

**Skagit Watershed Alternative Futures Project
Steering Committee Meeting Summary Notes
Wednesday, February 4, 2009
Skagit Valley College Multi-Purpose Room**

Attendance:

Larry Wasserman
Allen Rozema
Margaret Studer
Mike Rundlett
Alternate for Mike Shelby

Rebecca Ponzio
Margaret Fleek
Jana Hansen
John Schuh
Alternate for Carolyn Kelly

Shirley Solomon
Paul Kriegel
Gary Tollefson

Other Participants:

Kirk Johnson
Josh Greenberg
Ryan Walters
Jon-Paul Shanahan

John Lombard
Michael Rylko
Gary Christensen
Kendra Smith

Sara Breslow
Derek Poon
Dave Oleyar
Linda Christensen

The fifth meeting of the Alternative Futures Steering Committee began at 9:00 a.m. with a welcome from project manager Kirk Johnson.

Meeting Notes

The Steering Committee approved the December 3, 2008 and January 7, 2009 meeting note summaries.

Further Project Clarification

Kirk provided a basic overview of key project terms and committee relationships. He and John Lombard discussed the role of the Steering Committee, Technical Committees and Stakeholder Committees. Kirk also explained the role of the Plan Trend and the Development, Agriculture and Conservation futures in the initial modeling and evaluation. He explained that the Stakeholder Committee has the responsibility to develop the Preferred Future which (to use Michael Rylko's words) "seeks to optimize all goals."

The Committee discussed a number of issues, including the meaning of terms (including conservation and preservation); the role of and membership on technical committees; who would serve on the Stakeholder Committee (and might some Steering Committee members also represent their organizations on the Stakeholder Committee); how would forestry be addressed through the process; the proposed contract with Skagit River Systems Cooperative; and the lack of a Department of Ecology representative on the ecosystem Technical Committee.

Kirk closed the discussion saying the group needed to move into the next agenda item, but that these organizational issues would be the first major topic of discussion at the March meeting.

Factors Discussion (small group exercise)

Three separate groups gathered for a brainstorming exercise regarding the possible "factors" (or assumptions) that could be used in defining the alternative futures. The following questions were discussed: 1) What are the factors that you believe should be common to all of the futures?

2) Plan Trend: What are the factors that influence the watershed presently and would continue to do so for the next 50 years under the Plan Trend future?

The factors identified through three small discussion groups are listed in **Attachment 1** to these meeting notes. The groups were also asked to report briefly on the dynamics of the small group discussions. Comments included: the breakout groups were good, but there was insufficient time; the small groups resulted in better group dynamics, it was easier to participate, less afraid to speak than in the large group.

Members Share Process Thoughts

About 35 minutes was devoted at the meeting's end to allow each Steering Committee member to speak for a couple of minutes and describe his or her thoughts on the project and the process so far.

One member said the project has a "huge component of cultural understanding." There needs to be more time "chewing and discussing." We need to engage the broader public; but we need to have more of these discussions in the Steering Committee before going public.

One was pleased that the project is providing a comprehensive framework for representing different interests in the valley in a positive way. In many ways it is a parallel track to the comprehensive flood planning process that is underway. Alternative futures is a way to incorporate things like the Endangered Species Act and federal flood buyouts. "We could do great things; I've been bragging about alternative futures."

One member was concerned about the cost and duration of the project and said this is a common private sector concern. Planning 10 years in the future is a noble effort; it's hard to fathom planning for 50 years. We should leave a little for our grandkids to decide.

One expressed hope for the project, as where we're headed under the plan trend is "not ideal. We're able to model alternatives for the first time." But this member has concerns about how large the committee structure is becoming, how the project committees and subcommittees interact; and who has ultimate responsibility; it's unclear. This could be the project's downfall.

One felt the meeting's length was inadequate – three hour meetings might be necessary. The agricultural technical committee's research scope is larger than the budget – how can we find the extra resources to fund that effort? When the process reaches the Stakeholder Committee, there needs to be stepped up public participation and outreach to all members of the community, beyond the Stakeholder Committee itself, including town hall meetings and public presentations.

One felt the public had not received enough information about the project, and suggested staff and perhaps Steering Committee members should hold outreach meetings with non-governmental organizations to get the word out.

One was "thrilled" with the day's more interactive process. Project managers were commended for aiming high. This member has worked in the valley since 1986 and is looking for a success. This is fundamentally a land use planning exercise. "What would we like to see in the valley 50 years from now?" for the collective thing that comprises our landscape and resources. Ian McHarg pioneered a form of landscape planning (design with nature) that didn't require

computers. We should use charrettes and a tactile, informal process that talks about what this place means to us and what we want to conserve.

One member liked the breakout groups, balanced with the large group discussion. A quick survey would be helpful of previous planning efforts in the Skagit in the last 20 to 30 years. What happened, were they successful, not successful, what are we steering toward? The Stakeholder process should engage community leaders early. The project should link to regional efforts such as the Puget Sound Partnership which have resources and valuable scientific work that can be shared.

One said the project is a type of watershed land use process and solution with potential applications elsewhere in the region. It realizes the need to put sociology before science, to use incentives and regulations together, and to be transparent.

One member noted a recent set of forums where people indicated the overwhelming reason they choose to live in Skagit County is because of the environment. "People can thrive here." This person hopes the project can help in a small way to create a future that maintains that. There has not been a good history of working together, an emphasis on litigation over conversation. What factors will allow us to keep those elements of the environment people so value? There are great possibilities in the process.

One member re-emphasized the need for an organizational chart that clarifies the Steering Committee's role and where things are in the process. This will provide the opportunity for buy in in the early stages and a greater potential for ultimate success.

County planning director Gary Christensen closed the discussion saying that the county has options today due to the plans that were made forty years ago, as displayed on the county's 1968 comprehensive land use plan map hanging on the wall. He said the current comprehensive plan map is similar in many ways to the earlier map, showing that the plan has helped to shape development and retain natural resource lands in the valley.

Attachment 1 – Summary of Small Group Factors Discussion

Project staff will review and incorporate the small group results into the approach for the Plan Trend and the other initial alternative futures.

Group 1: Factors affecting all futures:

Green Infrastructure

- Buffers, open space
- Recreation, trails

Population

- Accept projections?
- Employment assumptions?
- Floodplain development
- Municipal infrastructure
- Transportation, water supply

Factors Affecting Plan Trend::

Water assumptions?

- Amounts withdrawn – consequences

Regional collaboration

- e.g. Mount Vernon, Burlington
- Puget Sound wide
- No change

Group 2: Factors affecting all futures:

Population and demographics

- Growth, greater than anticipated

Species diversity?

Demographic changes

- new people who don't understand
- The place – ecological, agricultural
- Will impact economy – how cities, county function: healthcare, education
- Plus or minus: different populations will have different needs
- Too detailed? Do these affect all futures?
- _____ salary; origin, household size; taxes
- No longer 3rd, 4th generation residents
- New people

Existing land uses, housing, demographics, species

- Current, existing conditions: baseline data
- Starting point

Climate change

Infrastructure

Economic, Socio Political

Variables that will be influential

- \$\$, vehicle fuel?

- Commuting
- Who chooses to live here
- Transportation
- Technical and science change
- Quality of life
- Businesses
- State & federal budget
- Regulations
- e.g. federal flood insurance

Group 2: Plan Trend:

- GMA – 20 year plan based on state goals
- Federal policies that affect state goals
- Current instream flow regulations
- ___ water resources – consumption
- Flood plain management
- Stormwater management
- Water quality, NPDES
- Implementing ESA plans
- Critical areas
- Transportation
- Economic status of agriculture, forestry industry

Group 3: Factors affecting all futures:

- Energy Sources
- Water Supply
 - Availability
 - Sources
 - Quality
- Demographics/ethnicity
 - Public opinion
 - Education
 - Age (youth, old people)
- Agricultural economy-global, regional
- Family makeup
 - Extended
- Urban Growth Boundaries
- Climate change/endangered species
- Sea level rise/flooding
- Regional economy (Boeing, etc.)
- Regional transportation systems
 - People & freight
- Long term resource availability
- Flood risk management/dam flows
- Drainage
- Future economic drivers

Group 3: Factors affecting Plan Trend

Land available

- Planning policies

- Urban densities

- Urban Growth Areas

- Growth Management Areas

Forest Practices

Hydraulics code

State economics

Transportation

Critical Areas Ordinance/WMB/Growth Management Hearings Board

Wall-E

Waste reduction

Elected officials

Urban/rural population allocation

Salmon population/habitat restoration

Farmland legacy, other conservation easements

ESA/Clean Water Act

Water rights

Tribal treat rights

- Usual & Accustomed

Education and skill level

Lawsuits, partnerships

Tech – Employment opportunities

- Telecommunication