



Clean Water Advisory Committee – Surface Water Subcommittee Meeting

November 16, 2023

Committee Members in Attendance: Jenny DeGroot, Vicki Heater, Ann Jarrell, Judy Meyer, Kimbal Sundberg, Cathi Winings

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

Pre-meeting chatter: Jenny suggests someone from Orcas for the TAG, Kendra will be the staff-person presiding today.

9:04AM **Westsound Community Meeting on Crow Valley Restoration** *Jenny DeGroot*

It was a well-attended meeting, 25 in person and 5 virtually, including Tyler, SJPT, CD, a WWU grad student interested in setting up a project, etc. Laura laid out priorities with upcoming State grant funding, riparian buffer projects, etc. Discussed ways to increase flows. Interested in reestablishing coastal cutthroat trout population, need some work to find out how far up the watershed they go. Some discussion of local property owners there.

9:12 AM **Cascade Creek** *Jenny DeGroot*

Quiet year for adult spawners. Still coho and cutthroat juveniles there, will continue monitoring.

Q: how did Glenwood Springs do as far as return? Jenny: Mike would know the answer to that question

9:16 AM **eDNA sampling** *Jenny DeGroot*

Kim: I requested WDFW to present about eDNA technique, asked if opportunities for surveys. They have a priority habitat and species program to be featured at December HPA advisory meeting. Could we use eDNA to create fish maps?

Jenny: some 'fishscape' maps are off for our county (provides example) There are gaps in data based on property access. It would be nice to know that DNR has the most current data

- more discussion of collecting eDNA data, property access and staff capacity and how to apply to maps

Kendra: we should have a quick strike sampling team to access properties as notified. Susan will be monitoring.

Ann: Jenny, can you provide summary of what it is and how to use it? Testing some residual of the fish?

Jenny: collect and filter a water sample, send to genetics lab and they find biological parts (scales, etc.) and test for markers to identify organisms. It's reliable based on scientific literature. No need to seine or get fish in hand. The question is how much we're relying on eDNA vs. habitat type etc. Need about 5 gallons of water to sample.

Kendra: sample taken and filtered at the stream, can be challenging in low flow, so good to do in winter

Jenny: but may find certain species only at highest probability times, has been used for tracking Chinook in winter

Kendra: let's plan with Susan from a mapping perspective about where gaps are, make a game plan to answer those questions. Then as CD moves forward with landowner outreach, find out what properties can be accessed.

- gaps in knowledge about coastal cutthroat trout, are origins wild or stocked?

Jenny: eDNA won't answer questions regarding source, just species identification

- discussion of a previous example with trout. with climate change, can't rely on known spawning times

Cathi: the visual stream work we're doing as part of VSP monitoring – prioritizing the 8 basins, spreading surveys across those basins over 5 years, could consider taking eDNA data as part of that sampling
Kendra: with property owners' permission we'd send samplers to coincide with your team. If we had targets for certain areas we could let you know where we need samples from. Then sample as opportunities come up.
Cathi: we're figuring out our maps and timeline, should have some sorted out by January
Judy: what are we sampling for with eDNA, just salmonids? Kendra: trout, resident and coastal
Kim: need to look into labs and what they can identify, this is being used for many species, not just fish
Jenny: it would be nice if this type of sampling was added into WDFW protocol

9:41 AM **Fishtrap Creek Flow** *Kendra Smith*

Kendra: Fishtrap has no water. What's going on? We've spent a lot to replace this culvert, ready for water
Jenny: water is not coming from Helsell's pond
Kim: my pond is at an all-time low, there's likely no water being discharged from Helsell's pond. This is the problem with the Fishtrap system, it's mostly controlled by the Helsells' dam
Jenny: recommendation from DFW was that they need to start releasing more water over time
ACTION ITEM: Kendra will check in with Kelly Hamilton and cc Buck to ask about when water will be turned on
Kim: that water right and dam are under a consent agreement between Ecology and Helsell. Fish advocates strongly recommended Helsell guarantee instream flow release. They say not enough water to meet that demand and Ecology granted voluntary release of water. Like most water rights, giving more than system can produce.
Kendra: at least to have Ecology look at it, that would be a good start and could report back in December. Water hasn't flowed since April. County replaced the culvert in the dry and need to see it in flowing conditions
Kim: impoundment is holding water, small amount of seepage below dam. No water is released to Fishtrap Creek when pond level is below spillway. Pond will not spill until we get significant rainfall.
ACTION: follow up with DFW and Ecology about instream flow needs.
Kendra: what else can we do to help the system?
Kim: impoundment area is a former bog wetland. The watershed is small, dam built in the 90's without a permit
- Discussion of other property owner in the area who's interested in promoting fish health
Kendra: we'll follow up and see what options we have

9:55 AM **Drought Preparedness** *Kendra Smith*

Comprehensive plan coming up, must consider climate as part of the process. This is sea level rise, wildfire risk, mitigation for disaster risk.
Kim: need a discussion in this next phase of comp plan to ask, is it right for people to impound water that belongs to all? Private lakes made by building dams, impounded water for private use like Helsell affecting a public works project. If we want to restore stream flow, dams should be pulled or modified.
Kendra: but fundamental question around drought planning is the need to hold more water in the winter, don't want to shunt it off but hold onto it in floodplains etc. Need conversations about this in a comprehensive way
Jenny: With Fishtrap, that watershed supported a lot of fish at one time, some property owners there have large parcels, they had to do mitigation and we went through the process of working with them but recommendations from DFW and Ecology conflict. Many downstream ready to do riparian work, held up by one property owner.
Kendra: we will follow up on that, but goes to this broader issue,
- Discussion of specific requirements in the system. Ensuring adequate groundwater supplies, injection?
Vicki: Reality is we live on islands that have a different hydrogeology. Measuring stream flow is essential, breaching dams is great but still need to know how much water capacity is there

Kendra: how can water rights be issued if we don't know what's there?

- Discussion about being able to assess quantities, how to keep and maintain reports and data https://www.cakex.org/sites/default/files/documents/SJI_WorkingTowardClimateResilience_lowres.pdf

Kendra: comp plan will be gearing up in Spring 2024 for community conversations, February -May. Plan to adopt plan by 2025. Need to ensure it's well-grounded in climate and drought information. We'll have consultants.

- More discussion of how to bring water issues to forefront for the comprehensive plan, adapt to climate. Striking balance with tourism, address through community visioning, planning meeting(s).

Kendra: we're trying to ensure there'll be one or two planning commissioners to help with different elements, i.e. water, transportation. So someone on the commission is following each of these issues.

Kim: population projections need to reflect how much water is available to support.

Vicki: Burke's monitoring of wells on Orcas being well-managed under efficient new system

Jenny: old infrastructure in East part of Orcas that still need to be addressed

- More discussion of water systems county-wide, variable – some places more water than others

Judy: desalination will come up more and more as a potential option

- QUESTION for Vicki: Could you please distribute the link for Burke's presentation?

Ann: if Vicki doesn't have it already, get in contact with Don Burke, General Manager, East Sound Water

Jenny: Taking water from east part of Orcas to west, need to ensure fish needs are being met. It's inefficient.

Vicki: taking water out of Cascade Lake system needs to be measured carefully

10:46 AM **UW False Bay Creek Water Quality Report**

Judy Meyer

Judy in contact with Masters' student writing the report, should be done by end of November. Judy will get together with him before the CWAC meeting, hope he can present it there on December 14th

10:52 AM **San Juan Island Destination Management Plan**

Kimbal Sundberg

Kendra: we have over 900 comments, learned some good lessons for the comp plan on how to collect them. Now need to organize and analyze this qualitative data. It's not all negative, but some pretty unhappy people.

- Kim points out issues with rural wells going dry and being supplemented by hauled water from Town of Friday Harbor, not just Hannah Heights. Issues with visitor water use, and whether vacation rentals should have water meters and annual reporting of use before permits are renewed
- Some ideas: flash surveys, streamlining by requiring reporting on wells (should be online)

Kendra: many ideas from Destination Management plan will come into policy and management via the comp plan. ACTION ITEM: We'll plan to share these minutes at the next CWAC meeting December 14th

Kendra: for 2024 we may need to go back to monthly CWAC meetings once we get into the Comp plan

Kim: maybe some theme meetings, working group discussions about water issues and Environmental Stewardship needs. Local experts could be valuable just like consultants, we have a lot of technical expertise on island

Vicki: when will destination management plan wrap up?

Kendra: now comment period is closed, we'll analyze through end of year and then report to council. May need to re-do resident and business survey from 2018 that were pre-Covid.

- general description of 'freedom' camping

Ann: we thought SDMP was a draft plan and we'd have the opportunity to comment together as the CWAC

Kendra: We'll let the comp plan dynamic play out because of comments on relevant issues (like ferries), SDMP won't come back until 2025. Get clarity around the community vision and bring people along better.

Kim: according to Open Meeting Act guidance, the county requires advisory committees to provide written comments via quorum. Next time we need more heads-up to have several months to get a letter drafted, reviewed, and voted on by full committee

Kendra: I hope through comp plan work things will be more integrated.

11:17 AM Adjourn