

**Alliance for a Healthy South Sound (AHSS LIO) Riparian Workshop**  
**June 7, 2024, 10:00 – 12:00 pm**



**Participants**

Adrien Glenn Owens, Conservation Northwest  
Alexandra James, Capitol Land Trust  
Alison Brown, City of Lacey  
Allan Warren, Bonneville Environmental Foundation  
Andrew Deffobis, Thurston County  
Barbara Ann Smolko, Pierce County  
Bob Oxborrow, Wetland Ecosystem Team, University of Washington  
Brienne Blackburn, Pierce County SWM  
Cindy Haverkamp, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department  
Colin Hume, WA Department of Ecology  
Connor Racette, WA Department of Ecology  
Cynthia Catton, WA Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Dana Bowers, Thurston County  
Daniel Einstein, Olympia Ecosystems  
Elizabeth Bockstigel, WA Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Elizabeth Spaulding, Governor's Salmon Recovery Office  
Emily Davis, Department of Ecology, Water Quality Program  
Erika Harris, Puget Sound Regional Council  
Evan Bauder, Mason Conservation District  
Genevieve Becker, City of Olympia, Water Resources Stream Team  
Glenn Johnson, Pierce Conservation District  
Grant Gilmore, City of Tumwater  
Hannah King, WA DNR  
Heather Green, Pierce Conservation District  
Jake Heckert, South Sound Beavers  
James Blacklaw, Consultant working with Conservation Northwest  
Jennifer S. Lewis, Office of the Chehalis Basin  
John Stepanek, GHCD  
Josh Giuntoli, WA State Conservation  
Josh Lambert, RCO  
Julia Stinson Ebert, WA Department of Ecology  
Kayla Seaforth, Bonneville Environmental Foundation  
Keith Folkerts, WA Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Key McMurry, Key Environmental Solutions, LLC  
Kim Bredensteiner, Nisqually Land Trust  
Kirsten Joy Harma, Chehalis Basin Lead Entity  
Kitty Weisman, WA Department of Ecology  
Lance Winecka, SPSSEG  
Libby Gier, WA Department of Ecology  
Mack Hunter, Grays Harbor Conservation  
Mark Heckert, South Sound Beavers  
Michael Yadrick, City of Tacoma Environmental Services

Monea Kerr, Puget Sound Partnership  
Nick Braun, WA DNR  
Nick Norton, Recreation and Conservation  
Olivia Williams, USFWS  
Rebecca Brown, Department of Natural Resources (HSIL)  
Sadie Normoyle, Puget Sound Partnership  
Stephanie Bishop, Thurston Conservation District  
Tye Menser, Thurston County, Yolanda Holder, WA Department of Ecology  
Michelle Quast, WA Department of Ecology

### ***Meeting Facilitation***

Elizabeth McManus, Ross Strategic  
Kristen Durance, Ross Strategic

**Summarize breakout sessions – questions in the form. Group information by questions that were asked. Not all of the groups answered all of the questions. Organized the notes by topic**

## **I. Welcome and Introductions**

Elizabeth McManus and Kristen Durance welcomed the attendees and went over the agenda for the day. Kristen led a group exercise to encourage folks to introduce themselves to three people they hadn't met yet.

## **II. What we heard from IGNITE Speakers**

- **Heather Green** – Pierce Conservation District.
  - Heather presented on Stewarding Riparian Plantings: Importance and Challenges. A big challenge they face is young plants in riparian ecosystems susceptibility to many stressors like herbivory, invasive plants, flooding and drought stress. Solutions can include seasonal irrigation, infill planting, invasive species control over at least 5 years, 10 years is ideal to allow plantings to become self-sustaining. Heather's slide deck can be viewed [here](#).
- **Evan Bauder** – Mason Conservation District.
  - Evan presented on challenges and successes of riparian projects MCD has worked on over the years. A success that Evan mentioned is the transition from one off, small projects and CREP to coordinated larger scale riparian restoration thanks to Hood Canal Knotweed Control Strategy and Southern Hood Canal Riparian Enhancement Project (multiple phases) in 2009. However, they needed to scale the labor to meet this need. The work is both technically challenging and takes a long-term commitment. They identified a solution that could mitigate this is to hire a year-round crew with seasonal focus on knotweed, planting, and site maintenance. This idea as well as an increase in funding led them to hire full time benefitted positions in 2019 and now, they have 5-10 field staff and 1.5 FTE to help coordinate their work. Unfortunately, funding sources

don't have a specific riparian focus, so they must cobble together funding from multiple sources. Evan's slide deck can be viewed [here](#).

- **Keith Folkerts** - Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.
  - Keith presented a riparian data engine GIS tool. This is a scalable, land use decision support tool that can help riparian restoration practitioners get info to identify and prioritize riparian restoration projects. It compiles a lot of information (ex: NHD stream lines, parcel info, fish passage barriers, easements, land cover data, change detection data) to look at the status of riparian ecosystems (RMZ – 200 yr. SPTH), compares gaps in vegetation to water temperature impairments, fish passage barriers, salmonid stocks, and creates new data. It can be used at the site reach or basin scale. The tool creates polygons that summarize the statistics. The polygons will be assigned a score based on canopy cover and other characteristics. WDFW wants to learn from project sponsors what stats are needed for this tool to be most useful. They are listening to stakeholders, CDs and fisheries enhancement groups, salmon recovery, and ag groups. The tool is currently under construction as they are adding more data, adding new capabilities and considering the ways to use it. The plan is to roll out the new tool one year from now for Summer of 2025. Keith's slide deck can be viewed [here](#).
- **Mark and Jake Heckert** - South Sound Beavers
  - Mark and Jake are WDFW certified beaver relocators. Beaver populations are currently on the rise, leading to increased human/beaver conflict. The benefit of beavers is that they are riparian engineers with many benefits to riparian function. Beavers can replace machinery work. Trapping and relocation is underway, but release sites are lacking in South Puget Sound. Long term goals are to promote acceptance of beavers as a restoration tool and pass a statewide beaver management plan. Their presentation can be viewed [here](#).

### III. What we heard from Funders

- **Colin Hume** – WA Department of Ecology
  - **Colin Climate Resilience Riparian Systems Lead (CR2SL)** – The CR2SL is a partnership between the WDOE, the State Conservation Commission (WSCC) and Bonneville Environmental Foundation (BEF) that supports restoring and protecting riparian areas in Puget Sound. The final work plan was approved, and the program officially launched on Oct 1, 2023. Funding will be dispersed incrementally over the first 4 years of the 6-year agreement. In summer and fall of 2024 initial request for proposals will be released and after that two or more additional solicitations for RFPs will go out. Colin's presentation can be viewed [here](#).
- **Josh Giuntoli** – Washington State Conservation Commission
  - Josh spoke on 2 different funding opportunities, one being the Riparian Grant Program which is Climate Commitment Act (CCA) funding to restore and protect riparian habitat. It is structured with a wide range of project eligibility, for distribution to Conservation

Districts exclusively. The other is the Riparian Plant Propagation Program that fosters coordination between nurseries, Conservation Districts and local partners to increase plant availability and match plants with projects. An information sheet Josh provided to project sponsors can be viewed [here](#).

- **Nick Norton – Recreation Conservation Office (RCO)**
  - Nick spoke on behalf of the Salmon Recovery Funding Board riparian funding dispersed to salmon recovery organizations through their normal processes, with each lead entity receiving no less than \$300,000 of this funding. RCO is trying to offer more flexibility in these five-year grants. The projects can be focused on stewardship of old sites, livestock exclusion, habitat projects, acquisition projects that meet certain requirements, and 10% could go towards riparian assessment work at the local level.
- **Nick Vira – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**
  - Nick Vira presented on the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), a voluntary program administered by the USDA NRCS that provides farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices, including riparian buffers. They are trying to find new ways to increase enrollment as the program is not being utilized as much as anticipated. Nick's presentation can be viewed [here](#).
- **Paul Cereghino – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)**
  - Paul shared funding for the Community Based Habitat Restoration Program which is a 3–4-year agreement and is focused on fisheries and ESA recovery. This year the PNW is nationally dominant, with 1/3 of national funds going to WA and OR. There is an emphasis on coalition requests, multi-benefit projects, and amplifying the community voice. Paul's presentation can be viewed [here](#).
- **Olivia Williams – US Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife**
  - Olivia shared the National Fish Passage Program funding which provides technical and financial assistance focused on improving fish passage. Projects must be on the ground and benefit ESA species and demonstrate fish passage benefits. Projects can include culvert replacements, restoring natural processes, floodplain connection. There is a separate pot of funds for Tribal and underserved communities.

#### IV. Breakout Sessions

- **What aspects of this work are both critical to project success and particularly difficult right now? Why?**

Workshop attendees expressed that it is critical to have larger buffer widths with continuous length for project success, but this is not always conducive for landowners especially as regulations and requirements change over time. Further, conservation easements take a lot of capacity and there is a significant amount of red tape involved. When it comes to local government, purchasing land is difficult as government funding cannot go above land value. One project manager explained that when it comes to landowner willingness, it is a fiscal challenge to “give” landowners a tree due to the amount of maintenance that is involved, as it's not necessarily “free.”

Participants unanimously agreed that there is a need for specific positions and processes to aid in project success such as cultural resource permitting and archeologists. At times, there are audience tolerance and knowledge gaps among those involved in projects which makes finding consistent participants such as landowners and conservation districts a challenge as they back out at times, making it difficult to accomplish projects and programs.

Small groups shared that there is an immediate need to implement climate adaptation techniques by designing watershed scale solutions to reduce erosion and flooding to increase water availability such as water storage solutions, improve water quality (water temps are too high), and be prepared for more challenging weather events. However, to accomplish this work, it's critical to articulate and address climate change in grants and public outreach.

Project sponsors reported that consistent information needs to be shared widely from funders and various parties to increase who is invited to the table (lack of equitable funding for forums). A couple of themes that emerged from many groups are how inaccessible grant applications can be and that there is a lack of reliable and current data to accurately represent trends and details of project sites. Groups emphasized that there is a significant burden of applications/paperwork and a lack of consistency to support funders review making applying for funding even more cumbersome and discouraging. Additionally, data needs to be revisited and updated every 5 years to make sure data sets are staying current as availability of resources and data are often lacking. Monitoring data over long term trends and ensuring there is crossover between water quality, salmon, riparian and riparian datasets can be difficult. There needs to be alignment on success and prioritization criteria.

- **Is there a different way to approach this challenge? Is there a courageous conversation we should be having?**

Participants reflected on a variety of ideas and potential solutions to address the above challenges. Some of which were to build on soft skills to engage in better outreach with landowners and the community through more targeted messaging on topics they care about. Other ideas to get landowners on board included incentives and community based social marketing. There needs to be a more holistic approach by engaging Tribes, factoring in ecosystem values, and looking at the whole landscape to aid in protection of riparian areas and not just restoration. Although it can be difficult to have a robust vision when the funding is on a grant-by-grant basis such as the Conservation District's Forest Stewardship Plan which has a backlog, making it difficult to get a plan in place.

These riparian experts reflected on whether watering is necessary and that innovative planting techniques should be researched and evaluated such as live staking with variable widths. Exploring new techniques such as blue carbon and implementing zoning and protection first can lead to positive outcomes. Alternatives to herbicides should be explored including mechanical and manual removal. Pasture conversion to build soil complexity and suppress weeds as well as hiring full time basin specific noxious weed coordinators could be beneficial. If funding allows, moving to the model of permanent crews that do plantings in winter and weed control in the summer could present many benefits. Attendees expressed the importance of relying more on current data, Lidar, drones, and field data collection apps. Knowing how and when to lean on weed classifications (regional differences) to leverage action and prioritize across watersheds

can help to approach these challenges. Folks finished this conversation by agreeing that a repository of lessons learned to improve future outcomes could improve impact and efficiency.

- **If there is a funding need, what could funders change or emphasize in their riparian programs to improve riparian project success? How do we ensure funding is effective?**

Like the above question, providing more incentives for landowners and businesses to take the burden of maintenance off landowners should be prioritized for ongoing periods of time like 5-10 years. Participants felt there needs to be funding for workforce development, labor, training, and programmatic approaches such as providing site stewardship designated funding with capital funds and NRCS money for monitoring. Further, moving toward a model of buy-protect-sell can aid in increased funding opportunities.

Support and funding should be prioritized for projects in disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, community engagement, social marketing, and research so project managers have data to share. Leaning on smaller organizations to plant trees can help to increase capacity for project sponsors by reducing the administrative burden and shifting the focus more to underserved communities.

Current project funding does not include making long-term commitments for in-house crews which requires cobbled together funding for year-round crews. This can help to provide higher quality control and better support for employees. Washington Conservation Crews should be shared between entities. Providing one portal between or within agencies can help to streamline the process for project sponsors.

- **How could different partnerships support work in this topic area? Are these connections already happening or do they need nurturing?**

Connections that need nurturing include partnerships with universities and developing common core language can improve the science of this work. Participants also mentioned people involved in the building industry and Climate Conservation Corps crews to rely on specific expertise. Building better relationships with the Tribes as many work across jurisdictions and watersheds, as well as the Washington Department of Transportation for habitat connectivity, Washington Department of Commerce in terms of GMA updates, and legislators for policy support. Developing these cross-sector relationships can help to amplify messages and impact.

Holding Forums and listening sessions to develop knowledge with funding agencies and project staff was also a topic of discussion. Project sponsors would like to see the development of groups and programs such as Conservation Tactical Development Groups and an SCC capacity building program for CDCs. They would also like to see and be invited to more in-person workshops centered on riparian work.

- **Are there policy or programmatic needs that should be addressed? What change is suggested?**

Participants voiced that tailoring messaging to the audience and providing evidence-based communication by being transparent about actions that are being taken are programmatic needs that deserve to be addressed. Ensuring that solutions and positive stories are at the forefront of messaging can help to foster actionable change. It's critical to invest in landowners since much of

this work is accomplished on their private property and to practice empathy, respect, and courtesy with landowners. Further, the focus should be on land trusts to implement these programs so that restoration is possible.

Groups also noted the need for a shift from funding programs, not projects. For example, there is a data gap regarding the impact of knotweed on salmon as this has not been addressed as an important programmatic need but rather on a more project-to-project base. Additionally, salmon is often the focus topic for programs, which should have a further reach on other topics such as beavers, reforestation, etc. Implementing programs will allow project sponsors to better compete for funds and more effectively communicate the problem to funders.

Across the board, groups agreed that requirements for funding need to be significantly reduced and more state money needs to be prioritized at the state scale.

In terms of on the ground work, growing the buffer over time should be a best management practice. Funding focused on programmatic needs around nature-based solutions such as reforestation, beaver restoration, urban forestry, snow retention, water storage, reservoir improvement, GIS, re-wilding, species migration, tree/plant material increases, and land conservation (micro forests, land trusts) are practices that can enhance riparian project work.

- **What can we do at the regional scale (South Sound) that would better support projects in this topic area? How about basin-wide (Puget Sound)**

At the regional scale project sponsors could utilize Floodplains by design funding and pushback on more competitive funding. Sponsors agreed that investing in the same thing, rather than bouncing around can lead to positive change in the riparian sphere. Lastly, there needs to be a focus on local issues, but action needs to be taken collectively on a basin-wide scale.

## **V. Report Out – Key Highlights and Takeaways from Funders**

Funders noted that the feedback on the CR2SL funding will be rolled up into a synthesis of feedback from around the region which will help inform investment priorities. The data will be shared out. Colin (Department of Ecology) mentioned that project sponsors should be thinking big for some upcoming investments and to start talking to their partners about big asks and planning now. Ecology will be working on things together to create a bigger, landscape-scale project that is beneficial on multiple levels.

Another highlight is that a plan can start to be developed now for the Climate Commitment Act. It's hard to predict if it will be appealed or not but one action that can be taken is to offer site tours of Climate Commitment Act funded projects. It is a priority for Funders to get messaging out to communities and show the impact of those dollars on the ground.

Based off the new noxious weed coordinator in the Chehalis Basin who is funded for two years by a grant, funders agreed that having a group or staff to coordinate between entities and help with applications and outreach could be beneficial and can assist in finding high priority areas. Lastly, funders will look at things that are being asked for by project sponsors to see where they can provide supporting materials for applicants to plug in and make the application process simpler.

## **VI. Closing and Next Steps**

- Next Meeting September 19th 10-12pm
- Identify another topic to engage both funders and project sponsors such as climate mitigation. Understand who and how best to get funders in that space.