

# MEMORANDUM

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**Date:** June 6, 2018  
**To:** Chehalis Basin Board  
**From:** Jim Kramer, Chehalis Basin Strategy Facilitator  
**Re:** Summary of Key Feedback from the Spring 2018 Landowner Meetings

## Introduction

The *Aquatic Species Restoration Plan (ASRP) Initial Outcomes and Needed Investments for Policy Consideration* (ASRP Steering Committee 2017) has identified community involvement as one of the high-level strategies to achieve the ASRP vision. The draft ASRP being developed over the coming year will identify actions that could occur over several hundred miles of the Chehalis River and its tributaries. The implementation of actions will occur only where there are willing landowners. This memorandum summarizes the key feedback and themes heard from landowners in Spring 2018.

The Thurston, Lewis, and Grays Harbor conservation districts (CDs) hosted five meetings with landowners in Spring 2018 in locations throughout the Chehalis Basin. The purpose of the meetings was to understand the experience, perspectives, and concerns of landowners throughout the Chehalis Basin in regard to: living and farming along the Chehalis River or its tributaries; how the State could help agriculture be prosperous in the future; and initial thoughts on habitat projects. Understanding local agricultural needs and concerns can help ensure farming and farmers are supported as part of the Chehalis Basin Strategy and considered during ASRP development. Below is a table providing information on meeting date, region, and number of attendees.

**Table 1**  
**Aquatic Species Restoration Plan Focus Group Meetings Information**

MEETING DATE	REGION	LANDOWNERS
4/26/2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Central Lowlands</li><li>• Black River</li><li>• Black Hills</li></ul>	8
5/1/2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cascade Mountains</li></ul>	7
5/8/2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Willapa Hills</li></ul>	10
5/9/2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Olympic Mountains (Wynoochee/Satsop)</li></ul>	4
5/22/2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coastal Lowlands</li></ul>	3

## Landowner Comments: Feedback and Themes

The following sections provide a compiled summary of feedback and key themes provided by landowners on agricultural viability, fish habitat and flooding conditions, and restoration and enhancement activities. The feedback is a compilation of comments provide at the meetings by participating landowners and not intended to represent the views of all landowners or a consensus of those participating landowners. There are differences between the different areas of the basin in regard to the type of agriculture, land conditions and landowner perspectives. Those differences are not summarized in this memo.

### Agricultural Viability

Concerns	
Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant market changes with the loss of contracts from National Foods</li> <li>• Hay market is supported by horse owners who purchase most of the locally grown hay</li> <li>• Eastern Washington growers have less expensive and more predictable water supply</li> <li>• No local USDA processing for meats</li> </ul>
Productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water rights are restrictive and water availability is unpredictable</li> <li>• Climate change is affecting production</li> </ul>
Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application of Open Space Tax rules creates challenges to stay in the program</li> <li>• Increased taxes to existing farmers as taxable land decreases</li> <li>• Cost is prohibitive for young farmers</li> </ul>
Needs	
Water Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water rights to farmers that need them</li> <li>• Adjudication of Chehalis Basin water rights</li> </ul>
Permitting and Regulations Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surety of rules and transparency in requirements</li> <li>• Clear understanding of rules and consistent interpretation of rules among agency staff</li> <li>• Easier and more accessible permitting process (land, time, and money lost waiting for permitting processes)</li> <li>• Better trust built between landowners and the State</li> <li>• Farmers appreciate that the CDs can help landowners navigate permitting and regulatory processes</li> </ul>
Adequate Funding/ Incentives Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market and infrastructure assistance: equipment sharing, discount hay storage, assistance in growing and marketing higher value crops, funding for improving water efficiencies, and local processing facilities (in particular local meat processing and grain storage)</li> <li>• Adequate payment for buffers to offset cost of taking land out of production, incentives should offset cost to future generations for land taken out of production</li> <li>• Projects between landowners and the State need to cover the entire process including maintenance (i.e., continued state support needed for cost and labor of maintenance/repair of restoration projects) and a commitment by the State to monitor</li> </ul>

Market Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less restriction on what can be grown</li> <li>• Crop varieties that require less water</li> <li>• Using more value-added techniques to increase marketability of products coming from this area; more branding</li> <li>• More markets for local products (and increased marketability)</li> </ul>
Other Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from the Washington State Department of Agriculture and Washington State University Extension for value-added crops and machines/technology</li> <li>• Support for young farmers (e.g., youth programs, agricultural teachings in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math programs)</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>	
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dry storage facilities/locations</li> <li>• Agricultural industrial parks</li> <li>• Farm pads</li> <li>• Farmers markets</li> <li>• Local U.S. Department of Agriculture certified slaughterhouses (helps farmers fetch better prices than selling whole cow)</li> <li>• Grants for irrigation efficiency projects and practices</li> </ul>
Information for Agricultural Community/Landowners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recorded history of flooding as an online resource for producers</li> <li>• Map/model of ongoing river fluctuations/water paths as a resource for producers to support land management</li> <li>• Causes of increased flooding and fish habitat degradation</li> </ul>

## Fish Habitat and Flooding

<b>Fish Habitat Conditions</b>	
Water Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water is not as healthy as it has been in the past</li> <li>• Water temperatures are warmer from warmer summer trends</li> <li>• River water is not clear; there is a lot of sediment/high turbidity</li> </ul>
River Channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chehalis River (and Skookumchuck River) is degraded; instead of being deep and narrow, it is now shallow and wide</li> <li>• There is too much gravel in the rivers which spreads water out (gravel removal from river is no longer allowed)</li> <li>• Fish are not using habitat in upper reaches</li> </ul>
Other Pressures on Fish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predation by non-native California sea lions</li> <li>• Loss of genetic variability of salmon over the years, some loss due to hatchery practices of only using eggs from early returners, makes the populations less resilient</li> <li>• Overfishing</li> </ul>
<b>Concerns and Needs</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a significant decline in fish populations in the river</li> <li>• In-stream flow is a more pressing issue than buffers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Conservation practices won't make a difference if there is not enough water in the river</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Increased erosion and cutting of the river banks is adding to the silt in the river and streams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Erosion control is needed to reduce sedimentation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Accurate information needed on what has contributed to degraded fish habitat (e.g., farmers are not removing trees)</li> </ul>	

Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Road projects to hold back flooding in small increments (flood retention)</li> <li>• Address lack of vegetation along state and public lands (e.g., rails to trails)</li> <li>• Provide example of what a healthy river looks like, so the community can replicate efforts</li> </ul>

## Restoration and Enhancement

General Comments	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spending too much money on studies (frustrated with all the planning/studies and no action)</li> <li>• Supportive of large wood that will reduce erosion and doesn't push water upland</li> <li>• Open to idea of compromise but not demise (i.e., willing to work with the environment but not at cost of losing ability to farm)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Buffer width should be variable and site specific (e.g., buffer width cannot be too wide; a 500-foot buffer would take most of the productive and fertile farmland out of production)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Consider effects of placing land into reserves               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Loss of taxable land increases taxes of existing farmers</li> <li>– Once property is put into a reserve, ensure opportunities to put land back into production</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
Concerns	
Large Wood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chehalis Basin rivers are too powerful for instream wood projects (i.e., projects may work elsewhere, but not in our Basin)</li> <li>• Large wood and rootwads may be good for fish, but not as bank protection</li> <li>• Uncertainty on how the river will re-channel around large wood projects and cause erosion</li> <li>• Concerns on how large wood could affect neighbors' lands from river re-channeling and landowners downstream if large wood disengages</li> <li>• Concern with pinching the river into a narrow channel and increasing river velocity</li> <li>• River banks are too high for log jams to work effectively</li> <li>• Log jams create bank erosion downstream (e.g., caused loss of multiple bridges in 2007)</li> <li>• There are landowner maintenance, access, and liability concerns</li> <li>• Potential for impacts to recreational uses (e.g., canoes and kayaks)</li> <li>• Consider buffer/planting program that doesn't require fencing or less fencing</li> </ul>
Other Concerns and Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beavers removing trees is a challenge to maintaining buffers</li> <li>• Concern over longevity and security of state and federal programs</li> <li>• Uncertain whether State will increase buffers widths in the future</li> </ul>

Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Holistic approach to restoration projects<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Consider habitat conditions upstream and downstream</li><li>– Don't piecemeal projects</li><li>– Strategic effort from all parties</li></ul></li><li>• More information/outreach to landowners adjacent to smaller streams</li><li>• Appropriate species for riparian plantings (i.e., durable and long-lasting)</li><li>• Science-based monitoring of the effect of restoration projects on salmon habitat (referenced studies on the Touchet River in the Snake River Basin)</li><li>• Better and fairer compensation to landowners for implementing buffers</li><li>• Maintaining voluntary participation</li><li>• Maintenance of restoration projects by the State (State should continue to be involved even after initial implementation to deal with situations such as tree die-off or destruction of exclusion fencing by floods)</li></ul>
Opportunities and Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider benefits of a balanced restoration approach (i.e., consider agricultural and restoration interests) versus a purist goal (i.e., restoration only)</li><li>• Aim for higher percentage of landowner participation by developing restoration projects that balance landowner concerns with habitat</li><li>• Consider a mix of solutions (e.g., using wood and riprap instead of only one or another)</li><li>• Consider using pilings to anchor large wood projects to help them stay in place</li><li>• Consider a buffer/planting program that doesn't require fences (or less fencing)</li><li>• Consider opportunities to reconstruct back-channels</li><li>• Consider leases of riparian areas that could help provide supplemental income</li><li>• Expedite permitting for landowner restoration projects</li></ul>

## Next Steps

The CDs will plan to reconvene the landowner focus groups in Fall 2018 to discuss specific ideas for habitat actions and priority sub-basins identified by the Science Review Team during summer field efforts and other issues raised during the initial meetings.

## References

ASRP Steering Committee (Aquatic Species Restoration Plan Steering Committee), 2017. *Chehalis Basin Strategy: Aquatic Species Restoration Plan Initial Outcomes and Needed Investments for Policy Consideration*. Chehalis Basin Strategy. Prepared for the Governor's Chehalis Basin Work Group. November 30, 2017. Available at: [http://chehalisbasinstrategy.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ASRP-Initial-Document\\_2017-11-30.pdf](http://chehalisbasinstrategy.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ASRP-Initial-Document_2017-11-30.pdf)