



### **Steering Committee Meeting**

Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Suite 2

1800 Glenn Highway, Palmer

**Tuesday, March 10, 2015 1:30 – 4 pm**

### **Final NOTES**

**Facilitator:** Frankie Barker

**Notetaker:** Corinne Smith

**Steering Committee:** Christie Cincotta, Bill Rice, Erika Ammann (phone), Roger Harding (phone), Arni Thomson (phone)

**Coordinator:** Jessica Speed

**Guests:** Jon Gerken, Stormy Haught, David Wigglesworth (phone)

**Absent:** Jessica Winnestaffer, Kim Ryals

**Guest Presentation:** Stormy Haught from the Palmer office of the Habitat division of ADF&G gave an update on upcoming work on the Parks Highway. The Alaska Department of Transportation (ADOT) has two main projects: mile 99 – 163 (south) and mile 163-183 (north). There will be a total of about 40 culvert replacements, with significant work in 2016 and minor work this summer. The southern project is mostly adding passing lanes in some stretches, so culverts outside those areas won't be touched even if they are within the overall project area. Cathy Shea is the contact for ADOT on the southern project. The northern project is mostly rehabilitation and resurfacing. Luke Bowles is the contact for ADOT on the northern project. There are 19 anadromous stream crossings in the northern project; these are mostly chinook streams and four are high value resident streams (i.e. Dolly Varden). Sixteen of these crossings will be improved. Most of these pipes are 50 years old, and some have 8' perches with road fill on top. Priority crossings, including Little Honolulu, Honolulu, Rabideaux, and Horseshoe creeks, will be fixed. Bill said that this is the largest culvert upgrade project ever undertaken in the borough.

Stormy offered to bring photos of the culvert sites to the steering committee in the future. There was discussion about ADF&G and ADOT presenting the project to the assembly and at the August transportation fair. Frankie will contact the ADOT engineers to see if they'd give a briefing to the assembly.

The committee asked about the MOU for culverts between ADF&G and ADOT. It is still in place. The Anchorage habitat office is working with ADOT to update the MOU. With a new governor, this may be an opportunity for the Alaska fish habitat partnerships to contact the administration to let them know that they identified the revision of the MOU as a priority issue in 2013. Additionally, the governor's fish transition team identified fish passage as a priority issue.

**Consensus & Navigating Difficult Conversations as a Steering Committee:** Corinne led a discussion about consensus decision making with the attached handout on the unifying principles of consensus. The strategic action plan identifies consensus as the decision making process of the partnership. While this has worked in the past, recent difficult discussions have made it clear that the committee needs to review consensus and think about some aspects of it (e.g. quorum for decisions, identifying decisions clearly, decisions via email, etc).

- **ACTION:** At the meeting and via emails in the week after, we identified the following practices to incorporate into our decision making process. **These will be approved or revised at the May meeting.**
  - **Agendas:** The meeting agenda should note where decisions need to be made versus informational discussion items. If other decision points come up during the meeting, the notes will reflect them.
  - **Consensus:** The intention and hope is that all Steering Committee members are present at meetings and are available to review and provide input on decisions affecting the Partnership. This is not always possible. At steering committee meetings, the current practice is to reach consensus with those present in person or on the phone. Decisions should be made with at least five of the nine steering committee members present (i.e. a quorum).
  - When using email to circulate drafts of letters or reports that are being prepared for the Partnership, whoever is sending materials for review by email needs to ensure there is ample time provided to enable a quorum at minimum, who can approve the materials. If comments are not received from individual steering committee members within a reasonable allotted time, it is assumed they have no comments or objections with the written document (including meeting notes).
  - **Notes:** The meeting notes should highlight what decisions or actions were agreed upon and who is taking the responsibility for each item. Notetakers will send out draft notes from the meetings to all Steering Committee members after each meeting. Committee members will send back comments and corrections via reply all and the notetaker will make edits. Final notes are distributed with the agenda before the next meeting. At the next meeting the committee will briefly review the notes and the decisions made at the last meeting.
  - **Handouts:** Meeting agendas and handouts relating to agenda items should be sent out at least one day prior to the meeting and preferably 1 week in advance. Senders should indicate whether they want a decision to be made related to the information (ie. budget approval) or if it is just for general discussion. That gives time for people to make calls to Jessica and other board members ahead of the meeting to answer questions.

Some of these deficiencies in the process were evident at the January steering committee meeting. Arni didn't think the committee operated by consensus because it ignored his organization's (Alaska Salmon Alliance) opposition to the borough's planning process and the participation of the partnership coordinator. Some committee members did not realize that he opposed Jessica attending the workshop or that the committee was making a decision about that attendance.

- **ACTION:** Arni will revise the January meeting notes to accurately reflect this discussion. The steering committee will review those revised notes at its May meeting.

**Feedback on Borough's Cook Inlet Research Management plan:** Bill started this discussion by pointing out that we had two decisions on the table:

1. Do we comment on the plan, and if so, what are our comments?
2. How do we want to reply to the letter about the plan from member Upper Cook Inlet Driftnetter's Association (UCIDA)?

Bill had prepared a presentation that highlighted parts of the plan that he thought the committee might want to comment on. Jon Gerken attended the workshop, along with Jessica, and came to the steering committee meeting to share his thoughts. The committee discussed several points:

- ranking of habitat goal as third (i.e. last);
  - assumptions that inclusion in partnership plan indicates habitat issues are being addressed
  - assumptions about how partnership funding is used for research
  - ranking of habitat issues within that goal and overall
  - identification of Partnership representative
  - placement of Anadromous Waters Catalog in the plan
  - beaver dams
  - marine mammals
- **DECISION:** The committee agreed that the partnership should comment on the planning process and contents.
- **ACTION:** Corinne will draft a letter about the above discussion points and the committee will review via email.

Jessica noted appreciation for UCIDA taking the time to send Partnership a letter. UCIDA's letter took issue with the partnership coordinator's participation in the plan workshop because they thought that violated the partnership's abstention from allocation decisions. Committee members in attendance (Arni had left by this point) disagreed that we were weighing in on allocation issues. The partnership's strategic action plan does not preclude attending meetings where allocation will also be included; we cannot avoid those talks sometimes when habitat is also being addressed. We agreed that we need to be clear in the comment letter to the borough that Jessica was not involved in discussions related to allocation. Jessica suggested a teleconference between herself, a representative from the committee, and Eric Huebsch of UCIDA.

- **DECISION:** The committee decided that the coordinator and one or two members of the steering committee should talk with UCIDA.
- **ACTION:** Jessica will contact Eric Huebsch to see if he'd like to set up a teleconference with her and Bill.

**Wastewater management issues:** Arni had sent materials about this but had to leave the meeting before this topic came up. Frankie updated the committee about the borough's wastewater task force.

- **ACTION:** This topic will be added to the May agenda for discussion.

**Letter from FHPs on allocation process:** Jessica updated the committee about a letter that the fish habitat partnerships have been working on to provide comments about the NFHP funding allocation

process. Steve Perry of the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture took the lead on the letter and solicited comments. Jessica has not given him any feedback yet. Bill said that USFWS said they'd try this process for 2 years, and it's been 2 years, so it's time to comment. Roger has seen the letter and thinks that the FHPs have good comments about improving the process. Frankie suggested that we comment about how the timing of awards makes it difficult for field projects to start; it will be up to May 1<sup>st</sup> this year before we find out about funding levels.

- **DECISION:** The committee decided to hold off submitting any comments until after funding decisions have been made for this year and asked Jessica to convey that to Steve Perry and to ask for the latest version of the letter for the committee to review.

**Partnership budget** Jessica walked through the budget for fiscal year 2016 (July 1, 2015 – June 31, 2016). The steering committee needs to approve the budget every year. The budget includes a part-time coordinator (0.75 FTE). FWS/NFHP funds cover about 2/3 of that position and TNC raises the matching funds. Corinne said that the steering committee can help with finding those match sources. Bill suggested that we could reduce the NFHP match need in the future if the overall NFHP project list includes projects with large match amounts, such as the AKSSF \$1million fish passage.

In addition to finding match for the coordinator position, the other significant fundraising need is for the symposium. NFHP provides some base support but using federal funds for conferences has become very limited. The borough has also been a major supporter with \$4000 – 5000 per year. A few partners have made contributions each year, and TNC has provided most of the rest. Last year partners pledged \$1400 but not all was received. The committee discussed options for covering costs (e.g. donate at the event, charge for lunch, stronger member solicitation, outdoor stores like Bass Pro and Cabelas). Corinne said that we need to know about funds before the event, so we cannot rely on money that comes in at the event to cover current-year costs. Jessica and the outreach committee will be working on a fundraising plan for the symposium.

The committee also discussed use of NFHP coordination funds to support partners' travel expenses to represent the partnership at conferences. The budget identifies up to \$6700 for travel to state and national conferences (\$5500) and mileage for the coordinator (\$1200). NFHP grants currently include \$2000 for travel. Jeff Davis has offered to present for the partnership at the AFS conference in Portland next fall and asked if travel support was available. This would be the first time we've supported partners with NFHP funds. Corinne recommended that we should have a policy about these reimbursements and suggested a maximum reimbursement of \$500. Frankie suggested that we ask Jeff for his estimated travel expenses and then decide what to reimburse. Corinne voiced concern that decisions could be seen as arbitrary without a policy and that we could use up limited travel funds early in the year.

- **ACTION:** Corinne (who prepared the draft budget) will revise the budget to clear up some confusion about available match funds and bring it back to the committee at the May meeting for approval. The committee will decide then about how to distribute travel funds and supporting Jeff Davis' trip to AFS.

**Potential updates to RFP process:** Bill gave a head ups that a draft RFP will be presented for discussion at the May steering committee meeting and that the RFP will need to be approved at the July meeting.

- **ACTION:** Bill will update the RFP and refer to comments that the committee made at last fall at a meeting. Christy will help Bill to update the RFP and score card.

**January Steering Committee meeting notes:** Arni pointed out that the notes did not include Alaska Salmon Alliance's objection to the research plan.

- **ACTION:** Arni will provide revised notes to Jessica Speed for the January notes.

## Committee Updates

- **Science and Data Committee:** Jeff Davis will lead this committee. The committee is submitting comments for the national fish habitat assessment. Bill and Jessica are working on notes from the last meeting about Index watersheds. Jeff will manage that process from here. Bill said that it will be difficult to select those watersheds and it may take longer than expected.
- **Symposium Planning:** Jessica said that tentative dates of November 17, 18, and/or 19 have been selected and that the Depot is the preferred location. She will book it after talking to a couple of committee members. Polly Bass of Mat-Su College has joined the committee, and Chuck Kaucic has stepped off.
- **Outreach:** Frankie said that two new members have joined - Christy Cincotta and Kim Ryals. A draft outreach plan is out for review. The committee is working on the annual report with a goal to complete it by the end of April. The outreach committee is partnering with ADF&G, USGS, and Alaskans for Palmer Hayflats on a Wildlife Wednesdays talk series and will help with finding speakers.
  - **ACTION:** Steering committee members should send comments on the outreach plan to Jessica.

**National NFHP:** The NFHP triennial evaluation for fish habitat partnerships is due at the end of the month. Jessica may need steering committee members to review it.

## Other updates and announcements:

- All Alaska Fish Habitat Partnership meeting was January 14<sup>th</sup>. Roger and Erika said that notes will be out soon.
- Kachemak Bay Science Conference was last month in Homer. Christy, Roger and Erika attended. They said there was a good diversity of agencies, locals, and residents, a diversity of topics, and lots of opportunity to network.
- Mat-Su Borough has a part-time water quality monitoring position open from now to the end of June.
- Kelly Hepler remains the chair of the National Fish Habitat Board for another year and will likely stay on as Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) member from his new position with the state of South Dakota.

**Upcoming Events:**

- American Fisheries Society (AFS) conference, August, 2015 in Portland, OR. Jeff Davis is interested in attending and presenting for the partnership.

**Next Steering Committee meeting: May 12th, 2015**

**Facilitator:** Roger Harding

**Notetaker:** Frankie Barker