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**FLOODPLAIN LEADERS WORKSHOP SUMMARY**

**Puyallup, Washington – Tuesday, November 13, 2018**

On November 13, 2018, around 40 floodplain leaders from around Washington State participated in a daylong Floodplains by Design (FbD) workshop. The objectives of the workshop were to discuss changes to the FbD program and to stimulate cross-watershed sharing and learning using the Puyallup Floodplains for the Future approach as a model.

Brian Lynn (Washington Department of Ecology) provided an update on a proviso in the 2018 supplemental budget, which directed Ecology to prepare a report to make recommendations on statutory authorization of the FbD grant program. In order to get input on a draft report, which is currently under review, Ecology sought feedback from Legislators, Tribal representatives, environmental groups, and state agencies and also sent an online survey to 800 individuals working in floodplain issues. The feedback received included broad support for the FbD grant program, but also concerns about the program competing for funding with salmon recovery grant programs and about the impact of the program taking farmland out of production. They also received feedback that, instead of authorizing a single grant program, Ecology should think more comprehensively about how to integrate FbD principles into their statutory framework for floodplain management. The draft report includes several recommendations: look to integrate Floodplains by Design principles into existing flood statues; increase funding for the program; provide funds for planning and grant management; continue to engage with partners; and continue to refine the criteria and other elements of the design of the grant program. The near-term priority is to secure capital funding for the 2019 grant round.

Bob Carey (The Nature Conservancy) provided an update on TNC’s shifting role in FbD. Over the last year, TNC developed the 5-Year Vision for Washington Floodplains, which included getting input from over 300 partners. During this process, TNC heard that, over the last 5 years, we have proved that the collaborative, integrated approach to managing river floodplains is working. At the same time, there is a lot more work to be done to make this a permanent program and the norm in Washington State. However, the funding that TNC has used to create and lead the FbD partnership is winding down, and the significant EPA grants that supported TNC’s operations are ending this month. The contract with the Kramer Consulting team will also end at the end of November. Over the next several years, TNC envisions creating a more sustainable organizational structure and capacity and better, more sustainable funding sources to support a backbone organization. As the backbone organization for the past 5 years, TNC has convened the floodplain leaders group as well as the larger FbD workshops, deployed team members into watersheds to support local work, and devoted resources to communications materials, storytelling, the FbD website, fact sheets, and lobbying. Ultimately, while TNC’s role will be changing, they hope to build a bigger bench and bring more capacity to the table.

Workshop participants responded to TNC’s shifting role with questions, comments, and a discussion. One participant encouraged Ecology to fill the leadership role that TNC has provided. Another participant spoke to the value of a private partner who can provide a vision to government employees who can be constrained in their work. Having a private partner is also very helpful in pursuing property acquisitions. The group discussed how programs go through phases, and FbD is moving out of the start-up phase into a phase where the program needs to grow to scale. This is a leverage point which can push the program to greater heights or diminish it. One participant said that TNC has done a good job with visioning and in building local support, but more work is needed on partnering across agencies, nations, and boundaries. Another participant spoke to the value of Jim Kramer’s ability to listen to various floodplain managers and synthesize their perspectives and concerns.

Following the discussion of FbD program updates, the meeting shifted to a discussion of the Puyallup Watershed Floodplains for the Future (FFTF) program. Carol MacIlroy (consultant to TNC) described how the power of FbD rests in the interaction between integration at the regional level and at the local level. Kathleen Berger (Pierce County) described the FFTF program, which is a collaboration between 22 organizations who work together to develop and implement a common vision to manage community needs across 70 river miles. Over the past 5 years, FFTF has leveraged $12 million in FbD funding to implement $43 million of project work. FFTF has completed 10 floodplain restoration projects (with 14 more in progress), reconnected 440 acres of floodplain, conserved 600 acres of agricultural land, removed 53 at-risk structures from the floodplain, and developed reach-scale strategies and suites of actions that can be supported broadly. Isabel Ragland (Pierce Conservation District) described the Shared Monitoring Plan for the FFTF effort, which tracks FFTF investments relative to goals. The Monitoring Plan includes an index of floodplain health based on 21 metrics organized around three basic themes: how our communities are using land in the floodplain, what investments we’re making, and what the outcomes are. Carol explained that aspects of how floodplain land is being used and developed can cause tension and lack of trust in a collaborative group working on voluntary restoration projects. The power of the Monitoring Plan approach is that it tracks and quantifies things happening with floodplain development within the context of the investments being made.

Carol led the group in an activity using the Puyallup index of floodplain health to explore the information and data that would be required to respond to statements and questions that they often hear or ask themselves that could build or break trust within their collaboration or with funders. After discussing within small groups, participants shared what they learned with the larger group. Participants shared that the index of floodplain health provides a helpful distillation of what a group is doing, what others are doing, and the overall outcome. The index of floodplain health is a tool that expands a conversation beyond what is happening at a site to what is happening at a watershed scale, and it provides a model for ways to portray work as having multiple benefits even if it is funded by a single source. Participants discussed a variety of topics within their groups, including the importance of having access to land for multiple-benefit projects, the difficulty of implementing buffers using funding sources with strict requirements, and the importance of scale in tracking results.

The workshop included a site visit to the South Fork Side Channel Project, recently completed by Pierce County and FFTF partners. The project creates side channel habitat and has the capacity to divert a third of the Puyallup’s flows during a flood event for more than 1 mile.

Following the site visit, meeting participants shared thoughts on key take-aways from the workshop. Topics discussed included:

* The Puyallup shared monitoring approach and index of floodplain health are a model that other floodplain leaders are interested in using to help change the conversation in their watershed.
* Convening groups like the floodplain leaders is one of the best benefits of FbD, and there is concern this benefit will be lost with the shift in TNC’s role.
* Ecology’s plan to step back and review the whole paradigm of floodplain policy is very encouraging.
* Integrated floodplain management is just starting to get a foothold in many watersheds, so TNC’s shifting role is concerning.
* The FbD structure is important to help people orient to and navigate through very complex work. The shift in the FbD structure without clarity about the new structure puts local practitioners in a difficult position.
* It would be beneficial to reconvene the group in the near future after floodplain leaders have the ability to process what was presented today.
* Regulatory and capital programs are both backward facing programs addressing things that happened in the past. What is exciting about FbD is the forward-facing programmatic approach where we design what we want to have happen in the future.

In closing the meeting, Heather Cole (TNC) said she will be helping to lead additional learning exchanges and peer to peer meetings in the future, and encouraged participants to contact her (heather.cole@tnc.org) with suggestions of what would be most helpful to discuss.