



King County

Water and Land Resources Division

Department of Natural Resources and Parks

King Street Center

201 South Jackson Street, Suite 5600

Seattle, WA 98104-3855

206-477-4800 Fax 206-296-0192

TTY Relay: 711

Cedar River Council DRAFT Meeting Notes

**February 28, 2023 – 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm (scheduled)
Meeting/Video Conference Call via Zoom (King County account)**

I) Call to Order / Welcome

CRC Chair Max Prinsen called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

II) General CRC Announcements / Information (Open to All)

No announcements were made during this topic.

III) Presentation - Riverbend Levee Setback & Floodplain Restoration Report (Jon Hansen, King County DNRP)

A) Presentation

Jon Hansen is a Capital Projects Managing Supervisor from King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP). The Riverbend project is located along the Maple Valley Highway by the Cavanaugh Pond Natural Area. This presentation is a follow up to Hansen's November 2021 CRC meeting presentation, outlining the site's progress now that the project has completed. Many have already remarked on the amazing improvements in the Cedar River's features.

Hansen began by providing a 2015 aerial photo prior to the project's initiation and described the recent history of the area. The Riverbend Mobile Home and RV Park was purchased by King County in 2013 and subsequently demolished, while the Cavanaugh Pond Natural Area has been under the care of King County Parks since the 1970s. The site contained multiple flood protection facilities, levees (raised surfaces to keep water out), and revetments (rock armoring with the levee to keep the river in its channel) dating back to the 1960s. Cavanaugh Pond itself was once a gravel mine that ceased operation in the 1970s.

The original design scheme—under the goal of restoring the area to natural river conditions—was to pull out parts of the levee both upstream and downstream and build in side channels to harness high flows. Setback structures and the intent to maintain the original levee were planned to relieve some of the river flows without the river moving in any significant way. Observations from flooding events from both 1965 and November 1990 also contributed to the design. Once the river flooded in February 2020 and destabilized the levee, plans were redesigned until construction in 2022.

The second phase of the redesign and eventual construction saw the removal of the rock of the remaining failing levee while simultaneously maintaining elevations and cutting in four upstream side channels. Fill and the remaining upstream levee structure were pulled to allow the river to access the channels. The side channels now had a shorter route to the river since the main river channel had eroded in the 2020 flood. Large wood was placed throughout to keep the side channels in place. Collaboration with King County's River and Floodplain Management Section (RFMS) allowed for repairs and upgrades to the downstream Cedar River Trail Facility #2. Hansen showed pre- and post-construction photos as well as drone footage of the site and described the changes.

The side channels were cut through the center with three berms placed near the Cedar River Trail. On average, the highest flows in the channels have gone up to 1500-1600 CFS (cubic feet per second). The river itself is now lower along the outer banks due to rock and levee removal. No fish spawning data has been reported at this time. Various wood piles called 'growth positions' are placed throughout the channels to avoid avulsion (a river channel abruptly switching location). Roughly 70,000 plants were planted to help restore the natural appearance of the site. Cavanaugh Pond was filled with gravel and bumper logs were placed to help aid flow. Since the removal of the mobile homes and complaints of newly heard highway noise from existing residents, roughly 250 feet of berm was placed to help mitigate the issue. Further solutions are being researched to aid in more noise mitigation.

There is still some minor work on the project that needs to be addressed. Gates will be installed and have on-site security. Minor slope repair will be performed on Facility #2 and supplemental planting will occur. Hansen is currently in contact with Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and a consultant noise engineer to advise in noise mitigation that is consistent with project goals. In association with King County's Herzman to Camp Freeman Project, rock removal work will occur on the right riverbank as well as some contouring to comply with FEMA guidelines.

B) CRC Member and Public Comment / Q & A

- **Q:** Are there any plans for public access?
JH: Yes, it's public property. I have been talking to King County Parks and looking at what we can do to manage it so that it doesn't become neither problematic for neighbors nor destroyed by people. Access won't be open to the site this year, but we will do some planning with Parks and RFMS as to who will ultimately do site maintenance. The river will be a lot more proximate, too. We will be using the old Riverbend Mobile Home Park Clubhouse parking lot and where the clubhouse used to be, so there will be a lot more river accessibility.
- **Q:** How long until the plants fill out? It looks really bare now and they all look about the same size.
JH: That's a good point. We put a project out to bid for a contractor and it's typically best for us to do that in the simplest possible and biddable way. That's the concept of supplemental planting is to go in and plant bigger and more diverse things. We can do that every year, even the CRC could host a planting event next fall if we wanted to! When you get 70,000 plants, however, you get what is available en masse. We also have things in there that are growing at different rates like willows and cottonwoods, so it's going to look different for a while.
- **Q:** Do you know the cost associated with this to date?
JH: Yes, not including acquisition, our estimate at completion is \$17.9 million, but I think we are going to come in well under that because of some really good bid environment. The bid came in roughly 17% lower than our engineer's estimate, which is a lot.

Cedar River Councilmember Tom Allyn praised Hansen for his work, provided insight to mulch amounts and plant survival rate, and advocated for more recreation along the river. Cedar River Councilmember Larry Phillips remarked how astonishingly fast the vegetation in the area has returned while calling for the creation of an interim plan for recreation for this summer. Phillips also noted that, while these projects are allowing habitat for fish, observation and data are needed for both habitat productivity and fish recovery. Hansen mentioned not only the consideration of maintenance costs and their long-term impacts, but also the multiple project benefits such as recreation and flood reduction. Fish at Riverbend will soon be tracked after seeing success at a nearby project.

- **Q:** Cavanaugh Pond was one of the few places where sockeye salmon reared. Is there any attention towards any of the side channels or its attributes that would facilitate any benefit to the sockeye?
JH: I believe so. One of the issues with Cavanaugh Pond was that it was a clean gravel mine. Over time, there was weed growth and with depth we saw predators, so it was more like a lake. It stuck out in a dynamic floodplain and didn't really belong. As we saw, the river was really trying to reclaim its floodplain. We care about fish too! We are trying to get more fish in the system, but the limiting factors were a channelized river and barely accessible off channels. The fish would come in later when flows were over a certain threshold, but now it will be accessible from many different places with 8-10 times the amount of potential spawning. We'll now see less scour in the mainstem with multiple flow paths. My hope is that this is a "kick in the pants" in a positive direction. My driver is seeing the red color of salmon in the channel all over.

Councilmember Phillips pitched to Hansen to remind others to include CRC voices as positive feedback continues on these projects as the CRC speaks to the balance of community. The more voices that are successful, the easier the next project. Nathan Brown announced a King County media event at Riverbend in mid-April and will advocate for a CRC member to speak at the event once everything is confirmed.

IV) CRC Updates (As Needed)

- **Lakeside Industries Asphalt Plant**

Cedar River Councilmember Dr. Hugh Brown stated a decision from the Shoreline Hearings Board inquiry is still to be made. If the decision is not in the citizens' favor, the action put forth by King County Superior Court will be reinstituted. However, if all goes as intended, court action will not be needed, to which Lakeside and King County had agreed with that position. Dr. Brown directed meeting attendees to the 'Citizens to Stop SR 169 Asphalt Plant' Facebook page via the Zoom chat for further updates.

- **WRIA (Water Resource Inventory Area) 8**

No updates were provided during this topic.

- **Fish Habitat Conservation/Restoration (Sockeye)**

Cedar River Councilmember Frank Urabeck reported the fish count anticipated for the year. 2022 was forecasted to have 10,000 fish counted but resulted in 43,000 counted. This year, the official forecast is roughly 20,000 fish, but Urabeck expects that actual count to be between 12,000-15,000 fish. Of the fish counted in 2022, only 10,000 of the 43,000 successfully migrated to the Cedar River from the Ballard Locks, reflecting the lethality of the Lake Washington Ship Canal (LWSC) in terms of pre-spawn mortality (PSM). 5 million salmon eggs were produced, 1 million of which came from direct truck transfer from the locks at a 2% PSM. The plan for 2023 is to repeat the process of transferring fish via truck from the locks to the Cedar River Hatchery, increasing from 900 fish to 1,200.

The hatchery plans to perform an experiment as advocated by Chair Prinsen to take non-diseased fish from the locks and place them into a fourth round tub filled with river water to monitor PSM rates. If enough fish return this year from the ocean, another option is to take the non-diseased fish from the locks and put them into the hatchery's concrete raceways. Each experiment is relatively low cost and much has been learned from them. The City of Seattle, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW), and King County are also currently setting traps at the mouth of the Cedar River to capture predators such as the Northern Pikeminnow and collecting data.

A Muckleshoot Tribe sponsored proviso for a \$1.4 million predation reduction effort is also being attempted. Conversations on this issue have been held with elected officials such as Washington State Senator Christine Rolfes and more elected officials will be contacted by both the tribe and WRIA 8. Councilmember Urabeck mentioned the proposed draft letter discussed at last month's meeting did not occur as the CRC subcommittee of Urabeck, Councilmember Phillips, and Chair Prinsen wanted the City of Seattle's support on the proviso before moving forward. Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) as a city agency will discuss this week on how best to provide their support. Once SPU responds, the CRC subcommittee will decide whether or not to draft a letter of support. There is also a possibility of getting sockeye recovery efforts to a policy level as the CRC subcommittee wishes to have a policy meeting with Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell and leaders from the Muckleshoot Tribe, WDFW, and SPU.

- **Sockeye Recovery Advocacy and Actions**

Councilmember Phillips recalled the four-year journey of the CRC to get to the current state of the sockeye recovery effort. If strong advocacy and persuasion had not occurred, per Phillips, resources would be in poorer shape and people would have little knowledge on the issue. Now, actions are being discussed at the highest level with elected officials and the state legislature. The CRC May in-person meeting will also reinforce the importance of the issue. Another issue Phillips raised was the issue of water quality in not just the LWSC, but the Cedar River itself, as there have not been any sufficient studies performed. Low cost efforts will need to be brought forth to address the issue in order to preserve both recent habitat restoration and the sockeye run.

Chair Prinsen commented on the changes in various governmental administrations that have increased their cooperation and aid in achieving the CRC's goals for the sockeye. Regarding water quality, Prinsen's suggestion of using river water instead of well water in a fourth tub at the Cedar River Hatchery will help prove the efficacy of the water source that will increase sockeye numbers. The ultimate goal is to figure out the greatest benefit for the lowest cost, while in the interim, gaining additional support and funding.

Councilmember Allyn inquired on the results on the latest predation study, citing a previous CRC presentation from WDFW on comparative models showing methods that would potentially recover the sockeye run. The common factor in these methods, Allyn observed, was the necessity to increase the fry (baby salmon) to smolt survival ratio. Previous studies showed that greatest predation of fry and smolt was by native cutthroat trout, but it was uncertain if that species was part of the study. Allyn questioned which species is causing most of the predation if the culprit is not just invasive species and indicated predation should be a key CRC focus.

Councilmember Urabeck reassured Allyn that an expert from the U.S. Geological Survey has studied and shown that the native Northern Pikeminnow is a more dominant predator than the cutthroat trout. A current WDFW project is capturing various fish and seeing which species has the most predation impact. Urabeck advised inviting WDFW Region 4 fish biologist Aaron Bosworth to a future CRC meeting to present on these findings. If the proposed \$1.4 million proviso is approved, more work will be performed on this issue such as tagging fish and tracking concentrated areas of Northern Pikeminnow for predation reduction. More of this topic is intended to be addressed at the May CRC meeting.

- **Cedar River Watershed**

No updates were provided during this topic.

- **King County Flood Hazard Management Plan Update**

No updates were provided during this topic.

- **Membership Updates**

No updates were provided during this topic.

- **Maple Valley Area Council**

No updates were provided during this topic.

- **Riverbend Restoration Project and Miscellaneous Topics**

This topic was addressed in the above presentation. As the Riverbend project is now complete, this topic will now be replaced with new topics at future meetings, such as climate change and Cedar River water quality. Nathan Brown indicated the March 28, 2023, meeting will be presented by the King County DNR Science Section reporting on fish usage studies from the Green River, which could be beneficial for the Cedar River system. Brown contacted the UW Climate Action Group for a possible climate change symposium for the April meeting but received no response. This subject will be introduced at a meeting later in the year.

Chair Prinsen asked Jim Schloemer from WDFW if there are new things to discuss such as illegal fishing on the Cedar River. Schloemer was unable to provide any updates and will research further. Councilmember Urabeck suggested reinviting Dr. Lauren Urgenson from WRIA 8 for the April meeting to talk about the findings of WRIA 8's two-year study on fish activity in the LWSC. Brown agreed to said suggestion.

V) Public Comment Period

There were no public comments made during this topic.

VI) Closing/Adjourn

Nathan Brown expressed interest in creating video content on behalf of the CRC. The next scheduled meeting is on March 28, 2023, via Zoom. Meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.