August 24, 2011 Technical Group Meeting Summary

In Attendance:

Thom McConathy
Brett Raunig
Jeff Schnabel
Dorie Sutton
Lisa Willis
Phil Trask
Eileen Stone

Opening

Phil reviewed the agenda and asked if there were any additions, to which there were none.

Algal Control Techniques Report

The report was developed in 2009, includes many techniques for algal control. It is not prescriptive to Vancouver Lake, but an overview of many techniques used elsewhere.

The question posed to the Technical Group by the Steering Group is do we look to update the report and narrow down techniques now, or wait until later. If we update now, we cannot fully take anything off of the table while we await research results. The Steering Group wants to avoid putting effort into an update if it is mainly an editorial project at this point in time. Would updating the report now move the Partnership forward in choosing restoration alternatives for Vancouver Lake?

If we were to update the report now there are several options:

1. Update the document in total, possibly expand with new techniques.
2. Update parts of the current report – giving more information on those techniques that we think are most likely, and identify gaps for the techniques with highest likelihood. No techniques would be fully off the table at this time, but not given greater examination at this time.
3. Append an abbreviated update or case studies of likely techniques to the current report, without editing the 2009 report.
4. Leave the 2009 report as a research document and not update, but create a separate document on a narrow selection of likely techniques, possibly update new document with amendments when data available.

A concern among the group is how we judge which techniques are most likely without the USGS results and without taking other techniques off the table? There may be a few techniques that are very unlikely right now, but to do a true narrowing down we need the USGS data. At best an update would be a partial narrowing down now with another effort necessary later.

Brett raised a question on potential costs and if any techniques would be taken out of consideration due to cost. Jeff said that at this time, nothing will come off the list of techniques due to cost; just by potential for success in Vancouver Lake.

Jeff gave an example of calculation he made to get an idea of an upper bounds of costs. To do this he looked at the potential cost of lowering the entire lakebed by five feet at costs similar to the Columbia River dredging project. The cost of such a project would be over $184 million. In comparison, in the 1980s $17 million was spent on the flushing channel and partial dredging.

Phil noted the concern with the length of this process and the need to show progress. To maintain project support a focus on likely techniques could be beneficial.

As we cannot make a decision on the best technique(s) for the lake until we have USGS information it seems early to do a partial narrowing down now, as we will need to narrow down again in future. It could be more efficient to save effort for one larger screening and put current effort into looking to funds for critical studies (e.g., sediment, fish studies).

Also, the current list is not exhaustive. The group discussed the annotated bibliography that Thom circulated earlier – this list includes information on many techniques, funding methods used for various techniques, and reasons for failures. This has some techniques that are not in the 2009 report.
It would take quite a bit of time to examine techniques that have come to our attention after the 2009 report right now, versus keeping such information in a living database to which the Technical Group can add information. Once we have research results we will be able to more quickly pare down techniques and go into depth on those that would make sense given what we will then know about the lake.

The 2009 report does need to be updated, but to do so now without the USGS data is not necessarily the most efficient use of Partnership funds.. The process of choosing a technique(s) isn't waiting for the techniques document to be updated: it is waiting for greater knowledge of the lake, i.e., USGS research. We should continue to collect information and then move forward. The Technical Group loses credibility if we remove techniques/put certain techniques as priorities without the necessary information. At lakes that have conducted projects that didn't work it was often because they didn't have all the data when they chose a technique. A stronger process has higher success rate.

In regard to other priority research, Phil mentioned that the Corps is creating a new feasibility study that may include Vancouver Lake. Phil is hoping it might lead to funding of a fish study since other information on the lake has already been collected by the Partnership.
It was asked if the Estuary Partnership would be able to assist VLWP with some funding.

There is also a potential restoration project at Buckmire slough through BPA that will likely lead to fish seining survey for Vancouver Lake.

Phil summarized the discussion for a recommendation to the Steering Group: the Technical Group recommends not updating the document at this time but to wait until after the completion of USGS study to update the report/narrow down the techniques. At this time, more effort should be put into developing funding for priority studies (fish and sediment identified in research plan).

The group also recommends that the project management team spends some time on the annotated bibliography of techniques. A good list can serve as a repository for techniques and anyone from the group can add to it. Then we have a better starting point for technique information that is not in the 2009 report.

The group would like to have a meeting after the USGS update at the September Partnership meeting to discuss what we should do to be ready to move forward when we have USGS information. The meeting will discuss what other information we will need along with the USGS results. Once we have data we will need to come up with alternatives/no alternative options. It will take work and we need to know what landscape looks like: what path will we need to take in order to analyze three or so alternatives.

Potential Early Action Project(s) for Vancouver Lake

Phil opened the discussion of the second agenda item: potential small wetland restoration projects around Vancouver Lake. The thought is to have early actions that could build support and benefit the lake (not major restoration at this time). These actions might be appropriate for Centennial or other grant funding. These projects would be relatively small. It would be important that any project would not preclude future implementation of potential techniques. We will also need to be cautious on area we select to avoid any conflicts with recreational uses.

PC Trask staff kayaked some areas on the northeast side of the lake with Jeff Schnabel in mid August. The trip was to get an idea of some projects in that area. Another area would be the Northwest side of the lake near the park so that the public could more readily see the work.

Potential projects include invasive plant control and native plantings. Future projects could be larger with engineering. Question to the group: Should we go to Centennial for a small planting project, involve volunteers for labor?

Dorie has seen interest by volunteers to assist in planting along Burnt Bridge Creek. There is likely similar interest around Vancouver Lake.

Thom noted that it is important that any project is shown to be successful. We need to be careful to not do something that could be eliminated in a few years with implementation of a chosen technique(s) to improve the lake.

Removing invasive plants may be best at this point so that efforts aren't negated with future work. Any control of Himalayan blackberry or reed canary grass will need management because one effort on its own will likely fail.

The best controls of reed canary grass have been found to be a change in hydrology (water height or topographic changes) or shading. There was a study on reed canary grass control by Jim Comrada on Salmon Creek.

Lisa commented that the group should keep in mind that reed canary grass does serve a role in water quality, so removing reed canary grass without replacing it with other plants for the water quality function might not benefit the lake. Increasing shade around lake could help by both controlling reed canary grass, allowing other plants to come in, and providing some shade for the lake, albeit a small amount.

Willow stakes are great in areas to shade reed canary grass, provide some shade to lake, and provide stability to slope. If willows are planted in vicinity of park we may be able to ask Parks staff to assist with maintenance. It will be critical to plan for watering of project for successful establishment of plants.

Potential areas to look at for early action projects include:

1. Vancouver Lake Park: If do something on park grounds they may be able to help with maintenance. Potential work on Legacy lands. Parks: on their ground, possible maintenance?
2. Legacy lands near the park.
3. WDFW boat launch.
4. Trail building could be good on northwest side to connect Salmon Creek and Burnt Bridge Creek.
5. Removal of invasive plants along Reiger Road to further the efforts of Parks and the Department of Transportation.

Phil commented that items 4 and 5 would be good efforts but for the Partnership an early action project that addresses water quality improvements would contribute directly to our mission.

Jeff remarked that a pulling or planting project can get our foot in the door to show effort on lake. To wait for research completion and not do something now would be a mistake. We need some near term early actions. We can look at other grants for future activities but need to start somewhere – lake edge is a start. We should do something on the ground that is lake-centric.

Thom commented that while he can support this, he sees wetland work as the most responsible type of action. Recent flooding drowned many "restoration" projects – we need to know that we won't flood our project and ruin it in the future. The group noted that USGS information can help us in project placement based on flooding regimes. However, willow should survive various water levels. Also, willow can be moved if needed. The city project along Burnt Bridge Creek is growing willows in some areas now knowing that they will need to be moved later. This nursery area is considered beneficial now and can give a head start in tree size later.

Phil commented that on formulating early efforts we have access to work with Jeff Wittler of CPU for ideas as well – he has good riparian planting experience in the area.

Closure

The Technical Group recommends to the Steering Group that we develop a small invasive control/planting project and with their approval we should go forward in applying for Centennial /other grants- ideally our volunteer labor could be match for any of these grants.

We can move from a simple project to get started to more complex projects in the future. We will be sure to utilize restoration professionals when needed.

Phil thanked the group for coming and closed the meeting.