

Final Report for the Habitat Strategic Initiative

Accelerate Integrated Floodplain Management

The Nature Conservancy

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Summary:

This document is the Final Project Report under Task 1.3 of The Nature Conservancy's (TNC's) statement of work for the Accelerate Integrated Floodplain Management project (NTA number 2016-0019, Project Tracking Number 17-08349). The report summarizes key actions taken over the course of the project (April 15, 2017 through December 15, 2018), summarizes the success in achieving performance measures, and documents recommendations for the future.

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Project goals and objectives

The project focused on developing plans, political will, funding, and capacity to accelerate floodplains recovery and advance regional priorities. The goals of this effort were to:

- Advance reach scale planning in a majority of Puget Sound watersheds.
- Increase the funding and political support to achieve regional floodplain goals.
- Increase in quantity and success of large, integrated floodplain projects.
- Expand the network of local and regional leaders focused on implementing large-scale floodplain actions.

Methods

This project builds upon the foundation of the last three years of FbD, including the new state FbD grant program, the integrated management efforts initiated in nine of the largest watersheds in Puget Sound, and the draft Floodplain Implementation Strategy. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and its sub-contractors, Kramer Consulting, Inc. and the University of Washington Climate Impact Group, will facilitate the partnership and lead planning, coalition building, outreach, and funding efforts to make progress in the five priority strategies for accelerating integrated floodplain recovery.

Results

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The Detailed Project Plan (October 13, 2017) includes four NTA Project Outcomes:

- Advance reach scale planning in a majority of Puget Sound watersheds.
- Increase the funding and political support to achieve regional floodplain goals.
- Increase in quantity and success of large, integrated floodplain projects.
- Expand the network of local and regional leaders focused on implementing large-scale floodplain actions.

SUCCESS OF ACHIEVING PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Notes on success in achieving outcomes is listed below for each of the Project Outcomes:

- Advance reach scale planning in a majority of Puget Sound watersheds.
 - TNC provided direct support to four watersheds (Nooksack, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, and Puyallup) to advance their reach scale planning. Evidence of success in advancing reach scale planning can be seen in the integrated, watershed-scale grant applications each watershed submitted to Ecology's Floodplains by Design grant program, all of which ranked well.
 - Cohorts from eight Puget Sound watersheds (Skokomish, Dungeness, Stillaguamish, Skagit, Puyallup, Nooksack, Snohomish, and Quilcene) plus two additional Washington State watersheds (Yakima and Touchet) participated in

the storytelling workshop and presented stories at the May 2018 Floodplains by Design workshop. The training was designed to improve communications skills that enable participants to strengthen relationships with local partners and build understanding and support for their integrated floodplain planning efforts. We have received feedback from several of these groups indicating that their storytelling skills have helped them better engage stakeholders, talk to the media, and conduct outreach to elected officials.

- A majority of Puget Sound watersheds participated in knowledge exchange through participating in the three large regional Floodplains by Design workshops as well as a more targeted Floodplain Leaders workshop in November 2018. The agendas for these workshops were geared toward strategies and tools to advance reach scale planning.
- Increase the funding and political support to achieve regional floodplain goals.
 - No NEP funding was used to lobby for funding. However, the momentum developed through the work conducted under this grant has naturally led to an increased interest in funding integrated floodplain management and large, integrated floodplain projects. The Governor's budget for the FY19-21 biennium included an increase in FbD funding relative the past two biennia.
 - The *5-Year Strategy for Washington Floodplains* and the robust engagement process used to develop the *Strategy* have both increased political support to achieve regional floodplain goals. For example, the outreach conducted for the *Strategy* has led to engagement in the Floodplains by Design program from County Executives, which was previously not the case. The *5-Year Strategy for Washington Floodplains* includes strategies and actions to further increase funding.
 - During the grant period, the Ecology Floodplains by Design grant program delivered an additional \$35.4 million to achieve regional floodplain goals. TNC facilitated sessions on funding at the large Floodplains by Design workshops, connecting practitioners working on regional floodplain goals to funders. The funding level in the current biennium of Floodplains by Design grant program was not an increase over the previous biennium, however we have heard anecdotal information that integrated efforts have helped project sponsors secure additional funding. Pierce County was able to leverage FbD funding to secure \$7M in NRCS funding to protect farmland. The Nature Conservancy has also complemented Floodplains by Design funding with several million in federal funding from NOAA that it has used to support integrated floodplain planning and on-the-ground restoration projects.
- Increase in quantity and success of large, integrated floodplain projects.
 - Practitioners continue to advance and complete large, integrated floodplain projects with funding from Ecology's Floodplains by Design grant program. TNC's facilitation of the large project implementation group and a workshop on property acquisition increased knowledge sharing about tools and strategies to

increase the quantity of implemented projects. The large project group developed a set of recommended actions and steps to reduce barriers to implementing large floodplain projects. More information is included in the *Integrated Floodplain Management Status Report*.

- The technical and strategy support provided to targeted watersheds has led to higher quality large floodplain projects. For example, the support provided to the Puyallup Watershed has increased the scale of their effort to be truly basin-scale, increasing the level of ambition in floodplain projects and the likelihood of implementation and success. With support from the TNC team, the Puyallup Floodplains for the Future group has developed a Shared Monitoring Plan that will track investments, progress, and outcomes in integrated floodplain management over the next ten years, which will help foster collaboration while at the same time allowing the partners to hold themselves and each other accountable to their ambitious goals.
- Expand the network of local and regional leaders focused on implementing large-scale floodplain actions.
 - 125-150 people attended each of the three large Floodplains by Design workshops. In order to complete the *5-Year Strategy*, TNC conducted a robust outreach process that increased the network of leaders working on integrated floodplain management. 181 people from more than 20 watersheds responded to an online survey. In addition, TNC and its consultants conducted 24 interviews, met with several small groups (e.g. tribal representatives, Salmon Recovery Council, Puget Sound Conservation District caucus), and conducted a more detailed survey with 47 additional participants. In total, several hundred people provided input.

Conclusions

LESSONS LEARNED

This section summarizes key findings and lessons learned documented in the *5-Year Strategy* and the *Integrated Floodplain Management Status Report*.

5-Year Strategy for Washington Floodplains

Based on extensive outreach, the *5-Year Strategy for Washington Floodplains* identified a mission, vision statement, and five strategic focus areas necessary to make integrated floodplain management the norm in Washington.

The mission of Floodplains by Design is to help collaborative and integrated floodplain management become the preferred way of managing our river systems in Washington, so that we build resilient communities and ecosystems that sustain people, fish, farms, and our economy.

The vision statement is:

We envision a future in which collaboration based on shared values has transformed Washington's floodplains to reduce flood damages, increase salmon runs, and preserve vibrant farms and open spaces that enrich our lives and create a resilient future.

The five focus areas are:

1. **CULTURE & NETWORK:** Broaden and deepen the reach.
2. **CAPACITY:** Increase and develop capacity.
3. **POLICY:** Modernize the regulatory/policy framework.
4. **FUNDING:** Increase and diversify resources for integrated floodplain management.
5. **MARKETS:** Build market demand and better understand how markets can incentivize integrated floodplain management.

A suite of strategies and objectives was identified for each of these focus areas that, together, provide a roadmap for making integrated floodplain management the norm and achieving the FbD vision of more resilient floodplain communities and ecosystems.

[Integrated Floodplain Management Status Report](#)

The *Integrated Floodplain Management Status Report* identifies lessons learned about the interaction between regional and local work as well as lessons learned about local integrated efforts. Additional detail on each lesson learned is included in the *Status Report*.

Lessons learned about the interaction between regional and local work include:

- Regional support is needed
- Incentives drive integrated floodplain management
- Local integrated collaborations are under-resourced
- Regional integration is as important as local integration

Lessons learned about local integration include:

- There are a number key elements of integrated floodplain management
- Integrated floodplain management requires dedicated staff time
- Integrated floodplain management requires a wide variety of skills
- Integrated floodplain management works best at a bigger scale and with more voices involved
- Early actions set integrated floodplain management into motion
- Sustained integrated floodplain management requires tracking and measurement of progress
- Data management for integrated floodplain management is complex and essential
- Storytelling uses empathy to build understanding and respect

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

5-Year Strategy for Washington Floodplains

The *5-Year Strategy for Washington Floodplains* includes detailed goals, strategies, outcomes, and actions for each of the five focus areas (listed above) over the next five years. The *Strategy* also includes a list of key recommendations and priority actions:

- Incorporate FbD principles and program into existing flood statutes
- Address statewide capital funding needs
- Provide funds for planning and grants management
- Continue to engage with partners and increase participation
- Continue to refine criteria, information, and coordination
- Improve efficiency and transparency of project funding and implementation
- Create more sustainable funding and capacity for the backbone organization role
- Provide strategic and technical support to integrated floodplain management efforts
- Work to reduce re-appropriation requests and improve coordination with other water and salmon grant programs
- Develop curriculum and implement training program for integrated floodplain management
- Deepen engagement of tribal leaders in the overall program and more directly in their watershed
- Develop a leadership group consisting of key, diverse interests including tribes, vulnerable communities, agriculture, cities, and counties
- Convene a policy/technical work group to guide a study of development trends in floodplains and potential actions to address

Integrated Floodplain Management Status Report

The report *Floodplains by Design: Toward a New Paradigm* (June 2018) provides a status report in Integrated Floodplain Management. This report includes two sets of recommendations: recommendations for how regional groups (such as Ecology, PSP, and TNC) can support local integrated floodplain management, and key recommendations for local practitioners.

Recommendations for Regional/State Practitioners:

- Provide support. Support includes capacity, expertise, training, resources, venues to share cross-watershed learning, examples of successful efforts, and building support with local elected officials. At this point in the Floodplains by Design initiative, there are four critical functions to sustaining the effort. The four most important functions are the public-private partnership that creates the regional “backbone” organization (a role that has been filled by TNC to this point), administrating and advocating for the

Floodplains by Design grant program, strategic on-the-ground support locally to continue to both understand how to change the paradigm of floodplain management and change it, and hosting large regional workshops to promote shared learning.

- Provide incentives. As noted above, the Floodplains by Design grant program is a key incentive that should be maintained and expanded. Success in the grant program relies on the strategic use of the assets provided by the various public-private partners. The program must continue to evolve to reflect the collective learnings of the FbD partnerships and continue to incentivize integrated floodplain management best practices.
- Provide planning funding. There is currently no regional dedicated funding source for collaborative, integrated floodplain planning.
- Integrate at the regional level. This recommendation includes all of the elements of integration but at a regional scale. Integrating at the regional level also includes advancing the next steps identified by the Accelerating Projects Group (Section 3.3).

Key Recommendations for Local Practitioners:

- Use the elements of integration. Local practitioners should use the elements of integration infographic to help guide their efforts. There are many elements of integration that every collaborative effort should strive to incorporate, but it isn't possible to tackle all elements at once. Practitioners should continually consider the various elements of integration in order to assess the status of their effort and to identify the best next strategic step.
- Pursue early actions. Pursue early actions to build trust and to set the cycle of discussion, agreement, and action into motion.
- Add capacity. Make sure you have the staff capacity needed within each interest area of significance and to help assist the integration across those interest areas. Consider hiring dedicated staff.
- Foster skills. Consciously work to develop the variety of skill sets needed to lead the development and implementation of complex, collaborative efforts.
- Broaden your effort. Work to broaden the scale you are working at and the breadth of voices participating.
- Track and measure. Establish a mutually agreed-upon system to track and measure progress toward your shared goals.
- Manage data. Invest effort into data management systems that allow for complex integration and transparency within jurisdictions such as a county with different departments and divisions as well as with outside partners.
- Tell stories. Encourage storytelling as a means to building understanding and respect across people and interests.

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Mission for Next Five Years and Immediate Next Steps

Based on a synthesis of the recommendations in the two reports listed above, Floodplains by Design is focusing on five key program functions and results:

- Increasing capacity for integrated floodplain management
- Broadening and deepening support for integrated floodplain management
- Improve policies to support integrated floodplain management
- Increasing funding for all aspects of the initiative
- Statewide convening and coordination to drive continual improvement

In addition, The Nature Conservancy is currently following up on the work conducted under this grant by taken the immediate next steps:

- Growing a Floodplain Learning Network for floodplain practitioners
- Working with partners to increase the capital and operational funding through the biennial state budget
- Working with Ecology to evolve the FbD grant program in ways consistent with learnings over the last 2 years and to incentivize integrated floodplain management best practices
- Increasing storytelling and advocacy
- Organizing and facilitating Floodplains by Design Management Team meetings and other gatherings
- Developing a Needs Assessment Report identifying the key “backbone” functions needed to sustain the Floodplains by Design vision and approach
- Work with key partners to scope and identify an organizational governance and staffing structure for the Floodplains by Design partnership that increases the overall efficacy and resilience of the effort
- Building a broader and more active Floodplains by Design coalition to support the capacity, funding, policy, and engagement strategies laid out in the 5-Year Strategy