



Future of the Lower White Salmon River

Public Meeting Summary

Saturday, May 17, 2014 | 9 a.m. – Noon
Husum Fire Hall

Notification and attendance:

About 45 people attended the meeting, which had been publicized through direct emails to stakeholder and interest groups from Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group, forwarded emails to interest group mailing lists, a news release to 5 papers and announcements at Klickitat-White Salmon Science Conference and several local meetings attended by Mid-Columbia Fisheries. Meeting announcements were published in the Columbian, Hood River News and White Salmon Enterprise. Friends of the Columbia Gorge tweeted a notice of the meeting, Friends of the White Salmon posted a notice on their Facebook page and Wet Planet Whitewater posted a notice on their blog and their "White Salmon River" Facebook page.

As attendees signed in, they were asked to share what they cherish about the lower White Salmon River on a piece of paper and post it to a wall. Themes included natural beauty of the area, opportunities to see river restoration firsthand, opportunity to work together as a community, multi-use nature of basin, space to be free in nature, special place to live, missing Northwestern Lake, recreational opportunities, and holding PacifiCorp accountable.

Project introduction and meeting overview:

Margaret Neuman, Executive Director for Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. She said the community has a unique opportunity to identify goals and a vision for the lower White Salmon River and to influence decisions that will affect the future quality of fish habitat in the lower river.

Steve Stampfli, White Salmon Watershed Management Committee member, also welcomed attendees and provided an overview of the watershed committee's history and goals. The committee has a goal of using collaborative natural resource problem solving. He said this was the first opportunity for the community to identify values for the river and how to improve the river.

Margaret said after Condit Dam was removed, the final disposition of the land owned by PacifiCorp was not decided. She explained that PacifiCorp has no current plans to sell the 500-600 acres it owns in the lower river basin, but the company retains all rights to do as they see fit with the land.

Mid-Columbia Fisheries applied for a grant to develop a vision and goal for the lower White Salmon River for fish habitat protection. The project area for the grant is the White Salmon river downstream from Buck Creek to the mouth, about 6 river miles. As part of the grant, this public meeting was held to share the initial results of habitat assessments and obtain public input on desired future conditions for the river corridor. She said that Mid-Columbia Fisheries hopes to develop strategies for protecting key habitats that are supported and supportable by the community. Mid-Columbia Fisheries hired a consulting firm, EnviroIssues, to assist with meeting facilitation and the public input process.

Susan Hayman, EnviroIssues facilitator, provided an overview of the agenda and asked attendees to listen and be neighborly throughout the meeting. She stated the meeting objectives, which were shown on a slide.

Sounding board:

Susan said we are well aware that the process to remove Condit Dam was difficult and divisive. This meeting is focused on fish habitat, but we want to provide an opportunity for people to share other issues of concern. Attendees were given the opportunity to state a pressing personal or community concern that affects how they think about the lower White Salmon River. Most attendees spoke during the round-robin activity. The following themes of concerns and statements were expressed:

Public access

- Support for maintaining public access to the river so people can experience it, e.g. via a trail.
- Concern about public access and related privacy issues around cabins. Want to allow access, but to manage or direct it to designated areas through a trail or other mechanism.
- Interest in maintaining adequate boater take outs in the lower river.

PacifiCorp lands and their management

- Support for keeping lands as natural and beautiful as possible; similar to current conditions
- Concern with future potential activities on lands now owned by PacifiCorp: Housing (both upland and area formerly underwater) clear cuts, riparian/upland habitat not properly cared for, illegal camping, trash.
- CONLA is developing a business plan to buy PacifiCorp land in the cabin area with goal of implementing stated agreement of “right of first refusal” for 110 acres.
- PacifiCorp’s future actions are a concern. Will the company be a landowner in the basin? Will the company sell to the highest bidder?
- Support for keeping land in public trust.
- Keep PacifiCorp lands open and allow timber thinning and other management activities to occur – for fire control and other purposes so surrounding landowners are not affected.
- Support for land ownership for multiple uses that allows fish restoration to occur.

PacifiCorp actions post dam removal

- Concern with lower Buck Creek following reservoir draining – ancient trash, including metal barrels, has been exposed, some trees were cut in the riparian zone, some cabins have had to be removed, others are at risk. Orange plastic needs to be removed. “Looks like a war zone.”
- Concern expressed that PacifiCorp is not engaging in conversation related to cleanup, land purchase, river access across cabin area.
- Concern with condemnation of cabins.
- PacifiCorp has been good to work with following dam removal.

Fish populations and fish habitat

- Support for habitat restoration for wild salmon, steelhead and freshwater fish populations in the river.
- Concern with loss of sport-fishing opportunities (currently and in the future). Keep fishing site open at the mouth. Support enhancing fisheries.
- Be observant and act in best interest of river; wait 5-8 years before making alterations to the river for habitat restoration; rushing could be a waste of time and resources. “Give her a chance. She’ll talk to you.”
- Someday there will be tribal fishing on the river to fulfill treaty rights, but tribes are waiting for fish to recolonize for about five years before making decisions. May take 15 years. Resource needs to be managed in way that doesn’t jeopardize fish coming back.
- Maintain large woody debris in river.
- Concerned with sustainability of the river and the balance with other river uses.

Other issues

- Concern expressed about cabin owners around former Northwestern Lake and the issues they face related to public access.
- Concern with fire control and fire hazards – especially with steep slopes.
- Concerned with climate change and effects to the river water quantity.

Presentations on assessment findings:

Jill Hardiman, USGS fish biologist, gave a presentation on a salmon habitat assessment for the lower six miles of the White Salmon River using existing data. Her analysis showed:

- Study area meets criteria for suitable habitat for all salmon life history stages.
- The lowest 2 miles of the river have the highest observed redd (spawning nest) densities.
- Redd densities are higher in areas with lower slopes/gradients.
- Re-vegetation projects will likely enhance salmon habitat.
- Large woody debris recruitment would enhance development of pools and cover for salmon.

Margaret presented Columbia Land Trust’s analysis of development suitability in the project area. The high level, general analysis was based on Columbia Gorge Scenic Area zoning, county zoning, county critical areas ordinances, slope, and shoreline management zoning. The analysis showed:

- Within the Columbia Gorge, open space zoning along the river is a restrictive zoning classification and protects the river corridor.
- Zoning designations in Skamania and Klickitat counties allow for some residential development in the project area, particularly around the cabin areas, and in parts of Klickitat County.
- Steep slopes in many parts of the project area corridor make development difficult.

A map provided a visual of the development suitability analysis results.

Question and answers followed the presentation:

- Was the 1990 Growth Management Act applied to the development suitability analysis?
Answer: No.
- Is there anyone here from PacifiCorp? Answer: No.
- Did you identify any areas for fish stranding with Bonneville Dam operations? Answer: A data gap exists here.
- There is no grading ordinance in Klickitat County. Is there one in Skamania? Answer: Unknown. Follow-up needed.
- Isn't zoning subject to change? Answer: The analysis was a point in time. Zoning can change.
- How does the scenic area supersede county zoning designations? Answer: The scenic area zoning supersedes county zoning. Counties can implement the scenic area designations. Skamania County implements scenic area designations, while the Gorge Commission implements scenic area zoning in the affected portions of Klickitat County.

“River café” small group discussions:

Anne Pressentin, EnviroIssues facilitator, described the procedure for small group discussions. The stated purpose was to encourage conversation and discussion that results in understanding of issues and interests in the basin. The purpose was not to gain consensus. Each table had about 6 participants, including a host to help record the conversation. A series of three questions were discussed for 15 minutes each. After each question, the people at the tables moved to a different table.

Round 1: It is the year 2025. What does the project area look like: What social, economic, and ecological benefits is it providing; what is the ownership (public, private, mix)?

Physical description: Half the groups included a description of the future condition, with most describing a natural setting. Comments included:

- River will still be in flux, but closer to a natural state.
- Physically it will be similar.
- More rain-driven.
- Look untouched, pristine, restored to what it looked like 100s of years ago.
- Gorgeous, park-like.

Benefits: This category included several sub-categories stemming from the original question – social, economic and ecological. Comments related to public access to the river were made by all groups.

Balance: Four groups discussed need for balance between recreation (social/economic benefits) and stream/ecosystem function, so that recreation does not impact fish or aquatic habitats. At the same time recreational access can lead to increased awareness of ecological functions. One group said it may be good to limit boating because it can be environmentally destructive and rafters/boaters want to see good, clean habitat.

Access: Most groups discussed public access to the river for fishing, boating and other recreation. They envisioned people able to responsibly enjoy the river with good, defined public access points or trails. Some people said designated access or trails could have an education component for river users and others. Fixing up the old bridge for pedestrian use was identified. Some concerns were expressed with a public trail: trash, hunting, off-leash dogs that affect wildlife, effects to privacy.

Safety: A couple of groups mentioned a vision of safety where recreation areas are well-taken care of, safe from fire and provide safe put-in and take-outs for boaters.

Tribal and public fishing: Tribal harvest and public recreational fishing was envisioned in the future by a couple of groups. These comments were made with comments envisioning healthy fish runs.

Economy: Groups connected recreational opportunities (tourism, fishing, boating, rafting, trails) with future economic benefits. Some people said that protecting the area from new construction will support economic development. Some people also said property development and payment of property taxes will aid the economy. Water availability was identified as a potential limiter to economic benefits by one group. Another said residential over-development and water withdrawals could put pressure on available water for fish.

Ecology: The groups identified the following ecological benefits in the future: functioning ecosystem, robust returning salmon runs, and gravel coming back. A concern with trampling of riparian vegetation by river uses also was mentioned. One group wrote: Fish left alone. A couple of groups said to wait and see if active management approach is needed: "Let the river change first by itself."

Housing and development: Some people said cabin owners will still be in the project area in 10 years; they do not want buyout. Some concerns also were highlighted: Development free-for-all, road building on steep slopes, houses too close to river. One group said there should be no further development from the bridge at Northwestern Lake Road to Columbia on west side.

Property ownership: Groups generally said there would be a mix of property ownership in the future where there are private cabins and conservation lands owned by public entity (e.g. U.S. Forest Service) or a trust. Several people mentioned allowing cabin owners to buy land (under agreement of "first right of refusal") or maintain current lease arrangement under current or different ownership ("partnership between cabin owners and land trust to hold land in trust"). Some people clearly favored public or land trust ownership, but questioned whether it was realistic. One group said public access was more important than ownership and was particularly interested in publicly-accessible boater take outs.

Land management: Several visions for land management were identified: Recreation use statutes applied, area is not a fire hazard, potential to extend wild and scenic area, and good land use planning and management. In addition, land management concerns were mentioned: Brush jungle, county zoning is not adequate -- variances granted; and money will trump other benefits (e.g. boater take-outs).

Other comments related to future vision:

- Problems created by dam removal are resolved.

- Find a way not to “love it to death.”
- There will be more people on the landscape with growing population.
- WRIA process should be completed.
- Global warming will negatively affect everything and future generations.

Round 2: Given the current state of the fish habitat (per the assessments), what are reasonable goals to achieve in the next 10 years?

Public Access and Recreation: All groups discussed recreational and public access and generally called for a planning process. Some people want to encourage more recreation with a goal of a destination place while others simply want to manage it. E.g. “avoid area being loved to death.” One group said opinion leaders in the boating community will need to be involved in planning to better understand private boating practices. Identified access goals included:

- Recreation plan to address: garbage, pioneered trails/erosion, dogs, wildfire risks, fishing access (tribal and public), funding, partners.
- River-appropriate amount use and timing.
- Trail established that directs people to right places for access, respects private land and ecology.
- Clearly define access points with signage that build up or off of existing ones, such as park, powerhouse, hatchery.
- Trespass issues resolved.

Education and training also was a clear and important theme related to access and recreation goals:

- Clearer definitions and explanations of zoning to private landowners.
- Consulting to private landowners on working with community and habitat.
- Education and outreach for boaters, rafters, trail users, etc with signs and training on redds, control of animals, trash removal, fire prevention and other topics. (Rafters and boaters were identified as a critical audience by one group.)
- Law enforcement presence.

Land management and ownership: Most groups identified a goal of addressing PacifiCorp land ownership questions within 10 years. One group’s goal was “less uncertainty” in this area. Groups generally looked for a mix of ownership by cabin owners and public or land trust ownership.

Other stated land management goals included:

- Land use planning to help achieve visions in 2025
 - Maintain existing uses
 - Protects existing rights
 - Ecological-system/conservation goals for fish recovery/upland habitats
- Protect good zoning; work with Klickitat County
- Counties work together to have development plan for basin
- Minimum or same amount of residential development; want to let it look like we left it alone
- Fear of over-development

- Counties do their job enforcing shoreline protections

Groups also expressed land management goals related to safety:

- Provide emergency access for wildfire, recreation safety.
- Reduce fire risk by clearing dead trees and shrubs.

Aquatic, riparian and uplands habitats: Management of large woody debris (LWD) for fish habitat and recreational hazards was mentioned in multiple groups. Some people said LWD should be removed and others said the natural process should be mimicked. Two groups called for balancing fish needs with recreational safety. Ongoing monitoring of LWD and gravel beds were identified as goals. During discussion, enhancing tributary habitat for a variety of life stages (e.g. Buck Creek) was identified as a goal. Other habitat goals identified included:

- Healthy fish habitat.
- Let river do its processes.
- Restored riparian forest.
- Manage invasives or let run course somewhat.

Fish management: Groups stated goals for healthy and abundant wild fish runs, possible hatchery supplementation if needed, fishing enforcement, understanding of what truly disturbs fish and updating a fisheries management plan.

Water resources: Two groups discussed goals for initiating water resources planning and water rights discussions. One group discussed transferring water rights associated with Condit Dam to Klickitat County in a public process.

Overall planning: Two groups called for “realistic” and “prudent” goal planning for the future. Another group’s goal was for agencies to have a plan for their role in protection. The same group said policies, education and enforcement of goals will not be possible without locals stepping up and working together and that an active, engaged community is crucial to developing realistic and effective goals.

Decision-making process: Some groups talked about the need for transparent, collaborative decision-making. Comments included:

- Cooperative dialogue between PacifiCorp/public/county.
- Community hone in on what they want, define it and fight for it.
- Public scrutiny / transparency of land use practices.

Dam removal obligations: One group included a goal of “Review and achieve dam removal accountability plans/obligations.”

Round 3: Per the assessments, which areas are most important for us to focus on to meet our goals for fish habitat?

During this round, some groups focused on specific areas, while others had recommendations for the entire project area. There was a strong recommendation during discussion that a focus on tributaries for any near-term active fish habitat restoration work is important while the mainstem continues its natural stabilization and recovery.

Location-based focus areas:

- Lowest reach at Bonneville Pool/river mouth
 - Need to understand pool influences at fish habitat
 - Altered pool habitat is largely misunderstood; potential dredging may be needed
- Instream habitat: Lower two miles priority, protect spawning areas
- “The Narrows” – LWD and rafter safety
- PacifiCorp owned – forested
 - Mainstem habitat – spawning habitat above
 - Potential for effect
- Tributaries
 - Above dam provides opportunity, but need to wait for settling out (refugia, pool, etc.)
 - With mainstem in flux 5 – 8 years, potential for restoration in tributaries in near future
 - Monitor the tributaries
 - Continue work already underway
 - Buck Creek: Restore and clean up impacts from dam removal – half mile upstream from confluence with mainstem; remove metal drum
 - Confluence of Mill Creek
- Riparian areas
 - Intermittent streams
 - Steep slopes
 - 500 – 1000 feet on both sides / but we don’t have it because of homes.
 - Above dam; stabilize old lake bottom
- Within steep gorge area – don’t need to manage
 - Exception: Leave wood alone for habitat and to observe natural restoration
- Northwestern Lake Park area
 - Newly revealed lands downstream of NW Lake Park needs restoration.
 - Maintain access
 - NW Lake Park to Mill Creek to former dam site – managed use and access defined and communicated with signage
- Manage and encourage native plant growth of replanted areas
- Highly develop-able areas – most vulnerable
 - Get them less develop-able
 - Restoration / protective – focused uses
 - Lock in zoning and enforce current zoning more effectively
 - Look at areas which might be developed
- No one spot. All important.

- Husum Falls is important

Other Focus Areas:

- Now watching and monitoring. Future maybe different because the river may change
- Development protection (beyond just six miles upstream)
 - In medium-high suitability areas and upstream
 - Enforcement of critical areas ordinances
- Zoning with counties
- Large woody debris areas that provide fish habitat
 - Need to identify these areas on map – but they will continue to change
 - Need to understand what large woody debris is beneficial
 - Need to work on clear management of large woody debris
 - Rafting safety
- Provide clear procedures, regulations, training at designated access areas related to fish, fish habitat and safety at parking and unloading areas at river mouth, at Northwestern Park, at trail heads and entry/exit points for rafters and anglers.
- Outreach to recreationists on fish goals
- Conservation and protection of pristine areas

Following the small group discussions, the groups reported on results from each of the rounds.

Wrap-up and next steps:

Margaret and Susan thanked everyone for coming. They said a meeting summary would be developed and posted online along with all the meeting materials. Comment forms were available for anyone who wanted to provide individual written comments. In addition, a short survey to evaluate the meeting would be sent out.

The meeting adjourned about 12:15 p.m.

Evaluation results:

A week following the meeting, a link to an evaluation survey was distributed via email to attendees who provided email addresses. Of those, about half responded. The following themes emerged survey:

- Respondents said the meeting was a valuable use of their time
- Respondents said the meeting was facilitated effectively and met the stated objectives
- Respondents said the agenda items and activities were useful or very useful.
- People said they were notified of the meeting through email most frequently.
- People expressed interest in staying involved and informed in the future.

Mid-Columbia Fisheries will use the feedback when designing future public engagement efforts.

June 9, 2014