehensive Plan; the Flood Control District’s (FCD) comprehensive plan; a requirement of the Community rating System (CRS) under FEMA; an element of the state Comprehensive Flood Control Plan; and as the flood component of the FCD’s Hazard Mitigation Plan. The current update is partly a regular 5 to 6 year update that is commonly required for various comprehensive plans under State law, but the update is also a reflection of new issues, information and organizational structures that have emerged since 2006.

The biggest change since the current plan was written in 2006 is the formation of the FCD itself and the associated resources available via the FCD assessment. The program and inter-jurisdictional coordination have taken shape over the past 5 years and the plan update is intended to reflect those changes. At the direction of the FCD Board of Supervisors (i.e., the County Council), the update will not make any major changes in goals, but is intended as a ‘red-line’ update to revisit specific policies, program recommendations and basin-specific strategies and actions.

Key issues to be addressed county-wide include funding to address coastal and tributary flooding, which were not envisioned as core components of the original plan; improving communication with vulnerable populations; levee certification and level of service; vegetation on levees; large wood in rivers as a component of capital projects; and capital project prioritization.

The Snoqualmie watershed has vast differences among subbasins in the way that floods behave and the types of risks that can be addressed by the flood plan. In some areas, the valley is prone to wide and deep inundation, while others are mostly affected by channel migration.

Clint highlighted some of the key accomplishments in the Snoqualmie, including:

- Over 30 flood buyouts of high risk or frequently flooded structures
- 48 home elevations to a standard of 3-ft above the 100-year flood elevation
- 45 more elevations underway, including FCD and City of Snoqualmie projects
- 24 farm pads since 2008 with 3-5 scheduled for 2012
- 2 pending barn elevations as pilot projects
- Several emergency repairs following large floods in 2006, 2008, 2009 and 2011
- 24 repair and maintenance projects
- Many partnerships with salmon-recovery funding for multi-objective projects for acquisitions, restoration and monitoring

KC staff described some of the key strategies that are being developed for several distinct areas in the watershed. Richelle Rose described the vision and characteristics of the Middle and North Fork Snoqualmie basins, with an emphasis on the lower portions of these rivers in close proximity to North Bend and Snoqualmie. Both rivers are highly dynamic alluvial systems with ample sediment supply, high channel migration risk and generally discontinuous levees that provide limited, localized erosion protection. These facilities are expensive to maintain and cause localized habitat degradation. The FCD is working on a Middle Fork Corridor Plan to reduce flood and erosion hazards while benefiting the environment in a way that is cost-effective over time.

The South Fork Snoqualmie flows through North Bend and features fairly continuous levees that are not equally protective on each bank. The levees were originally designed this way to direct flooding away from the town core. There are numerous seepage issues and other needed repairs. A strategy is under development to address the level of protection provided by these levees and to address inundation and levee stability.

The mainstem Snoqualmie River above the falls flows largely through the city of Snoqualmie and features the highest number of flood damage claims in Washington State, with over 300 inundated homes and businesses in a big flood. The river does not have levees per se but discontinuous revetments that limit channel migration. The strategy emphasizes continuing cost-sharing with FEMA and homeowners to elevate homes and with the City to acquire flood-prone properties.

The lower Snoqualmie below the falls features wide and deep inundation with impacts to farmland and homes. The river is also critical habitat for several species of salmon and steelhead. The levees below the falls are discontinuous and are considered 'training levees' and revetments that maintain the river's alignment but do not provide protection from inundation.

Two reaches of the Snoqualmie – below the Raging and Tolt River confluences – are different from other parts of the river due to the substantial gravel input from these two large tributaries. These are the most important spawning reaches for Chinook salmon and feature a steeper gradient and more gravel and thus have higher risk of channel erosion. Strategies are intended to recognize the importance of these reaches for salmon while balancing needs for flood protection and agriculture. In these high-priority areas, more natural processes should be allowed and proposed actions include levee setbacks and voluntary acquisitions. In other parts of the lower Snoqualmie, key goals are to reduce impacts of flooding on farms through farm pads as well as home and barn elevations.

The Tolt and Raging Rivers are steeper and highly dynamic systems that feature significant erosion risks. Both are critical for salmon habitat and have been a focus of salmon recovery projects. Strategies in the Tolt focus on restoring natural floodplain processes and voluntary acquisitions while reducing long term maintenance costs of flood facilities. Strategies in the Raging River are similar, and also include protection of vital infrastructure, such as the Preston-Fall City Road.

Questions and comments: Erik Haakenson inquired whether the ‘Snoqualmie 205’ project attained its goal of reducing flood levels by 1.5 ft in the City of Snoqualmie. Clint Loper responded that while every event is different and thus difficult to compare, anecdotal evidence suggests that flooding in the city has been reduced by the project.

Duvall Mayor Will Ibershof inquired about data regarding fine sediment buildup in the lower Snoqualmie. He and others have observed that flooding in the lower valley appears worse even when the recorded river flow is the same. For example, the Duvall-Woodinville Rd. appears to overtop and thus cut off Duvall at lower discharges than it used to. Clint was not aware of any data on sediment accumulation in that area but agreed that it is worth investigating. Sally King noted that while gravel removal is under consideration in some areas of the Tolt and Raging rivers, as well as some other parts of the Snoqualmie, this issue had not been raised for fine sediment in the lower river.

Charles Peterson asked why King County insists on elevating homes to 3 ft above base flood elevation (BFE+3) when FEMA only requires BFE+1. Clint explained that 100-yr floods are not the biggest floods and that there are substantial uncertainties in hydraulic models and in the effects of climate change, among other assumptions. He also noted that the incremental cost of the additional 2-feet is quite low compared to the overall cost of the action.

Clint also explained that while gravel accumulation has certainly occurred in many areas, the significance of the gravel accumulation in a flood is much less than people may think. Gravel removal is included as a potential strategy in the Plan but it is not the first option and is not considered sustainable in the long term compared to other actions. He also explained that there is a multi-agency group studying sediment management and will produce some recommendations in the near future.

Jason Walker (Duvall) asked if biorevetments are less harmful than regular rip-rap revetments. Clint responded that biorevetments are better and are being used in many KC facilities.

Bill Knutsen (KCD) noted that rivers and streams seem flashier. Clint responded that the 2009 event was different than many other past events with “higher antecedent conditions” and featured a lowland snow event. Larry Pickering noted that he has observed significant changes in the

response of his small creek to heavy rain. Formerly, a 1” rain event would fill his creek for 36 hrs., but today the flows are much higher earlier and overflow the banks, and then dissipate more quickly afterward.

Bill also noted that when King County Roads or other sponsors replace culverts on gravel streams, the gravel just ends up on the next property downstream.

Isaac Cunningham asked whether King County has considered moving the road at the mouth of the Raging River or efforts at gravel management. Clint responded that moving the road has not been under consideration but that the county is very aware of the gravel build up issue at the mouth of the Raging River.

Kent Renno asked whether the flood plan update affects landowners who have pending permit actions. Clint noted that the plan update provides guidance, not regulations. However, in the future floodplain regulations may change and any new permitted actions would have to comply with those regulations.

David Burger stated his interest in learning more about the causes of seemingly greater flooding and changes in flood behavior. It seems that today farmers have less time to get out of harm’s way than in floods past.

Erik Haakenson stated that he only became aware of the county’s change away from ‘hard’ engineering approaches when he reviewed the recent Expert Panel report commissioned by DNRP Director Christie True. He agreed with the report’s finding that greater efforts at outreach are needed to keep the community informed.

County Councilmember Kathy Lambert noted her concern about gravel buildup and suggested that gravel removal could be an economic benefit to King County Roads. She also echoes earlier comments that residents have seen that there is more damage with less water than there used to be.

Gary West, Town of Skykomish, asked whether the Maloney Creek project in Skykomish is a gravel management project. Clint agreed that it is, but that it is not a county project, and reiterated that gravel removal is a tool that can be considered but is generally much less sustainable compared to other alternatives.

Forum Business

- *2013 Forum Budget:* Staff advised that the 2013 budgeting process was underway. King County has recalculated the cost shares for all three watershed forums this year. Due to annexations the cost-shares for some cities have increased slightly. Yvette provided handouts with preliminary 2013 budget and cost-share estimates. The final budget/cost-shares will be presented for approval in July. Staff urged member governments to begin confirming their 10% cost-share contributions for 2013.
- *Flood District Funding for Watershed Projects:* Staff advised the Forum of the May 14 Flood District Board decision to provide \$3M in funding for salmon recovery and water quality projects within King County watersheds. These funds are intended to help address the loss of the 2012 KCD-WRIA grant programs and will be allocated following the same allocation plan as our 2012 KCD grants (i.e., Snoqualmie Watershed \$600K /

WRIA8 \$1.2M / WRIA9 \$1.2M). This is a 1-year funding decision to fill the gap created by the invalidation of the 2012 KCD assessment. Potential long-term funding will be a topic of discussion for the Flood District Board.

Kathy Lambert noted that not all council members are in favor of dedicating 10% of the annual FCD assessment to watershed projects. She also believes that the grant allocation should be even across the three watersheds and needs help getting this message across.

- *Expedited Grant Round:* Perry Falcone advised that project recommendations for the Snoqualmie \$600K allocation are due to the Flood District by late July, so we will need to run a condensed grant round. The eligible projects, applicants and ranking criteria should be very similar to our past KCD grant round. The Forum authorized staff to launch the grant round following the condensed schedule presented in the meeting with applications due on June 14 followed by project ranking and a Forum recommendation at the July 18 meeting.

Public Comment

Charles Peterson commented that Snoqualmie and a coalition of 16 cities won the first step of their court fight over the FEMA Biological Opinion regarding development in floodplains and expressed disappointment that no counties had joined the group even as all local governments in floodplains will benefit.

Next Meeting

The July 18 Forum meeting will be held at Preston Community Center, beginning with a project tour at 5:00 PM, followed by a light dinner and meeting from 7:00-9:00 PM.