

## **Spirit Lake/Toutle-Cowlitz River System Level Collaboration**

**DRAFT** Meeting Summary: September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021 | 9:30am - 12pm (via WebEx)

Facilitated by the William D. Ruckelshaus Center

(Chris Page, Kara Whitman, and Maggie Counihan)

Link to Meeting materials: <https://ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu/projects/current-projects/spirit-lake/>

(Meeting chat notes included at end of notes as Appendix A)

### **Meeting Goals:**

- Present downstream communities' public safety and economic vitality
- Discuss draft Charter & Declaration of Cooperation
- Outline next steps to finalize declaration of cooperation and work beyond that
- Gain input on in-person meetings, field trip, workshop ideas

### **Meeting Attendees:**

#### **Representing Sovereign State, Federal, and Tribal Governments.**

Elaine Harvey, Tom Iverson—*Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation*

Seth Russell, Erik White—*Cowlitz Indian Tribe*

Amanda Gillen, Tom Hausmann—*National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)*

Karl Ahlen, Chris Budai, Valerie Ringold—*US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)*

Christy Darden, Angela Elam (phone), Gordon Grant, Rebecca Hoffman, Sue Ripp, Chris Strebis,  
Eric Veach—*US Forest Service (USFS)*

Dave Howe—*WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)*

Steve Ogden—*WA Dept. of Natural Resources (WADNR)*

#### **Representing Local Governments.**

Dave Vorse—*City of Castle Rock*

Ken Hash—*City of Longview*

Susan Eugenis, Jim Mallett, Ernie Schnabler—*Cowlitz County*

Bill Fashing, Brandon Robinson—*Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG)*

Dale Lewis—*Port of Longview*

#### **Representing State Representatives and Elected Officials.**

Carson Coates, Colin Swanson—*US Representative J. Herrera-Beutler's Office*

Sarah Kohout—*US Senator M. Cantwell's Office*

Bryan Stebbins—*U.S. Senator P. Murray's Office*

#### **Representing other Interested Stakeholder Meeting Participants.**

Dan Tormey—*Catalyst Environmental Solutions*

Molly Whitney—*Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board (LCFRB)*

Ray Yurkewycz—*Mount Saint Helens Institute*

Mark Smith—*Public, Owner of EcoPark*

Dan Weinberg—*Public*

**Introductions and Agenda Review:** Chris Page reviewed the agenda, asked participants to introduce themselves in the chat, and went over ground rules and the use of WebEx tools. Chris also explained the primary mandate for this phase of the collaborative (to enable the parties to determine whether to commit to long-term collaboration and, if so, to develop and agree on a

framework for doing so). He reminded participants the collaboration would not usurp existing mandates, not provide formal advice to any government, nor make policy decisions for agencies. Chris explained what the collaborative group *can* do, including:

- Determine whether to continue this effort over the long term
- Exchange info, find ways to dovetail/build on each other in beneficial ways
- Raise awareness of authorities, mandates, funding streams (& limits), projects, timelines, resource needs, etc.
- Coordinate to optimize planning timelines, balance priorities, and meet multiple objectives
- Develop & advance a vision for whole system

**Work to date on this phase.** The Ruckelshaus Center is trying to balance process and content in this phase. To date the group has heard presentations on the hydro geomorphic dynamics of the system and on the NASEM recommendations for collaboration. The group has generated ideas for and reviewed drafts of a shared vision for the whole system, a potential set of shared values, and goals for this convening stage of the collaboration. The group has also reviewed and provided input on a Draft Charter for the prospective long-term full collaborative, and on a draft Declaration of Cooperation by public agencies.

***DRAFT Vision:*** Holistic and systemic management, using a collaborative approach to planning, engagement, and participation focused on multiple benefits including:

- economic development and thriving communities
- human health and safety via sediment management, flood prevention & protection
- ecological restoration, fish and wildlife recover, and resiliency
- recreational opportunities
- research integrity & educational opportunities
- tribal historical, natural, and cultural resources (*proposed at 7/8 meeting*)

***DRAFT Set of Shared Values***

- Safety for downstream communities
- Restored, healthy ecosystems
- Access: increasing for recreation; maintaining for research & education
- Securing sufficient funding for planning & implementation
- Managing for multiple functions & benefits
- Reducing intervention via engineered structures in favor of natural processes

***Goals for convening stage:***

- Identify collective issues & risk concerns; recognize mandates & missions of government agencies and other key parties
- Develop and agree upon a shared vision for the whole basin and a set of common interests/values
- Get agreement from key parties to long-term collaboration
- When commitments made to work together, identify opportunities & mechanisms to establish the collaborative long term

- Increased trust & understanding, stronger relationships, agreement to act with awareness of others' perspectives

### **Presentation, Q&A: Downstream Communities' Safety & Economic Vitality:**

Speakers: Jim Mallett, Cowlitz County; Dale Lewis, Port of Longview; Ken Hash, City of Longview; Dave Vorse, City of Castle Rock; Ernie Schnabler, Cowlitz County Emergency Management

**Jim Mallet, Cowlitz County** (a County Commissioner & manager both resigned, so Jim is filling in) Jim has a keen interest in this collaboration, having started with Cowlitz County in the 1970s. When the mountain started to rumble, they developed a red zone to keep people. Then deputy sheriff and coroner, he now serves as an elected official on the Conservation District and a vegetation manager for the County. He deals with dredging issues daily, and the cells created from dredging in the 1980s and 1990s. The County has 2000 acres given to them by the state, full of cells with ash piles in various states of degradation. Invasive weeds have overrun the cells. If they take off the vegetation, they will degrade even faster (they are already breaking down and creating other ash piles). The ash piles present challenges for economic development. Jim has been working on Integrating ash with amendments with farm and hybrid trees and is currently drafting a fee and "in-lieu" program.

### **Dale Lewis, Port of Longview**

Dale was a freshman in high school when the mountain erupted. He is now the Director of External Affairs for the Port of Longview. Approximately 100,000 citizens rely on flood control of the river. The Port district spans 830 square miles. Dale provided the text from his presentation:

*"The Port of Longview sits at the confluence of the Cowlitz and Columbia Rivers at river mile 66. Over the last several years, the Port has experienced significant sedimentation deposits, likely from the Cowlitz River. Over the last 6 years the Port has dredged about 1300,000 cubic Yards from along its docks at a cost of \$2.3 million to maintain its operations. The Columbia River ports and the Federal government have invested millions of dollars in navigation infrastructure such as channel deepening and stern buoys. If the Cowlitz River system were to fail, 2.4 billion cubic yards of debris could fill our local river system, bringing disastrous impacts not seen since the eruption of Mt. St. Helens in 1980. An event of such magnitude will destroy decades of investments and stop the flow of goods on one of the Nation's most critical waterways. Since 1921, The Port of Longview has been this region's economic engine. Today, the Port generates nearly 20,000 jobs, \$34 million in state and local taxes, \$2.9 billion in overall economic value and \$687 million in personal income that leads to supporting local businesses."*

### **Ken Hash, City of Longview**

Ken (Public Works Director in Longview) has lived in lower Cowlitz since 1973. His dad worked for the Army Corp in the 1980s on all the structures. He has a long history of working in and around the Toutle Cowlitz. Public Works operates largely out of the public eye. In Longview, due to siltation issues with the water supply, they switched to a well system at huge taxpayer cost. Kelso now faces this same decision. Untold tax dollars have gone into just sustaining water for the communities. Ratepayers don't necessarily understand why their rates go up. They must

continually dredge the intake just to maintain water in Lake Sacajawea – their “crown jewel,” which supports a lot of economic activity. If they stop flushing water from Cowlitz, the Lake will stagnate. Another major impact is that the lower Columbia boat launch continually deals with siltation and is not useable now. When fish hit the Cowlitz, the river will be filled with boats, but only if the boat launch is available. They have cleaned out the old boat lodge and Gearhardt Gardens, and hope to maintain this, but at some point, something must be done about the silt.

***Dave Vorse, City of Castle Rock***

Dave has worked for Castle Rock for more than 40 years and seen that city’s quality of life and economic stability decline in the face of increasing flood control costs. Ash is the number one problem, bringing yearly flooding concerns. Dave said the Army Corp data is not trusted by all and believes that cross sections need adjusting to accurately understand the changes in the system. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) mapping has reflected these changes. What happens at the Sediment Retention Structure (SRS) matters, an alternative outflow to Spirit Lake is needed, and the SRS needs raising. Dave also noted that their quality of life is first and foremost about the fish. The city cares deeply what happens at the tunnel and the SRS, and hope it is done as quickly as possible. They appreciate the U.S. Congressional Representatives providing funding, but we need to do more than catch up since as of now it must be addressed on an ongoing basis.

***Ernie Schnabler, Cowlitz County Department of Emergency Management***

Ernie noted that they always must plan for the worst-case scenario. The Spirit Lake tunnel drains the lake effectively at this point, but the debris avalanche is still quite alive, so to speak. Constriction of that tunnel is possible, requiring repairs. The tunnel is the lifeline for us to make sure the Lake can drain. The collaboration with the Forest service is outstanding. The emergency preparedness plan and the Spirit Lake management plan dovetailed well together. They have training and exercises/drills for each of these plans. If the tunnel is compromised/restricted and blocked, Spirit Lake would rise to a dangerous height and possibly breach the dam – bringing water and debris from the Lake down the Toutle, into Cowlitz, I-5 and railroad tracks, emptying eventually in the Columbia River. This would include rocks, timber, etc. and would impact 64,000 residents of Cowlitz County. It all ends up in the shipping channel. Spirit Lake and the tunnel are of great concern for us.

Jim Mallett provided closing remarks, stating again, “the number one problem is the ash.” A long-term sediment solution is needed. Cowlitz County is in a dire situation that will only get worse as we go forward attempting to control the ash erosion problems. He shared pictures:



*Pic 1: Ash pile. Primary experimentation site. Pic 2: calves off like a glacier during high water events, then the islands wash out to frustrate the Columbia and our ports.*

Jim expressed that we all need a comprehensive plan, under emergency status, for dredging and addressing the stockpile of ash, which is a never-ending process. They would like to come out of this collaborative with a comprehensive plan to overcome the constraints and uncertainties. It is hard to cross all the jurisdictional lines of the regulators, who need to overcome their differences to tie up this ash all the way to the lahar—which would require all entities working together.

### **Bill Fashing, Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG)**

Bill expressed that this consortium (collaborative) is critical for dealing with these issues together over the long term, to provide steady/consistent communication between the agencies and the downstream communities. They can't go long periods of time without the federal and state partners working with all entities impacted. The next high-water event could happen next week, and we are not ready for it.

### **Questions/Discussion**

- **Q.** Do you track cost estimates of dealing with sediment as a budget category? **A.** The Port does. They have spent 2.3 million over the last 6 years (Port). Dave Vorse explained that residents are paying higher premiums as the flood zones change, every FEMA map revision leads to more properties being included.
- **Q.** (Tom Iverson) We need to update flood maps. The natural system is constrained by levees etc.; is there any planning on how settlement happens as the river and floodplain changes which is a natural process? Is there a long-term plan rather than controlling the river? **A.** These are long established businesses and homes; the floodplain is being expanded upon them.
- **C.** (Mark Smith) We have built a lot of developments in flood plains. The development moratorium expired (after 20 years) and after that they started to develop these regions. We have never sat down and looked at development through this lens. The lack of dredging is leading the gradient of the river to rise, impacting the sediment piles more often. The public needs to become more aware of what we are dealing with, including the building and planning division of the cities/ counties. People buy property and they don't know the history or understand the sediment.
- **Q.** (Ray Yurkewycz) Assessing risk of tunnel collapse. How did you get to these estimates from the previous presentation? **A.** (Bill Fashing) From a local resident perspective, what was missing in the presentation is the potential of a small seismic event combined with a water event disrupting Mt. Saint Helens.
- **C.** (Dave Howe) Redundancy is key for any engineering project. It is prudent to have a secondary outlet. **C.** (Chris Strebig) One of Gordon Grant's points (from last meeting) is that there is always some level of risk, and those risks tend to stack up. The highest level of risk is during tunnel repair since the only current outflow is the tunnel. We do what we can to mitigate that risk: the tunnel is designed to have 20 ft of free board, but there is the wild card of a seismic event.
- **C.** Valerie Ringold: The Army Corp did a limited evaluation report. The SRS is a flood risk management feature that helps protect downstream communities. We look at the population

at risk downstream and the consequences of flood events. It is part of standard operating procedures using models etc. to understand those risks.

### **Draft Charter and Declaration of Cooperation (DoC)**

Chris Page discussed the intention and ideas behind the DoC and the Charter. About a third of the participating entities have provided comments on the documents. The DoC is intended as a first step, then the group can work towards a more comprehensive document like a charter.

Chris walked through the DoC and provided an overview of the comments received. Chris Strebig noted that the main purpose for the collaborative is to *work together* on how we address the issues. We can work together to be stronger. The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) noted that to fully implement all their recommendations it would likely require congressional authorization.

- **C.** I have an issue with the NASEM quote “moderate consequence.” Timeliness is very important – funding needs to be timely to make sure it is beneficial.
- **Q.** We are concerned about mentions of “seek funding” and what that means. Can it be nuanced in a way that a federal agency could agree to? This is because federal agencies are not allowed to lobby for funding. An agency can be part of a solution to seek funding but could not sign on to a request for funding. **C.** Suggestion for wording to resolve this issue: “identify funding needs, and where able, advance or seek funding to support those needs.”
- **C.** Federal agencies can provide information and will do whatever we can. **Q.** Can we use language that does not obligate an agency to lobbying, but allows the agencies to participate in the process of helping others find funding?

**ACTION ITEM:** The Ruckelshaus Center will edit the DoC based on all feedback thus far and make calls to those who have not provided input to ensure their feedback is also incorporated.

### **DoC Discussion**

- **C.** (Valerie Ringold) My background is in planning. We solve water resource problems and the first thing we do is to make a problem statement. The DoC needs a clear statement of the problem we are trying to solve. **C.** We should look at NASEM Report for problem statement.
- **C.** There is a fair amount of focus on the limitations of the agencies.
- **C.** It would be good to identify points of conflict between the mandates/missions.
- **Q.** What decision-making authority does this collaborative have? Part of our charge here is to develop a holistic vision for the basin. That vision is aspirational that we would all strive for, but does not bind us in one direction, but gives us a direction. Helps to avoid working at cross purposes and identify opportunities to work together in an ongoing forum.
- **C.** (Mark Smith) This is a big undertaking, and we should do whatever it takes to make it simple enough for everyone to participate. It is cooperative, a venue to share the ideas, direction and the concept that would help to work towards positive change.
- **C.** (Bill Fashing) I see this as a communications tool and process. What are the needs, challenges, gaps, etc. This group could formulate ways to fill gaps and address challenges.
- **Q.** (Jessica Schafer) If we have comments that we want to make, who is the keeper of that information? How will information flow be handled? I look at regional scale planning. If there is information about a landscape project I want to share, who do I share this? **A.** Email this type

of request to The Ruckelshaus Center: either Kara Whitman ([kmwhitman@wsu.edu](mailto:kmwhitman@wsu.edu)) or Chris Page ([c.page@wsu.edu](mailto:c.page@wsu.edu)) to request time on the agenda.

### **In-Person Meetings, Field Trip, and Workshop Ideas.**

Chris page discussed meetings for the rest of the year. The group may opt for a hybrid approach to in person meetings.

- **C.** (Valerie Ringgold) Meeting agenda item— we would like to offer an Army Corp talk about the SRS, the Fish Collection Facility, and our ongoing projects: how they operate, how it ties in with downstream communities and navigation. We can give an overview of our facilities and how they work in this system, along with the congressional mandates.
- **C.** (Mark Smith) I live right behind the SRS. An in-person view would really help everyone to understand the scale and complexity. We could coordinate a time for everyone to travel to the area and have someone there to explain if we cannot put everyone on a bus together.
- **C.** (Dave Vorse) There is a drone presentation that the Army Corps could narrate to look at pinch points and address why things are the way they are.
- (Bill Fashing) I think that presentation consists of aerial photos turned into a movie.

**ACTION ITEM:** Put the aerial photo video (from Bill Fashing) on project website.

**ACTION ITEM:** Add to the DoC — roles and responsibilities by category, update (COMPLETE)

**Next meeting: October 14, 2021 from 9:30 am – 12:00 pm (In person/WebEx - TBD?)**

### **Appendix A: WebEx Meeting Chat (*not including Introductions*)**

September 9, 2021      9:44 AM      from Kara Whitman to everyone: project website  
<https://ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu/projects/current-projects/spirit-lake/>

September 9, 2021      10:30 AM      from Mark Smith to everyone: This identifies the two major sediment problems, the lower river deterioration and the sediment plan behind the SRS.

September 9, 2021      10:32 AM      from Mark Smith to everyone: Also, Cowlitz County, Castle Rock, Longview and Kelso, building and planning departments need to be provided more information regarding development .

September 9, 2021      10:34 AM      from Mark Smith to everyone: There was a 20 year moratorium in place after the eruption, when it expired there was no new plan or review conducted. We need to revisit this with a long range plan on the encroachment of development and the natural erosion .

September 9, 2021      10:40 AM      from Mark Smith to everyone: We are continuing to allow development and increase to the population in areas of concern. When the Mt erupted Cowlitz County was approx 62k today we are now at Over 100k , should we continue to allow

people to move into these areas of concern without a plan or clear understanding of the long term affects.

September 9, 2021 11:02 AM from cb to everyone: can you edit a quote from the NASEM Report?

September 9, 2021 11:04 AM from Mark Smith to everyone: I would add the Columbia River to the Project Background since it is also most effected. It also will give us a more federal support due to its priority as a national water way

September 9, 2021 11:06 AM from Jennifer Hennessey to everyone: how about "identify funding needs, and where able, advance or seek funding to support those needs"?

September 9, 2021 11:07 AM from Mark Smith to everyone: Agency can also help define estimated funding amounts

September 9, 2021 11:12 AM from Dave Howe to everyone: That makes sense to me Chris.

September 9, 2021 11:17 AM from Mark Smith to everyone: Is the Corp mandated now to study the entire system ?

September 9, 2021 11:19 AM from Bill Fashing to everyone: Might want to add state representative Jim Walsh who represents part of Longview.

September 9, 2021 11:19 AM from Kara Whitman to everyone: Padlet Link: <https://padlet.com/kmwhitman1/rscaupaigu6td4v5>

September 9, 2021 11:33 AM from Valerie Ringold Corps of Eng. Portland to everyone: @Mark Smith - the Corps does not have a study authority to look at the entire system at this time. We have construction authorization at the SRS for additional crest raises and FCF upgrades and fish release sites, and we have O&M responsibilities for those facilities and monitoring sediment movement.

September 9, 2021 11:37 AM from dave to everyone: I agree with Bill, Mark and David Howes comments.

September 9, 2021 11:37 AM from Valerie Ringold Corps of Eng. Portland to everyone: I should clarify that the State (WDF) actually does the O&M of the fish-related facilities

September 9, 2021 11:37 AM from dave to everyone: Communication is key.

September 9, 2021 11:41 AM from Chris Strebig to everyone: project website <https://ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu/projects/current-projects/spirit-lake/>

September 9, 2021 11:52 AM from PW-MallettJ to everyone: USFS hired Cowlitz County Search and Rescue to fly/drone the monument. Unknown if narrated

September 9, 2021 11:52 AM from Ray Yurkewycz, MSHI he/him/his to everyone:  
We are happy to help with coordination of a field trip, and if/when appropriate, host in person session/meal at former Coldwater Ridge Visitor Center (190000 ft2, meeting and commercial kitchen facilities).

September 9, 2021 11:56 AM from Ray Yurkewycz, MSHI he/him/his to everyone:  
Mark is right - impossible to get a sense of scale without being there in person. Scale is important. And even if folks have been there in the past, it's good to refresh memories and impressions.