***CHEHALIS BASIN PARTNERSHIP***

**Chehalis Tribe Lucky Eagle Casino, Eagles Landing Hotel Conference Room**

**Rochester, Washington**

**April 22, 2016**

**9:30 am – 12:30**

**Meeting Summary**

**MEMBERS\* and ALTERNATES’ PRESENT**

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| Amy Spoon\*, WDFWBonnie Canaday\*, City of CentraliaBrian Thompson\*, *Lewis Co. Farm Bureau*Chuck Caldwell\*, *Port of Grays Harbor*Dan Wood’, *City of Montesano*Dustin Bilhimer\*, *Dept. of Ecology* | Frank Gordon\* *Grays Harbor County*Glen Connelly’, *Chehalis Tribe*Kahle Jennings, *City of Centralia*Lee Napier’, *Lewis County*Terry Harris*\*, City of Chehalis* |

 **GUESTS**

Kris Koski, *City of Aberdeen*; Bob Amrine, *Lewis County Conservation District*; Garrett Dalan, *The Nature Conservancy*; Charissa Waters, *Thurston County*; Christie Barchenger, *Grays Harbor Historical Seaport Authority*; Omroa Bhagwandin, *Onalaska Citizen*; Mark Mobbs, *Quinault Indian Nation*; Susan Ujgic, *Helsing Junction Farm*; Annie Salafrasky, *Helsing Junction Farm*; Stephanie Zurenko, Ecology.

**STAFF**

 Kirsten Harma, *Chehalis Basin Partnership*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

* PowerPoint presentations from this meeting are available on the Chehalis Basin Partnership website: [www.chehalisbasinpartnership.org/presentations](http://www.chehalisbasinpartnership.org/presentations)

**MEETING**

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Bonnie Canaday welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members and guests provided self-introductions.

**Approval of Minutes**

Chair Canaday noted correction to the March 23rd meeting minutes: her name ends in “ie”, not “y.” Pending that correction, the minutes were approved.

**2. Member Updates**

Chair Canaday noted that long time Lewis County Citizen member and community leader Lyle Hojem is in a coma and has been diagnosed with cancer. She suggested keeping him in her prayers.

Garrett Dalan noted that Washington Coast Restoration Initiative (WCRI) grant application proposals are due May 15th. The grant team is still looking for qualified individuals to review proposals.

Amy Spoon noted that the Habitat Restoration and Protection projects are getting permitted and getting on the ground.

Kris Koski shared that the Aberdeen Stream Team will be holding a stream clean-up on April 23rd. The City of Aberdeen is also pursuing a grant for design for the restoration of Fry Creek. Their grant would be to address flooding issues on the creek, and they may do work to restore the creek with native vegetation later. Aberdeen has hired Timberworks to do a Master Plan. The goal is to find multiple benefit projects to reduce flooding and improve habitat. There will be continued work taking place on Aberdeen’s North Shore levee.

Omroa Bhagwandin shared news about the Willapa Hills Fat Tire bike ride on June 25 and 26. Interested people can register on [www.ridethewillapa.com](http://www.ridethewillapa.com). Kirsten told the group that she would be hosting a public education booth along the ride route on June 25th. She invited CBP members to come volunteer to share their knowledge at the booth, or to provide financial and in-kind contributions to provide brochures, pet waste bags, and refreshments for riders. Terry Harris said that lodging tax is supporting this event, so suggested that costs like that be incorporated into the event budget ask in future years.

**B. Theme: Agriculture and the Chehalis Basin**

The following presentations were filmed. The PowerPoint presentations are available on the CBP website.

**“Opportunities and Challenges to the Agriculture Industry in the Chehalis Basin.” By Brian Thompson, Lewis County Farm Bureau**

Mr. Thompson provided an overview on the state of the agricultural industry in the Chehalis basin. He stressed that agriculture is an industry and needs to make money in order to be viable. A limitation to expanding agriculture in the Chehalis is that is it a “closed basin” which means there are no new water rights available. The “use it or lose it” rule also can take water rights away from agricultural land. In the lower basin, the soils are more difficult for agriculture, also limiting its growth to that area. The economics of agriculture in general are challenging, given that there is a high cost and low return. In the Chehalis, this economic disadvantage is even higher given that there are no local shipping terminals, and products need to be taken to Portland or the Dalles for shipping. There is no place for trucks to deliver grain so it can be loaded onto rail cars. Mr. Thompson also noted natural resource regulations as a challenge to local agriculture. Any policy around natural resources generally affects agriculture, making it a particularly sensitive industry. (*the full presentation is available on the CBP website*)

Q/A

Q) What do you think of the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)?

A) The potential is great. The agricultural community here is generally supportive of this. Agriculture supports the Conservation Districts and is glad they will be getting more resources to run this program. Bob Amrine mentioned that the Lewis Conservation District will hold the contract for VSP in Lewis County.

Q) What would be the response time for benefits to producers if a Port puts in a grain elevator?

A) It would take a while for the growers to realize they have a local option. You’d need to start with a small elevator and have it expand.

Comment: This stresses the importance of keeping the infrastructure. It’s hard to get it back once it’s lost. Agriculture really needs to think long term.

Comment: Mr. Wood noted that agriculture is in crisis worldwide. More food is needed, but there is less land and water. In the three Counties of the Chehalis Basin, there is lots of agriculture, but “we are being careless in taking care of that resource.” We export now, but we might need more of the products here locally in the future.

Q) Why can’t farmers get together with local ports to improve shipping of grain?

A) Grain is getting shipped in from Eastern Washington. Local ports don’t see the need to accommodate local trucking.

Comment: Mr. Caldwell noted that the Port of Grays Harbor is working on getting new silos for grain and soy storage as a solution to some of the challenges Mr. Thompson noted.

Mr. Harris asserted the importance of conserving the land for food crops, as opposed to methanol production. Mr Thompson responded that if we need food locally, the price will be there. If there is a shortage of food and the food prices go up, we’ll produce food.

Mr. Amrine noted that the Conservation Districts support the CBP’s goal of keeping agriculture and forestry on the land. He stressed a need for education that water rights are necessary for irrigated agriculture. If you’re going to buy a farm, make sure there are water rights to go with it.

(*voice recorder battery died at the end of this presentation*)

**“Organic Farming in the Chehalis Basin”. Annie Salafraky and Susan Ujgic, Helsing Junction Farms**

Ms. Salafraky and Ms. Ujgic run an organic farm just across the river from where this meeting is taking place. They echoed Mr. Thompson’s message that agriculture needs to make money to be viable. They explained that organic agriculture has benefited greatly from a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. This involves “direct marketing” and is therefore the best way to make money. It doesn’t require farmers to take bank loans, which are difficult to get. They noted that wholesalers “squeeze prices” on farmers, and therefore the direct approach has worked better for them.

Opportunities for organic agriculture include: Good soil and a location close to markets. Land is affordable here because it’s located in the floodplain.

Challenges for organic agriculture include: Irrigation is difficult, and it’s not possible for new farmers to get new water rights. The drought in the summer of 2015 was unexpected, and meant they lost water in one of their most productive wells by June. They were able to get around this challenge with support from the NRCS, who predicted the drought and advised them to install drip irrigation. They also advised looking for water leaks in the irrigation system, which ended up saving a lot of water. Their farm’s agriculture practices that provide more resilience to drought include cover-cropping, no-till, and being able to switch to different crops quickly depending on water availability.

Some solutions they proposed as way to meet the challenges to agriculture in the Chehalis include local places for food storage and refrigeration; a small scale local mill for grains; a “food hub” between Thurston, Lewis and Grays Harbor Counties; support for selling local produce locally; maintaining the small farm’s model of diversity and ability to retool to adapt to changing circumstances.

**“Voluntary Stewardship Program.” Charissa Waters, Thurston County**

VSP is a way for agricultural producers to meet the stated challenge of “regulations” on their long-term viability. The program has a dual goal of protecting critical areas (streams and wetlands) while keeping agricultural lands from being converted to other land uses. Ms. Waters explained the VSP pilot project that took place in Thurston County. They got to the point of developing a work plan before funding ran out. To date, they have looked at “baseline conditions” in the portions of the Chehalis Basin that are in Thurston County. They mapped where critical areas (e.g.., wetlands and streams) intersect with agricultural areas. They then chose where to work based on landowner willingness. One of their biggest challenges was describing “agricultural viability.” The next step, once funding for this program are secured, will be for the Thurston Conservation District to take the lead on implementing this plan.

Lewis County and Grays Harbor County will soon be beginning VSP programs.

Q/A

Q) Does every county need to put the same amount of effort into mapping as you did in Thurston County?

A) Most likely. Every county will find that you need to go back to square 1. They will need to come to consensus on what is meant by “agriculture”, and what are agriculture activities vs. agricultural land.

Q) What tips can Thurston County share with Lewis and GHC?

A) There aren’t benchmarks for things like “no net loss” of agricultural land. The regulations do say “no net loss” of critical areas.”

Q) Who have you been inviting to VSP work groups? Is there any group that’s not coming?

A) The environmental groups have been invited but they stopped coming after the first meetings. A lesson learned here is to do more to get the environmental groups to the table.

Q) How do you define progress?
A) We haven’t developed that criteria yet. Right now we’re calling these benchmarks.

Comment from Dan Wood: Farmers will participate if it makes sense economically. Set goals low so that you can exceed them. It will take even more effort to implement this plan than it took to develop it. If this fails we’ll have to go back to regulations. It’s worth the effort to try and make this work.

**“Conservation Districts – Working with the farming community” – Bob Amrine, Lewis Conservation District.**

Bob Amrine shared information about the tools the Conservation Districts use in working with farmers. The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) has been used in Lewis County since 2000. The program takes buffer areas of a minimum of 35 feet around streams and rivers out of production, and provides farmers with compensation for loss of that productivity. Mr. Amrine said this has proven to be a very viable option for farmers, especially small and beginning farmers. While land is enrolled in this program, the federal government pays farmers annually. In Lewis County, 820 acres are enrolled, protecting 51 miles of stream.

Another program the Conservation District is putting on is teaching farmers new irrigation water management techniques. One of those is use of “moisture meters.” The District has a demonstration site that shows how these work. A lesson the District has learned is how little irrigation education has occurred in the Chehalis. They have found it difficult to get financial assistance from state agencies for irrigation improvements because the Chehalis is still seen as a “wet” area.

The Conservation District has piloted working with landowners on a sub-watershed basis to do self-directed conservation. The District held several meetings in the Newaukum subwatershed with successful outcomes. Landowners enrolled in CREP and one signed up to get a farm plan

Discussion:

“Don’t divide agriculture, we need both organic and conventional agriculture here.”

**ADJOURNMENT**

With there being no further business, Chair Bonnie Canaday adjourned the meeting.

**NEXT MEETING

June 24th 2016.**