**Habitat Work Group   
Chehalis Basin Lead Entity**

**ZOOM ONLY**

**MINUTES**

**October 7, 2024**

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| --- | --- |
| Alex Bradberry - *CSP Outreach Director*  Alex Gustafson *- Trout Unlimited*  Anthony Waldrop - *GH Conservation Dist.*  Ben Amidon - *Chehalis Tribe*  Bob Russell - *Lewis County Citizen*  Brett DeMond - *CBFTF Streamworks*  Drew Mealor - *ASRP Implementation Mgr*  Emilia Schwartz - *Thurston Co Planner*  Greg Green *- Ducks Unlimited*  Jacob Baker *- Coastal Interpretive Center*  Jenny Lewis - *Office of Chehalis, ASRP* | John Stepanek - *Grays Harbor Conserv Dist*  Kathy Jacobson - *LE Education Coordinator*  Key McMurray - *Grays Harbor Citizen Rep*  Kim Figlar-Barnes - *WDFW*  Kirsten Harma - *LE Coordinator*  Mack Hunter *- Grays Harbor Conserv. Dist.*  Mara Healey - *Thurston County Conserv Dist*  Mara Zimmerman - Coast Salmon Part/Fdn  Ned Pittman - *Coast Salmon Part/Fdn*  Olivia Williams - *USFWS*  Tara Livingood-Schott - *Chehalis Tribe*  Victoria Knorr - *WDFW* |

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1. **Welcome & Introductions** (9:00)
2. **Minutes – August** (9:10)
3. **Organizational Business** (9:15)
   1. **Outreach Update** (Kathy, others)

Kathy shared that after last month’s meeting, a group of HWG members visited Sabra Noyes’ home and prairie restoration property. The group toured and learned from Sabra, and also participated in an activity discussing one another’s motivation for participating in the conservation work sector. Kirsten Harma discussed the possibility of a similar future field trip and discussion events, and the group discussed the spring as a good time for this.

Second, Kathy shared a presentation highlighting her participation at the Onalaska Apple Harvest Festival. She stated that it was very well attended, and that attendees were very interested in the groundwater model, the basin map, and various topics of conversation with her, with WDFW, and with the Lewis Conservation District. Participants were also able to handle a Chinook salmon carcass, and learn about taking biological samples.

Kathy also noted that Katie and Daron, new WDFW biologist were in attendance, as well.

Finally, Kathy shared that the Return of the Salmon event will be taking place on October 26th, with Lauren Bauernschmidt at Schaefer State Park from 10 to 12.

Alex Bradberry shared an update about the Coast Salmon Partnership strong salmon future sign program. She shared information about their project map (<https://www.coastsalmonpartnership.org/current-initiatives/strong-salmon-future/>), and shared also that 14 signs have been installed, with two more in the works.

* 1. **Cloquallum PWR Update**

John Stepanek provided an update on the Cloquallum Pilot Watershed. He shared a map of the watershed, and explained that the group has moved to more technical work, identifying the top 20% locations for wood placement and for riparian restoration. He shared a draft map of this identification with the group. Next steps will involve discussing additional planned restoration actions, including barriers for correction. He shared that the group is looking to be on track to have the plan complete by Spring 2025.

* 1. **HWG Citizen Members – Close Nomination & Vote**

As a quorum was not present, so Kirsten led a discussion on nominations, but an election was not possible. She shared that Martin McCallum’s position is not up for reconsideration at this point, and that Bob Russell and Key McMurray, who are up for reelection, are interested in continuing. Sarah Watkins, however, will be unable to continue in her citizen position, and her Grays Harbor seat is open. Kirsten opened the discussion of potential names to fill this position, offering Ron Figlar-Barnes, Lonnie, and Dick Stone as possibilities. Other names suggested include: Terry Willis, Matt Meyer, and Sam Howell.

Kirsten also noted that another seat that is vacant is a representative from area Stream Teams.

* 1. **HWG Chair and Vice Chair – Close Nomination & Vote**

In absence of a quorum, this vote was postponed to November’s meeting. Key McMurray and Ben Amidon are both interested in continuing in their roles as vice-chair and chair, respectively.

* 1. **Annual Work Plan**

Kirsten shared a draft of the coming year’s annual work plan, which the group reviewed together.

She highlighted that the main tasks the entity and Kirsten are responsible for are:

Running the SRFB grant round; application workshop facilitation; project site tours; processing applications; ranking projects; and interacting with SRFB and RCO.  
  
New possibilities in the coming year Kirsten noted include:

Climate resilience tool assistance; training on detailed project budgets; hosting completed project site tours; integrating climate resilience to local review team work; and stronger integration of Grays Harbor College students in site visits.

A number of members pointed out that a large number of students participating in the site reviews is logistically challenging and is not ideal for all landowners. Further, they noted that a different level of participation might be a better fit for student learning, as well. Kirsten will reach out to the Grays Harbor contact and discuss possibilities for this opportunity.

Kirsten then led the group through the rest of the plan. Highlights on new considerations from this conversation include new integration of the Salmon Recovery Portal; new activities with the Grays Harbor College; and facilitating salmon viewing opportunities.

Kirsten will send out this plan with the discussed new elements for review, and approval of the plan will be voted on in November.

1. **Salmon Recovery Funding Board** 
   1. **SRFB Updates:**

Kirsten provided a short update, as Alice Rubin was not in attendance. She highlighted the grant manger presentations, shared that all projects on the Chehalis Basin’s SRFB list were approved, and that contracts are underway.

1. **Regional Monitoring**

Mara Zimmerman provided a briefing on a regional monitoring grant program being set-up by the SRFB. This new grant will only fund monitoring studies. It will be a statewide competition, and each Regional organization across the state will be invited to submit projects. About one million dollars is available statewide, and so these will be more modest project proposals. The coast region will be asking about preferred pathway: to identify already-formed monitoring projects for submission in 2025’s grant round; or secondly to find types of monitoring that will meet regional priorities. In the longer term, the regional group will put together a broad, strategic plan to develop monitoring across the four lead entities of the coast region in a way that is strategic about the limited funding available statewide.

The 2025 SRFB grant will fund three types of monitoring studies:

* identifying bottlenecks for fish survival;
* monitoring studies that identify limiting factors; and
* studies focused on determining project effectiveness.

Going forward, the CSP will be seeking input from its four constituent entities in the work of forming a region-wide, technically rigorous strategic plan for leveraging these limited statewide funds to address coast-wide information gaps.

Already in-process monitoring projects that Mara is aware of include a study on fish passage barrier project effectiveness, as well as one studying the effectiveness of remote site incubation projects.

Plan for more conversation about this in coming meetings.

1. **WDFW Statewide Fish Barrier Prioritization** – **CBLE Comment letter**

Kirsten sought input from the group on a letter being put forward by the LE commenting on the upcoming WDFW statewide fish barrier prioritization. Mara explained that the WDFW, in response to a legislative requirement to develop a statewide prioritization of fish barriers. This needs to give priority to listed species, as well as species and stocks that are of concern because they are limiting with respect to the Pacific Salmon Treaty or the Coast Pacific Marine Fishery Council’s coastal fisheries planning. This prioritization will be used to rank projects for funding sources like the FBRB in the future. It is not clear how it is anticipated to be used in processes like SRFB or WCRRI. Many elements of this are not yet defined, but groups like our entity will be asked to use this prioritization in the future when seeking state funds. As such, comments are being sought in the development of this strategy.

As of now, the state is proposing a two-tiered strategy: this would start with an algorithm-driven optimization of existing barrier information, and then this optimized information could be developed regionally into locally relevant scoring and ranking. The way in which this regionalization of that information will occur has not been fully determined, either.

Briefly, Kirsten summarized points of concern addressed in the proposed LE letter:

As a result of the gap in the connection between what the state is doing and how LEs will be using it, it is a concern that the LEs maintain autonomy in the prioritization of our barriers through that process - many factors go into local ranking of barriers that are not possible at a statewide level. This integration of such a statewide prioritization will also require a lot of staff-time and funding and may well present a burden to local entities. Further, as local groups have developed their funding processes, sponsors and projects have developed in response to those processes - requiring these processes to be replaced by a statewide prioritization for acquisition of state funds would be very disruptive. Finally, she noted that such a prioritization shouldn’t be updated too frequently, as the process of developing, ranking and funding projects is not a nimble process.

Brett DeMond also expressed the concern that the statewide model would strongly incorporate listed species and contribution to orca survival. Such a structure could cause basins like the Chehalis to lose funding, as the Chehalis does not have listed species. She shared that when she has expressed this concern, it has been offered that the intention of this prioritization is to establish a stronger case for more funding from the legislature, as opposed to making projects compete differently for existing funding. Brett expressed concern about that explanation, and she also emphasized that coastal tribal fisheries may be similarly harmed by this ranking. She emphasized that it just seems logistically difficult to deploy this ranking system in a way that accomplishes its stated goals without putting basins at a disadvantage if they do not have listed species or potential for high orca benefit.

As there is no quorum to vote on the letter and this deadline is quickly approaching, Kirsten shared that she would plan to make edits based on the day’s discussion and send it out in the coming week.

1. **WSDOT – Stormwater Retrofits**

Kirsten shared that 6 months ago at a Washington Salmon Coalition meeting, the WSDOT solicited input from state entities on prioritizing stormwater retrofit projects. They currently don’t have funding, but are seeking input on where to put funding as it develops. Kirsten noted that the Chehalis LE's focus on the Newaukum might provide a strong case for funding from this potential source, as the Newaukum passes directly under I-5, low in its basin. Work Group members suggested adding priority focus on the Scatter Creek crossing under I5, Salzer Creek and the Skookumchuck where it passes directly under I-5 as well.

1. **Our Group’s Name!**

Kirsten led a discussion on a new name for the Chehalis LE. There is not a quorum present, but had Kirsten sought votes from three voting members prior to the meeting - as such, this was voted on at the present meeting.

She shared that at the previous meeting, there was agreement on adding both *Salmon* and *Habitat*, to the name, but there was not agreement on whether or not to include *Recovery*, or whether group will be described as a Collaborative or a Coalition. The goal is to have a name that is relatable and widely understandable by the public, in contrast to the term *Lead Entity*.

After a discussion on word order, the group voted and decided to leave out the term *recovery*, and to describe the group as a *collaborative*. As a result, the group landed on the ***Chehalis Basin Collaborative for Salmon Habitat (CBCFSH)***, with “Lead Entity” implied at the end, and included for official purposes.

1. **Associated Program Updates** 
   1. **Coast Salmon Partnership**

Ned Pittman shared an update from the Coast Salmon Partnership, as follows:

1. Thursday October 10th, an online workshop will be held 1-3PM on the Ellsworth Creek wood placement experiment. 2. The next implementation committee will meet on October 22nd, and discuss the monitoring strategy and the alignment of shoreline strategies with the objectives of the regional plan. 3. The next partnership board meeting is Thursday October 24. Topics will include: discussion of the monitoring strategy, statewide fish passage strategy, and statewide riparian strategy, as well as election of the board chair’s next two-year term.

* 1. **Fish Barrier Removal Board**

Kirsten shared that the FBRB has come out with their ranked list. Three projects in the Chehalis might be funded, though one of the three is ranked pretty low. These projects are Van Ornum at Bunker Creek (ranked 10), Point Hill Creek at Wildwood (ranked 43), and Camp Creek at Monte-Elma (ranked 44).

* 1. **Aquatic Species Restoration Plan**

Drew Mealor shared that the ASRP has an RIT meeting the next week, where projects will be reviewed. They will also discuss the new ASRP funding guidance that is resulting from the administrative move from RCO to Ecology. This guidance will join scattered sources of guidance into a single, integrated document. The ASRP steering committee, meeting next week, will also discuss this manual. $13 million is yet to be obligated this year, and $9 million in projects are currently in the pipeline. There are further projects in development, and it looks likely that all funding will be obligated this year. Drew also shared a link to the ASRP’s funding dashboard here: <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=9003397fb6e94340b65fbc6e46bb3f1b>

Jenny Lewis then shared an update on a recent legislative tour put on by the Office of the Chehalis Basin (OCB). She shared that it was highlighted by article in the Chronicle, and then described the tour, which touched on a wide variety of ASRP-funded projects in the community. <https://www.chronline.com/stories/office-of-chehalis-basin-to-request-80-million-from-legislature,362722>

Jenny also emphasized the help that has been provided by the development of the funding guidance document described by Drew above.

Additionally, she shared that she has received one application for the Erosion Management Program, and that this funding will be open through the end of January. Finally, she shared she is working to manage the OCB’s Water Smart Application. There will be two elements to the proposal: one will be planning and design in the Black River region, and the other will be construction-ready projects focused in the Humptulips.

Mara Healy shared an update on the River Bend Ranch project, stating that construction was very successful and is complete. She shared that planting and fencing are coming up, and that this has been a good project.

Ben Amidon also shared that the tribe has removed 18 acres of blackberry at Harris Creek, putting in a 150’ buffer, which is also being planted. Upstream and on the east side of the creek, a 300’ buffer will also be going in this winter.

* 1. **Other - Coal Creek Project Update**

Bob Russell briefed the group on the Coal Creek project. He and others briefed the City of Chehalis two weeks prior, and the city council is very supportive, and have signed a letter of support. They have also met with the OCB, who were supportive as well. The day following this meeting, Bob will be addressing the Lewis County Commissioners, as well. Next steps are looking for Phase 1 funding, and the project is rolling along well.

1. **Closing** – (12:00)