



**Technical Advisory Group Meeting #5
Meeting Report**

**February 1st, 2017
Puyallup Library**

The fifth meeting of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for the Farming in the Floodplain Project (FFP) was held on February 1st, 2017 at the Puyallup Library. Over 25 people participated, including Clear Creek area farmers and residents, Pierce County staff, Farming in the Floodplain Project staff, and regional technical experts. PCC Farmland Trust and ESA, the technical contractors working on the project led the meeting.

Topics included a presentation on the Snoqualmie Valley Watershed Improvement District, Flood Risk in the Clear Creek area, and a presentation and discussion on conservation easements. Discussions at the meeting are summarized below.

Planting Project Update

PCC Farmland Trust is partnering with Pierce Conservation District to do a large scale planting project along Nancy's Ditch. The plan is to plant 4000 linear feet of native plants with the goal of shading out reed canary grass and elodea to improve flow.

Snoqualmie Valley Watershed Improvement District Presentation

Cynthia Krass, Executive Director of Snoqualmie Valley Watershed Improvement District (SVWID) presented on the history of the SVWID and its current work. Cynthia presented a brief history of agriculture in the Snoqualmie Valley. Challenges facing agriculture include limited water rights and drainage problems. While the valley has a high water table, limits to available water rights has become a greater challenge as agriculture in the valley transitions from dairy production to mixed row crops, which have a higher demand for water. With confusing regulations and inadequate maintenance of drainage systems, drainage issues have led to a reduction in growing days from standing water. The creation of the SVWID was a response to a need for more formal and unified representation and management to address both irrigation and drainage issues. Cynthia Krass discussed the institutional infrastructure of the SVWID and the benefits it provides. Irrigation districts have more power than other special purpose districts and, unlike drainage districts, irrigation districts can address both drainage and irrigation.

Since its formation, SVWID has purchased a water right from Weyerhaeuser, created an agricultural water bank, is conducting the first comprehensive drainage network analysis, and is taking an active role in watershed planning activities. SVWID has been successful in receiving support and grant funding from multiple sources. The first water rights auction was successful with both buyers and sellers being pleased with the established prices.

Questions and comments on Cynthia Krass' presentation included:

- How was the auction conducted? What happened to the water right? SVWID worked with a Natural Resource Market Economist Team to set up the initial auction. SVWID owns water rights from the Weyerhaeuser purchase, as well as created a virtual pool of water rights from willing sellers. The lease was for one year- buyers submitted bids, and sellers submitted their minimum price requirements. The auction was successful in that the buyers paid less than they expected to, and sellers got more than they expected to. Additionally, the available water rights met the demand, and the water right from Weyerhaeuser was not needed and was allowed to remain as in-stream flow.
- Did the Farmland Preservation program affect SVWID's creation? Cynthia explained that King County's strong Farmland Preservation program acted as an incentive- the public has made a direct investment in preserving farmland, and good drainage is required for viable farmland. Therefore, there is an understood need for good drainage and supporting organizations, such as the SVWID.
- What is the effect of the drainage network analysis on drainage issues? The analysis (similar to a drainage inventory) hasn't started yet and so Cynthia can't be sure yet how issues will be addressed. There will be some needs that can't be met, but the hope is to break up the area into small hydrologically connected units that can work in multiple pieces.
- Could you have both a drainage district and an irrigation district? Yes, you could, but an Irrigation District has more authority to do activities in the watershed, including drainage, so it might make having a Drainage District unnecessary. Additionally, it is not allowable to tax the same parcel twice for the same purposes.

For more information about the Snoqualmie Valley Watershed Improvement District, see:

<http://svwid.com/>

The SVWID was part of a 3+ year planning process in King County as part of the Fish Farm Flood Forum. This collaborative process led to a report detailing agreed-upon actions by the 14 entities participating in the process. The report can be found here: http://farminginthefloodplain.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/DRAFT_Snoqualmie_Fish_Farm_Flood_Report_08.18.2016.pdf

Drainage Inventory Update

ESA conducted additional field work last week when water levels were high. The field crew went to several of the same places they observed in the summer. They observed a lot of standing water and found that South Ditch flow was different than it appeared to be when water levels were lower. There were a few overtopped culverts. The roadside ditch on the east side of 50th was full of water with no flow. More information will be available in the draft inventory to be released in March or April.

Flood Risk Memo

ESA's Draft Flood Risk Memorandum was released with a two week comment period. Spencer Easton of ESA shared information on the findings within the flood risk memo and addressed some of the flood risk concerns heard from farmers.

Questions and comments from the TAG included:

- Does the discussion on sea level rise in the flood risk memo address the effect on groundwater level or tide gates? Spencer explained that the memo is focused specifically on flood risk, not on groundwater or drainage. If anyone is concerned about a connection between groundwater, sea level rise, and flood risk, ESA would like to hear the concern so it can be included in the final memo.
- Does the memo discuss weak points on River Road Levee, including where it is most likely to overtop? Spencer said that the Corps of Engineers modeled what would happen if the levee were to overtop, and we can include that information in the report. He cautioned that the information is somewhat speculative as it will depend on the specific flood event and debris conditions.
- Who holds responsibility of what sections of levee? Pierce County is responsible for River Road Levee and the North Levee Road Levee in the Clear Creek area.
- Is there any information in the memo about how Clark's Creek may interact with Clear Creek during high floods? Spencer said that some limited information is included in the memo.
- Farmers expressed an interest to understand the difference in food risk compared to Snoqualmie Valley flood risk. Snoqualmie Valley farmers are used to more significant and regular flowing, which drains faster because it is an un-leveed system.

Agricultural Conservation Easements

Hilary Aten and Robin Fay of PCC Farmland Trust and Diane Marcus-Jones of Pierce County presented information on agricultural conservation easements, including what conservation easements are, how projects are identified, and the role of the Strategic Conservation Partnership (SCP).

Agricultural conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements structured to support the long-term viability of agriculture. The conservation easement removes development rights from the property. With the sale of the easement, the landowner is reimbursed for the value of those development rights as compensation, determined by an appraisal. Land trusts that hold agricultural easements may also have additional requirements to support agricultural uses of the property, including restrictions on commercial development, limitations on impervious surfaces, or maintenance of intact water rights. Easements can be managed by land trusts, county government, conservation districts, or the state government. Easements are perpetual and cost and responsibility go beyond the current landowner. Management and responsibilities include annual monitoring, enforcing violations, and managing natural resources.

Easements are not a one-size fits all option. They are particularly good for lands designated as priority resource lands. Easement sales can fund property transitions, retirement, infrastructure improvements, or preserving a family legacy. By reducing the value of the underlying land, easements help with affordability for the next generation of farmers.

Recently, the Pierce Conservation District and other partners in Pierce County received a large grant from NRCS that will provide funding for agricultural conservation easements and EQIP. Please contact any of the Strategic Conservation Partnership members (PCC Farmland Trust, Forterra, Pierce Conservation District, and the Pierce County Agricultural Program) for more information.

Announcements

The Pierce County Farm Forum is on February 22nd at the Pioneer Park Pavilion. The day will include opportunities to visit technical tables, a catered lunch by Arista Pasta of Puyallup, and break-out sessions on various topics. The day will conclude with an informal discussion of the Puget Sound Food Hub updates.

The next TAG meeting is scheduled for April 19th from 10am to 1pm.