City of Bellingham Habitat Master Plan
Technical Advisory Group Meeting #2
June 14, 2012
9:00 am-12:00 pm
Mayor's Board Room; Bellingham City Hall

TAG Members present:
Kurt Baumgarten, Ecology; Julie Guy, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board; Jim Helfield, WWU; Sue Kaun, citizen; Wendy Steffensen, RE Sources; James Luce, City of Bellingham Parks Department; Sue Madsen, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group; Kim Weil, City of Bellingham Planning Department; Barry Wenger, citizen.

Others present:
Project manager**:** Renee LaCroix, City of Bellingham Public Works
Consultant team: Derek Koellmann, Anchor QEA; Vikki Jackson, Northwest Ecological Services; Hilary Wilkinson and Sarah Brace, Veda Environmental

A. Meeting purpose, goals, objectives

Hilary reviewed the goals and objectives of the meeting, and she and Derek provided project updates from the last meeting, including:

- John Rybzyck and Cathy Lehman have resigned their positions on the Advisory Group due to time limitations.
- The ftp site is live and contains literature and other project related materials, including a list of TAG members with e-mail addresses and phone numbers (per a request from the last meeting).
- Input on the information review/synthesis matrix (focus of Meeting #1) has been incorporated; a revised matrix will be available on the ftp site shortly.

Questions/comments from discussion:

Question: Does restoration include preservation? *Response*: Yes, it includes preservation, restoration and regulatory components.

B. Project Approach -- overview

Derek provided a flow diagram of the proposed project approach. (Note: this diagram is on the ftp site under "presentations"). It is a 5-step approach.

- Step 1: Identify Limiting Factors
- Step 2: Determine stressors
- Step 3: Identify restoration and regulatory constraints and opportunities
- Step 4: Habitat restoration potential and feasibility
- Step 5: Prioritized Actions

Questions/comments from discussion:

Question: Is there a GIS layer that shows which projects have been implemented? *Response:* Yes; though it has not yet been incorporated into the GIS information for this project--it is not a specific deliverable for this project.
Question: How will the GIS information generated from this project be used by the City? *Response*: Task 6 of this project is integration of this information and metadata into the City's GIS system and incorporation in the "City IQ" program.

Question: Will species richness/biodiversity be captured in habitats of concern? *Response*: Yes; species richness has been identified in several areas in Bellingham. WDFW priority habitats will be included, for example. Do we need to expand those areas? Link them? These are examples of the decisions that will need to be made. The grant that funded this project addresses impaired water quality and salmonids, but we can include other issues. We will be asking the TAG: What are the values of the folks at this table regarding species and habitat?

Question: Could we potentially change/alleviate some of the constraints in the system, (e.g. culverts)? Would this be included in the prioritization process? *Response*: Yes, we may find instances where removing one culvert can make a huge difference -- one expensive action that has a huge benefit. On the other hand, stormwater or impervious surface is a harder issue to tackle.

Question: Please provide clarification on "Regulatory Protection Exists" component of the flow diagram. *Response*: Look to see if the regulatory protection is in place and is the action/regulation effective and making a difference.

Comment: Tease out habitat function and regulatory protection. There might be places that have high function but not under much protection – little gems worth preserving. The temporal scale very relevant here. Would like to see how this is incorporated.

Question: Will historical corridors be included? *Response*: Yes, if these are a priority for a species. Also may be a huge benefit to many species. With urban/developed corridors, this may be too challenging. But there could be a suite of actions across multiple landscapes that would bump historic corridors up the prioritization process.

Question: What about not-regulatory priorities? *Response*: These will fall under restoration opportunities. Do we have areas that are functional now that could be protected/restored? How it fits into the approach diagram is not clear.

Question: Will the approach address regulatory effectiveness? *Response*: This is one of the challenges: do you hire another enforcement officer to protect what's out there? Some regulations are not enforced. This could also be an education opportunity. It is very hard to measure the effectiveness of existing regulations. Addressing this could be an action item.

Question: How is the overall report going to be used (e.g.: project level or planning process?)
Response: The end goal is a GIS tool plus a report that identifies within the City of Bellingham opportunities, constraints, the regulatory framework, etc. Hope to see 20 prioritized actions at the end of this process. It will be a living document/process: as things get implemented or rise higher in prioritization, the city can use the tool to go back and re-prioritize the remaining actions along with new ones. The goal is to show the process and illustrate how decisions were made.

Action Item:

- Share simplified 5-step process with TAG

C. Existing conditions/limiting factors analysis – big picture feedback

Derek presented the draft Limiting Factors Analysis report (also available on the ftp site) and provided a brief overview of its contents. The report is the result of the first phase of this project

(information review and synthesis) and is organized by 8 major geographic areas: the 7 major watersheds contained within the City of Bellingham, plus the marine shorelines, estuaries and nearshore areas.

These eight areas include:

1. Bellingham Bay
2. Chuckanut Creek
3. Squalicum Creek
4. Little Squalicum Creek
5. Whatcom Creek
6. Padden Creek
7. Silver Creek
8. Marine shorelines, estuaries and nearshore areas

For each of the watersheds, the report provides four key areas of information:

1. A description (including an overview of any sub-basins)
2. An overview of limiting factors such as water quality and aquatic barriers
3. Salmonid presence
4. Data gaps

A summary of the TAG's comments follows. The consultant team's responses appear, or any follow-up discussed related to the comment, appears in parentheses.

- Include maps in the final report. (This will be done; City of Bellingham Watersheds map is on the ftp site)
- Include a matrix that provides a crosswalk of the watersheds. (A draft of this exists – consultant team is working on how to make it more user-friendly).
- Table 1: it is not immediately apparent that the bottom four sub-basins are within Bellingham bay watershed. (This will be cleared up. Also, a map of the sub-basins will be included).
- Include/identify Superfund cleanup sites. (comment noted)
- Be sure to include information when no data exists to determine conditions: e.g. condition is 'good' OR 'no data exists'. In some cases, there may not be information or it exists elsewhere. Absence of information does not mean there is no problem. We'll need to make clear that existing data was inconclusive.
- Did you find chronic sources/factors? For example, some water quality (phenols) from wood degradation showing up downstream. (Barry can point Vikki to where data exists. This has occurred on marine shorelines).
- Will you be showing special denning areas, nesting sites, etc.? (This information is not broken down by watershed so it was not easily incorporated into the matrix. The consultant team will try to determine how best to incorporate it.)
- Include wetlands -- they link fish, wildlife and water, and lot of priority species use wetlands.
- What is the city trying to maintain beyond salmon? (Goal is to maximize habitat in a more general and broader sense. Maximum habitat function made available to the broadest number of species.) In Whatcom Creek, coyotes, mink, 87 species of ducks, etc. That is the sort of info we want to include.
- This is salmon-focused; biodiversity/species richness is not well called-out. (This is a difficulty we faced: what is truly a limiting factor? Forest cover, biodiversity could be incorporated into limiting factors.)
- What might you find in the city? List priority habitats that could be present in the city and if you find an area that meets the criteria, include it. This limiting factors process gets at what's wrong. We will also be turning this around to look at what's right.
- Re: limiting factors.

    - Consider including percent of intact riparian corridor. Speaks to water quality, species abundance, habitat
    - Street abundance
    - Land use (current) – residential vs. industrial
- Some of the key data gaps should fall under a priority action. Also, include invasive species.
- Are you going to produce an existing conditions document? Need to know what species you are looking at to make sense of limiting factors. (We looking at this as 'habitat forming processes' for all species (not just fish). Where information exists, it will be included. Tried to look beyond species, but there's just not a lot of data out there. Only one report has this type of information, but it looks ACROSS watersheds not at individual sub-basins to describe species.)
- Can you point to the data you used for water quality limiting factors? (The consultant team will make this clear - need more clarification on the type of data. Some data weren't included if it was raw data and wasn't interpreted, or data that didn't have a conclusion/relevance.)
- Be clearer on what the limiting factor is limiting *for*. (A description of the context is for the limiting factors - context for what is being considered. This is very salmon centric right now).
- Need to answer this BIG broader question: Why restore? Consider ecosystem functions and services, etc.
- Include a table of functions that could be used when analyzing a project. For example, one could see that "Project A" has 30 of 50 boxes checked.

Action Item:

- A survey monkey link will be distributed shortly for additional feedback on the Limiting Factors Report.

D. Stakeholder Engagement

Hilary provided a brief overview of the plan to develop a stakeholder engagement plan. Key elements of the plan include:

1. List of key stakeholders
2. Communication strategy
3. PPT type presentation that can be brought forward to stakeholder groups
4. Key messages

She requested input on individuals and entities that should be included on the stakeholder list. Responses included:

- Neighborhood organizations
- Developers
- Realtors Association
- Whatcom Builders
- Alliance Properties (owned by the Black brothers)
- Wendy Harris
- Laura Lee Brackie (Responsible Development)
- Folks who always comment on development projects, Historical development
- Sustainable Connections
- Utilities
- DOT
- Port of Bellingham
- Humane Society – seem to be a huge impact on habitat.
- Other city departments – Transportation, Parks, etc.
- Greenways Committee

- Whatcom County
- Noxious Weed Control Board

The TAG will review the draft Stakeholder Engagement strategy at the next meeting.

E. Prioritization Approach

Derek provided a brief overview of the proposed approach for prioritization and asked TAG members for initial thoughts on what types of habitats, processes, and/or species should be prioritized. A summary of the TAG's responses follows.

- Wetlands
- Riparian corridors
- Forests – Lidar maps
- Baseline inventory needed of forests, canopy, etc.
- Islands around the city that reseed species back into the other areas as they get restored
- Interconnectivity between islands
- Best Available Science – incorporate
- Peat bogs
- Keep it simple! Get into individual species, habitat types (peat bog), too detailed and won't have an ability to address that level of details. Streams are important for lots of things – keep it at that. A simple motto that has worked well elsewhere: "Swimmable, fishable, drinkable." (include "hikeable, bikeable")
- Large trees for raptors
- Pocket estuaries
- Biological hotspots – snags, riparian area, estuaries, etc.
- Make it specific enough that people get excited.
- Advance of English ivy. Document their spread.
- Citizen science
- Preserve and restore biodiversity

F. Wrap up and next step

- A Survey Monkey link will be distributed to capture remaining input on the Limiting Factors Analysis report, as well as preliminary feedback on developing the Habitat Master Plan.
- A Draft Stakeholder engagement strategy will be distributed prior to the next meeting.
- The flow diagram will be simplified, and the 5 key steps will be clearly outlined within it.
- Next meeting: Friday, July 13, 9 am to noon, Bellingham City Hall, Mayor's Board Room.