

ISLAND UNIT ADVISORY GROUP

Meeting Summary

Monday October 26th, 2020 • 1:00 to 3:00 pm

Virtual Meeting

Participants

Advisory Group Stakeholder Members

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

WDFW Staff

Jenny Baker
Seth Ballhorn
Loren Brokaw
Belinda Rotton
Bob Warinner

Facilitators

Elizabeth McManus
Andy Chinn

Advisory Group Ex Officio Members

Greg Hood, Skagit River System Cooperative
Karina Siliverstova, Skagit County Public Works
Jenna Friebel, Skagit Drainage and Irrigation
Districts Consortium
Laurel Jennings, NOAA
Scott Schuyler, Upper Skagit Tribe

Results of Applying the Criteria to Management Options

WDFW staff provided a [presentation](#) on the Island Unit alternative analysis steps to-date, changes in the criteria since June, the summary rating system, and the analysis and summary ratings for each alternative and criterion. The presentation covered the following categories of criteria:

- WDFW policies
- WDFW obligations and agreements
- Costs and funding
- Fish and wildlife needs
- Community interests
- Climate Change Resilience

During the presentation, Advisory Group members asked clarifying questions. WDFW staff responded to questions when possible and compiled additional questions to be answered offline or during the 11/4 Advisory Group meeting. WDFW provided more detailed responses to the Advisory Group via email on 10/28; a copy of these responses are included in Appendix A of this summary.

Advisory Group Discussion – Cost Estimates

Advisory Group members provided the following comments and questions (answers to questions shown in italics):

- Why is Alternative 1 under WDFW policy 5003 (salmon and steelhead initiative) rated as negative?
 - *If WDFW replaces infrastructure at Island Unit the Agency would be committing to continue operating Island Unit as is and not restoring habitat for salmon and steelhead for some period of time, which is why WDFW rated this as negative.*
- What is included in the \$6.5 million estimated cost for Alternative 1? The impact of sea level rise on the levees is not known because the speed of sea level rise and associated impacts are unknown.
 - *An appendix to the analysis includes a table of construction costs. For any alternative that has remaining levees, sea level rise must be accounted for. Tidegates are also included and the cost estimates are based on other tidegate replacements that have occurred in the area during the last two years. The costs also include design, permitting, planting and inspections. There are also costs associated with mitigation for continued loss of estuary habitat.*
- WDFW is not spending any money on the tidegates now nor has the agency spent money on the tidegates for the past ten years.
 - *WDFW recognizes that the tidegates could fail, and if they fail WDFW will not be able to produce enhanced and managed waterfowl forage and the site will not be fully functional estuary. See Appendix A in the alternatives analysis report for additional details.*
- Are operations and maintenance costs included in the current costs for Alternative 1?
 - *Yes, they are included (approx. \$41,000 per year).*
- Does full restoration only include levee removal? Why is it more expensive than building a setback levee?
 - *See construction cost appendix.*

Advisory Group Discussion – Fish and Wildlife

Advisory Group members provided the following comments and questions (answers to questions shown in italics):

- Does WDFW's data indicate that there's more forage value in the estuary than on agricultural lands? There seems to be a prevalence of shorebirds using agricultural lands on the Skagit Delta.
- Can WDFW clarify landscape-scale impacts to waterfowl, and their forage needs?
 - *There is no predicted negative impact to waterfowl at a population scale from a change in management at Island Unit. There is greater uncertainty associated with crop types and availability of food for waterfowl when we shift from producing concentrated food resources for waterfowl on public land and rely more on food resources that are available on private lands.*

- WDFW should reach out to the WSU Skagit Extension Office for information on agricultural trends, which show a steady state of crop rotations and row crops for waterfowl forage.
- Is funding for farmed forage originating from a more or less secure source?
 - *WDFW has historically paid for farmed forage work through program-generated income such as agricultural land leases and use of non-Pittman-Robertson funding.*

Advisory Group Discussion – Community Interests and Climate Resilience

Advisory Group members provided the following comments and questions (answers to questions shown in italics):

- It appears that there is significant uncertainty around sportfishing and how the project will affect salmon returns, how is that accounted?
 - *The modeling that is used to forecast adult fish considers the number of fish produced, and more estuary results in higher smolt survival rates, which results in greater fishing opportunities.*
- How are hunting opportunities on the landscape being addressed generally? I can appreciate that losing historic sites is not desirable but curious about things like private land hunting throughout the greater Skagit Delta.
 - *WDFW developed an inventory of habitats provided by state lands through wildlife areas and through the private lands access program. The inventory compares the status in the year 2000 through 2016 and is included as an appendix in the report. The general conclusion was that WDFW continues to provide a broad portfolio of hunting opportunities, except for an overall decline in enhanced forage acreage within Skagit County. WDFW does not have information on management and acreages for private hunt clubs.*
- Communication with the farm community could possibly lead to improvements in the private lands program. If possible, the agricultural community could enhance forage opportunities in order to try to meet waterfowlers' needs.
- If possible, it would be helpful to see updated data on the private lands access program since 2016.

Advisory Group Discussion – Overarching Comments and Questions

- It might be useful to present the pros and cons between the site-scale evaluation and the greater Skagit Delta perspective.
- The criteria application suggests that Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 are equal but that is probably not the case. If so, the rating system may be too coarse.
- Is WDFW using a weighted rating system or are all criteria equal in value?
 - *WDFW is not weighting criteria. When the preferred alternative is selected the rationale will be provided.*
- A purely quantitative approach would be preferred and WDFW is using a qualitative approach, which is necessary. WDFW should think about how the information on the criteria is presented.
- Regarding the climate change resilience criteria, some of the factors could be confounding. For example, how the alternatives affect upstream water surface elevation is probably different from how the options support upstream habitats as sea level rises. In other words, it could be useful to differentiate climate change categories, so they are not confounding.
- What is the timing of the decision on a preferred alternative, and how will the Advisory Group be notified?

Next Steps

- WDFW will consider any questions not answered immediately during the meeting and will follow up either via email or during the 11/4 meeting.
- WDFW will circulate details on the 12/2 virtual public meeting. Advisory Group members are encouraged to participate and reach out to their networks to participate.