

ISLAND UNIT ADVISORY GROUP

Meeting Summary

Friday November 1st, 2019 • 1:00 to 3:30 pm

Padilla Bay Interpretive Center
10441 Bayview Edison Rd
Mt Vernon, WA 98273

Participants

Advisory Group Members

Rick Billieu
Richard Brocksmith
Reb Broker
Bob Cooper
Roger Goodan
Jed Holmes
James Ono
Jeff Osmundson
Amber Parmenter
Brandon Roozen
Darrell Tawes

WDFW Staff

Alan Myers
Jenny Baker
Seth Ballhorn
Loren Brokaw
Belinda Rotton
Bob Warinner

Facilitators

Elizabeth McManus
Andy Chinn

Ex Officio Members

Janet Curran, NOAA
Rick Hartson, Upper Skagit Tribe
Laurel Jennings, NOAA
Erin Murray, PSP
Karina Siliverstova, Skagit County Public
Works
Jenna Friebel, Skagit Drainage and Irrigation
Districts Consortium
Mike See, Skagit County Public Works

Members Not in Attendance

Advisory Group Members

Greg Green

John Stein

Ex Officio Members

Rich Carlson, USFWS

Scott Schuyler, Upper Skagit Tribe

Greg Hood, Swinomish Tribe/Skagit River System Cooperative

Welcome and Introductions

Meeting participants introduced themselves and briefly provided a few remarks on their background and interest in participating on the Advisory Group.

Captain Myers, North Puget Sound Acting Regional Director (Region 4), welcomed meeting participants and thanked them for taking the time to be on the Advisory Group. Captain Myers noted that this type of Advisory Group brings together all the interests WDFW needs to consider, and that WDFW is balancing many needs in an attempt to find the best pathway forward.

Background and Goals, and Reasons for the Advisory Group

Jenny Baker from WDFW provided a presentation that covered WDFW's mission and responsibilities, including landscape-scale considerations such as waterfowl conservation, requirements related to ESA-listed species such as Chinook salmon and Orca, the desires of recreationists and local values such as agriculture. The presentation described WDFW's interest in balancing these landscape scale needs with site-scale issues and obligations related to funding and aging infrastructure, which is important at Island Unit because of dike erosion and loss of tidegate functionality.

The presentation covered the scope of the Island Unit effort, which involves an alternatives analysis for management scenarios at the Island Unit, and criteria by which the alternatives can be compared. As part of this effort, WDFW hired a third-party facilitator (Ross Strategic) to engage stakeholders and the public to provide input regarding the issues and considerations used to develop and select a preferred alternative

Jenny reviewed the Advisory Group objectives and some of the initial consideration that WDFW used to identify draft alternatives. Jenny noted that detailed engineering solutions are not part of the analysis at this stage. The four draft alternatives identified by WDFW are:

1. No restoration (would require replacing both tidegates)
2. Maintain enhanced winter waterfowl forage on West Island, restore East Island
3. Restore southern portion of each island, keep northern portions as enhanced winter waterfowl forage
4. Full restoration of tides and river to both islands

Following the presentation, meeting participants engaged in a facilitated discussion. Key points raised during this discussion included:

- Future work will require funding, and WDFW's budget situation is messy right now. Are there additional funds for these projects?
 - *WDFW noted there is currently no funding for any of the alternatives; an action must first be identified before funding is sought.*
- How much does it currently cost WDFW to operate Island Unit? Where does that funding come from, and what happens to it if Island Unit is restored?
 - *WDFW noted this will be determined as part of the process.*
- Is WDFW considering Milltown Island? It was "restored" but poorly restored and is almost 100 acres. Could Milltown Island be properly restored?
- The north end of the East Island is privately owned. Do we have to account for those landowners?
 - *WDFW noted that these properties are not part of the diking system on the Island Unit and therefore are not expected to be negatively impacted by a potential project that alters dikes. Also, removing dikes could reduce flood water height.*
- The levees at Island Unit were moved back in 2000 for fish restoration, and Headquarters Unit also was restored to estuary. Does the state have any scientific data that shows if that's working or helping? Or that more Chinook are returning as a result?
 - *WDFW noted that the Agency is generally seeing indications that restorations are having a positive impact on fish. The link to returning adults is harder to address given the myriad challenges fish encounter between using the estuary and returning as adults. This topic will be covered in more detail as part of the process.*
- What are the recurring costs of existing restorations (at Headquarters Unit, Deepwater Slough, etc.)?
- Is restoring lands a smart use of money or is it better to spend money at "off the beach" things. In other words, if this project costs \$10 million, should that be spent on something else? What is the return on investment?
- Many of the questions are similar to those asked during the Skagit Hydrodynamic Model Project (SHDM Project) initiated by the Farms, Fish, and Flood Initiative (3FI). Waterfowl interests were not part of that conversation. This is a potential future agenda item.

- Benefits and drawbacks to flooding interests seems like something that needs to be included in the alternatives analysis.

Draft Advisory Group Charter and Ground Rules

Elizabeth reviewed the draft Advisory Group charter and ground rules, noting that both documents are standard for these types of groups. There were no questions or comments from Advisory Group members on either document. Both documents were accepted as final by the Advisory Group and will be archived for future reference as needed.

Themes from Initial Conversations

Andy reviewed a thematic summary of key points from initial interviews with Advisory Group applicants, noting that the themes represent the opinions and perspectives of interviewees and do not represent the opinions of all interested stakeholders, WDFW, or other state and federal agencies. The six key themes were:

- Waterfowlers that were interviewed value the Island Unit as it is currently managed
- In addition to habitat there are a variety of factors that combine to affect salmon recovery in the Skagit Basin
- Agricultural stakeholders in the Skagit Area are committed to meeting salmon recovery goals
- Salmon recovery advocates are closely connected to the science around the importance of Puget Sound estuaries to Chinook recovery
- The entire Skagit Wildlife Area would benefit from a comprehensive plan
- WDFW should strive for complete openness and transparency

Meeting participants noted that some opinions laid out in the interview themes contradicted other opinions, which indicated the need to provide further information to the group (see next section); and do so in a clear, concise manner.

Draft Calendar, Meeting Outline, List of Information Requests

Meeting participants reviewed the draft calendar and meeting outline, which provides a high-level view of the Advisory Group's activities over the next 8 to 10 months. The schedule is draft and WDFW staff noted that meeting topics need to be edited. For instance feedback on the alternatives is needed now so that alternatives can be finalized. Participants also commented on some of the information that would be useful to hear about, as they move forward with discussions. An initial list of information requests was provided to meeting participants at the

meeting; this list was developed based on initial interviews with Advisory Group applicants.

Other suggested information requests discussed during the meeting included:

- Is there any unique habitat at Island Unit that would be displaced under the full restoration scenario?
- Is there more detailed information on forecasted positive and negative impacts to fish and waterfowl under each management alternative?
- How have hunting opportunities changed over the past several years in the North Puget Sound region?
- What is the impact on hunting of changing the Island Unit from current status to tidal estuary?

Given the information requests, participants suggested convening a day-long workshop with subject matter experts. An alternative or complementary suggestion was to set up a series of educational webinars, also using subject matter experts, to address some of the information requests.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

During the wrap up session, Advisory Group participants reviewed next steps:

- WDFW staff noted that they are available to meet with groups affiliated with Advisory Group members.
- The facilitation team and WDFW will review and update the list of information requests and consider what materials are appropriate to circulate with Advisory Group members, and what would be more appropriate for in-depth conversations (during a longer workshop or webinar, for example).
- The facilitation team and WDFW will consider the most convenient approach to circulating information with the Advisory Group.

WDFW and the facilitators thanked meeting participants and adjourned the meeting.