



Community Technical Group Meeting 3 Summary

12/16/15

OVERVIEW

On Nov. 18, 2015, Pierce County Storm Water Management hosted the third Community Technical Group (CTG) meeting for the System Wide Improvement Framework (SWIF) planning process.

Topics for the Nov. 18 meeting included:

- Building understanding and providing input on different vegetation management concepts and how these fit into the SWIF Plan
- Discussing and identifying how to balance competing needs for inspections and maintaining vegetation for habitat
- Learning about riparian vegetation communities, issues, objectives and approaches
- Discussing a risk-based approach to vegetation management

All presentations can be found at:

<https://www.co.pierce.wa.us/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/4136>

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 asked if the CTG had any objections to finalizing the Meeting 1 Summary. The summary was previously emailed to the group for review. There were no emailed responses. No objections were raised and the summary draft was accepted as final.

The CTG did not have enough time to review the Meeting 2 Summary prior to the meeting, so the Meeting 2 and Meeting 3 summaries will be reviewed for approval at the next meeting on Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2015.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS

Rob Wenman, Pierce County Project Manager, provided an overview of the proposed strategy goals, objectives and guidelines for levee vegetation management. These goals, objectives and guidelines will align with the Puyallup River Vegetation Management Program, the PL 84-99 Program and the PL 84-99 "Interim Policy."

The County proposed three main objectives for the levee vegetation management guidelines: risk, habitat and maintenance. In order to achieve these objectives, the County proposes the following deliverables:

- Vegetation communities mapping
- Risk analysis
- Levee structure schematics
- Vegetation inspection standards
- Vegetation risk matrix
- Planting plan
- Invasive species management plan

See slides 4-23 of the [Presentation](#) for details.

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

- A CTG member asked whether the objectives should specifically mention maintaining eligibility for the PL 84-99 program.
 - Rob indicated that eligibility for the PL 84-99 program would fall under the risk objective.
 - Penny noted that these objectives are for the vegetation management plan, and that maintaining eligibility is the objective for the overall SWIF Plan.
- A CTG member said that the Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed species have changed since the development of the Puyallup River Vegetation Management Plan in 1985. The Plan will have to be changed in order to address concerns for these species. The CTG member noted that this does not need to be included in the goal statement, but should be part of the overall plan.
- A CTG member noted that river flow regimes will change over the next several decades due to changes in precipitation levels and the severity of weather events.
- A CTG member indicated that the goal statement seems like the bare minimum to meet requirements and is not aspirational enough. The goal should include a statement about actually recovering species.
- A CTG member asked about the scope of the timeline for the SWIF Plan and whether this plan fits into a larger overarching strategy for the County.
 - Rob indicated that the SWIF Plan will fold into the Flood Hazard Management Plan (FHMP), which is the overarching directive for the Surface Water Management Department at the County. Habitat improvements, including species recovery, are part of the FHMP. The vegetation management proposed goal is focused on meeting USACE requirements, but other goals can be included. The County acknowledges that vegetation on the levees provides habitat for much of the river system.
 - Tony Fantello, Pierce County Project Sponsor, indicated that the SWIF is related to levee maintenance and operations, including vegetation management. The Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) looks at the bigger picture of species recovery.
- A CTG member noted the County did not include any strategies to ensure that operations are practical and cost efficient.
 - Rob said that practical and cost efficient strategies are the County's main objectives. The implementation strategy will outline efficiencies.
- A CTG member asked what type of guidelines the County uses for hazard trees. For example, is the tree a hazard if a beaver has chewed through only part of the tree.
 - Rob indicated that the project team will discuss possible definitions for hazard trees and develop a matrix.
 - Peter Hummel, Anchor QEA Landscape Architect, said that the team will bring a draft definition to the December meeting.
- Penny asked if the proposed objectives were reasonable. There were no objections.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT MAPPING

Erick Thompson, Pierce County Environmental Biologist, provided an overview of vegetation and land cover mapping along the river segments. This mapping provides a picture of vegetation communities on the levees and will be used for the development of the vegetation management plan, but also for the long-term monitoring of vegetation and enhancements. Erick shared

preliminary data on tree mapping and indicated that information on shrubs, invasive species and other types of land cover would be included in the SWIF Plan once it is finalized.

See slides 24-39 of the [Presentation](#) for details.

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

- A CTG member asked whether tree height was mapped.
 - Erick indicated that tree height was not collected. This information would need to be gathered separately.
- A CTG member asked about the mapping area.
 - Erick said that these data include 200 feet from the water's edge.

LEVEE STRUCTURE OVERVIEW

Todd Essman, Pierce County Project Technical Lead, presented levee vegetation management schematics, which detail the five typical levee structure types in the PL 84-99 program. Todd defined these levee schematics as follows and provided examples of each in his presentation:

- Schematic A: River channel adjacent to levee (without silt bench)
- Schematic B: Levee with silt bench/gravel bar (on levee structure)
- Schematic C: Concrete panel levee with silt bench/access road
- Schematic D: Concrete panel levee with silt bench and trail
- Schematic E: Setback levee with floodplain bench

See slides 40-56 of the [Presentation](#) for details.

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

- A CTG member noted that Schematic E – Setback levee with floodplain bench is the desired outcome from the fisheries perspective.
- A CTG member asked whether representatives from the Foothills Trails Association would be consulted because some of the levees include trails.
 - Rob indicated that the CTG has a representative from Pierce County Parks and Recreation to provide that perspective. Safety of trail users is part of vegetation management considerations.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT ZONE & LEVEE SCHEMATICS

Peter Hummel, Anchor QEA Landscape Architect, provided an overview of the vegetation management zone and subzones. Different levee schematic types provide different opportunities for vegetation management. For each levee schematic type, Peter proposed vegetation management strategies. The five vegetation management subzones include:

- Riparian management zone
- Clear zone
- Backslope zone
- Upland zone
- Inspection zone

See slides 57-81 of the [Presentation](#) for details.

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

- A CTG member requested definitions for mature trees and clumps of younger trees.
 - Peter indicated that the team would come up with some parameters for mature trees by species, including recommendations for size range based on height and diameter, as well as a size range for understory vegetation.
- A CTG member noted that the river eventually migrates to the setback levee once it is set back. The member asked why the team would not plan vegetation management with the assumption that the river will migrate.
 - Peter noted that the river could migrate in either direction. If the river does migrate, a different vegetation management schematic would apply based on the situation.
- A CTG member asked whether there had been any analysis of the consequences of conditions (e.g., effect of a drought on young trees) and whether there were any short-term plans for addressing concerns with river temperature.
 - Rob noted that no analysis had been done, but that vegetation is beneficial for habitat in all cases. He also noted that the County could consider proactive planting as part of their vegetation management planning.
 - Several CTG members indicated that there are only long-term plans to address river temperature concerns.
- A CTG member asked whether the schematics reflect that most setback levees have riprap surfaces rather than grass.
 - Rob noted that the schematics represent maintenance efficiencies, and since mowing is the most efficient maintenance method, levee surfaces are depicted with grass.
- A CTG member noted that mowing can often increase the spread of certain invasive species, and that staff should be trained to properly deal with these species.
 - Tony indicated that the County is aware of these concerns and trains their staff appropriately.
- A CTG member asked whether volunteers could be used to supplement County maintenance.
 - Tony said that volunteers are a possibility, but that staff are still required to manage volunteers.

Penny asked the group whether the maintenance concepts presented in the schematics reflect the direction the County should pursue for vegetation management.

- A CTG member said that the group needs a better understanding of where hazard trees are and the risks associated with those trees. Hazard trees are usually large trees that take a long time to regrow to the same height.
 - Peter said that the County has not mapped hazard trees.
 - Rob indicated that some trees are evolving to become hazard trees as the river erodes roots. He suggested that there might be opportunities to perform routine maintenance (e.g., placing face rock around trees as protection) to prevent having to remove those trees.

Penny reviewed a list of topics for the next meeting, including:

- A more in-depth discussion about hazard trees including the following:
 - Proposed management of hazard trees
 - Number of hazard trees
 - How best to retain hazard trees that are large and valuable

- How to manage USACE expectations regarding hazard trees, including how hazard trees are defined and where they are acceptable
- What to do with wood from hazard trees that are taken down
- Further clarification of what constitutes mature trees

Penny asked whether there were any other topics the CTG would like to discuss at the next meeting.

- A CTG member said that trails should be a topic of discussion, since the repaving that occurs after levee maintenance is a huge benefit to trail users.
- A CTG member asked whether the team could conduct a mapping exercise to look at areas that are most critical for solar radiation shading.
 - Rob said that the team considered mapping that in their most recent mapping exercise, but those data were not available and the team was unsure how they would use the information.
 - Erick noted that if the goal is to maintain as many trees as possible regardless of solar radiation, the mapping is unnecessary, since the implementation strategy would be the same.
- Rob said that he would like to discuss specifications for vegetation clusters.
- A CTG member said that best practices for maintaining recruitment trees should be a topic for discussion.
- A CTG member noted that the schematics seem to depict elimination of all understory vegetation in the inspection zone.
 - Rob indicated that the County is not suggesting the removal of all understory, but maintaining clusters of vegetation.
 - Peter said that they can prepare schematics to clarify how understory clumps might be maintained.
 - Tony and Rob noted that maintenance must be efficient and practical in order to manage costs.

NEXT STEPS

Penny confirmed the details for the Levee Tour. The tour will take place on Thursday, Dec. 3, 2015 from 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. at the River Office on North Levee Road. Rob will share details via email.

Penny also confirmed that the CTG will continue their discussion of vegetation management concepts at their next meeting on Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2015 from 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

ATTENDANCE

Community Technical Group Members

Chrissy Cooley	Agricultural Round Table
Ken Gill	City of Fife (alternate for Russ Blount)
Steve Friddle	City of Fife (alternate for Russ Blount)
J.C. Hungerford	City of Orting (Parametrix)
Steve Carstens	City of Puyallup
David Molenaar	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Ryan Mello	Pierce Conservation District
Hugh Taylor	Pierce County Council's Office
Jill Bushnell	Pierce County Emergency Management
Russ Ladley	Puyallup Tribe of Indians
Seth Klein	US Army Corps of Engineers (alternate for Charles Ifft)
Jeffree Stewart	Washington Department of Ecology
Doug Wiedemeier	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Pierce County

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

Anchor QEA

Peter Hummel	Landscape Architect
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EnviroIssues

Penny Mabie	Facilitator
Chelsea Ongaro	Notetaker

Hackney Interests

Clint Hackney	Tribal Liaison
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