

Spirit Lake/Toutle-Cowlitz River Collaborative

May 11th, 2022 | 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Cowlitz County Museum, 405 Allen Street, Kelso, WA 98626 | WebEx

Facilitators: The William D. Ruckelshaus Center (Chris Page, Molly Stenovec, Maggie Counihan)

<https://ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu/projects/current-projects/spirit-lake/>

Meeting Chat Transcript available in Appendix A

Meeting Goals:

- Updates from participating organizations
- Finance Committee: Review and revise proposal for Steering/Technical Committee
- Data/Info Workgroup: Review and provide input on Workgroup goals
- Continue discussing and developing workplan
- Plan site visits/field tour for June

Meeting Attendees:

Representing Sovereign State, Federal, and Tribal Governments:

- Karl Ahlen, Chris Budai, Valerie Ringold – *US Army Corps of Engineers*
- Christina Donehower – *Cowlitz Indian Tribe*
- Angela Elam, Gordon Grant, Rebecca Hoffman, Sue Ripp – *US Forest Service*
- Matt Gerlach – *WA Department of Ecology*
- Dave Howe, Kessina Lee – *WA Department of Fish and Wildlife*
- Tom Iverson – *Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation*
- Steve Ogden – *WA Department of Natural Resources*

Representing Local Governments and Special Purpose Districts:

- Amy Boyd – *Port of Longview*
- Susan Eugenis, Jim Mallett, George Winn – *Cowlitz County*
- Bill Fashing, Brandon Robinson – *Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments*
- Stephen Taylor – *Cowlitz County PUD*
- Dave Vorse – *City of Castle Rock*

Representing US Congressional Offices:

- Sarah Kohout – *US Senator Maria Cantwell's Office*
- Anthony Peña – *US Senator Patty Murray's Office*
- Colin Swanson – *US Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler's Office*

Representing Other Interested Parties:

- Kelley Jorgensen – *HDR, Inc.*
- Ashley Short – *Cascade Forest Conservancy*
- Mark Smith – *Public, Business Owner (EcoPark)*
- Dan Tormey – *Catalyst Environmental Solutions*

Welcome, Introductions:

Chris Page welcomed the participants and reviewed the agenda. Chris invited the participants to state their names and affiliations before answering the following question: What has surprised you most about this first year of collaboration? Many participants have been surprised by high levels of engagement during Spirit Lake/Toutle-Cowlitz River Collaborative (SLTCRC) meetings.

Chris Page briefly reviewed the ground rules. Chris also reviewed the definition of the SLTCRC: a network to address complex problems, a self-organizing system, and a learning and action alliance. Chris summarized the SLTCRC's work-to-date, which includes the Declaration of Cooperation (DOC). Several common interests were identified in the DOC.

Review and Consider Accepting Plan for Steering/Technical Committee:

Finance Committee:

Since the last SLTCRC meeting, the Finance Committee has met twice. The Finance Committee has discussed an RFQ and developed a plan for the Steering Committee. The plan involves adding representatives, considering a technical role, updating workplans, developing meeting agendas, addressing challenges, and overseeing SLTCRC wellbeing.

The SLTCRC has enough funding for the next fiscal year, which ends in July 2023. The Finance Committee is working on funding opportunities for the following fiscal year.

Discussion:

- Dave Howe: We want every group to be represented on the Steering Committee. The Corps plays an important role. The Forest Service is helping, but it would be great if the Corps was involved with the Steering Committee.
- Valerie Ringold: I will put in the request. We will find a way that the Corps can participate.
- Chris Page: Are there any ideas or corrections? Is anything missing?
- Comment: The Steering Committee is not final. It's not something that we have to live with; it's fluid. The Finance Committee should never go away. Finance is very important.
- Comment: We've been talking about shifting the Finance Committee to the Steering Committee. We've identified some voids, such as getting the Corps involved.
- Chris Page: We've discussed getting someone involved from the Department of Ecology. The Finance Committee has meetings every two weeks. The meetings could take place every month. If you are interested, please let us know.
- Comment: I'm not opposed to the Corps being on the Steering Committee, but I see it as more of a resource than a decision-maker. I hope there is an equal balance of people from all organizations.
- Mark Smith: The Steering Committee does not include everyone. Advocates should bring their concerns to the Steering Committee. It's not that people aren't represented; the folks on the Committee should evaluate concerns and make recommendations.
- Sarah Kohout: Will the meetings be open?
- Chris Page: They could be. The meetings should be small enough to be manageable.
- Comment: We should not prevent people from attending the meetings. People could make presentations during the meetings. There could be public comment sessions. Information could be reviewed before being presented to the SLTCRC.
- Matt Gerlach: I'm a member of many collaborative groups. I'm weighing my own participation on the Steering Committee, knowing that I play that role already. I'm curious about local participation on the Steering Committee. These folks are well-suited to be leading and planning agendas. Are there any local folks who are in consideration? The Committee should be connected with resources, as needed.
- Bill Fashing: This may warrant more discussion. We could use state and federal partners as resources to set local agendas. The Finance/Steering Committee can have a discussion.

- Chris Page: We have one local representative. We haven't had a nonprofit representative. Ashley, would your organization be interested in participating?
- Ashley Short: We already sit on the steering committees for forest collaboratives. We have a small staff. We can discuss this internally and get back to the group.
- Chris Page: Having a nonprofit on the Committee would make it well-rounded.
- Mark Smith: We could use federal agencies as "advisory" to balance decisions and recommendations. The Corps isn't wanting to make decisions, but it could provide information, as could the Forest Service.
- Chris Page: The group could have standing membership, as needed, from nonprofits and regulatory sectors.
- Matt Gerlach: In the model I was discussing, which is more locally-led, we have had success with disappearing task groups. If we can ask a question with a specific time frame, it's easier to solve. It's easier for people to commit to disappearing task groups.
- Chris Page: The group could involve additional parties for advice and information. Disappearing task groups could be included.

DECISION: Should the Finance Committee transition to become the Steering Committee, with roles and responsibilities articulated? **APPROVED**

Review and Consider Accepting Goals for Data/Info Management:

Data/Info Management Workgroup:

The Data/Info Management Workgroup met on April 27th. The Workgroup discussed a draft workplan and an information clearinghouse/tracking system. The clearinghouse/tracking system could involve the US Army Corps of Engineers, the US Geological Survey, the US Forest Service, the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments, and the University of Nottingham. The Data/Info Management Workgroup also updated its long-term goals.

Discussion:

- Chris Page: The Data/Info Management Workgroup is interested in developing an information clearinghouse/tracking system. We could center the system around a timeline and provide online information.
- Comment: I'm going to pitch the idea to the Workgroup at the next meeting.
- Chris Page: The next Workgroup meeting needs to be scheduled. It will take place in June.

Updates from Participating Organizations (Related to Sediment Management):

Discussion:

- Matt Gerlach: We have a network of managers across Washington. We are trying to advance multiple-benefit projects, such as watershed management. Are there local representatives that we can pull into this network?
- Karl Ahlen: We anticipate advertising a project for construction by May or June. We hope to award construction by the end of September and begin construction next summer.
- George Winn: We received a grant from Ecology for a comprehensive flood management plan. We are contracting with an engineering firm. We will be finished by the end of next year. There will be public meetings, an analysis of selected watersheds, and a list of ways to reduce flooding within Cowlitz county.
- Bill Fashing: It's important for everyone to hear about the ongoing challenges in local communities. We can see structures that were in place pre-eruption.

- Susan Eugenis: We have a pair of culverts on the mudflow. On February 28th, we had localized heavy rains. Things are returning to pre-eruption levels.
- Mark Smith: Now that the weather is improving, I want to invite members of the group to see the area. I can help arrange. Sarah took the tour and saw the mudflow.
- Chris Page: We will discuss the tour at the end of the meeting.
- Sarah Kohout: It was a great tour. It was really helpful.
- Angela Elam: There is an experiential master's program at Portland State University. Spirit Lake is being incorporated this year. I know several people have been tapped to participate. An event is happening for risk managers and agency administrators. It's a training to look at complex decisions. A tour has been developed to focus on non-fire risk management. I have a comment about the Steering Committee. I didn't catch how the Committee would summarize its meetings and report to the SLTCRC.
- Chris Page: Thank you to those who have volunteered for the Steering Committee. We will set the roster in June. We will make sure the conversations are transparent. Kara Whitman has been taking detailed notes at the Finance Committee meetings. The meetings could be open to folks who want to know what's going on. Should we have open meetings or make notes available to the group?
- Bill Fashing: One of the key deliverables from the Steering Committee will be the meeting agendas. These will be available to the whole group. Meeting notes will be important.
- Chris Page: We could revise the Steering Committee charter. Notes could be available.
- Comment: The agendas need to go out. People need to know what they are meeting about. We need people participating in the meeting. The agendas could be left for the Steering Committee.
- Chris Page: This could be included in the RFQ for the future facilitator.

Continue Developing Workplan:

Develop/Explore Additional Floodplain Capacity:

- Valerie Ringold: In general, the project still needs to be evaluated. Because this involves sediment in the river, Section 404 or 408 regulatory review could be triggered. It depends on the specific proposal.
- Bill Fashing: The Corps has reviewed things on this list. It has passed on certain projects. It could still have interest in these projects, even if these projects were initially passed on. We need to discuss these projects more. Some confusion will go away. People will understand why some decisions were made.
- Chris Page: Some parties think these projects are high priorities. These projects need a champion to move forward. We need to find out whether 404 or 408 analysis will be needed.

Levee Improvements:

- Chris Page: Port has identified this project as a priority.
- Amy Boyd: We're focused on sediment management, facilities, and infrastructure. The levee system is important to the infrastructure of the Port.
- Chris Page: Is 408 analysis part of this effort?
- Amy Boyd: This is a federal levee, so Section 408 analysis is required. Section 205 could be a source of federal funding.

Address Spirit Lake Outflow Risks:

- Chris Page: We should hear from the Forest Service.
- Rebecca Hoffman: I don't have any updates on this. Updates will be posted.

- Comment: Some projects seem repetitive. We could combine some projects.
- Chris Page: While we're here, could we do that?
- Valerie Ringold: Anything in the Spirit Lake area that would affect the sediment would need a Section 408 review. We've made the Forest Service aware of that.
- Chris Page: That would apply to all four Outflow projects. Would it be useful to have a contact for each project? Rebecca Hoffman will be the contact for each project.
- Angela Elam: Outflow opportunities will be evaluated once an environmental impact statement has been completed. We are doing preliminary work. We will add more information online.

Modify Mossyrock Dam Operations:

- Comment: If no one claims this project, we can walk away.
- Comment: There are concerns about flow requirements. It might be better to use the dam to support fish recovery. I don't know where this project came from.

Long-Term Dredging Plan for Cowlitz River:

- Valerie Ringold: We are developing a 20-year plan for the Columbia River. We do not dredge the Cowlitz River. We need to have federally-mandated levels of protection at the levees. Dredging would take place as a last resort to achieve these levels of protection.
- Amy Boyd: The Port gets sediment from the Cowlitz. We are participating in management for the Columbia, but this does not affect the Cowlitz.
- Valerie Ringold: We are finalizing a measure for a sediment trap for the Cowlitz and Columbia. More information will follow.
- Comment: We have a process to ensure downriver safety.
- Valerie Ringold: The annual monitoring informs the level of protection. We will take action if we are not meeting the level of protection.
- Dave Vorse: I have some thoughts about the last topic. I understand what Valerie is saying. The cities and counties believe there is a bigger issue. We want to figure out why the Corps will not measure the river where the sediment is. This needs to happen now; it is becoming dangerous. We had a day with four inches of rain. The water goes higher than it would normally. There have been inconsistencies with the Corps' information. There are serious concerns about its data. Most of us believe we are at the level of protection. We need to have serious discussions with the Corps about how to move forward.
- Sarah Kohout: Valerie, can you remind me of the timeline for the monitoring of fiscal year 2022?
- Valerie Ringold: We will get this information to you.
- Karl Ahlen: We will start in June.
- Dave Vorse: Can we have a discussion before June to review where you are monitoring?
- Karl Ahlen: Can we get back to you? I need to have internal discussions with hydrology and hydraulics people.

ACTION ITEM: Maggie Counihan will send Dave Vorse's contact information to the Corps.

Reconnect Old Channel at Mouth of Cowlitz River Dikes:

- Chris Page: Ideally, you will have high-priority projects and deliverables. This is necessary for the state to provide long-term funding for the SLTCRC. Where did this project come from?
- Bill Fashing: I'll track something down.

Develop Sediment Management Plan Beyond 2035:

- Comment: This goes back to the 2035 expiration concern. We need to make sure that the authority is continued past 2035. Are there things we need to be doing?
- Valerie Ringold: The authority does not expire. The long-term sediment management plan goes through 2035. We need to clarify what the plan looks like beyond 2035. Anything that has been constructed will continue to be operated and maintained.

Explore Collaboration/Connection: The group is already doing this.

Conduct Evaluation of “Grade Building Structures” in Mudflow:

- Mark Smith: We looked at cross-valley structures and inland structures to review options for sediment management. They have started to create islands and re-channel rivers. We want to look at this in upstream areas. I would like a report on the effectiveness. The Corps could give us information. I’m sure they have it.
- George Winn: I wish we could change the term “grade” to something else. I thought “grade” meant “level off.”
- Comment: The reason we are grading structures is to stabilize the river for fish and wildlife habitats. It’s another way to capture sediment and build habitats.
- Valerie Ringold: In 2035, everything will still function. 2035 is an economic deadline. I don’t want a cutoff in 2035. It’s our spending plan for the first 50 years.
- Mark Smith: I’m concerned that new ideas will not be introduced after 2035. We should not stick with the original plan. We should be able to modify it. This is my observation. I don’t want to see things done when there are better, newer ideas. We may need to do something different.
- Valerie Ringold: We need to talk about that more. The plan is authorized. If there is a modification, there is a process that we go through. If something needs to be addressed, we will have to go through the process. It takes a lot to get these approved. It’s not an easy process.
- Chris Page: We’re starting to share information in ways that allows us to address concerns. This has been a really good conversation.

Upcoming Meetings, Next Steps, Action Items:

The next SLTCRC meeting will take place on June 16th from 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM in Kelso, WA. Virtual attendance will be available, but participants are encouraged to attend in person.

Some participants are interested in organizing a field tour. The tour could include the Forest Learning Center and/or EcoPark at Johnson Ridge Observatory.

Adjourn

Appendix A: Meeting Chat Transcript

05/11/2022 09:44:20 AM from Steve Ogden to Everyone:

Steve Ogden, WA DNR. Most notable for me, how much progress has been made, with a large group, virtually... (Basically what Chris just said)

05/11/2022 09:44:25 AM from dave to Everyone:

David Vorse, City of Castle Rock

05/11/2022 09:44:30 AM from Valerie Ringold Portland District Corps to Everyone:

Valerie Ringold - Portland District Corps of Engineers: Surprised me: misunderstanding/mis-information that our Corps authorities for sediment management ends in 2035 - it does not.

05/11/2022 09:44:37 AM from Amy Boyd to Everyone:

Amy Boyd, Port of Longview. I just rejoined this group, and impressed with the work that has advanced in the past year.

05/11/2022 09:45:01 AM from kessina lee to Everyone:

Kessina Lee, WDFW. Surprised by the consistent participation of such a diverse group, and the sense of shared purpose that has developed.

05/11/2022 09:45:50 AM from dave to Everyone:

Appreciate the continued presents of our local, State and Federal representatives.

05/11/2022 09:46:03 AM from Colin Swanson Jaime Herrera Beutler to Everyone:

Colin Swanson Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler. Diverse members on the meetings

05/11/2022 09:46:23 AM from Matt G to Everyone:

Matt Gerlach, WA ECY. Solid participation and minimal tech issues!

05/11/2022 09:46:37 AM from Ashley Short, Cascade Forest Conservancy to Everyone:

Ashley Short, CFC, same as others - level of participation

05/11/2022 09:46:40 AM from Rebecca Hoffman - Gifford Pinchot NF to Everyone:

Rebecca Hoffman - Gifford Pinchot NF - The diverse group that regularly participate

05/11/2022 09:46:41 AM from Christina Donehower to Everyone:

Christina Donehower, Cowlitz Indian Tribe, surprised by diversity of participating organizations and level of collaboration

05/11/2022 09:46:43 AM from Dan Tormey to Everyone:

Dan Tormey, Catalyst Environmental, supporting GPNF. Surprised/glad at the number of multibenefit projects that we are finding as a group.

05/11/2022 09:46:44 AM from Tom Iverson to Everyone:

Tom Iverson, Yakama Nation Fisheries, Surprised on the narrow focus on sediment management, expected a broader ecosystem focus

05/11/2022 09:48:07 AM from Steve Taylor to Everyone:
Steve Taylor, Cowlitz PUD - collaboration, level of collaboration

05/11/2022 09:48:21 AM from Sue Ripp to Everyone:
Sue Ripp, Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Same comments as others -- commitment of group and working together to create a path forward.

05/11/2022 09:48:25 AM from Kelley Jorgensen to Everyone:
I came to the first meeting to learn about the collaborative's efforts. I have been impressed by the diversity of stakeholders represented and hope that some good ecosystem restoration projects come out of the process, in addition to sediment management and improved fish passage.

05/11/2022 09:48:52 AM from kessina lee to Everyone:
(My internet is unstable today, keeping my video off so my audio doesn't cut out. Dave Howe will be the "face" of WDFW today.

05/11/2022 10:05:38 AM from dave to Everyone:
Where is the list of those who are suggested on the steering committee?

05/11/2022 10:11:16 AM from PW-MallettJ to Everyone:
Wish to sign on to the steering committee.

05/11/2022 10:17:36 AM from Valerie Ringold Portland District Corps to Everyone:
Is there consideration of an Advisory Committee in which agencies such as the Corps can help advise on our authorities, regulatory role, Congressional mandates that we have, etc?

05/11/2022 10:32:12 AM from angela.elam to Everyone:
Executive Seminar

05/11/2022 10:35:15 AM from Steve Ogden to Everyone:
Such an awesome program, went through the program about 5 years ago.

05/11/2022 10:53:43 AM from dave to Everyone:
Having trouble hearing Valerie

05/11/2022 11:05:36 AM from angela.elam to Everyone:
this spreadsheet may be an opportunity to identify project milestone dates

05/11/2022 11:07:24 AM from angela.elam to Everyone:
yes on POC

05/11/2022 11:14:35 AM from Valerie Ringold Portland District Corps to Everyone:
Mossy Rock is not a Corps project

05/11/2022 11:45:37 AM from Colin Swanson Jaime Herrera Beutler to Everyone:
I will definitely try and make it in person next month. Thanks for everyone participation!

05/11/2022 11:46:38 AM from Sue Ripp to Everyone:

Chris - Should mention the time frame of the trip to help determine how many stops.

05/11/2022 11:46:56 AM from Sue Ripp to Everyone:
Sorry I can't jump in but my Webex is not working well

05/11/2022 11:49:17 AM from Valerie Ringold Portland District Corps to Everyone:
Chris - have you identified support needed for the field trip? The Corps would need to determine resources needed and if we have availability of staff on the day of the site visits. Thanks

05/11/2022 11:49:56 AM from Amy Boyd to Everyone:
I am familiar with the area and issues but find seeing it together has a lot of value.

05/11/2022 11:51:04 AM from Matt G to Everyone:
I am unable to attend next month's meeting on the 16th

05/11/2022 11:51:38 AM from Steve Ogden to Everyone:
I'm in for an all day tour.

05/11/2022 11:51:38 AM from Ashley Short, Cascade Forest Conservancy to Everyone:
We have a conflicting tour with one of our Forest Collabs for the same day in June

05/11/2022 11:52:19 AM from Sue Ripp to Everyone:
Agree it should be planned far enough in advance to determine resources needed and availability

05/11/2022 11:52:54 AM from Colin Swanson Jaime Herrera Beutler to Everyone:
I am always open for tour but agree with Sue might need some advance notice.

05/11/2022 11:53:50 AM from Rebecca Hoffman - Gifford Pinchot NF to Everyone:
If most can't make in person -think we should consider if doing virtual meeting if only a few make an in person...

05/11/2022 11:55:07 AM from Amy Boyd to Everyone:
I will be attending meetings in person going forward.