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**Steering Committee meeting minutes  
June 14, 2006**

Introductions. Agenda was reviewed and approved after continuing business was moved up to follow the presentation. Minutes of the May 10, 2006, meeting were approved with the following correction:

- Philippe Cohen clarified that when he was asked by Richard McMurtry what alternatives for ecological restoration Stanford would be willing to consider with regard to the SFC-JPA / USACE project, he prefaced his response by saying, "I can't speak for all of Stanford, but I imagine most of the bullets listed in the [draft] resolution."

The next meeting will be July 12, and the presentation topic will be the Watershed Council's new monitoring program for its revegetation sites.

**Announcements**

- Trish Mulvey: The Santa Clara Valley Water District published an update of the history of its water supply and flood protection service as part of its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The District will be celebrating the anniversary on July 7 at the new Martin Luther King, Jr. Library in San Jose. Trish will circulate information on the specifics when they are known. The updated book won't be available until after the July 7<sup>th</sup> celebration.

**Presentation: The importance of woody debris in streams for fish habitat and Santa Clara Valley Water District stream maintenance procedures (Melissa Moore and David Salsbery, Santa Clara Valley Water District)**

Pam Sturner introduced Melissa and David, saying that every year the Watershed Council fields a number of calls from creekside property owners asking about downed trees in local streams. The question is usually whether to take them out of the creek or leave them in. This is a challenging question that exemplifies the issues involved in a watershed approach to watershed management: how to balance two different needs. In this case it is the needs of steelhead and other aquatic habitat and the need for stream maintenance to keep the channel clear enough to convey high flows. Today's speakers have thought about this balance from both perspectives. Melissa Moore and David Salsbery are fisheries biologists with the Santa Clara Valley Water District who will present information on the habitat value of large woody debris and on the Water District's stream maintenance program.

Melissa started the presentation, saying that in addition to talking about what wood does in the creek and the stream maintenance program, David would also be talking about a steelhead genetics study underway in Santa Clara County.

Large woody debris is important because it influences the creek flow, which influences both food production and the energy the fish must expend. Downed trees and other large woody debris trap sediment, which creates gravel bars and instream islands. This creates the habitat complexity such as pools, riffles, and refugia from predators that fish need for different life stages. Woody debris is also the substrate on which benthic macroinvertebrates and biofilm

grow, both of which are important food sources for steelhead. It influences the trophic structure: in other words, what each critter eats at each level of the food web.

In many creeks in the area there are flooding concerns, and the goal is to balance flood protection with protection of instream habitat. When large woody debris falls into the creek, the District will come out to the site to evaluate whether the debris is providing habitat or risks causing stream blockage and erosion, and will make recommendations about how to handle it. These recommendations range from full removal of the wood to modifying it in order to maintain its habitat value but reduce the risk of blockage. If the wood is removed that had been providing habitat, the habitat loss must be mitigated. An example of a modification to woody debris would be to remove the branches that might catch debris, but leave the trunk, and then come back periodically to check both for habitat complexity and for erosion and blockage.

In an urban watershed where hydrographs are spikier and flow velocities are higher, large wood set in creeks as mitigation for removal of wood elsewhere must sometimes be anchored in place. Melissa also talked about the concept of “hardscape” vs. “softscape.” As a “softscape” example she described a collapsing bank on Alamitos Creek that was stabilized by the placement of an old tree.

Until four years ago, the District regularly removed any wood that was in the creek, as it was considered to reduce flow capacity. The flow capacity issue still remains, but the District now considers the habitat value of wood as well. The District now has a geomorphologist studying the benefit of wood in creeks vs. flood conveyance.

The District recommends that property owners leave any woody debris that falls into the creek in place. If the wood might pose a flood problem, the owner should call the District, which will come out to evaluate it and recommend whether it should be modified or removed and mitigated. Melissa pointed out that if the District doesn't know that wood has been removed, they won't know that it should be mitigated.

The District has put together a flyer about large woody debris to send out to residents in the Stevens Creek watershed. A similar flyer for San Francisquito Creek will be next.

*Question:* Is there a distinction between lumber and trees? There was some lumber stuck on a shopping cart in the creek at Middlefield Road.

*Response (Melissa Moore):* Yes, lumber, which could have nails sticking in it or could be treated, is considered trash. However, there is no distinction made between native and nonnative woody debris. You can call the District and have them remove the lumber, or there is also a form on the District's website for reporting this kind of thing.

David Salsbery took over the presentation at this point. David is also a fisheries biologist with the District and shared a list of fisheries-related studies the District is currently undertaking. These include:

- (1) A TMDL mercury study on human and environmental concerns;
- (2) The Guadalupe Flood Protection Mitigation and Monitoring Program;

- (3) The Mid-Coyote Baseline Fisheries Study on water quality and fisheries composition and habitat up to the dam (to be used in developing a mitigation and monitoring program);
- (4) The Biotelemetry Fish Passage Study;
- (5) The Vaki River Watcher fish counter; and
- (6) A county-wide genetics study on steelhead and lamprey.

There are 15 populations of salmonids that have been listed under the Endangered Species Act since 1997. Two of these populations are present in Santa Clara and Santa Cruz Counties. It is unknown whether the fish are hatchery plants or wild native steelhead. California has a long history of planting fish in streams since the 1930s. The District is seeking to prioritize salmonid populations based on genetics, and are compiling results from 1100 samples about the genetics of populations above and below various reservoirs.

The Smithsonian has eighty 100-year old samples of salmonid tissue from Llagas Creek that are being compared with current samples to determine if the species has evolved or not. The samples are typically a 1-millimeter fin clip. The District took samples from salmonid populations below reservoirs before the ESA listings, and continued to take samples from healthy populations above reservoirs. The study did not include samples from fish above Searsville Dam. David will give the Watershed Council a copy of the steelhead genetics map when completed.

*Question:* Can the genetics testing distinguish between rainbow and steelhead?

*Response:* The analysis can determine if the fish still have an anadromous trait.

The preliminary results of the genetics study and the draft report should be done in July, and the final report should be available in the fall. It will provide results and implications for management.

*Comment:* The Department of Fish and Game continues to plant rainbow trout from other places in streams through the county. Have you seen impacts in Stevens or Coyote Creeks?

*Response:* They also plant channel catfish in Vasona Reservoir, some of which have escaped and have now been found all the way down to Highway 101. They are planted for a put-and-take fishery. In theory they plant fish in places where they can't escape, but they do. The nonnative fish compete and sometimes prey on native fish and also introduce disease.

*Comment:* The hot spot for fishing on Stevens Creek is on the spillway below the reservoir.

Half of the aquatic fauna diversity of Coyote Creek has been lost since the 1880s because of invasive fauna including bullfrogs and turtles, gravel mining, impacts of impervious surfaces on flow regimes, etc. Native fish are usually the most sensitive to altered flow regimes.

*Question:* What kind of flow regime would you recommend for local creeks?

*Response:* One that mimics natural hydrology. Natural streams have some high flows that scour the streambed and are part of channel formation. However, we can't release flows high enough to do that anymore. Also, historical ecology work that is being done shows that lots of creeks in this area were originally intermittent. These kinds of creeks tend to have populations with low diversity and high specialization – you lose this when you change the hydrology. The District

has done this in some cases by changing some creeks from intermittent to perennial.

*Question:* People like to canoe on Coyote Creek. Is there a way to manage flows and channel maintenance for both habitat and recreation, like keeping the lower reaches clear that are the migration corridor for salmonids, then maintaining woody debris in the upper reaches where spawning and rearing happen?

*Comment:* This is a question to bring to the WMI WAMS group.

*Comment:* Also, access points through the riparian corridor cause disturbance, so there are lots of competing uses.

*Question (Pam Sturner):* You talked about a study to assess the balance between flow conveyance and habitat. When will we be able to see the results?

*Comment (Melissa Moore):* Lots of attention is now being paid to large woody debris in rivers. There are conferences and symposiums about it, including the American Fisheries Society's "Ecological management of wood in rivers." Also, lots of other critters besides fish benefit from wood in streams.

*Question:* When will the flyer for the San Francisquito watershed be ready?

*Response (Melissa Moore):* We're pushing to keep it moving forward and are working with the public information people. We'll show it to the Watershed Council for review before it is released to residents.

*Comment:* We should explore opportunities for funding a print run for the San Mateo County side of the creek.

*Question:* Is there an equivalent effort to look at the management of wood going on in San Mateo County?

*Response (Melissa Moore):* I don't know.

*Comment (Trish Mulvey):* Sam Herzberg with County Parks would be interested in hearing about this.

*Question:* Is the Mid-Coyote baseline study the same thing as the stream flow allocation?

*Response:* No. This study is the first time the District has collected appropriate baseline information about fisheries conditions. In addition to steelhead, they are collecting data on lamprey and others. They will evaluate the natural fish communities and propose recommendations to improve these communities. The hope is to bring some of the populations back that were present prior to urbanization.

*Question:* Would you actually reintroduce fish?

*Response:* We may, depending on the conditions. Tule perch were thought to be extirpated (locally extinct), but then more were found and were reintroduced. We're going to use historical ecology to determine what habitats were where and hopefully bring some of the natives back. It's very exciting!

*Question:* Are you willing to train local volunteers to do fisheries monitoring?

*Response (Melissa Moore):* Yes! The District has 5 fisheries biologists for 800 miles of stream, so training volunteers to do monitoring is really helpful. We've trained volunteers in the Stevens Creek watershed to evaluate fish passage at different flows, depths, and velocities. We

love to work with the community. We could work with the community on anything from spawning surveys to fish passage measurements.

### **Continuing business**

- WMI – The District is still working on an indicators report card. It is a prototype based on existing Coyote Creek data that includes indicators such as riparian habitat condition, fish assemblages, water quality, and benthic macroinvertebrates. The goal is to come up with indicators that will help us understand habitat condition and impacts of management interventions, that will then feed into a monitoring plan. We want to take a broader look at what data is useful to collect and easy to use so we're not just doing bean-counting. We will share the demonstration score card with the WMI Core Group and the Water Resources Protection Collaborative. There seems to be more interest in trash because of the salt pond restoration project.
- Water Resources Protection Collaborative – The Revised Ordinance will be brought to the Collaborative on June 29 for review. It is memorializing Water District practices for streamside development near streams. There will be a Water District workshop on it in July or August, and Water District Board Adoption in early fall if the schedule holds.

### **Discussion: Request for guidance on timing and format of proposed educational meeting on Searsville**

Pam led the discussion on a proposed educational forum about Searsville dam and reservoir. This discussion came out of questions regarding Searsville that arose at the update at last month's meeting on the Army Corps San Francisquito project. One question was what an appropriate venue would be for reconvening a Searsville working group. Cynthia D'Agosta will agendaize that question with the JPA Management Team (made up of representatives from the JPA, the Public Works Departments of the member jurisdictions, Stanford University, and the Watershed Council) to help give input to the Watershed Council.

Given the level of interest in this topic, Pam discussed with the Watershed Council's Management Advisory Committee whether there was something that the Watershed Council could do to help in its role as a neutral forum. Since the Watershed Council is a forum for discussing complex issues in the watershed, the idea was proposed for the Watershed Council to hold an educational forum on Searsville. The target date discussed was either the November Steering Committee meeting (November 8) or a Saturday in November. The only Saturday without a Stanford home football game is November 11. The Watershed Council would invite experts from Stanford to discuss various aspects of the management of the dam and reservoir, and the forum would be contingent on Stanford's participation.

Comments about the idea of an educational forum about Searsville Lake:

- The Steering Committee time (weekday afternoon) is not convenient for many people from the community, if we are hoping to get a broader audience.
- (*Dianne Dryer, City of Menlo Park*): I think there may be a lot of interest on the part of Menlo Park residents. They would probably prefer an evening or a Saturday. Something short, no more than an hour and a half, with handouts would be good.

- We may need a couple of different forums, maybe one that goes into more depth and one that is more of a summary.
- It should also include a presentation on the habitat communities around the lake, as it now exists. That alone could easily take 30 minutes.
- (*Philippe Cohen, Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve*): This may not be the right venue for that if we are trying to attract a larger group. I would be happy to speak about the role of the lake on Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve. We could probably also get David Freyberg to talk about the hydrology.
- (*Dianne Dryer*): The City of Menlo Park may be able to offer a venue.
- This forum must have a really clear objective. We need to define the goal.
- The forum may need to be two different events. We could ask Chris Christofferson and Alan Launer to speak to a smaller group about more in-depth issues and also have an overview and synthesis presentation for residents.
- For the residents to be interested, it needs to be relevant to them. What's relevant to them is flooding and erosion, and plans for Searsville.
- You need to know a certain amount about the details to be able to understand the overview.
- Pitching this forum to residents as related to the flooding problem may just polarize the situation.
- It could also help clarify misinformation.
- We should pitch it as an opportunity to learn about Searsville Dam and reservoir – how Searsville Lake relates to San Francisquito Creek, not how it relates to flooding and erosion.

Pam reminded the group that we don't want to get too deeply into the content of the forum, but that we're trying to see if there is enough interest in such an event to follow up with more planning.

- The forum should provide baseline information – the minimum education everyone needs to know in order to be able to discuss the issues in further depth.
- We need to know who we want the audience to be. The topics can be more in depth for this group, but if the goal is to inform residents to the watershed, we need to think about what their needs and interests are.
- (*Trish Mulvey*): There has been no JPA Management Team meeting since the May Steering

Committee meeting. We will want to frame this discussion in the context of the Army Corps project information and alternatives.

- *(Kevin Murray, Joint Powers Authority)*: The Corps will study alternatives for the Flood Damage and Ecosystem Restoration Project. The components of the alternatives have yet to be defined. They may or may not include alternatives for Searsville. The alternatives should be known within the next year and will be presented at the meeting next April according to the current timeline.
- Did something happen to Searsville Dam?
- Something will happen sometime; it's a question of what and when.
- *(Trish Mulvey)*: At the Corps public meeting that took place at the International School, I asked that Searsville Dam be looked at in the context of the Army Corps study. It's full, it has a limited lifetime, and this is an opportunity to get the best professional and academic understanding about the dam that we've had for a while.
- If the forum is held in a town or city venue, it will be widely advertised.

Pam summarized that it sounds like we may be planning for two events: one for the Steering Committee that goes into more depth, and a separate event for the community. Philippe Cohen, Marty Laporte, Trish Mulvey, and Ted Bache volunteered to be on a planning committee. It was also agreed that it should not be on a Stanford football game weekend. Pam will contact the committee, which will write up questions and goals for the forum.

### **Presentation and request for approval: SFWC proposed FY 06-07 budget**

Pam Sturner passed around handouts on the budget that are also available on the Watershed Council website ([www.sanfrancisquito.org](http://www.sanfrancisquito.org)). The highlights of the budget are that the Watershed Council is well funded for this fiscal year and even have some surpluses in overhead, personnel, and direct costs. The personnel and direct cost surpluses occurred mainly because we had a delayed start on the revegetation monitoring project, which resulted in some unspent funds from FY 05-06 that are carried over into FY 06-07. The surpluses in the overhead are the effect of not having had budgeting tools in the past as precise as the ones we have now.

All funding is in hand except the \$61,000 in local contributions, which we expect to get in full.

Summary of expenses: The Watershed Council now has three full time employees: Project Director Pam Sturner, Restoration Projects Manager Katie Pilat, and Field Coordinator Ryan Navratil. Ryan is a graduating Master's student in biosciences with a concentration in ecology and evolution from Stanford. The field coordinator is a new position to manage volunteer workdays, site monitoring, development of a restoration site maintenance plan, and *Arundo donax* mapping and removal. Ryan will start in July.

The Watershed Council's contractor expenses are down to \$272,000 from \$414,000 last year. This decrease reflects work contractors are doing getting done.

Overhead expenses have gone up about \$5,000 since last year, reflecting our new status as a fiscally sponsored project. Overhead expenses are comprised of a 12% fiduciary fee to Acterra on all non-pass-through income (everything except what is paid to contractors) as well as indirect costs such as rent, utilities, and IT support.

We are doing much better on preventing cash-flow deficits than in the past. We've tightened up our invoicing schedule, we use upfront money to buffer outstanding invoices from government contracts, and we now have a \$90,000 revolving funds to cover expenses while we are waiting for reimbursement from funders.

*Comment (Philippe Cohen):* It has been a Herculean struggle to get the Watershed Council's finances in order to get to this point. The Acterra Board and a volunteer treasurer have worked closely with the Management Advisory Committee. The finances are now much cleaner and easier to follow.

Pam thanked the Management Advisory Committee, Acterra's Board and staff, and Katie for all their hard work on upgrading SFWC's financial management and reporting systems. She concluded the budget review by noting that the Watershed Council is well funded for this year, but most of our current funding ends by June 2007. We did not get the CalFed grant that we applied for in March and were told by CalFed that for this round they funded projects in locations where they had not funded projects in the past. When we get more comments back from their reviewers, we will decide whether to resubmit if there is another funding cycle in the fall. We think it was a strong proposal and we plan to shop pieces of it around to other funders as well. We will also be looking for new funding sources for our other projects in FY 07-08.

Philippe Cohen moved to approve the budget; Trish Mulvey seconded. The budget is approved.

### **Update on transition to fiscal sponsorship with Acterra**

Pam handed out copies of the final documents approved by Acterra's Board outlining conditions for the transition of the Watershed Council to fiscal sponsorship with Acterra. The same documents are also on the Watershed Council's website at [www.sanfranciscuito.org/projects/forums](http://www.sanfranciscuito.org/projects/forums). The goal today is to present the documents as they now stand, take questions, and then send them to the Steering Committee for correspondence review to approve them. The good news is that we're almost there and are on target for our transition date of July 1.

The documents look a lot like the ones that Acterra's Board and the Steering Committee approved last November. Changes reflect the work that has been done since November to meet the conditions and make the status final.

Pam then talked through the status of the conditions described in "Addendum #1 to Fiduciary Agreement, Watershed Council and Acterra:"

- (1) Review assets and liabilities – Acterra’s business manager and treasurer went through all the Watershed Council’s income and expenses up through the end of the last fiscal year and figured out what belongs to whom. The result was that the Watershed Council has approximately \$90,000 in assets, which is now the revolving fund mentioned earlier in the budget discussion. We will update that figure after the close of FY 05-06 on June 30. As of July 1, 2006, we will also have our own bank account.
- (2) Financial report format – a team of Acterra Board member and staff and Watershed Council staff have been working on a financial management and reporting system to track finances. It is in good shape and we are close to having it up and running.
- (3) Watershed Council treasurer – The treasurer is meant to be a liaison between Acterra and the Watershed Council for financial matters. Since Pam is already fulfilling that role, she is the treasurer for now.
- (4) Fiduciary fee – The agreed upon fee is 12% of all non-pass-through income. This was based on an analysis of actual costs to administer our organization.
- (5) Loan agreement – the dates shown in the final documents posted on the website reflect the new timeline for implementation.

The documents will be left on the website until the correspondence review is finished. Send Pam any questions or comments by June 23. If there are no problems, we will consider it approved on that date.

*Comment:* It should say “June 2006” in the first line of the first bullet on the “Transition of SFWC” document.

*Comment:* Some city government people get confused about the relationship between Acterra and the Watershed Council. I want to make sure that I’m correct when I tell them that the Watershed Council is independent and that all decisions are made by the Steering Committee and not Acterra.

*Response (Pam Sturmer):* Yes, that is correct. The relationship is now a fiduciary relationship only. The only thing we get from Acterra is our financial services and our nonprofit status.

Pam will send an email to our larger email list on July 1 announcing that the fiduciary agreement and change in status are finalized. She will also announce this in her “Associate member matters” remarks at the next JPA board meeting.

*Comment:* I find the language “fiscally sponsored project of Acterra” misleading. It still sounds like the Watershed Council is a project of Acterra.

*Comment:* The word “project” is included in all of these documents. Can we still change that?

Pam will talk to Acterra Executive Director Michael Closson about changing this wording.

*Question:* Is the Watershed Council forming a board?

*Response:* Yes, with the help of the Management Advisory Committee.

*Question:* I ask this because I wonder if the Watershed Council can take donations beyond cash, such as property for example.

*Response (Pam Sturner):* Yes, that is the purpose of having a fiscal agent. It would go through Acterra but be earmarked for the Watershed Council.

*Comment:* Woody Erstad is looking to donate a piece of property along the creek.

Many thanks to the Acterra board and staff, the Management Advisory Committee, and Watershed Council staff who have helped bring this transition to fruition.

## **Staff reports**

### Restoration Projects Manager (Katie Pilat)

- Stormwater demonstration projects: Construction work on the second half of the stormwater demonstration project in the City of Menlo Park Parking Plaza #5 is moving forward. The pervious concrete portion of the lot was poured on June 1.
- Fish passage improvement projects: 50% designs were submitted for two projects to modify box culverts on Los Trancos Creek. Both projects involve installing baffles in the bottom of the box culvert to make them easier for fish to navigate in both low and high flows. A design review meeting with all property owners and stakeholders was held on June 13. Work is continuing on completing 90% designs for a culvert replacement on McGarvey Gulch in Huddart Park.
- We had a great last volunteer event of the season with a hearty group of volunteers who helped clean up the top of bank along the creek for National River Cleanup Day on May 20. The water was so high this year that we weren't able to walk the creek bottom like we usually do. The next volunteer workday will be Coastal Cleanup Day on September 16.

### Project Director and Coordinator (Pam Sturner)

- Welcome to Bill Whitmer, who joined the Management Advisory Committee (MAC) in May and helped enormously in getting SFWC's budget into its new, streamlined format. Also, many thanks to Marge DeStaebler who will be leaving the MAC. She has been a wonderful resource and great support and we thank her for her service. She wants to focus her attention on a number of issues coming to the fore in Portola Valley but assures us that will still be an active member of the Steering Committee.
- We participated in several outreach events over the last month including the USGS Open House and the Portola Valley town picnic. Trish Mulvey, Philippe Cohen, Pam Sturner, Leo Laporte, and Katie Pilat staffed the San Francisquito watershed exhibit at the Open House. We got many thoughtful questions (mostly about topography, flooding, and habitat) and were in a good location this year. At this event, the older, more general outreach materials seemed to be more popular than our newer ones on more specific topics. But Pam did hand out quite a few of the new materials, especially the bank stabilization and native plant landscaping brochures, at the Town picnic. There was a high level of awareness and a lot of conversation about pulling French broom there as well.

Meeting adjourned.

In attendance:

Katie Pilat – SFWC

Peter Neal – Acterra

Marge DeStaebler – Portola Valley Conservation Committee

Spence Everson

Libby Lucas – California Native Plant Society

Philippe S. Cohen – Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve

Paul Randall – SCVURPPP

Paul Heiple – Portola Valley Conservation Committee

Bill Whitmer – SFWC

Brad Eggleston – City of Palo Alto

Leo Laporte

Trish Mulvey – SFWC

Melissa Moore – SCVWD

David Salsbery – SCVWD

Marty Laporte – Stanford Utilities

Kevin Murray – San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority

Ted Bache – Menlo Park resident

Art Kraemer – Crescent Park Neighborhood Association

Dianne Dryer – City of Menlo Park

Minutes respectfully submitted by Katie Pilat.