



Community Technical Group Meeting 9 Summary

4/26/16

OVERVIEW

On April 20, 2016, Pierce County Storm Water Management (SWM) hosted the ninth Community Technical Group (CTG) meeting for the System Wide Improvement Framework (SWIF) planning process.

Topics for the April 20 meeting included:

- Discussion of SWIF Action Plan Draft
- Review of response to comments on proposed Vegetation Management Strategy

All presentations can be found at:

<https://www.co.pierce.wa.us/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/4619>

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Meeting facilitator Penny Mabie welcomed everyone and led a round of introductions. She conducted an overview of the agenda, meeting handouts and ground rules.

COMMUNITY TECHNICAL GROUP BUSINESS

Penny noted the draft of the Meeting 8 summary had not been provided to the group for review. Penny will share the summary with the group via email requesting feedback. The summary will be finalized over email and made available on the SWIF webpage.

SWIF ACTION PLAN DRAFT

Action Plan Review

Rob Wenman, Pierce County Project Manager, reviewed the SWIF Action Plan Draft, which describes the actions, funding and implementation of the SWIF over time. The action plan establishes key activities aligned with milestones for implementation and includes the following elements:

- Deficiency action plan
- Maintenance program
- Interim risk reduction (IRRM) plan
- Capital maintenance program
- Capital improvement program
- Funding (schedule and milestones)

Rob requested that the group provide comments via email on the SWIF Action Plan Draft by May 13. After receiving comments, the County will work to revise the action plan and full SWIF Plan to share with the CTG in July. See slides 4-22 of the [Presentation](#) for details.

CTG members shared the following questions or comments and Pierce County provided answers where appropriate:

- A CTG member asked if the Pierce County Planning Department's priorities were being considered in the action plan.
 - Rob indicated that the team is working closely with the Planning Department. The Flood Hazard Management Plan (FHMP) outlines the County's comprehensive

approach to levee repair work and flood risk reduction measures. The suite of projects outlined in the FHMP will be folded into the SWIF Action Plan.

- A CTG member asked when the group would have the opportunity to provide input on the planting program monitoring fields.
 - Rob indicated that the team would be working to develop standard operating procedures, but was unsure of the timeline. This information will also be studied as part of the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). Through the monitoring program, the County intends to capture what was planted and where, and how the vegetation does over time.
 - A CTG member noted that thermal buffering should be addressed in the action plan.
 - Erick Thompson, Pierce County Environmental Biologist, added that pieces of the monitoring program may be included in the strategy, but the planting program included in the SWIF will only include plantings associated with levee repairs.
- A CTG member indicated that the action plan should include assurances of habitat restoration, suggesting that the County acquire a 200-foot easement behind the levee for vegetation as part of the SWIF. The member indicated that environmental and habitat protection must receive the same priority as flood protection.
 - Rob noted that only 20% of the system is in public ownership on PL 84-99 levees and SWM is not able to use funds to work with private property owners on those issues. He also noted that the County would consider addressing these issues more fully in both the vegetation strategy and the action plan.

Maintenance Prioritization

Todd Essman, Pierce County Project Technical Lead, provided an overview of maintenance prioritization, which is an element of the action plan. Todd outlined how the County uses worksheets to conduct condition assessments in order to systematically and consistently prioritize work. The worksheet uses the following four criteria that are calculated into an overall score:

- General land use at risk
- Perceived threat to public safety
- Infrastructure at risk
- Frequency of damage

See slides 23-40 of the [Presentation](#) for details.

CTG members and Pierce County staff shared the following questions or comments and Pierce County provided answers where appropriate:

- A CTG member asked whether mapping like that of the Water Ski Levee on slides 28 and 30 had been done for all of the PL 84-99 levees.
 - Charles Ifft, US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), noted that USACE developed these maps as part of their Screening Study. There will be maps for every levee but USACE is still working to complete the final maps.
- A CTG member asked if USACE completes a cost-benefit analysis before conducting repairs, specifically noting that property acquisition might be more cost effective than continual repair.
 - Charles said that USACE looks at the cost of repairs for each site before completing the repairs, but that they do not aggregate the analysis over multiple years and repairs. Property acquisition is an option only when the cost of repairs for a single year is greater than the cost of the property.

- A CTG member suggested that USACE do a project to project the cost of future repairs in order to justify property acquisition, which would ultimately reduce tax payer expenses and result in floodplain restoration.
- Charles noted that such a project would be beyond the scope of USACE's emergency rehabilitation program, but could be part of the General Investigation Study. He also noted that the cost-benefit analysis must also consider the economic impacts of the loss of tax revenue from property acquisition.
- A CTG member added that the analysis should also include fisheries resources.
- Rob asked what was included in the total assets identified for each levee.
 - Todd indicated that total assets refer to the value of everything that the levee is protecting.
 - A CTG member asked whether replacement costs for infrastructure (i.e., bridges, roads) is included as part of the assets.
 - Charles indicated that these data come from the USACE Risk Management Center, which uses 2010 CENSUS data. Properties and structures, but not roads or other infrastructure, that were present in 2010 are likely the only elements considered, but updated information from the County can be used to recalculate if needed.
- A CTG member noted that the damage history includes a lot of repetitive loss.
 - Todd said that many of the repetitive loss areas are areas where the County is considering doing setback levees. He also noted that the damage history does not currently include severity and he is working to include that in the chart to provide a more complete picture.
- A CTG member asked how the land use description ranking criteria were ordered on the worksheet.
 - Todd indicated that he designed the worksheet to be similar to the FHMP's criteria.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Rob conducted an overview of the Vegetation Management Strategy Draft and how it has been updated to incorporate the CTG's comments and ideas where appropriate. Detailed responses to CTG comments and questions are included in the Vegetation Management Guidelines Comments. Rob noted that the SWIF is happening in conjunction with other habitat restoration efforts (i.e., Levee Setback Feasibility Study, Habitat Conservation Plan), and that the SWIF will not address all habitat concerns. The Vegetation Management Strategy that will be included as part of the SWIF Plan is meant to address the direct short-term impacts of levee maintenance.

CTG members and Pierce County staff shared the following questions or comments and Pierce County provided answers where appropriate:

- Charles noted that USACE will continue to conduct their assessments to the national standard, meaning that the County will receive "U" ratings related to vegetation. However, based on the interim policy, these "U" ratings will not impact the County's eligibility for the PL 84-99 program.
 - A CTG member asked if this "U" rating would have any other implications, such as an increase in flood insurance rates.
 - Charles said that flood insurance rates would not be affected.
- A CTG member asked whether the SWIF can include efforts to develop conservation easements within the 200-foot buffer.
 - Rob explained that SWM funds are limited to operations and maintenance expenses. He indicated that those who are interested in developing conservation easements along the 200-foot buffer can work through other avenues (e.g., Conservation District, land trust groups) to pursue those efforts.

- A CTG member noted that habitat protection should be considered equally with flood protection. Flood Control Zone District (FCZD) funding should be spent on the whole picture, including habitat protection. Opportunities for increasing shade on the river should be considered, such as establishing easements or property owner incentives.
- Tony Fantello, Pierce County Project Sponsor, noted that the FCZD is not currently funded to a level that would allow for a system wide program like vegetation restoration. Vegetation restoration is, however, included as part of the mitigation elements of individual capital projects. The County is working with the Council to advocate for additional funds.
- A CTG member suggested that the Conservation Future Fund or tax programs might be good avenues for acquiring easements.
- Rob noted that these ideas cannot move forward as part of the SWIF and would need to be pursued through other avenues. He suggested that the Pierce County Executive's Office or the Conservation District would be a good place to start. He indicated that these conversations and ideas would be documented as an appendix to the SWIF.
- A CTG member liked the idea of including the appendix but said that the SWIF should include certainty for habitat protection beyond the ideas put forth in the appendix.
- Tony said that the SWIF will only cover mitigation for impacts to vegetation related to maintenance and operations work. The HCP will focus on system-wide impacts and is the place for further discussion.
- Rob indicated that the appendix with ideas and opportunities discussed will be forwarded to Pierce County elected officials as well.
- A CTG member noted that the King County Green River SWIF included areas of opportunity for developing 80-foot and 100-foot buffers as part of their SWIF process.
- Tony asked whether there is anything built into existing codes which would preclude new development so that those areas could naturally vegetate.
 - Rob indicated that existing codes require a 200-foot setback distance from rivers and streams for development, except in cases where there is a structure, such as a levee. This exemption essentially allows property owners to clear out all vegetation right up to the backside of the levee. In addition, the floodplain is not considered a critical area under the critical areas ordinance; that only applies to channel migration areas.
 - Hugh Taylor, Pierce County Council's Office, noted that the Council reviewed those codes in the 1990s and updated them in 2005. While it would not be part of the SWIF, the Council could potentially do another review of the codes that may have some impact on vegetation.
- A CTG member noted that vegetation is also having an impact on the fishing season in the Puget Sound, not just for listed species.
- A CTG member noted that there are many placeholders in the strategy and asked when the group would get to comment on an updated draft.
 - Rob noted that the strategy would be updated and included in the overall draft plan. The CTG will be able to comment on the draft plan in July.

NEXT STEPS

Penny reviewed the next steps for the SWIF process, noting that the County is working to develop the SWIF Plan and will share that with the CTG for comment at a meeting on July 20. The County

will then revise the SWIF Plan based on input from the CTG and initial feedback from USACE. The County plans to submit the final SWIF Plan to USACE on Jan. 27, 2017.

Penny also reminded the group that the team would be asking for their feedback on the SWIF Action Plan Draft and the Meeting 8 summary by May 13, as well as the Vegetation Management Strategy by May 20.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Honorable Tim Reynon of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians Tribal Council was in attendance and shared a few comments. He thanked the County for bringing the group together to discuss this topic, noting that maintaining fish habitat is of paramount importance to the Puyallup Tribe. He encouraged the County to consider the suggestion to incorporate habitat enhancements into the SWIF Plan.

ATTENDANCE

Community Technical Group Members

Russ Blount	City of Fife
Steve Carstens	City of Puyallup
Martin Fox	Muckleshoot Indian Tribe
David Molenaar	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Hugh Taylor	Pierce County Council's Office
Hon. Tim Reynon	Puyallup Tribe of Indians Tribal Council
Russ Ladley	Puyallup Tribe of Indians
Cathie DesJardin	US Army Corps of Engineers
Charles Ifft	US Army Corps of Engineers
Jon Moen	US Army Corps of Engineers
Alex Callender	Washington Department of Ecology
Jeffree Stewart	Washington Department of Ecology
Doug Wiedemeier	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Pierce County

Tony Fantello	Project Sponsor
Rob Wenman	Project Manager
Todd Essman	Technical Lead
Erick Thompson	Environmental Biologist

EnviroIssues

Penny Mabie	Facilitator
Chelsea Ongaro	Notetaker

Hackney Interests

Clint Hackney	Tribal Liaison
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