



Community Technical Group Meeting 5 Summary

2/17/16

OVERVIEW

On Jan. 27, 2016, Pierce County Storm Water Management hosted the fifth Community Technical Group (CTG) meeting for the System Wide Improvement Framework (SWIF) planning process.

Topics for the Jan. 27 meeting included:

- Finalizing proposed vegetation management strategies
- Reviewing risk reduction and how it fits into the SWIF Plan
- Reviewing history of flooding, repetitive loss and repetitive levee damage

All presentations can be found at: <https://www.co.pierce.wa.us/Archive.aspx?ADID=4268>

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 announced that the American Public Works Association would be holding an event in Seattle on Feb. 10 about the Levee System Wide Improvement Framework program. Penny will share details about the event with the CTG.

A CTG member shared that City of Orting won a Washington State Chapter, American Council of Engineering Consultants Excellence Award for the Calistoga Setback Levee and is going to be considered for a national level award.

Penny asked if the CTG had any objections to finalizing the Meeting 4 Summary. The summary was previously emailed to the group for review. There were no emailed responses. A CTG member noted that the summary included a request for another levee tour with a focus on vegetation management and asked how that was resolved. Tony Fantello, Pierce County Project Sponsor, noted that another tour was unlikely, due to project schedule and he would follow up with the requesting member. No objections were raised and the summary draft was accepted as final. The summary is available on the SWIF webpage.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Penny and Rob Wenman, Pierce County Project Manager, led a conversation about the vegetation management strategies. Penny reminded the group that the team wants to hear their input in order to finalize the strategies, which will be submitted as part of the Regional Considerations, Approaches and Tools section of the SWIF Plan. See slide 4 of the [Presentation](#) for details.

Rob gave an overview of the comments the team had received via email about the strategies. Comments are included below and CTG members shared the following questions or comments and Pierce County staff provided answers where appropriate:

- Rob shared that Pierce County Parks and Recreation had indicated that their main concerns related to trails on the levees are hazard trees and making sure that there is clearance on either side of the trail for safety. Parks indicated that they do not feel that the proposed strategies interfere with their mandates and goals.

- A CTG member asked what the required clearance zone was on either side of the trail.
- Jessica Stone, Pierce County Parks and Recreation, indicated that the entire cleared area, including the width of the trail, is 10 feet.
- Rob noted that minimum access required by US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on the levee crown is 10 feet, so trail requirements should not have any additional impact. He also noted that the County would continue to work closely with Parks to ensure that proposed strategies and concepts are compatible with trail use.
- A CTG member noted that Parks and Recreation requirements related to trails add another level of complexity and requirements which may further impact trees and habitat.
- A CTG member asked if Parks and Recreation currently has any proposed trails on levees.
- Jessica indicated that she would attempt to acquire future plans for parks and share them with the group.
- Penny noted that it sounded like some members would like to see a statement in the strategy regarding mutual uses of levee tops and how those uses should fit within levee maintenance and habitat needs.
 - Rob indicated that the County has discussed developing a Memorandum of Understanding with Parks and Recreation related to joint use.
- A CTG member asked where the trail guidelines come from.
 - Jessica indicated that there are federal and local guidelines and that she would request a copy of the guidelines and share it with the CTG.
- A CTG member expressed concern that it is unclear how many trees will be removed to meet levee maintenance requirements.
 - Rob indicated that the Vegetation Management Guidelines outline that the County intends to keep as many trees as possible. He noted that the team needs to work out the details to provide assurance that there will be minimal impact to trees.
- Rob shared that a CTG member had expressed concern about the appropriate level of mitigation to offset impacts to river temperature and shading.
 - Rob noted that one of the proposed objectives in the guidelines focuses on habitat: "Habitat -Vegetation management will be performed in a manner that avoids or minimizes impacts upon fish and wildlife habitat." He also noted that impacts to habitat will be analyzed in greater detail in the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). One way to address shade concerns is with vegetation on the backside of the levee; Rob noted that the proposed guidelines do not impact the ability to retain these trees. The County conducted a GIS study of the 1,200 feet from the water line on PL 84-99 levees and determined that on 80 percent of those levees, the County does not own the land on the backside of the levee and therefore does not have control of those trees. Rob suggested that the HCP would be the appropriate place to explore partnerships with other programs to work to retain those trees.
 - A CTG member suggested that the SWIF Plan incorporate language about what combination of tree height and density provides the best thermal buffer for fish species, especially on the southern and western exposures.
 - A CTG member noted that the Green River SWIF Plan established a buffer width and density of 80 to 150 feet, where possible. It takes time for trees to reach a height that allows for proper shading. A single row of trees is not enough, because new trees are required to fill the holes if trees come down. River depth also factors into temperature.

- In order to address concerns about temperature and shading, Penny said it sounded like there was a request to incorporate language to establish a buffer of trees on the backside of the levee of 80 to 150 feet where possible.
 - Rob noted that issue would be best addressed in the HCP.
 - A CTG member said that we should incorporate into the SWIF if possible.
 - Rob said that the team would work on some language and then determine if it would be most appropriate to include it in the SWIF or the HCP. He also noted that the County could work some language about being proactive about developing a multi-layered canopy into the SWIF Plan.
- A CTG member expressed appreciation for the County’s commitment to discuss language changes to the SWIF Plan to incorporate these concerns.
- A CTG member shared ideas about working to develop a buffer of trees on the backside of the levee on private properties.
 - A CTG member asked if there was a statement of agreement about tree buffers on private property easements along levees.
 - Rob noted that these properties are exempt under the Critical Areas Ordinance, but that there might be other avenues to work with them (e.g., through the Pierce County Conservation District).

Rob reviewed the handouts, including the revised Levee Maintenance Schematic Plan, the draft Hazard Tree Assessment Matrix, and the draft Levee Planting Program Recommendations Memo, highlighting the changes that have been incorporated based on CTG input. He noted that the vegetation clusters proposed in the schematic plan will require more hands-on maintenance, but that mowing will still be used around these clusters. He also noted that crews will identify and recruit saplings, as well as plant in areas where there is more than 25 feet of space between vegetation clusters. Rob also noted that the guidelines include a plan to choke out invasive species using proper procedures.

Rob requested that the CTG provide comments on the draft Levee Planting Program Recommendations Memo, draft Hazard Tree Assessment Matrix, revised Levee Maintenance Schematic Plan and the Proposed Levee Vegetation Maintenance Guidelines by Feb. 10.

- A CTG member asked if an arborist would make the final decision about whether a tree is a hazard and should be removed.
 - Rob clarified that the hazard tree matrix includes a note at the bottom about required qualifications to assess whether a tree is a hazard.
- A CTG member asked who funds mitigation efforts (i.e., replanting) after levee repairs.
 - Tony noted that the County is required to pay for mitigation.

RISK REDUCTION OVERVIEW

Todd Essman, Pierce County Project Technical Lead, provided an overview of risk reduction, including how it fits into the SWIF Plan, as well as a history of flooding, repetitive loss and repetitive levee damage. See slides 5-24 of the [Presentation](#) for details.

Todd outlined that in order to manage risk, the County utilizes a multifaceted maintenance program which includes:

- Developing an inventory
- Performing condition assessments
- Evaluating results

- Prioritizing actions / action plan
- Implementing actions
- Monitoring

Todd also shared a map of composite damages to levees and revetments between 1990 and 2012, which highlights areas of repetitive loss. This mapping helps the County identify possible areas for setback levees.

- A CTG member noted that the results of the General Investigation Study do not include plans to build setback levees in the lower river, which is where the map shows the most repetitive loss.
 - Kimball Ohsiek, USACE, said that he would connect with his team about this issue.
 - Rob indicated that the Feb. 24 meeting will include presentations about other efforts, such as the General Investigation Study and the Levee Setback Program.

Rob shared that the SWIF Plan must show how the County is optimizing risk reduction, which requires an understanding of where there are the greatest risks to the levee system and consequences of damages to those locations. The Plan must suggest how the County intends to improve the system over time and prioritize those plans.

Jill Bushnell, CTG member, Pierce County Emergency Management, noted that she will be presenting on the non-structural aspects of Interim Risk Reduction Measures (IRRM) at the next meeting. She asked if there were any particular topics that the CTG members wanted to know more about.

- A CTG member asked for a clear definition of non-structural IRRM.
- Rob suggested that the group should learn more about inundation maps, and populations and properties at risk.
- A CTG member asked that the presentation include information about notification to title holders related to the 100-year flood event.
- Penny asked whether it would be useful to hear about the emergency management strategies of other organizations.
 - Jill indicated that she would reach out to the Muckleshoot Tribe to learn about their strategies.

Penny asked the CTG members to email her if they had any other requests for information for Jill's presentation.

NEXT STEPS

Penny reminded the group that the next meeting will take place on Wednesday, Feb. 17. At that meeting, the group will continue discussing risk, including the IRRM and risk assessment and prioritization. The team will also share an updated version of the CTG Work Plan at the next meeting.

Penny asked if the CTG had any questions or suggestions about the process. CTG members shared the following questions or comments and Pierce County staff provided answers where appropriate:

- A CTG member noted that the project team brought a draft of the Proposed Vegetation Management Guidelines to the meeting for the CTG to look at and asked whether that same process would be used for the other sections of the SWIF.

- Rob indicated that the discussions at the meetings will inform chapters of the SWIF Plan, which will ultimately lead to the Action Plan. The Action Plan outlines the County’s goals for the next five to ten years. Based on the current schedule, the team expects to have a draft of the SWIF Plan by July.
- Penny said that the team would highlight the SWIF Key Sections handout, distributed at the first meeting, at the Feb. 17 meeting to remind the group of the elements of the SWIF Plan.
- A CTG member asked when the group could expect to see a new version of the Proposed Vegetation Management Guidelines incorporating CTG input.
 - Rob noted that all comments will be addressed but was not sure if an updated plan would be ready for the next meeting. He indicated that the County may reach out to address specific comments individually.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

ATTENDANCE

Community Technical Group Members

J.C. Hungerford	City of Orting (Parametrix)
Steve Carstens	City of Puyallup
Martin Fox	Muckleshoot Indian Tribe
David Molenaar	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Jessica Stone	Pierce County Parks and Recreation
Jill Bushnell	Pierce County Emergency Management
Bill Sullivan	Puyallup Tribe of Indians
Russ Ladley	Puyallup Tribe of Indians
Kimball Ohsiek	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

EnviroIssues

Penny Mabie	Facilitator
Chelsea Ongaro	Notetaker