



## Brian Abbott Fish Barrier Removal Board – April 2025 Meeting Summary

**Date:** April 15, 2025

**Time:** 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

**Location:** Virtual Meeting

### Summary: Formal Actions / Decisions

Board Decisions:	Formal Action
March 2025 Meeting Notes	Approved
Padden Cr at 12th St Fish Passage Improvement	Approved
Padden Cr at 14th St Fish Passage Improvement	Approved
Johnson Creek Triple Culverts	Approved

### Summary: Follow-up Items and Next Steps

Item	Follow-up
<b>Fish Passage Strategy – Optimization Model Development</b>	WDFW staff will complete pilot study on the Stillaguamish watershed and share the results with the Board for consideration. The Board will help inform future analysis of additional watersheds.
<b>Policy Subcommittee Update: Minimum QHA Score</b>	Staff will incorporate the Board’s feedback into the Manual 22 update, including defining the process for projects that fall below the minimum score, and present it to the Policy Subcommittee for discussion and review. The final decision on the Manual 22 update will be made by the Board in August.
<b>Funding Status Updates (Ongoing)</b>	RCO staff will continue to work with project sponsors on the 23-25 to award funding based on the funds made available by the CCA.
<b>2027-2029 Grant Round (Long-term)</b>	The Board will discuss updates to the next grant round RFP based on topics identified by the Board and staff.

### Welcome/Introductions/Agenda Review:

Triangle Associates (Triangle) facilitator, Joy Juelson, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Chair Thomas Jameson, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), welcomed attendees to the virtual meeting.

Kate Galambos, Triangle, facilitated introductions with Board members and staff. A quorum was present.

## Old Business:

Joy reviewed the summary notes from the March 18th, 2025, meeting and highlighted decisions and action items.

### ***Decision: Approval of March 18 Meeting Summary***

Erik Neatherlin, WA Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) made a motion to approve the March meeting summary. Chair Jameson seconded the motion. With no objections, the March meeting summary was approved

## Public Comment:

*Chambers-Creek Watershed Council: Could a discussion be added to the Brian Abbott meeting about creating a project to partially lower the dam at Chambers Creek. It is a fish passage problem and is keeping sediment from flowing to Puget Sound. The Pierce County plan is to build a new bridge over the next 6 years and then work on the dam removal. I believe this would be a terrible waste of time when a partial solution could be achieved much sooner.*

**Path Forward:** Kaylee Kautz, WDFW, will reach out to the Council to understand more about the inquiry and discuss the Board process for projects.

## **Policy Subcommittee Recommendation: Next Steps for Sponsors Below 300 Quality Habitat Assessment (QHA) Score -Kaylee Kautz, WDFW; Policy Subcommittee**

*The purpose of Kaylee's presentation was to provide an update to the Board and request direction; no formal Board decision was required at this time.*

Joy framed the conversation by providing a recap of the Board's discussion at the March 18<sup>th</sup> meeting. At the March meeting, Kaylee provided an overview of the Board's request of the Policy Subcommittee to conduct a review of eligibility requirements to ensure the Board is funding the most beneficial projects for fish. The Board was supportive of the staff's recommendation to enact a minimum Quality Habitat Assessment (QHA) score requirement of 300. The Board requested the Policy Subcommittee reconvene to discuss the process for projects that do not meet the 300 QHA score threshold, noting that the Board is supportive of being flexible.

Based on the Board's feedback at the last meeting, the Policy Subcommittee met on April 2 to clarify the process for projects that do not meet the 300 QHA score. Kaylee presented the Policy Subcommittee's recommendation to the Board, which included:

1. Maintain the Board's discretion to determine project eligibility
2. Update Manual 22 for the 27-29 biennium grant round to include:
  - a. A minimum score of 300; along with
  - b. A description of the QHA score
  - c. Criteria for appealing to the FBRB Policy Subcommittee, should a project fail to meet minimum requirement, including:
    - i. Biological benefit of the site

- ii. Project specific considerations (e.g. Key barrier, coordination with other work, timeline)

**Proposed Process:**

3. Policy Subcommittee will convene to review and evaluate projects that fail to meet 300 QHA requirement
4. Project Sponsors will be invited to present and justify their projects.
5. Policy Subcommittee will make recommendations to the Board
6. Board will make the final decision on whether to waive the 300 QHA minimum score requirement

**Board Discussion:**

Board members expressed general support and gratitude to the Policy Subcommittee for their work developing this process. Key questions and reflections included:

- Biological benefit is the objective, while “project specific considerations” are subjective. Will these projects be reviewed on a case-by-case basis?
- This proposal is a way to confirm that the best projects for fish are being approved and will help us understand the projects better moving forward.
- This process helps us ensure we are using public dollars responsibly and efficiently.

***Path(s) Forward:***

- The Board supports the recommended process for projects scoring below 300 QHA.
- Staff will incorporate the Board’s feedback into the Manual 22 update.
- The **final decision** on the Manual 22 update will be made by the Board in **August**.

**Update: Relevant Legislative Topics – Chair Jameson, WDFW; Board Members**

**April 19 Fish Passage Work Session with the Local Government Committee**

Axel Swanson, WA Association of Counties; Carl Schroeder, WA Association of Cities; and Chair Jameson, WDFW, met with the Local Government Committee on April 19, 2025, for a Fish Passage Work Session. The briefing began with a general overview of fish passage and associated recovery goals.

Axel explained that counties partner with WDFW to conduct inventory assessments of culverts, which will inform the state’s priorities. Carl noted that historically cities have focused their inventory assessments within the Injunction Case Area. They highlighted several fish passage barrier correction projects and noted how work is accomplished through local coordination of partners.

Axel, Carl, and Chair Jameson also noted that the Committee members were unable to answer questions related to funding.

**Senate Bill 5804**

Carl provided an update to the Board on Senate Bill 5804, which was introduced by the Senate as a method to fund culvert corrections and work toward the 2030 federal injunction obligation. The bill proposes bonding up to \$5 billion over 15 years to pay for barrier correction projects. The bonds would be backed by redirecting revenue from the existing state tax on electric utilities, which typically goes toward grants and loans for local public works departments.

Carl noted that the Association of Cities has expressed concerns about the bill due to the redirection of funds from local governments and that they are tracking it closely.

## **Budget Update**

Chair Jameson provided an update on the status of the 25-27 legislative budget. The House and Senate have yet to reconcile the differences in their two budgets and the legislative session is expected to go long in order to finalize the budget.

He noted that the proposed House budget includes \$400,000 to fund WDFW's Statewide Fish Passage Prioritization Strategy work. These funds could support filling the Fish Passage Strategist position at WDFW and assist in updating the state hydrologic stream layer to improve data accuracy. The proposed Senate budget does not currently include funding for the Strategy.

**Path Forward:** Legislative session is scheduled to end on Sunday, April 27, pending budget approval. Chair Jameson will provide an update at the May Board meeting on the status of WDFW's \$400,000 funding request.

## **Cost Increase Requests, John Foltz, RCO**

John Foltz, RCO, provided an overview of three cost increase requests along with the Cost Increase Subcommittee recommendations. The Subcommittee met on April 9<sup>th</sup> to discuss the following requests. John noted that the Board has sufficient funding available to approve all three cost increase requests.

- 21-1418 Padden Cr at 14th St Fish Passage Improvement
  - Sponsor: City of Bellingham
  - Requested Cost Increase: \$1,393,320
  - Ranked #28 on the 23-25 project list
  - High benefit for multiple salmon species
  - Sponsor prioritized downstream projects on Padden Creek
  - Cost increase due to Technical Review Team (TRT) comments on design to modify infrastructure to accommodate fish passage

**Subcommittee Recommendation:** Approve \$1,393,320 Cost Increase Request for 21-1418 Padden Cr at 14th St Fish Passage Improvement project.

- 21-1419 Padden Cr at 12th St Fish Passage Improvement
  - Sponsor: City of Bellingham
  - Requested Cost Increase: \$1,022,244
  - Ranked #33, listed as an alternate, on the 23-25 project list
  - Similar project and cost increase request to the Padden Creek at 14<sup>th</sup> St. (above)

**Subcommittee Recommendation:** Approve \$1,022,244 Cost Increase Request for 21-1419 Padden Cr at 12th St Fish Passage Improvement project.

- 22-1084 Johnson Creek Triple Culverts
  - Sponsor: North Olympic Salmon Coalition
  - Requested Cost Increase: \$205,141
  - Ranked #3 on the 21-23 project list
  - 21-23 funded project
  - The sponsor requested a cost increase about one year ago from the Board. The Board did not have available funding at the time. The Board now has available funding due to Returned Funds.

**Subcommittee Recommendation:** Approve the cost increase request using all remaining funds from the 21-23 project list.

Discussion of the Three Cost Increase Requests:

- Board members noted that the Padden Creek projects are part of a larger effort to restore one of the major estuaries in Bellingham.
- Craig Mueller, City of Bellingham, thanked the Board for their continued support of barrier correction projects in Bellingham.

#### **Motion and Decision**

Chair Jameson made a motion to approve all three cost increase requests as presented on screen for:

- 21-1418 Padden Creek at 14th Street
- 21-1419 Padden Creek at 12th Street
- 22-1084 Johnson Creek Triple Culverts

Susan Eugenis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with no objections.

**Decision:** *Approve all three cost increase requests for the 21-1418 Padden Cr at 14th St Fish Passage Improvement, 21-1419 Padden Cr at 12th St Fish Passage Improvement, and 22-1084 Johnson Creek Triple Culverts.*

#### **Fish Passage Strategy Update, Chair Jameson, WDFW**

Chairman Jameson provided a brief update on the status of the Fish Passage Strategy:

- WDFW is awaiting the status of the Decision Support Package funding request submitted by Jane in November. Based on the status of funding, WDFW will consider filling the Fish Passage Strategist position.
- WDFW staff have been working with a part-time GIS contractor to run the optimization model on a pilot watershed (potentially the Stillaguamish River watershed). The pilot results revealed inaccuracies in the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD) layer, leading to inaccuracies in the model output.
- GIS staff will need to correct the NHD layer on a watershed-by-watershed basis, before running the optimization model. Chair Jameson recommended the Board consider which watersheds should be run.

- o Erik noted that this proposed path forward may sound like a de facto prioritization process, which is not aligned with the Board's original understanding would be the process for the optimization model. Erik recommended the Board engage Tribes and recovery Regions to provide input on priority watersheds.
- o Carl emphasized the importance of the Board demonstrating the optimization model's success to the legislature to maintain support and funding. He requested clarification on the following information:
  - What are the next steps following completion of the pilot study on the Stillaguamish?
  - What information can be shared with the legislature about the status of this effort?
  - What is the Strategy's capacity of this Strategy serve as a key part of the state's approach to statewide barrier corrections?

***Path Forward:*** WDFW staff will continue to update the Board on the run of the optimization model.

**Next Meeting:** The next FBRB meeting is scheduled for May 20<sup>th</sup>, to be held virtually.

**Adjourn:** The meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

## ATTENDANCE

### Board Members/Alternates:

April Margane, WSDOT	Axel Swanson, WA Association of Counties
Carl Schroder, WA Association of Cities	Kaylee Kautz, WDFW
Erik Neatherlin, GSRO	Jeannie Abbott, GSRO
Karen Zirkle, WA DNR	Susan Eugenis, WA Association of Counties
Tom Jameson, WDFW	Susan Kanzler, WSDOT

### WDFW, RCO Staff and Triangle Facilitation Team:

Molly Borgaard, WDFW	Daniel Coffman, WDFW
Casey Costello, WDFW	Alissa Ferrell, RCO
Kate Galambos, Triangle Associates	Joel Ingram, WDFW
Joy Juelson, Triangle Associates	Timothy Young, WDFW
Josh Lambert, RCO	Mike Malon, WDFW
Danny Proctor, WDFW	Christy Rains, RCO
Alice Rubin, RCO	Gabrielle Stilwater, WDFW

### Others observing:

Rachel Ainslie	Analiese Burns
Annalise Hill	Ashe McFarland
Cheryl Baumann	Craig Mueller
Tracy Gilson	Don Gourlie
Daniel Howe	Erin Drumm
Kevin Long	Sara Brooke Benjamin
Paul Simmerly	