



Future of the Lower White Salmon River

Public Meeting Summary

Saturday, Nov. 15, 2014 | 9 – 11 a.m.

Husum Fire Hall

Notification, attendance and public survey:

About 30 people attended the meeting. The meeting was publicized through direct emails to stakeholder and interest groups from Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group, forwarded emails to interest group mailing lists, and a news release to local newspapers. Meeting announcements were published in the Columbian and Hood River News. Meeting notices were also posted on Mid-Columbia Fisheries' website and Facebook page. Wet Planet Rafting posted a notice on their Facebook page and Underwood Conservation District included a notice in an electronic newsletter. Attendance was likely affected by winter weather conditions in the Columbia River Gorge.

Prior to the meeting, a public survey was opened for the period of Oct. 16 – Oct. 27, 2014 to collect feedback on the draft vision, goals and geographic focus areas for the lower White Salmon River developed from previous project activities. The survey was distributed through direct emails to stakeholder and interest groups from Mid-Columbia Fisheries, published in the Columbian newspaper, and posted on Mid-Columbia Fisheries' website and Facebook page. The results of the survey were discussed during the meeting.

Project introduction and meeting overview:

Margaret Neuman, Executive Director for Mid-Columbia Fisheries, opened the meeting, welcomed everyone and provided a brief project overview and update. She explained that Mid-Columbia Fisheries is preparing a document to outline an approach to fish habitat conservation on the lower six miles of the White Salmon River, in the area formerly affected by Condit Dam. While PacifiCorp has indicated that it has no current plans to divest itself of its lands along the White Salmon River, the approach document will be made available to PacifiCorp, county governments and other agencies to inform decisions regarding these lands in the future.

Anne Pressentin, Envirolssues facilitator, reviewed the agenda and explained planned activities for the meeting. Anne asked participants to be active listeners and to engage in constructive conversations.

Margaret explained that Mid-Columbia Fisheries worked with USGS to conduct a fish habitat assessment and a development suitability analysis in the project area to inform the approach document. The fish habitat assessment found the project area meets suitable habitat criteria, with the lower reaches of the river containing the highest observed redd density. Margaret also summarized the results of a development suitability analysis completed as part of this project. Various forms of development are allowed in the project area, though development potential is affected by steep slopes, zoning, and national scenic area designations.

Questions and comments

Question: How much of the project area includes improved property sites?

Response: Of the 534 acres in the study area, 110 acres are considered improved.

Question: How many total redds were counted in the salmon habitat assessment?

Response: USGS estimated about 4,000 Chinook redds in the main stem of the White Salmon River in 2013. The redds were very dense in some places and difficult to count.

Comment: There are land use designations that have been grandfathered that could affect the future of the project area and should be researched and considered.

Public survey results

Anne discussed the results of the public survey. The purpose of the survey was to reflect back ideas heard during previous project activities and gain additional input on draft vision, goals and geographic focus areas for the project. The survey was not intended to establish statistically significant results.

- 128 survey responses were collected from participants in Washington, Oregon, California, Wyoming and Pennsylvania. About half came from the Gorge area.
 - 77 survey responses from Washington, about 48 from the local area
 - 30 survey responses from Oregon, about 14 from Hood River
- Respondents most commonly referred to themselves as:
 - Boaters (50%)
 - Year-round residents (54%)
 - Interested in ecological restoration (70%)
 - Interested in salmon recovery (78%)
- Respondents shared their preferences for ownership of currently undeveloped PacifiCorp lands in the project area:
 - 92% favored public and/or trust ownership
 - 8% said undeveloped lands should remain privately held without new conservation easements or restrictions.
- Four primary concepts related to fish habitat emerged from the survey:
 - A healthy river ecosystem that supports all fish life stages is a priority
 - Effects to aquatic resources should be considered when development decisions are made
 - Support for continued natural river restoration over time
 - Large wood in river supported for salmon, but causes a concern for boater safety

Anne explained that several other concepts came up in the survey that were important to the community but did not fit within the scope of the project. A poster with the concepts listed was displayed on the wall at the meeting. Mid-Columbia Fisheries will pass these concepts on to appropriate public and private entities (see appendix).

Revised vision and goals

Anne reviewed the draft vision and goals developed from input collected during previous project activities. The draft vision and goals were posted on large posters on the wall in the meeting. Anne asked meeting participants to take a break, read the vision and goal posters together, and encouraged them to underline words or phrases that were confusing or needed additional clarification. Participants could also write comments and questions on sticky notes and post them on the posters.

Following the break, Anne reviewed the feedback on the posters with the greater group to determine the level of agreement with each comment.

Vision: Fish habitat conservation – comments received:

- Use active voice for all vision statements.
- Vision should specify a timeline, particularly for healthy salmon runs.
- The term “proximity to the river” is not clear.
 - Give consideration to properties that have a visual connection to the river.
 - One person said property development close to the river may not have an impact. Another said that groundwater connections from development activities far from the river could affect river habitat.
 - Suggested using the term “connection to the river.”
- Add a vision statement for developable lands – to go with vision statement about undevelopable lands.
 - Vision needs more detail about what is envisioned for developable land priorities.
 - Vision needs more clarity regarding difference between PacifiCorp lands and other private lands.
 - Suggested conservation easements on PacifiCorp lands and low-density development on other private lands.
- The term “restoration” is too broad.
 - Suggested the vision specify “active” or “passive” restoration.
 - Involve the community in deciding the type of development on private lands.
- Add a vision statement for Native American values and interests.
- Vision for river restoration needs more specificity.
 - Suggested a vision of river with functioning ecosystem processes.
 - Vision should specify restoration to “riparian areas” in addition to the river.
 - Vision should include restoration of upland habitat including oak woodlands and deer/elk winter range

Goals: Fish habitat conservation – comments received

- Goals should include the management/removal of invasive plant species.
- PacifiCorp should be held accountable for the long-term restoration of riparian areas.

- Rephrase land clearing goal: “As required by existing shoreline regulations, protect existing native trees and shrubs from land clearing.”
- Education goals should include a component to help river users understand the value of riparian habitat for healthy fish runs.
- Landowners need to be educated in addition to river users.
- Goals should include clear definitions for rules and regulations so they can be communicated and enforced effectively.
 - Rules about public river access and high water lines are confusing and difficult to enforce.
 - Clarify how “wild and scenic” designations affect river access.
- The term “adjacent to the river” is too specific.
 - Give consideration to properties that have a visual connection to the river.
 - Properties that are not adjacent to the river can still have wells connected to groundwater from the river.
 - Suggested using the term “connection to the river.”
- Public access management goal should include considerations for impacts to fish and private property.
- Public access goals should specify river access for people of all ability levels.

Anne thanked everyone for their participation and said the input would be considered as the vision and goal statements are finalized.

Geographic focus areas – dot exercise

Margaret said the project had identified several geographic focus areas where attention is needed based on fish habitat goals within the next 10 years. The project is asking for public input on the areas that should be given the highest priority.

Anne explained that the geographic focus areas were posted on easels in the meeting room beside maps of the project area. Each participant was given three colored dots and asked to stick them next to the three focus areas they thought should be given the highest priority. The color of the dots indicated a priority rank: orange for first priority, yellow for second priority and green for third priority. Anne explained that the dot exercise was a way to collect input on public priorities but was not meant to be a voting process.

The dot exercise resulted in the following priority ranking for the geographic focus areas:

1. Highly developable areas which are most vulnerable
2. County enforcement of existing shoreline protection regulations
3. Fish spawning areas
4. In-stream protection within and adjacent to the lowest two miles of the river, due to redd densities

5. Define and manage access and use from Northwestern Park to the former Condit Dam site
6. Restore fish passage by addressing blockages in Buck and Mill Creeks
7. Entire corridor from mouth to Buck Creek
8. Retention of large wood in the short term and consideration of adding large wood in appropriate areas in the future
9. Newly revealed (i.e. formerly submerged) lands downstream of Northwestern Park
10. In-stream and riparian restoration in tributaries, including Buck Creek and Mill Creek

Next steps

Margaret said the meeting materials would be posted on MCFEG's website with a meeting summary. The draft approach document will be available for review on Dec. 8. The final document will be available in early 2015.