



Surface Water Subcommittee Meeting

May 16, 2024

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

Ex-officio, County support staff, and members of public: Raquel Callans, Tyler Davis, Susan Eshelman, Katie Johnson, Kendra Smith, Ryan Ericson, Cathi Winings, Sarah Wozniak

9:08 AM **Convene meeting**

Kimbal Sundberg

9:09 AM **Topics for Discussion**

- SRFB/TAG Site Visits Summary

Kimbal Sundberg

Site visits happened on May 1 and 2, included people from various agencies as well as TAG members and some MRC members. There were three projects that involved riparian restoration. These would be funded supplementally with new money from the State, a one-time only influx of money for riparian funding. Two projects along False Bay (FB) creek involved supplemental funding for riparian planting and maintenance of plants already there. We hope to do a CWAC field trip October 17. Third project on Orcas at mouth of Cascade creek.

- Fishtrap Creek Flow Update

Tyler Davis

Tyler shared Jay Cook's email, his assessment of Helsells' reservoir is that the construction there was expected and meets requirements, but they haven't done the monitoring or reporting they were required to do. The Helsells have directed flow from the reservoir as instructed so it's a mystery why there's still no flow in Fishtrap Creek. Flow from Skull Creek is not from the Helsells. I plan to go there on Monday if anyone wants to join me.

Jenny: I'd recommend we have WDFW come look, someone like Steve Boessow who will be in here next week

Kim: I've located the final report/initial approval from Ecology. There's a lot of good background there going back to before they built the dam, about what was there before Helsell dug the bog/wetland. It was a unique wetland, included fossils. There was continuous flow out of the bog into Fishtrap creek before it was disrupted in early 70's. The loss of the bog may explain why there's no flow in Fishtrap creek, aside from the dam

ACTION ITEM: Kim sent that report to Tyler, he can forward it to the whole group

Bob: what data do we have to confirm past flow? In previous meetings we've talked about a large number of impairments (i.e. impoundments, other ponds/dams) between Helsells' dam and Cormorant Bay Road -more discussion between Kim, Bob, and Jenny about potential impoundments and water works on properties above Cormorant Bay. Should be easy to find out about new activities there, not that many property owners

Tyler: in corresponding with Jay there hasn't been any mention of WDFW and their involvement

ACTION: Tyler will try to get in touch with Steve Boessow about this and report back about upcoming field trip

Jenny: Steve will be on Orcas next week. Original report includes recommendations from WDFW

- On-site Sewage Workshop

Katie Johnson

Last week there was an On-site sewage System workshop. Part of model for Puget Sound Partnership, this is a pilot project, setting an action plan that rolls up into bigger Puget Sound Recovery framework. They publish an Action agenda every 4 years which includes the SILs (Strategic Initiative Leads). The LIO Action plan is a

detailed outline of gaps, needs, barriers in the form of actions to achieve locally, specific recovery goals. We had some key partners in SJI's, our LIO, Dept. of Health, Dept. of ES, Conservation District, Friends of SJ's, and the CWAC. Some common themes were climate preparedness including sea level rise and inundation risk. Also discussed vacation rental capacity issues, and handling of pump out waste. Discussed strengths (like the annual inspection reminders), and needs such as GIS mapping for SLR and for pollution identification and control

- Stormwater Update

Krista Davis

Krista is out, we'll need to reschedule this update

9:33 AM **San Juan County Comprehensive Plan (Water Element)**

- Drought Plan Storyboard

Susan Eshelman

Susan is taking the water element and the comp drought plan from 2016 and creating a public outreach effort. Make public more aware of water availability and resources. Susan shares spreadsheet with notes. There's a lot of information, condensing it down to a usable format the public can access and work with. Bibliography, not producing new information but showing what was done in previous comp plan. Showing exactly where SJC water comes from, availability, specific issues with maps and sources (i.e. town surface water, groundwater, saltwater intrusion, number of desalination facilities). Other things like forest health, wildfire data, habitat data, climate change projections, etc. Then once education is provided on island-specific data, go into the drought resilience we're building. The drought plan is a conglomeration of efforts but doesn't include a strong plan for outreach and how we can influence water use into the future. I plan to finish this by mid-June, ready to start cracking away at the figures, maps, etc. Climate resilience featured on the Madrona Institute website.

QUESTIONS

Jenny: we recently pulled together some documents that were meant to be put on the County website, documents and verbiage for the water resources website. Could we provide those to Susan? (YES)

Judy: It's about SJI's on the whole, but many want to know "what's happening on my island?" Should put island-specific information to engage islanders more. And in agriculture section, nothing about water metering

Susan: I have that as a bullet point, but the information provided will depend on what the committee prioritizes. And thanks for the input about specific islands, we could have tabs for each island

Kim: or in the spreadsheet of reports, could you tag those by specific island? Like the saltwater intrusion

Bob: is your intent to start applying numbers specifically to the water rights as an inventory or are you just calling for doing an inventory?

-more discussion between Kim and Bob of water right information and how to get a handle on how much water is actually being used.

Bob: a water right doesn't mean you don't need to follow guidelines; it's keeping track of what you're using and showing historical record. Your water right is actually the amount you've been putting to beneficial use.

Cathi: Susan, not sure if this could be useful because of timing, but we are just embarking on updating the 2012 Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) and a new fire risk analysis will be performed.

Vicki: so impressed with Susan. One thing that jumped out to me was focus on climate change and drought impacts, but the other side is impact from demand from population. It would be good to assess that as well, looking at the Group A systems isn't just looking at volume in Trout Lake it's also looking at number of people using that water. The way we hoped the water program would work with the policies developed in the comp plan, the goal was to be adaptive. I have a continuous concern because our water capacity has been fragile

Melissa: About island-specific details, maybe a map of the SJI's to hover over, keeping the visuals in mind. And it would be helpful to include a schematic diagram showing our island water cycle/sources in this story map. To point out in a picture form that we don't have that mountain cycle. It would be good to point out how water quality affects water quantity, nutrient run-off etc. And it would be helpful to show a list of action items/take-home messages of what people can be doing at home. Metering their water use.

Kim: implications of trucking water from group A systems, if that was stopped it would affect development. Do we want to create a comp plan that addresses the minimum water availability requirements for development or one that will manage impacts on water resources?

Judy: we're talking about drought and that's important. But the other side of climate change is the winter rains, where will that be presented in the comp plan in terms of excess water run-off?

Kendra: together with Public Works, CW utility will be addressing drainage as well as sea level rise. We'll need to make sure to address flooding and effects on septic systems over time.

Jenny: I want to follow up on community conversations, make sure other islands are involved and not just on SJL. Things like taking shorter showers and don't leave water running, but we need to take that a step up.

Ryan: I work for the Town Planning Department. We're updating our water plan; it's never addressed wholesale trucking of water so we're looking at that now. The current rate is below what we charge for water to our own customers so we're looking at that too except for emergency situations like Hannah Heights. But going forward it's likely not going to be an option to regularly supplement County properties. Our current issues are plant capacity and system resiliency. We're getting a fourth filter because when one goes down, we can barely meet summer demand with only two filters. That's not cheap and it's on FH taxpayers. In FH the median income is already much lower than the County average. Our capacity for our water rights far exceeds the capacity of our system in terms of sustainable yield. One option would be to raise the dam, but that also comes at a price. We're not in dire straits yet, we have plenty of sustainable yield until 2040 but that's just around the corner.

Kim: thanks, we appreciate you coming to this meeting, addressing the hauled water situation and keeping the growth of the County within sustainable limits. Can you explain how hauled water is reported by FH and what the trends are?

Ryan: There's a system for haulers to record the amount of water taken but they don't need to report where it's being taken. It's approved by the County Department of Health and Community Services (H&CS).

ACTION: Ryan will get the CWAC numbers for bulk/hauled water quantity, rates and how much they're rising.

Kendra: could we get that by our June meeting? That's the kind of data we need to feed up to the County, that's also connected to the issue at the Fairgrounds. I'm happy to help facilitate those communications

Vicki: FH is the largest water system in the County, but major sources of water are FH, Eastsound, and Rosario. These larger systems have the major impact of tourist activity and hauled water. Their capacity is essential to growth and the comp plan is about managing our infrastructure capacity for growth. It's the ability of a system to produce water, that's expensive and the burden is falling on the people of FH and Eastsound

Kim: in FH, the water that goes to town and to water haulers is coming from San Juan Valley and FB Creek where we want to maintain flow, while demand increases. There's a finite limit, with drought becoming more prevalent

Ryan: we can only withdraw from that Aug2 system between October-April, we can't take from there in the summertime. We're late on our last water system plan, we're trying to get this one out and done because new population projections will affect the amendment. With H&CS questions, specifically about hauled water, it's slowed down. I've been working with Sophia on joint planning policies around this topic as we learn more about how much we actually have in both sustainable yield and plant capacity, that and conveyance are currently our biggest obstacles, but sustainable yield will come up too within the scope of this next plan.

Judy: this committee will be very interested to see your water plan update when it's available

ACTION: Ryan will provide that plan, and also whatever Susan needs to complete her storyboard

Kim: do you also have responsibilities on the waste treatment side of town?

Ryan: No that's someone else - Jesse in Public Works, I help with planning documents

Kim: because the flip side is the difficulties dealing with septs and pumpouts from RV's and boats. The town has said 'hands off, we don't want any RV waste in our system' so it's all hauled off island?

Kendra: there is a pumpout available for the boats, but it is an issue. We should add those to the agenda for June and see if Jesse can join us. Not sure if County team is aware of all the nuances, costs, etc.

Ryan: When we had pumpout it would spike our system, it was too concentrated and killed ability of treatment to do its job. I do know that with the new system we should have more capacity for treatment. We'll never allow RV's to dump in town again. But our plant upgrade should accommodate projected FH population growth

Kim: so, we should keep on talking about how to handle pump-out waste. What do Orcas and Lopez do?

ACTION: Judy will ask someone on Lopez about where RV's pump out

Bob: on Orcas the park has on-site septic and a pump out, West Beach and Deer Harbor also both have onsite secondary treatment facilities.

Kendra: we can find out from the septic haulers; my understanding is they have storage tanks and when trucks are full, they pump out in Anacortes. We should be thinking of some alternative strategies and talk to Ecology

Vicki: septic isn't just from RV's and boats; the haulers also pump out septic tanks and that need is large.

Lynn: technologies for using waste in some productive ways, methods for processing into fertilizer?

- Resources Review & Next Steps

Kim: thanks again to Environmental Stewardship staff for organizing all that information

Kendra: we want to make sure language is good and tight in comp plan, and then next plan updates will reinforce those policies and goals for other updates coming up in 2025.

Kim: what about the statement in Community Development that we'll do the minimum required by the State?

Tyler: are you referring to what Susan relayed from Sophia? I think that was more something they identified as specifically lacking from current plan – groundwater quantity and protection. That's something to address

Kendra: and broadly in comp plan, we updated the plan in 2022 so we hope to just address modifications in areas tied to climate or specific omissions, not a wholesale redo but filling in gaps that have been identified as required by state law. Need to keep focused energy toward tending to the development code

Tyler: feedback is that water element ranked high among parts of comp plan in terms of completeness. But highlighted a few things as missing. Sophia suggested this committee put together a memo by July meeting of what is lacking in current water element. It could highlight topics that need addressing or suggest actions.

ACTION: we will submit that memo by the July meeting. Consultants have June-September to compete plan.

Lynn: in intro I'd like to see an emphasis on climate change, right now you really don't get there until section 4.2.3. We need to integrate the aspect of climate change throughout. Should be the third sentence right up front at beginning. And wherever we talk about degradation, talk about conservation. Quantity and quality. And in second paragraph, add a sentence about handling increased runoff in extreme rain events. Something that acknowledges those huge events as the flip side of drought, if we handle it right it'll help us with drought. I have some notes like that I can share with whoever is putting together that memo

Melisa: Some larger signage on roads about water conservation being an important way of living on the islands is needed. The state of California has done this, and it has really help spread the message to more people.

10:42 AM **Housekeeping**

- Confirm next Comp Plan subcommittee meeting

Judy: have a smaller group to write the memo and take it to the larger group? Between now and June?

Judy, Jenny, Lynn? Whoever is willing to work on it, maybe we can set a time to get together on that

ACTION: Tyler will email that smaller group to set up a meeting for writing the memo

Jenny: a Public Comment, May 2nd I went out with the folks from Ecology etc. to look at Cascade Creek watershed. Kelly Hamilton will be transitioning out of her position and the person taking her place was there. It was nice to have everyone there to discuss concerns about Mountain Lake water levels, connections with Rosario, etc. Tessa was there from Water Trust. It was a great event, helped me to realize that we really can get to the right people at Ecology if there are water flow issues. Many engaged young people with new jobs.

Moran State Park has very old infrastructure. No meter to monitor water going into the Doe Bay system

Bob: I attended a recent meeting to discuss PFAS, someone from Hannah Heights was there. With Kyle being given more responsibilities, it would be beneficial for this committee to show some support for the Hannah Heights group. They're being shuttlecocked between Dept. of Health and Ecology, still finding PFAS in the soil and found in the blood of people living there. Assistance is needed, this is uncharted territory. There should be funds available for the soil remediation. Hopefully we can have Paul on the agenda for next month

Kim: yes, we'll have that on the agenda for the general meeting. This has been a problem a lot of places in WA.

Kendra: the broader issue is that PFAS is everywhere, in a lot of products and contributing to groundwater

Lynn: need to find the right microbe that eats it

Judy: does the County Council realize how short-staffed the Dept. of Health is? Would a letter help?

Vicki: They're definitely aware

Kendra: we're negotiating with a candidate, hopeful we'll see someone by September

Melissa: I was at a conference at CalTech last month and PFAS came up. I learned that reverse osmosis can help get rid of it. That's a treatment process being used in California to get to new EPA standard. Could we provide County funds to supply that technology? it's improved a lot and become more cost effective. Also need to educate folks more about the products we're using that make impacts. There's no regulation from the top on this so we need to do it from the bottom up. About the microbe idea, they are looking at it but it's farfetched.

Meet again June 20th, that's the regular CWAC meeting – we'll continue to discuss the comp plan there as well as in this subcommittee. Tyler will work to set up memo-writing meeting with the smaller work group

11:02 AM **Adjourn Meeting**