



Surface Water Subcommittee Meeting

March 21, 2024

Committee Members in Attendance: Lynn Bahrych, Jenny DeGroot, Bob Eagan, Vicki Heater, Ann Jarrell, Judy Meyer, Melissa Rohde, Kimbal Sundberg

Ex-officio, County support staff, and members of public: Kendra Smith, Cindy Wolf

9:06 AM Convene meeting

Kimbal Sundberg

The bulk of this meeting will be about the comp plan. Welcome to the Surface Water subcommittee and comp water planning joint meeting. We're working to combine these meetings as much as possible.

9:08 AM Topics for Discussion

• Fishtrap Creek Flow Update

Kendra Smith

We didn't connect yet with the person who was going to provide the update there

• First Flush Report

Krista Davis

Krista is out today, can't report at this meeting

• SRFB Riparian Funding Update

Kendra Smith

We've submitted a proposal for Lower Zylstra Lake area to extend riparian all along San Juan Valley Creek. We got some good feedback from TAG on that. We also received an Ecology grant from the ESRP program for \$270K to continue to advance riparian work throughout that corridor with SJPT and Land Bank. At some point hope to remove that lower dam. The goal is to recognize continuing warming trends, need to move that system from a nutrient-rich algal producing open water system into something else.

Kim: it would be great to have a field trip out there, maybe in fall, to see the progress.

Lynn: I'm interested in that, is the problem lack of flow?

Kendra: yes, it's also a heat sink, built on the surface of prairie. Hope we can facilitate more flow, preserve for wildlife and migrating waterfowl, shade some of it if we can get cottonwood growing, maybe beaver.

We're understaffed in ability to find contractors to come do this work. Only small access to ICC crews.

- Ann, Melissa, and Judy are all also interested in the False Bay field trip

Lynn: ICC is asking the community foundation for \$15K to support and expand conservation crews

Jenny: it would be great to get more local people involved, both of my kids went through the YCC program.

Land Bank had two seasonal positions this summer and got lots of applicants. It would be great if that money could get spread around to make more jobs, lots of interested and qualified people locally

Kendra: we should look at it as a mechanism to support local economy. We have capital improvement dollars, if we receive a bill from ICC we can charge it, we could look at putting money in the Clean Water Utility for interns, we did that in the Solid Waste program, Climate, and for Marine. Clean water doesn't have interns in their budget, but we can look at doing that going forward, field crew interns that get to learn about projects.

Kim: can we spend Utility money? it would be a great opportunity to support and train local youth to help with projects funded by the Utility.

Kendra: we can do that, right now through interlocal agreement we fund CD on specific projects, and they hire ICC, so we have them going now on Garrison Creek and Crow Valley. We're already doing this, but we have a lot more projects, and we don't want to overtax the CD too much because crews still need a leader – we have

overtaxed them that's why they're looking to expand. But now we need maintenance on Lopez Village bioswale, someone to water and weed, it often takes 3-4 years to establish a project. We could do this within our existing budget, but I'd want to check with Cindy Wolf

Lynn: you should check with Paul Andersson to make sure funding is there, but I think they have the work force. They always have more young people applying than positions. Now they just need \$15K for this program

Kendra: we'd need to pay them to work on the ground, we hire them like they're contractors and get billed, different than a general donation to a youth program. An internship is work on the ground plus education

ACTION ITEM: Kendra will check with Paul Andersson about what's possible

Jenny: housing is a big issue, hiring local kids who can't get jobs easily is great, they have free housing

Kendra: we're just ramping up now with our current program. County overall has had to suspend their internship program, but the Utility gets to keep theirs because of how they've managed their budget.

9:28 AM **San Juan County Comprehensive Plan (Water Element)**

Kendra Smith

The State wants a climate element added to the Comprehensive (comp) plan. Brought Cascadia on for guidance, they've done previous work for us – helped facilitate a 2017 Guidance document that included a water element, laid out some issues coming up with Climate. We're working with Council to get an approved process for the Climate element, just like we have a water resources element, there'll be an independent climate element and action plan – the element is the goals, and the action plan is the implementation strategy. The reopening of the comp plan gives us a window, until December 2025, setting the stage for the next decade. Members of this group were working through the water element in the last comp plan that just got approved in 2022. It was a fight with the planning commission, our committee pushed back and got most of what we suggested. Now the question is –anything else we should add to the comp plan? Ensure consideration of Climate, water issues in both the Climate and in the Water element will be cross-referenced

Discussion

Lynn: My over-riding suggestion is that we highlight water conservation. In the goal statement at the beginning, add the word "conserving" – it starts with "monitoring, enhancing..."; add "conserving" at beginning (in goals and policies). Emphasize ways to conserve water. We need to do two major things in our conservation effort; come up with new ways to produce what we need – green energy, potable water and make it easy to recycle water so it's not wasted – looking at it all through the lens of water conservation

Kim: is the drought plan the same as the climate sustainability element or is it separate?

Kendra: there is an existing drought plan (thanks Vicki for making that available and sharing with the CD)

- Could we look at that plan, do some minor tweaks and adjustments, and present it as our plan?

And does a drought plan only kick in when we have drought on the island, or with longer dry seasons due to climate change just presume it's drought whether or not it meets official definition?

Kim: using Climate Impact Group at UW, they have fairly refined drought predictions for San Juan County. The issue of trucking water must be brought up, if Health Dept. continues to approve building permits with trucked water, that's just displacing water to places where there isn't enough water to develop property. Must examine the practice, won't accomplish surface water goals if we continue to allow trucked water to be distributed around the island. That needs to be in the new element, need data on how much is being trucked. FH doesn't want to supply water for all SJI, in emergencies but not to support developing rural areas. Many people developing water-challenged properties can pay for trucked water so it's not a significant economic deterrent

Vicki: this is my tenth iteration of working on the comp plan and water element. A couple of historical points, in the past we had a philosophy of conservative approach due to so many unknowns – we don't know what the capacity is. We're careful about language and policies for that reason. In old days County had an open policy to creating parcels without regard to water resources or septic capacity, in some places it's not that

there's a drought just historically created parcels that are developable but no water there. Now we have new studies and information in some places so would be good to examine language.

Kendra: we want to be clear about the language so there aren't takings on existing parcels, good to have these conversations and document this so people know a team of experts really thought through these issues.

Bob: I'm a well driller and water works operator, water works being the key component in understanding there. It becomes an issue for me how we control water to tell people what they can use it for. A lot of home water situations that are merely to fill a swimming pool or have a lawn, with a large contingent the money isn't connected to the resources. Question, how do we tell somebody they can't use that water for a certain purpose? If they have a willing purveyor, if they have the water and the ability to distribute it without negatively impacting the resource, then by all means pay to fill your swimming pool? It helps the purveyor make more money and then when they have no water available because there's a drought, they'll say no, you need to go somewhere else. Based on studies by Ecology, east side of Orcas Island could probably supply water to all SJC without negative impacts. In some areas unaccounted for water is huge, leaking issues with supply line to Cascade Creek, to the point where Doe Bay can take care of Olga and don't even need the Olga works anymore. So how do we have the right to say whether that water is available to someone or not? I don't think reverse osmosis makes any sense in SJC when we have other sources.

Kendra: we've started a storyboard; we need to get down to that nitty-gritty of what is the story. Yes, we have water but not in all places, we need to conserve – how do we get information out to the public quickly so they can be informed and help us get to these goal and policy answers without a lot of misinformation?

Lynn: to get water to individual homes, catchment and treatment for residential systems, ways to use controlled grey water usage. Given precipitation, we have enough freshwater for individual homes if technology is there. Being creative about getting potable water in a residence so we don't have to haul it in. And, we do have police power to prevent swimming pools from being filled, we've used them to prevent individual helipads. In our County you can't have a helipad or a jet ski. We've made some decisions based on our quality of life and our values and it's enforced by our government. We should not be shy about considering ways of diverting water from expensive swimming pools.

Kim: need to be careful using that word "taking". Because there are people who bought parcels in SJC where there were no water resources, basically bedrock outcrops. Is the County obligated to provide water to those people? They're not necessarily entitled to treated water from the FH group A system just because they can afford to deliver it. It's their bad property decision if bought without ensuring water was available.

And as to what Bob said around water sources, are they real sources or are they creating a situation where they're degrading a system because of other uses, like with Cascade creek?

I want to bring up the potential for pump storage for providing peaking power as our ferries and transportation become more electrified. OPALCO may be studying the idea of pumping water up to a reservoir at altitude to use for peaking power. We should discuss potential uses of water for power production in Water element even if we don't have all the answers yet.

Jenny: I want to see a lot more information and data in the comp plan. When we talk about water and Eastsound budget, stated not enough water to supply all the uses there. And with Rosario they may be building a lot more structures. We're planning for the future, if we didn't have enough resources before, how will we find them? In Doe Bay Creek, I'm a short timer and already seen changes toward less surface water

Kendra: from the drainage system being dry for extended periods of time, there may be adequately stored water. But we haven't talked about augmenting the river water. There are streams that if there's a desire to keep flow go, because there's important critical species, that's something else to figure into the equation.

Jenny: it's unfortunate, seems like we're losing water for purposes now and in the future. But reports would be helpful, some of the reports I've seen from East Orcas is that there isn't always the water we think is there. Gary Sales and Buck have often feared there won't be enough water in Mountain Lake, what is enough water? And what are the uses we're looking to support?

Vicki: We should ask Kyle to produce permits for both rainwater catchment and hauled water. Good to eliminate hauled water as an allowable source for new development. Issuing building permits based on water hauling doesn't make sense. But rainwater catchment could make sense, would be good to see data on how that's worked in the County, and to have someone from the town of FH talk to us about their water system plan. Looking at this water element and considering the number of tourists, in terms of capacity and sustainability, need to be realistic about the impact of tourism on water availability. Tourists are here for a short time but use lots of water.

Bob: it's key to work with town of FH on water system plan. On Orcas, committee for Eastsound realized they weren't just supplying the Eastsound area it's also a hub – school, laundromats, these things draw people from entire Island and that needs to go into entire water system planning. We have a pool in FH that serves the entire population. Everyone should read Ron Mayo's white paper. It's very informative for anyone putting in a rain catchment system, he says "you're starting a new hobby" just the task of cleaning gutters as a homeowner, especially if you're going to take it to the level of drinking water

ACTION ITEM: Bob will share that white paper with the group by sending to the group as an email (DONE)

Lynn: issues with water catchment are great because those are mechanical issues and there'll be someone who will figure out how to resolve that and figure out the right systems to be able to do this easily.

Kendra: with climate, that inventiveness is coming. But a potable water catchment system is complicated.

Kim: in terms of desalination and catchment as alternative methods, in past catchment hasn't been approved as a potable water source for residences because of issues with bacteria and roof contamination. There were people in county who've wanted to use grey water to water gardens etc. But this issue came up with Ecology in which they wouldn't allow grey water systems to irrigate around a house unless it had gone through some kind of septic system to treat bacterial issues. I agree that we should explore all the technology, but you also have hurdles with Ecology approvals.

Kendra: that's part of the conversation about priorities, some other ideas to be developed or built upon.

10:17 AM **Next Steps**

Great discussion, we also want to bring up Irrigation and issues with Agriculture. We should have a working group looking at some of this language

Bob: I also wanted to bring with up either to Jenny or Vicki the East Orcas study done by Ecology. What bothers me most is unaccounted for water in Doe Bay and Olga, how is that conservation? So important to find leaks. Other water works issues with materials in roofs, downspouts, best chance of potable water.

Jenny: Agree, there were recommendations done for that Eastsound water budget to tighten up those systems to look at existing water rights, there were discussions prior to that about bringing water out of that system and into Eastsound. Information and recommendations are out there. There is more that can be done e.g., Doe Bay doesn't monitor take at Mountain lake, and in terms of conservation, that should be done.

<https://www.sanjuancountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/862/East-Orcas-Water-Budget-Study-2007-2008-PDF>

Bob: I believe Andy Dunn was the DOE lead on the water shed study for East Orcas

Kim: we should have a session on best available science to get that up front. And then switch to goals and policies section and see what's changed. As to metering, we've discussed it before. Agriculture doesn't meter but likely the largest water user, where are those data? What's the average consumption per households?

Kendra: and then should we have an implementation plan? Because if the goal is metering, what's the meat – who should be monitoring? Who's going to do what action?

Making sure we can give clear guidance over next decade about how to invest and work with water providers.

Kim: Should start with a solid base and not get too far in the weeds until we figure out what we can use to make informed statements. I suggest a first session with this group to start going through what's available and see what we can use, bring in town of FH, can we use their trucked water data, etc. Do they want to raise Trout Lake dam, would they want to do that to support rural development??

Lynn: about agriculture, I noticed in the water element there's only 15K active acres but only 300+ is irrigated. There are BMPs for irrigation we can reference, but that seems to be a small percentage of agriculture. Biggest conservation source will be personal use. Educate about how to use drinking water, how valuable it is, not for anything you can use recycled water for like watering garden etc. it's a precious commodity.

Kendra: is it going to stay 300 acres?

Kim: in SJ Valley two property owners irrigate 80 acres primarily to exercise their water right.

Vicki: That study from East Orcas by Andy Dunn – that was probably one of the cleanest and best we have.

Town of FH is required to conserve through stopping leakage it would be great to get an update on that

Bob: It's difficult when you make requirements rather than recommendations. There's a group in Eastsound that have a minimum fee per month, many systems have 300 gallons per month as a base rate consumption, but I think most people work under that base level. All our appliances (washing machines, toilets, etc. have flow restrictors). And you can certainly shame your friends for having a clean car

Cindy: about the farmers using water right to irrigate 80 acres, at Ag summit I heard about the ability to place your water in a trust and not lose your right, could be a good incentive to consider in comp plan

Kim: you can discuss that with Lincoln, he's been advised by a water rights attorney with respect to placing Zylstra Water Rights into the Trust Water Rights program.

Kendra: We'll work with Sofia on the Climate element and with Lynn on the Sustainability committee. We've done a lot of the legwork, now need to look at what's missing like metering and how to accomplish that

Kim: Group B water consumption data would be a good start. I've never seen those annual metering data compiled in a way that we can describe household consumption.

10:42 AM **Housekeeping**

- Confirm Comp Plan Workgroup meeting schedule? aim to align this with regular subcommittee schedule

Bob: are we going to have a representative from County Health as a chair of our committee?

ACTION: Kendra will touch base with Kyle about that, not sure about his staff capacity, we'll have to tag team.

Cindy: did I miss the part where you all talked about desalination?

Vicki: we haven't even gotten started on that!

Kim: desal systems may be a good data source to compile because I believe they must report their production and usage to County Health

10:46 AM **Adjourn Meeting**