Notes compiled by Bob Zeigler at Watershed Subcommittee meeting April 20, 2004 Room 537-WDFW Director's Conference Room, Natural Resources Building.

Attending: Darrell Phare, NorthWest Indian Fish Commission; Dee Arntz, Audubon Wetnet; Peter Downey, WSDOT-TPEAC, Dick Gersib, WSDOT; Steve Thompson, WSDOT Olympic; Gary Davis WSDOT NW; Ashley Probart, Association of Washington Cities; Rick Anderson Applied Hydrology Northwest; Bob Wubbena, Economic and Engineering Services; Annie Szvetecz, Ecology, Stephen Bernath, Ecology; Peter Birch, Steve, Penland, John Carleton, Margen Carlson, and Bob Zeigler, WDFW.

SUMMARY

Peter Downey mentioned that Senator Haugen and others needed to given an overview in lay persons' terms on what the Watershed Characterization and Mitigation include. He mentioned that the Governor's office under Bob Nichols is involved in a watershed mitigation planning that extends beyond Highway Projects. Ashley Probart and Dee Arntz said they would be willing to assist on the layperson's watershed characterization and mitigation effort.

Dick Gersib discussed his request to identify landscape attributes – which attributes are affecting cost and develop a way to screen for environmental benefit. John Carleton pointed out that there are two different analysis required:

1. Cost of mitigation;
2. Level of impact from potential projects.

Bob Zeigler passed out an unedited draft of possible landscape biological elements to identify red flag areas for planning and project development such as areas with high biodiversity or special limited features that would make full compensation very expensive or impossible. Peter Downey felt that belonged at the Planning Stage and not WSDOT's 6-year out phase. Steve Bernath felt it had too many layers. Dick Gersib felt the new Ecoregional Conservation Assessment effort held some potential.

Dick Gersib asked:

1. Is it cost effective to mitigate on site?
2.Is adjacent to the right-of-way the best place to do mitigation.

Peter Downey mentioned the example of the Seattle Lake Union Ship Canal Bridge. Their cost of mitigating stormwater impacts is very high and there would be zero environmental benefit. Gary Davis pointed out that we had to see if we were mitigating the same thing? It was mentioned that WSDOT is looking at using a statistics package, "Frag Stats" to model impacts.

Steve Thompson mentioned what we develop in landscape attributes should be a prioritization tool. It should provide alternatives to mitigation inside the right-of-way.

Peter Birch mentioned we need to look at "Effectiveness" and our Effectiveness to mitigate on site.

Steve Thompson discussed the problem of a stream with a riparian buffer next to the road. The road was being widened and the riparian area had not been identified as environmentally sensitive. If they had know early on it was environmentally sensitive, they could have avoided it and focused the widening the other direction.

Dick Gersib pointed out that project engineers are driven by cost. The environmental benefit tool needed to be given to them.

Peter Downey presented his Watershed vision. Ten years out Watershed Planning takes place and is not a WSDOT focus or done by WSDOT. It is general watershed planning done by state, federal and local government including TMDL, Salmon Recovery, Instream Flows and Subbasin Plans. Six years out, WSDOT uses their product: a watershed screening tool to look at potential impacts and look at opportunities.

Steve Bernath mentioned that what we needed to have was a prioritization tool.

Bob Wubbena discussed the Walla Walla Watershed planning project. He pointed out in the lower portion of the Walla Walla was not a good place to do mitigation. It only provided migration route for salmonids and had a temperature block. He said there is nothing one could do there to improve things. He mentioned that the City of Walla Walla gets its water out of Mill Creek and that is the only source of City water there now and in the future. He mentioned that the area was developing and agriculture was changing to vineyards. He mentioned there has been a watershed planning process where there would be joint agreement on in-stream flows at 3 points of Mill Creek. Bob mentioned this would start Phase 4 or final planning. They would have 3 construction phases (Phase 6-8). He mentioned there is a lobby group in Walla Walla that wants a 4-lane highway so there can be economic development. Annie Szvetecz asked about how the watershed plan addresses the issue of highway widening to attract growth if water was so limited, Peter Downey responded that highways do not cause growth. It is local planning that directs growth and highways just responds to meet that identified need. He said Washington tax structure based on sales taxes are the stimulus for growth because cities and counties have to continually develop to receive revenues to meet the citizens' needs.

Bob Wubbena pointed out the Plan for the Walla Walla was forward 50 years;

1. 50 years out (2055) Vision – Water supply and land use.
2. 20 year out (2025) CIP Transportation Plan
3. 10 year out (2015) Watershed Planning effort
4. 6 year out (2011) GMA and WSDOT Analysis and Plan
5. 5-1 year out (2006-2010) Implementation.

It was mentioned that if WSDOT could have a "right-of way bank" and acquire right of way earlier in the process there could be financial savings.

Bob Wubbena pointes out the plan for the Walla Walla was to mitigate with habitat restoration and enhancement. For example, they could supplement the aquifer in some places by taking treated stormwater and routing it to gravel substrate areas to infiltrate.

One concern was mentioned that in the Walla Walla pilot, the outcome is known. We need to be deliberative so we accurately reflect what is in the Phase 3 model.

Dick Gersib mentioned that we need to go through the process and see where that leads us and see where we can pull information from.

It was pointed out that not all watershed plans are created equal.

Bob Wubbena outlined the steps in the process:

1. Walla Walla Project
    a. Step 1
    b. Step 2
2. Second Pilot
    a. Step 3
    b. Step 4
3. Third Pilot
    a. Step 5
    b. Step 6

The question was raised: How do we meet the goals of TPEAC.

Peter Birch mentioned the need to involve the local, state and federal agency involvement and this might be a benefit of the Walla Walla Pilot.

Ashley Probart mentioned he wanted to see the federal thumbprint on the pilot. We need to make sure they are engaged.

It was mentioned that we need to demonstrate a process in which

1. Agencies are tied to a united schedule
2. Existing Data is used
3. The results produce benefits.

The MAP Team process was mentioned a defined process of getting everyone in a room and coordinating on permits.

It was mentioned that in performance measure we need to measure success at each step.

Key criteria identified was: interest in watershed mitigation pilot by WSDOT project engineer and resource agency support for the process.

For future pilots, the recommendation supported by the subcommittee was going to the regional administrators and asked them to nominate two candidates projects to test this watershed approach. Bob and Rich would take this potential list to see how it would conform with the Phase 3 Methods and make recommendations and the Subcommittee would screen using criteria presented.

Margen Carlson mentioned that in the Phase 3 report, there were a number of areas where agency comments were responded to that states a particular question would be answered by the pilots. Those comments need to be revisited and those questions actually raised again for the pilots so they can be answered.

The meeting was cut short by a schedule malfunction. Rick Anderson passed out his final draft (April 19) of the Phase 3 report. He said he needed comments back by Monday, April 26.

.