

THE WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Spirit Lake/Toutle-Cowlitz River Sediment Management Collaborative

Conducted for the United States Forest Service
By the William D. Ruckelshaus Center

September 2022

WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER
Hulbert Hall, Room 121
Pullman, WA
- and -
901 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2900
Seattle, WA 98164

The following report was prepared by the William D. Ruckelshaus Center, a joint effort of the University of Washington and Washington State University, whose mission is to act as a neutral resource for collaborative problem solving in the State of Washington and the Pacific Northwest.

The Gifford Pinchot National Forest and Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG) entered into an agreement with the Ruckelshaus Center to facilitate bringing local, state, federal, and tribal government entities together to develop a collaborative group to address long-term management of sediment and related issues in the Spirit Lake / Toutle-Cowlitz River system. This summary and detailed information on the Ruckelshaus Center website fulfills the agreement commitment by Ruckelshaus Center to provide facilitation, coordination, and communication needs in forming a collaborative group.

The Spirit Lake, Toutle/Cowlitz River Collaborative (SLTCRC) follows a recommendation in the [2018 National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine \(NASEM\) report](#) for agencies and entities with management responsibilities to create a system-level consortium to share information and identify opportunities to address sediment management and risks associated with catastrophic flood risk in the Spirit Lake and Toutle-Cowlitz River system. The NASEM report was commissioned by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) after the U.S. Congressional delegation requested the USFS, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to generate long-term Spirit Lake level management solutions.

In 2019, through an agreement with the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, a [Situation Assessment](#) completed by the Ruckelshaus Center determined that entities with management responsibilities in the system—and other interested and affected parties—supported forming a collaborative to address long-term sediment management and related issues in the Spirit Lake / Toutle-Cowlitz system. Since almost two years had passed, it made sense before convening the SLTCRC to reaffirm the parties still had interest in creating a collaborative. The Ruckelshaus Center contacted several of the key governments by email and phone to reconfirm interest in participating. Representatives of multiple federal, tribal, state, and local governments along with state legislators all indicated they would be willing to come together to at least share information and explore the benefits of a long-term collaboration.

The collaborative met over a series of 13 meetings from April 2021 to June 2022 to discuss a long-term approach to addressing challenges related to public safety, sediment management, recovery of fish species, economic development, and recreational opportunities in the Spirit Lake / Toutle-Cowlitz River system. All meetings were open to the public, and all interested parties were encouraged and welcome to attend. Several meetings included presentations by agencies and interested parties. These presentations helped participants better understand the system, its challenges, and potential opportunities to address sediment management. Meeting notes, SLTCRC goals for working together, and other information related to the development of the SLTCRC can be found on the Ruckelshaus Center website at: [Spirit Lake/Toutle-Cowlitz River Project](#).

With the COVID19 pandemic in effect, the SLTCRC held its first dozen meetings virtually via WebEx technology. Even after improving pandemic conditions allowed in-person meetings to occur, in the spring of 2022, the Collaborative continued offering virtual participation to enable attendance by those who could not attend in person. While online participation limits the depth and quality of interaction, it nonetheless enabled folks with exceptionally busy schedules or lacking travel funding to continue engaging in the conversations and meetings.

The group identified the following ***Indicators of Success*** for this phase in forming a collaborative. As of July 2022, the SLTCRC fulfilled all these indicators, recognizing that some (not listed) do not lend themselves to measurement (e.g., Identify collective issues and risk concerns; increased trust, stronger relationships, deeper understanding of each other's needs, and agreement to act with awareness of others' perspectives).

- ***Declaration of Cooperation:*** A key deliverable of the agreement was for those entities with management responsibilities in the system to formally commit to working together. The Collaborative developed a Declaration of Cooperation (DoC) over the course of a handful of meetings in the fall of 2021. As of early 2022, it had been signed by representatives of 19 of 20 local, state, federal, and tribal governments

(signatories to the DoC are listed below). The DoC provides the mechanism for entities to agree that the SLTCRC provides a forum to:

- Develop and pursue an aspirational vision for the whole system
- Work together on items that contribute to long-term management of the system and safety and economic well-being of downstream communities
- Create a communication venue to exchange information, enhance understanding of system complexities and engage interested parties
- Raise awareness of those interested or affected by sediment management in the system
- Respond to requests from the U.S. Federal delegation, Washington State Legislature, and the Washington Governor on issues related to managing this complex system

The SLTCRC recognized and acknowledged that any actions or recommendations will follow each agency's authorities and mandates and will not make or advise on decisions for those agencies. The DoC can be found on the Ruckelshaus Center website at: [Declaration of Cooperation](#).

- **Shared Vision for the Basin:** The following represents a set of ideal conditions to guide the collaborative: *Healthy Ecosystems – Safe Communities – Healthy Economy*
- **Mission Statement for the Collaborative:** *To share information, build understanding, and develop and coordinate management solutions to address sediment transport and flood protection in the Spirit Lake, Toutle/ Cowlitz River system while enhancing ecological benefits and serving the many needs of the communities within the system.*
- **Common interests or Shared Values:**
 - Safety for downstream communities
 - Restored, healthy ecosystems
 - Access: increasing for recreation; maintaining for research & education
 - Securing sufficient funding for planning & implementation
 - Managing for multiple functions & benefits
 - Reducing intervention via engineered structures in favor of natural processes
- **Develop database of agency authorities, roles and commitments, projects and timelines, legally binding agreements, existing metrics and what should be updated (e.g., flood protection levels):** The Ruckelshaus Center gathered information from entities and developed a spreadsheet which includes missions and mandates. The draft spreadsheet is located on the Ruckelshaus Center website, November 10, 2021 - Meeting Materials.
- **Recognition by the U.S. Congressional delegation, Washington State Legislature, and Governor of the need for a successful, long-term collaborative group to comprehensively address the challenges associated with long-term sediment management in the system:** Recognition is demonstrated by attendance at all SLTCRC meetings by representatives from U.S. Congressional delegation along with Washington State Legislature allocating \$90,000 for SLTCRC to operate for another year. Communications with Governor's office representative has been ongoing throughout process.
- **Identify paths to continue collaborative group long-term:** Resulting from the commitment of the Cowlitz County Commissioners and the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG) working with the State Legislature, the state legislature allocated \$90,000 for another year of for facilitation. The shared intent of the work moving forward is to continue to strengthen the Collaborative by solidifying the long-term funding plan and maintaining consistent engagement by the parties of the Declaration of Cooperation in an open dialogue on the issues identified by the National Academy of Sciences and by the group moving forward. The project will advance the SLTRC by facilitating meetings of the partners to support the ongoing development of a system-level collaborative of agencies that can plan, program, and identify funding needs and opportunities to implement management solutions focused on the entire system.

- **Operational funding to support the collaborative over a three-year period:** The Collaborative formed a Finance/Steering Committee to explore potential funding opportunities and options. In addition to the funding support from the State Legislature, there has been a tentative commitment from multiple local entities to provide some funding in future years.
- **Prioritized list of actions to pursue that contributes to the long-term management of the system and the safety and economic wellbeing of downstream communities:** The SLTCRC developed a project work list and is currently refining to ensure projects meet SLTCRC objectives and goals. The next step is to prioritize actions and determine how the collaborative can play a role in advancing them.
- **Pursue at least one action as a group during this phase of developing a collaborative:** The SLTCRC has formed a subgroup to consider options for an information clearinghouse that can educate and support work in the basin. In addition, the group has coordinated to provide letters of support for a for local habitat restoration and land acquisition/conservation projects.

A key to the successful outcome in forming the SLTCRC was the engagement by the CWCOG and local entities. Local expertise played a key role in helping to define the interests of needs of downstream communities who are affected by management actions in the system.

Signatories to The Declaration of Cooperation (2021-2022) - Governments & Special Purpose Districts:	
WA Dept. of Ecology	WA Dept. of Natural Resources
Cowlitz Indian Tribe	Confederated Tribes & Bands of the Yakama Nation
U.S. Forest Service	WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
NOAA Fisheries	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
U.S. Geological Survey	U.S. Federal Emergency Management Administration
Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board	Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments
City of Kelso	City of Castle Rock
City of Longview	Port of Longview
Cowlitz Conservation District	Consolidated Diking Improvement District #1
Cowlitz County	Cowlitz PUD
Participation by Non-Governmental and Other Interested Parties:	
Participation provides the collaborative opportunities to work with individuals and entities that have interests or are affected by management decisions in the system. Opportunities may exist to pursue grants and other funding opportunities that can further the goals of the collaborative.	
Organizations and Interested/Affected Parties as of Late 2021 – Early 2022 (non-signatories)	
Mount Saint Helens Institute	Cascade Forest Conservancy
Wildlands Network	Pinchot Partners
Academic Researchers (e.g., from Universities of Nottingham & Washington; Washington State University)	Eco-Park Resort
Catalyst Environmental Solutions	Pacific Northwest Waterways Association
Members of the Public	
U.S. Congressional Delegation	
Office of Senator Maria Cantwell	Office of Senator Patty Murray
Office of Representative Jaime Herrera-Beutler	Lower Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group