

Vancouver Lake Watershed Partnership

November 15, 2006 Meeting Summary

The sixteenth meeting of the Vancouver Lake Watershed Partnership was held on Wednesday, November 15th from 4:00-6:00pm at the Port of Vancouver Administration Offices.

Partnership members in attendance:

Patty Boyden, Pete Capell, Brian Carlson, Nancy Ellifrit, Anne Friesz, Chris Hathaway, Jonnie Hyde, David Judd, Gary Kokstis, George Medina, Thom McConathy, Jim Meyer, Iloba Odum, Doug Quinn, Tim Rymer, Vern Vesey

Staff in attendance:

Loretta Callahan, Victor Ehrlich, Annette Griffy, Jeanne Lawson, Curt Loop, Kalin Schmoltdt, Kelly Skelton, Ron Wierenga

Public in attendance:

Beth Adams, Michael Bertish, Robert Buker, Jacqueline Edwards, Jeff Fisher, Cody Fleece, Traci Nolan, David Page, Ron Rintala, Donald Jacobs

Partnership Business

Jeanne reviewed the agenda and asked if anyone wanted to add to add anything. Thom McConathy said he'd still like a briefing on the tissue sampling report. Ron had mentioned the possibility of this report at the Steering Group meeting but unfortunately the Dept. of Ecology was unable to attend today's meeting to give that update. Ron will still try to schedule this for our next Partnership meeting in January. Thom also had a list of items that he wished could have been on today's agenda including:

- Looking at the source of the mercury in the lake
- Development of plans to look at all tributaries into Vancouver Lake, not just Lake River and Burnt Bridge Creek

Thom reminded the Partnership that there are other issues that aren't be pursued because we are only meeting every month. Thom is concerned that issues are not being dealt with in a timely manner. Jeanne acknowledged Thom's concerns and said that we would cover these issues during the process recap portion of our agenda.

Jeanne noted that there were quite a few new public audience members and she how they had heard about the group. A number of people commented that that had seen the article in the Columbian and one person commented that the article should have been published sooner so that more people could make it to today's meeting. Loretta Callahan, who does Public Information/Community Relations for the City of Vancouver Public Works, commented that she agreed but unfortunately she cannot dictate when a reporter will publish their stories. Jeanne reviewed the protocols of this Partnership and she reminded the new attendees that there are two opportunities for public comment at the beginning and the end of the meeting.

Minutes

Jeanne asked for comments on the September minutes, none were made. Kelly had received comments via email which have since been incorporated into the final meeting minutes which are posted on the Vancouver Lake website.

Membership Updates

Kalin Schmoldt, a Project Coordinator from Jeanne Lawson Associates was introduced by Jeanne. Kalin will take over the administrative duties on the VLWP because Kelly Skelton will soon be on maternity leave and not returning to this project. Kalin's email address is kschmoldt@jlainvolve.com and he can be reached at 503-235-5881.

Patty received a call from Lee McAllister, he informed her that the Fruit Valley Neighborhood Association voted to extend their boundaries to include Vancouver Lake. They look forward to future participation and involvement in the VLWP.

Public Comment

Jeanne asked if anyone in the audience would like to address the Partnership. No one had any comments.

David Judd pointed out that all members of the public can be added to the email mailing list to keep involved with the Partnership. One member asked if he can be added to list if he doesn't have email, Loretta said he can receive the agendas through the mail.

New Project Manager

For the benefit of new attendees, Pete Capell gave some background information on this new position. The VLWP project was started in December of 2004 and funding for the Partnership comes from the Port of Vancouver, the City of Vancouver, and Clark County as the primary funding partners. The Corps of Engineers has also become a funding partner, and other recent contributors (Sailing Club) as well as various other agencies. But up until now there wasn't one person that had the primary responsibility for moving the project forward. The major funding partners felt that without a dedicated full time project manager who is responsible for coordination of the work, the project will stall out. They collectively agreed that a project manager should be hired, not a staff person, because the nature of the work could possibly be less than full time all of the time. Some of the necessary skills in this position are a good technical understanding of shallow lakes, familiarity and access to grant opportunities, and overall good project management skills to bring all the pieces together.

There were numerous recommendations by the Partnership group for possible candidates. Katy Brooks, from the Port of Vancouver, and Pete met with three final candidates who were all excellent. Katy and Pete recommended Phil Trask as the best candidate for the position of the three interviewees. Unfortunately Phil had a prior commitment and couldn't attend this evening's meeting but he will be at all future meetings. Phil previously worked for the State of Washington IAC, they do a lot of work for parks and conservation programs. Recently he worked for the Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Program and was highly recommended by this group.

Most recently Phil has been a private consultant working for a number of different agencies; the largest body of work has been with Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership or Estuary Partnership for short. VLWP Partnership member Deb Marriot works for the Estuary Partnership and she spoke highly of Phil, his skills, and level of professionalism. The Steering Group agreed that Phil was the best candidate. At the same time, the Estuary Partnership offered additional assistance and involvement in the VLWP. They don't necessarily have a lot of money to offer, but they can offer resources like grant writing and project and technical assistance. They proposed that VLWP hire Phil through the Estuary Partnership, Phil will be the Project Manager and the Estuary Partnership will donate other administrative assistance. A six month contract will be established to hire Phil through the Estuary Partnership on a trial basis to make sure that the

Steering Group and the Partnership agree that this arrangement will work and will draw up a new contract to go beyond the six months. Pete is working on a scope and contract to get things underway.

Unfortunately Deb Marriott could not make it to today's meeting, but her alternate Chris Hathaway of the Estuary Partnership (EP) was in attendance and Pete asked him to give an introduction and overview of the Estuary Partnership to the group. Chris stated that the EP was established in 1995 as part of national estuary program comprised of 27 other similar programs and administered by the EPA. From 1996-1999 there was a three year planning phase pulling together stakeholders through a management committee that developed forty-three "actions" that now comprise their management plan. The EP now has a board of directors, including some VLWP members, as well as staff of about 13; a science team of 3, education team of 4, and support staff. The EP focuses is on three key areas, habitat restoration and storm water issues, education & coordination, and conventional and toxic pollutants. They do a lot of habitat restoration work and water quality monitoring work as well. The area covered by the EP runs from Bonneville Dam to the ocean, and is bi-state program including work on both sides of the river. They do a lot of coordination work, they've been involved in the NW power planning councils, they were the lead entity in developing the sub-basin plans for the lower Columbia and Columbia estuary, and they recently were the group putting together the estuary module for recovery plans. They have been very successful in securing a large number of grants for both water quality and restoration programs.

Pete added that initially he and Katy were concerned that the Estuary Partnership would try to drive what we do with Vancouver Lake, local control is very important to the VLWP. Deb assured Pete that the EP wants to keep things that way allowing local control to stay as it is but still taking advantage of the services that the EP is offering.

Thom asked if the Estuary Partnership is working with other groups the same way that are offering to work with the VLWP, and he asked for clarification on the types of services that the EP is offering. Chris replied that a similar project would be their contract work with the NOAA on the Fisheries Estuary Recovery Module. It's tough to say how this project will be similar because this SOW hasn't been established yet. Pete said the EP's work on the Sandy River project is similar but Chris did not work on the project and couldn't comment.

David Judd asked Chris to comment on the EP's education program, he feels that it is in important part of their program. Currently there the EP has 4 people full time employees working with students doing things like class rooms visits, educational field trips, doing invasive species removal and native tree planting. Ron Wierenga commented that the EP has partnered with other agencies and they've done significant habitat projects allowing them to bring a wide variety of expertise to the table with things such as grants, permitting, other funding resources etc. Chris said the EP sponsors a science workgroup comprised of about 30 people representing various agencies and universities. They get together once a month to discuss important scientific issues, score restoration project proposals, and could be a valuable resource for the VLWP. Pete said Phil Trask was the preferred candidate, and the relationship with the EP was the icing on the cake in choosing to go with Phil.

Jeanne asked if any other SG attendees have comments about the candidates that were considered and the eventual selection of Phil. Thom said all the candidates were amazing candidates and had great experience. Thom said that we will keep these candidates in mind when looking for future consultants on this project, there could be a future role for these other two candidates in a more technical capacity.

Iloba asked for clarification on if this six month contract is with the Estuary Partnership or Phil directly. Pete said the contract will be with the Estuary Partnership; Phil will be the person doing the work.

Patty asked when Phil will be starting. Pete said he expects within the month, Pete needs to get a scope and contract established first but he feels that will be fairly simple since it will only cover the first six months.

Corps Update

As a recap, George Medina said the Corps is looking to execute a feasibility study based on the findings from a Preliminary Restoration Plan done earlier this summer. The PRP yielded a couple of problems and several possible solutions focusing on hydrology, the flushing channel in the lake, introducing fish habitats, and working closely with the State of Washington to put together a long term plan.

As a result of the new Congress the Corps is not working with an approved budget, federal agencies across the board are operating on the "trickle down effect" which means they receive a little bit of money every few weeks until the budget is established. Once funding is secured the Corps intends on pulling together a technical team to scope out the feasibility study in much more detail and collaborate with the technical team to create a plan that will be executed over the next 12 months building off of the PRP. This plan will include the investigation of fish habitat development and hydrology capabilities. George is hoping to have the team pulled together by the end of the calendar year and he hopes to introduce the team at the next Partnership meeting in January.

The Corps only has \$100k to contribute to the feasibility study, anything above and beyond will be a 50-50 split between the Partnership and the Corps. George is hoping to put together a scope and schedule that will show the Partnership what the \$100k buys us, and if this does not cover our respective needs it will define how much more funding we will need to wrap up the study. George would like to have a formalized Project Management Plan which will layout the entire matrix of the scope of the work and roles and responsibilities as well. The Corps will have someone from the VLWP sign off on this plan because this is truly a partnership. This is not a Corps project, this is a partnership and the Corps wants input from the VLWP to ensure that this plan will work for everyone.

Curt Loop commented that the Corps hoping to use the feasibility study to get authorization for their own project. George would like to graphically illustrate the Corps process at a future Partnership meeting. Pete asked if George has any idea about the timing of an approved budget from Congress. George replied that the existing Continuing Resolution Authority (CRA) is terminated on November 17th. George went to his program manager to ask about funds for the 18th and beyond and at this time he does not know what he has to work with.

George said in January he wants to have the project plan ready with a SOW, defined roles/responsibilities, and how the plan will be executed. Next month (December) George would like to have a preliminary version of that that plan ready to review. Thom wanted to know if the proposed final product will be strong enough to approach congress to use as justification for funding. Curt clarified that the recommendations outlined in feasibility study will be really be the tool used to go to Congress and ask for additional funding based on what is outlined as necessary work beyond the Corps contribution of \$100k, but this feasibility study will take about 12 months to complete.

Brian Carlson asked if activity is on hold since the Corps waiting for money to come in. George said yes, he'd like to get a hydrologic engineer on board but he can't until he has money to pay her. Brian asked if the Corps ever enters into agreements asking someone else to front the money temporarily. George said that isn't necessary, there is still activity occurring and work is being done in the mean time until the final authorization for funding comes in.

Vern commented that he is concerned that the \$100k will only cover a piece of the "ideal study". He thinks that other funding sources could be available to fund the rest of the study that might not be covered, he'd like us be aware of those other funding sources as soon as possible. George

agreed that that is the Corps intent with this Project Management Plan, to define a course of action and define the need for additional funds as soon as possible.

Patty asked about timing and costs for the feasibility study to help plan ahead. George said he'd like to get his team pulled together within the next few weeks and have the study laid out and ready to present to the Partnership in January if he can.

Ron commented that the Corps' work is only a piece of the work that we need for the diagnostic portion of our study. These studies can be expensive, complex, and can take a long time. One of the activities that the Tech Group would like to get going early next year is a science workgroup, to bring experts together to layout the plan for this "ideal study" and define the technical strategy, how groups like the Corps and WSU fit together and ultimately define what is that final product will be.

Pete added that we are all anxious to get out and start doing things but we need to be prudent and do the appropriate amount of analysis so the money is well spent on the correct solution and the work is successful.

Tech Group Update

As introduction for the new attendees, Ron Wierenga introduced himself as an Environmental Permitting Coordinator for Clark County Public Works. Ron said we have recognized the complexity of the lake, the lack of information available, and the need to get more information on the lake. Since the beginning of this Partnership we've always been aware of our relationship with the Corps and the need to keep momentum on the project going while waiting for funding. It was decided that in the interim we would start some technical work; one piece of work was asking WSU to propose a biological evaluation of Vancouver Lake to see what we could afford and how it would fit into our overall technical strategy without creating redundancy with the Corps work.

WSU told us that due to the size of our budget we could not afford a complete overall biological study. Based on their expertise in plankton research, WSU proposed a one year study to look at plankton and other insects, and nutrient sampling and chemical sampling that look at algae blooms. The final work plan with WSU has been finalized and the final contract is underway with the County and should be wrapped up within the next month.

WSU has proposed that they will look at eight sites in the lake because the algae distribution throughout the lake needs to be validated. This funding will allow them to look at these eight sites quarterly throughout the year to see how they change over the seasons. WSU will also sample one site every two weeks for the entire year which will look at variability throughout time. They'll look at what types of algae are out there by looking at the distribution and abundance of algae giving us a snapshot of the health of the lake. They'll also look at recent data collected by the Health Department, and some of Ron's other work and data that he has gathered.

Vern Vesey commented that other waterways (such as Lake River, Salmon Creek, and Whipple Creek) can all affect the lake. Vern is concerned that WSU's study sites do not include enough sampling outside of the lake and down river. How do we know what the outside influences are if we only look at and samples from the lake? Ron agreed that it is important to look at tributaries and other water sources into the lake, but this interim work will not look at those other water sources at this time. Ron agreed it's important to look at doing broader sample studies. Vern thinks we should get others (the Port of Vancouver, Port of Ridgefield) involved in doing some of the sampling work for us. Ron agreed and said that hopes that this science panel/workgroup will help make connections with other groups and bring other resources together to get this information pulled together. Thom commented that Ron's presentation this summer showed that at least 20 other agencies are doing work that would offer useful input to our project. Ron agreed that those are the people that he would like to get involved in the workgroup, but reminded everyone that this interim work needed to get started.

Ron added that he has been able to coordinate an aquatic plants survey with the Department of Ecology which will take place at Vancouver Lake this summer. Jennifer Parsons from DOE will come and do the survey this summer.

Nancy asked about the possibility of getting the high schools involved in testing the small streams. Ron said yes it's a possibility and it's currently happening already in the tributaries and he hopes it continues in other areas of the lake as well.

Process Recap

Jeanne thought that with the recent scoping and contract development work performed it is good time to revisit the project and review the work that has been done thus far. A critical thing to remember is that this group was a grassroots effort that recognized that there was a lack of understanding and agreement about the problems plaguing Vancouver Lake and a desire to find possible solutions. When this group started meeting in January of 2005 there were presentations by citizen groups and agencies to help us come to a more common understanding of how the watershed works, how the lake is used, and how it fits into this area. An outcome of these presentations was a series of defined information gaps, and those gaps have fed the technical work scoping that the Partnership has been done thus far. Another outcome of those presentations and discussions was a list of values that shaped the Partnership's unrestrained vision. Those information gaps and unrestrained vision really drive the direction we are headed in now. A lot of progress has been made with funding and the new project manager will continue to move things forward by coordinating and managing the complex list of issues the lake currently has.

Thom said there are some major issues that he believes the Partnership (collectively) is not moving forward on such as:

1. Characterization of the major tributaries into the lake, including Burnt Bridge Creek, Lake River, and the flushing channel.
2. Characterization and description of the minor flows into the lake.
3. Rieger Road problem. This is the "road that goes to nowhere" and is used for dumping and is accessed by ATVs that are destroying the land. No one seems to be dealing with it.
4. Developing a plan to address the 303d deficiencies on the major tributaries (Salmon Creek, Lake River, Burnt Bridge Creek) a plan for addressing these deficiencies needs to be developed.
5. Address the county and city septic tank elimination programs. This was identified as a problem decades ago.
6. Start developing a recreation and fish and wildlife plan that will address the future of this area in order to get people down to the lake. We need to address abuses in the area such as illegal hunting on park lands, the ATV and car use on the Fish and Wildlife lands.
7. Mercury levels in the lake -- what is the source?
8. The impact of Lake River (added by Vern).

Vern warned against blaming any one agency for this list of problems. Pete commented that it's important to keep in mind that through our process thus far we've created an unrestrained vision for what the lake will be -- as we do the studies and analysis and move forward with a plan, we have to figure out how to fund the initial work but also any ongoing work that is required. We don't want to do something that we cannot sustain.

Thom said that there was a maintenance plan that defined what the Port's responsibility would be to maintain the flushing channel and the flood gates. But there were other responsible agencies that dropped the ball as well.

Vern reiterated that he strongly feels Lake River needs to be looked at as a separate issue, as more than just a tributary into the lake.

Jeanne asked Ron if any of these eight issues fall under the WSU work plan, Ron said that numbers 1 and 2 definitely do they will be looked at as part of the work plan. It is important to look at things like the tributaries, septic tanks, 303d listings regardless of the work being done in Vancouver Lake. There is a possibility that the Dept. of Ecology looked at mercury levels in their latest fish tissue and sediment study. Most of these issues raised by Thom will be addressed directly and indirectly through the work the Partnership is planning on doing in the future.

Gary pointed out that this Partnership is unique because it brings together a wide group of people with expertise and also allows citizens to voice their opinions concerns.

Pete reminded everyone that balance is needed between all of these contributing factors. The septic tank elimination issue is a huge county-wide issue that needs to be dealt with but it is beyond the scope of the Partnership.

As an FYI, Iloba said that there has been raw sewage on some Frenchman's Beach for years; the Dept. of Ecology has been working with the Health Department and the Parks Department in an effort to clean things up. They have contacted DEQ and it was investigated, the suspicion is that it's coming from combined sewer overflow coming from the Willamette River in Portland. The Department of Ecology knows that the City of Portland is working on their big pipe system, but the one likely to affect us will not be done until 2011. The city of Portland said that from now until March there are going to be overflows so deal with it. The Health Department has posted signs but more need to be posted, and the Parks Department needs to post signs to help raise public awareness. Iloba needs help from others in the group to solve this mysterious waste problem.

Patty said the flushing channel dredging will begin after Thanksgiving, flow monitoring has started and the flows are quite a bit higher than anticipated. Patty will keep the group updated on the dredging as it progresses.

Public Comment

Robert Buckert, a retired professor from Ohio State University and his family has owned the mouth of Burnt Bridge Creek since 1883. He's the four generation to build a house on the same piece of property, his family came to Vancouver in 1883 to mine gold and they have been farming every since. Most of their land has been taken by Vancouver city. Robert said that he is concerned about the mercury content of the fish in Vancouver Lake and Burnt Bridge Creek. If the fish are above the toxic level for mercury (which he suspects they are) he thinks it is wrong to increase the population of fish in Vancouver Lake because those fish will eventually be consumed by humans. He thinks an early mercury content survey needs to be done to measure the levels before the habitats are improved.

Ron said that some of the work that the Department of Ecology did on mercury levels last year covered this exact problem. This is the report that Ron referred to earlier and he hopes that the DOE will present to the Partnership when the report is finalized.

Michael Bertish commented that the most recent 303 de-list study included testing for mercury and that is why Vancouver Lake failed to meet the standards. Following up on Iloba's comments on the raw sewage at Frenchman's Beach, Michael said he feels there are indications that the source if the sewage is crossing the Columbia River and getting into Vancouver Lake. Michael that a few more items should be added to Thom's list:

1. Closing the flushing channel to prevent pollutants from coming into the lake.
2. Storm water migration and how that affects the water flow into the lake, particularly because storm water migrates through industrial complexes.

3. Ongoing clean up of toxins in the area, such as the Cadet plume.
4. The Port's plan of expansion of transportation in the area because this expansion is slated to go through this project area.
5. Drinking water, the city has long range plans for drinking water wells in the Vancouver Lake lowlands.

Michael asked again why the EPA is not part of the Partnership because they have applicable expertise. Jeanne reminded the group that the EPA has been invited to meetings but has not attended. Michael asked George Medina if the upcoming feasibility study will go through a public comment process or will the Corps just make a presentation to the Partnership and the public will not be able to comment. George replied that everything is transparent. Michael asked the feasibility study includes a variety of options of recommendations to choose from as the group feels appropriate or if the recommendation will be limited to a single best guess recommendation. George said there will be alternatives and recommendations, but it is too early to tell. George did say that is very rare for the Corps to come back after a feasibility study is conducted and say "this is the solution, we are done". Once a Project Cost Sharing Agreement is signed everyone will be presented with all the options, people will be able to comment and make the best decision based on the recommendations and funding available.

Michael had one final comment that the recent flooding of the Columbia River was an example of a time when the gate should have been closed to protect the lake.

Another new public attendee, Ron Rintala commented that he doesn't think adding more water to the lake is going to help the lake's problems. He thinks the lower end of Lake River should be dredged and let the water flow out. The upper end of Bachelor Island, the slough that used to flow from the Columbia River to Lake River acting as suction for Lake River water is no longer there, that water flow is gone.

Jeanne thanked the public for their comments, but wrapped things up because it was 6:00.

Our next Partnership meeting will be January 17, 2007 at 4:00 pm.

Meeting Adjourned.