City of Bellingham Habitat Master Plan
Technical Advisory Group Meeting #5
February 26, 2013
1:00-3:00 pm
Bellingham City Hall

TAG Members present:
Kurt Baumgarten, Ecology; Julie Guy, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board; Jim Helfield, WWU; Wendy Steffensen, RE Sources; James Luce and Leslie Bryson, City of Bellingham Parks Department.

TAG members absent:
Barry Wenger, citizen; Sue Madsen, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group; Kim Weil, City of Bellingham Planning Department, Joe Meche, North Cascades Audubon Society

Others present:
Project manager**:** Renee LaCroix, City of Bellingham Public Works
Consultant team: Margaret Clancy and Pete Lawson, ESA; Analiese Burns and Vikki Jackson, Northwest Ecological Services; Hilary Wilkinson, Veda Environmental
Additional attendees: Sara Brooke Benjamin, City of Bellingham; Ann Stark, City of Bellingham; Wendy Harris, citizen; Geoff Middaugh, citizen

A. Meeting purpose, goals, objectives

Renee welcomed the group. Hilary reviewed the main goal of the meeting: gain TAG understanding of the results of the existing conditions assessment (summarized in the "Existing Conditions Analysis Memo"). Meeting objectives included:

- TAG members have a working understanding of existing conditions analysis methods.
- Gain TAG understanding of/input to next steps in development of Habitat Restoration Master Plan (HRMP).

The consultant team provided project updates and briefed TAG members on results of the last meeting. Highlights include:

- A new project website is live at: http://www.cob.org/services/environment/restoration/plan.aspx
- At the last meeting, TAG members
    - Were introduced to the new consultant team lead: Margaret Clancy from ESA, and her colleague Pete Lawson.
    - Reviewed and discussed the new conceptual model for the project (and accompanying memo), including key differences between this conceptual model and proposed approach and the previous approach. This effort proposed the habitat groups and scale of analysis, and proposed screening criteria for attributes and measures.

- Since the last meeting, TAG members provided comments on the Conceptual Framework memo. Comments were incorporated and fed into the development of the Existing Conditions memo.

B. Existing Conditions memo

Pete provided a detailed presentation of the Existing Conditions Memo, and provided a re-cap of the how information gathered during last TAG meeting and in the interim led to the development of the report. The full presentation is available on the project website (see web link above). **Highlights from the presentation include:**

- A few key changes were made to the habitat groups. Key changes include:
    - There are now five total habitat groups being looked at for the HRMP, down from eight previously.
    - The five remaining groups include: 1) riverine, 2) estuarine/nearshore, 3) wetland, 4) forest, 5) shrub/meadow.
    - Three habitat groups were either removed or blended in with another habitat group. These include:
        - "Urban" was removed. At a later date, the team will include language that addresses restoration actions that will address urban habitat.
        - Riverine and riparian were combined into one habitat group: RIVERINE. This was done because the functions for riverine were difficult to separate from adjacent riparian functions.
        - The two forest habitats were blended to one habitat group: FOREST. This was because with the existing data resolution, and there was much duplication of data in the early and late forest seral stages.
- The Riverine habitat group was used as an example for TAG members to understand all of the process and logic used to arrive at the existing conditions assessment. Briefly, this includes:
    - Each habitat group was broken into sub-watersheds (e.g., wetland: used 28 sub-watersheds)
    - Functions were identified for each habitat group (for Riverine, this includes but is not limited to: flow variation, surface storage and biodiversity maintenance).
    - Attributes were attributed to each function (for Riverine, this includes but is not limited to: runoff regime and infiltration regime for the flow variation function)
- The consultant team has more confidence in some data sets than others. In general, data selected cover the entirety of the project area. In some areas, it was more limited (e.g. mainstem versus secondary tributaries) In general; equal weighting was assumed unless factors dictated otherwise.

Please refer to the full presentation on the project website for additional detail

Discussion highlights

- A lengthy discussion regarding removal of the "urban" habitat category occurred. Several TAG members expressed concern about this decision and asked for more information, including an example of how this would work on the ground in a real setting, such as at Bloedel Donovan Park, which is categorized as urban but provides a number of ecological functions. Pete explained that the "forest" habitat group would address areas of Bloedel Donovan that contain tree canopy. A request was made to provide more examples so that the TAG is more comfortable with this: Pete responded that this would be a next step, and noted that Bloedel will not be an example provided since it is outside the project boundary.
- Meadow/shrub habitat group needs more description. Response: had to create a definition for meadow/shrub and forest because there is no data set to define it. Five acres was selected as a reasonable place to start.
- Riverine Habitat discussion: just includes status, not risk? Response: Yes.
- For the fish biodiversity attribute: does it only include salmon, or are there other measures for other fish? Answer: there is not enough data to cover other species.
- A lengthy discussion was held on the weighting of functions and attributes. Highlights include:
    - Q: How much would the results change is the attributes were weighted differently? Response: based on our limited sensitivity analysis, changing the weighting does not likely have a dramatic effect. The reason is that the differences in the weighting are very small and because the results are grouped by quintiles so it takes a relatively big change to move from one group to another.
    - Q: How do quintiles make more sense than quartiles and quintiles? Response: Quintiles allow for more segregation in the overall results, which will be desirable when it comes to identifying restoration actions. Quintiles also allow us to define a middle group that represents the mean condition. We can then define other groups based on whether they are better or worse than the "average" group. Quartiles break things into 4 groups so there is no mean or middle condition. We don't want everything in middle because it doesn't drive restoration decisions.
    - Please explain further the philosophy for having restoration and protection actions at the tail ends of the quintiles. Response: the project team hasn't taken that step yet; that comes next. Restoration actions will be classified and matched up with how each will affect the function, both positively and negatively.
- The WRIA 1 prioritization effort for salmon habitat restoration was noted as a resource that should be looked at. Note: the project team has already reviewed this in its preliminary work.
- What is the intention in terms of how this project will be used by decision-makers and others at the city? Response (Renee): This plan is meant to be a tool. First, the results of this work should help in grant writing. Second, although the plan itself will have no regulatory/code changes, the idea is to have it adopted by city council.

- How will this be brought to the public: Response (Hilary): A stakeholder engagement plan was developed as part of this project. Targeted workshops are being developed. Careful consideration will have to be made in bringing this forward. **Note**: the Project Team scope and budget does not include a public outreach component, just a stakeholder engagement component. But that aspect will need to be carefully considered.
- TAG members requested better maps to better understand how things link to each other. **Note**: maps were distributed via email following the meeting.
- Is this approach flexible enough that another metric can be included at a future date when/if new information comes to light? Response: basically, yes. The idea is that this can be refined over time. Theoretically, as the city implements restoration actions that change the baseline condition, we should be able to go back and calculate changes in the condition using the same (or new) attribute measures.
- Have you thought about a lumped value? Might be important for the creeks. Response: We have thought about it but have concerns that it would obscure and weaken the results. We fear that a lumped rating would be would be misleading and harder to use in determining restoration actions.
- Margaret noted that the discussion has made her think that criteria need to be developed for when something falls into a protect versus restore type of action. She indicated an example of work with Ecology to look at a watershed scale—Ecology has done a Sound-wide assessment of watersheds. One factor that helps determine a watershed's suitability for protection or restoration is the condition of the watersheds upstream and downstream of it. Need to look at sub-watersheds in context of what is around them. Depending on what action you might take; likelihood of success/failure may be dependent of what is up/downstream. The project team will think more about this.

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS:

- The Project Team will provide additional examples of how ecological functions that occur in the "urban" habitat category will be addressed as restoration and protection actions are developed.
- The TAG will receive an email with specific instructions for how to provide comments on the Existing Conditions memo. TAG members were encouraged to focus specifically on those habitat groups they have expertise on and to not worry about addressing all five habitat groups. **Note**: this email was sent on Friday, March 1.