



King County

Water and Land Resources Division

Department of Natural Resources and Parks

King Street Center

201 South Jackson Street, Suite 600

Seattle, WA 98104-3855

206-477-4800 Fax 206-296-0192

TTY Relay: 711

Cedar River Council DRAFT Meeting Notes

October 27, 2020 – 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm (scheduled)
Meeting/Conference Call via Zoom (King County account)

I) Call to Order / Welcome

Nathan Brown, King County staff for the CRC, called the meeting to order at 6:35 pm and reviewed general Zoom meeting “housekeeping” rules.

II) General CRC Announcements / Information (Open to all Attendees):

Jay Mirro reported when walking on the Cedar River Trail near Dorre Don recently, he noticed the river flowing again in a section where it had diverted and dried. He suspects this is due to local citizens moving many large rocks by hand to create a weir to direct the flow. Judy Blanco, Cedar River basin steward for King County, told him Chinook were spawning in the channel, and this was being monitored.

III) Rainbow Bend Project Update and Video Tour of Site (Dan Eastman)

Mr. Eastman, a King County project manager for the Rainbow Bend restoration project, reviewed the history of the project since 2013, and how it’s become a success story in many aspects. Mr. Eastman has been involved with the project since 2011. He narrated a PowerPoint presentation and aerial video of the project site.

The site is downstream of the Cedar Grove bridge and upstream of the current Riverbend project. He showed photos of the site dating to the 1970s, when a revetment had just been built. There were many mobile homes and other single residential homes in the area, and a levee. The area was prone to flooding, with many significant cases documented between the 1970s and 2000s. The goals of the Rainbow Bend project were to reduce flood risk and future need for maintenance, restore floodplain function and salmon recovery processes, and address potential impacts to recreational safety. Relocation of the mobile home residents was completed in 2011, then the armoring and levee were removed. This allowed the river to expand into the floodplain and the river mainstem to widen. Some floodplain excavation was done to “jumpstart” some natural processes, so the river would interact with the floodplain more frequently. Lots of planting was done as well, as well as revitalizing of a side channel of the river. This channel was meant to develop as good habitat over time, as part of encouraging a dynamic nature by plumbing water back into the floodplain.

Mr. Eastman showed a timeline of photos documenting transformation at the project site. 2013, just after construction, already showed the channel starting to grow wider and shallower. 2015 continued this trend, with low flow water surface elevation coming up but flood elevations going down. Most new change after this point occurred in the February 2020 flooding event. The changes emphasized importance of widening and distributing wood which might have otherwise been in dangerous positions in the river, and absorbing flood hazards. He said this turn of events created some of the best habitat he’s ever seen. 2020 site photos showed more dramatic widening, extensive wood and sediment retention, and gravel bars above the original floodplain surface. The side channel even carried a 125-foot tree, along with many others, down during the flood. Water has pumped wood and sediment down the side channel during floods, and gravel dams have layered with wood to raise the surface water level three to four feet higher than before the project. This means water is now flowing into the floodplain year-round, the definition of floodplain connectivity.

Mr. Eastman then narrated an aerial video of recent conditions at the site. The side channel and main channel are each now wetted to a width of about 100 feet, whereas their combined pre-project width was closer to 90 feet. Gravel and wood jams are pushing water into the floodplain. The entire upper half of the site is under water even in lower summer flows. This slow edge water is good for juvenile salmon to rest out of flood flows which can flush them into the lake. It’s best for juvenile salmon to stay longer and grow bigger in rearing habitat before going into the lake, as these bigger fish make up over 90% of adult return counts. Mr. Eastman said he observed many Chinook at the site in February, though not as many coho due to it being early enough in the season that the coho were still largely in the gravel. Many fish hide in the large wood jams, which have pockets of slow water and lots of great habitat. He believes the wood –

which includes big trees such as cedars and Douglas fir – will remain for a long time and see a period of dramatic change over the next few years.

He said the lift in off-channel rearing habitat is “unprecedented,” much of it created by the floods. Early numbers indicate possibly five to seven times more low-velocity habitat than before, which could translate to an estimated 1,100 to 1,300 more Chinook smolts. He said in addition to improved fish habitat and water quality, benefits from the project include: more people are out of harm’s way and no damage to key infrastructure or private property from floods; and collection of wood and sediment at the site minimize these getting caught on bridges or downstream in Renton.

Q & A:

- Q: What’s the time span? Five years from excavation completion to this?
A: Seven years.
- Q: It would be good to see numbers from third-party spawner surveys to determine if these projects are making a difference to the overall system. It seems we’re holding our own with Chinook, in trouble with sockeye, and not getting data on coho.
A: Seeing smolt yields will be important. This will be their first full year spawning in the new expanded site. I also saw elk for the first time at the site, and deer and beavers. It’ll be interesting to see how they transform the site.

Larry Phillips noted in the 1970s many people lived in the homes and trailer parks in the area which have now been removed. He said the CRC helped a lot on this, that no eminent domain was used to remove inhabitants; they were all willing sellers. It was also made a priority that anyone being moved would be relocated into equal or better housing. He said when people are taken care of fairly, it helps make this work more palatable to more people.

IV) CRC Updates (As Needed)

- **Lakeside Industries Asphalt Plant Status – Ty Peterson (DLS project line manager), Steve Hiester**
Mr. Peterson reminded all that while he could not discuss merits to the proposed plant’s application, he could answer questions about the process and applicable regulations. The applicant responded to DLS’s comment letter in late August/early September, filing a complete response. DLS is expected to review this to ensure its consistency with King County code starting about mid-November, with completion expected by mid-December. Mr. Peterson said for projects of this scope it is not unusual to go through three review cycles, and this will be the start of the second one for this project. There is no set schedule on when a decision would be rendered. When reviews are done and no more follow-up is needed, the next step would be a SEPA threshold determination. While the official comment period is over, DLS still receives many comments on the proposal and resubmittal package. The Maple Valley Greater Area Council submitted a 46-page rebuttal which is being reviewed by DLS. Steve Hiester offered to send out a copy of the final version of the rebuttal for CRC review.
- **WRIA 8:** It was asked if WRIA 8 is looking at the sockeye issue. Ron Straka replied that while they started doing studies of water quality and predation at the Locks earlier this year, he didn’t know their status.
- **Fish Habitat Conservation/Restoration (Sockeye):**
 - Larry Phillips reported there is still no reply from the Governor to the CRC’s letter from last year on sockeye recovery efforts. Nathan Brown said Jim Scott of WDFW is confirmed to speak on the overall sockeye issue at next month’s CRC meeting. Mr. Phillips added that he and Max Prinsen continue to be in touch with Lynda Mapes of the *Seattle Times* to gauge her interest in writing an article.
 - Frank Urabeck reviewed latest sockeye counts. There are likely less than 3,000 sockeye in the Cedar, with half of those spawning naturally. There may be 1 million eggs at the hatchery this year, well below prior years. Overall pre-spawn mortality is over 80%, and 30% mortality in the hatchery. Warm shallow water in Lake Washington’s ship canal remains a trigger for diseases, to which sockeye are very susceptible. Mr. Urabeck continued that while the hatchery is intended to produce 35 million fry and the river should produce up to 50 million, there are only about 2 million fry in the lake. 98-99% of these never make it out of the lake and to the Locks. 350,000 adult sockeye are needed for a fishery, which is the intended goal.
- **Cedar River Watershed:**
 - It was asked if there were updates to progress at the Riverbend project site. Nathan Brown replied demolition is wrapping up a month ahead of schedule. Access to the site is restricted until the next phase of construction in 2021-22. Jon Hansen, Riverbend project manager for King County, added that all remnants of the mobile home park have been removed, including any impervious surface and utilities, leaving a big open area. A setback revetment was put in to protect houses in the area, and extend the protection done by King County’s Rivers section earlier this year. The goal of Phase 2 is to connect these two separate properties under the authority of King County’s Parks Division. When asked about public access to the site and Cavanaugh Pond, Mr. Hansen replied the levee is unstable and there is a danger the trail could fall into the river. The County is trying to discourage people from entering the site.

- It was asked if there are any plans for damage repairs to the trail upstream of Carco in Renton. Ron Straka said the City of Renton is working with FEMA on funding for a repair. It's still very early in the process and moving slowly; he was unsure if approval had been received for the design.
- **CRC Member Updates:** There were no updates.

V) Public Comment Period

There was no public comment during this period.

VI) Closing / Adjourn

The next scheduled CRC meeting is November 17. The main topic will be all things sockeye, including state recovery efforts. Frank Urabeck encouraged word to be spread about this meeting.

Mr. Urabeck motioned to adjourn today's meeting, and the motion was seconded by Jay Mirro. The meeting adjourned ahead of schedule, at 7:44 pm.