

Spokane River Regional Toxics Task Force Zoom Meeting

June 28, 2023, Meeting Notes

Facilitated by White Bluffs Consulting

Meeting Documents: <https://srtrtf.org/?p=13229>

Attendees:

Voting Members and Alternates

Tom Agnew, BiJay Adams – Liberty Lake Sewer and Water District
Rob Lindsay – Spokane County
Brent Downey – Kaiser Aluminum
Doug Krapas – Inland Empire Paper
Jeff Donovan – City of Spokane
Vikki Barthels, Mike Lascoula – Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD)
Mike Anderson – City of Coeur d’Alene
Holly Davies – WA State Department of Health

Advisors

Adriane Borgias, Annie Simpson, Cheryl Niemi, Jeremy Schmidt, Sandra Treccani, Suman Paudel
– Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology)
Gunnar Johnson, Maria Hegstad – Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Kristen Lowell – Idaho DEQ

Interested Parties

Dave Dilks, Caitlin Lulay – LimnoTech
Ben and Lara Floyd – White Bluffs Consulting (WBC)
Lisa Dally Wilson – Dally Environmental and SRSP
Alyssa Gersdorf, Craig Borrenpohl – City of Post Falls
Kara Whitman, Nathan Enos and Zack Cefalu – WSU
Chris Page – Ruckelshaus
Lauren Heine – ChemForward
Ann Robertson – AKWA-DC
Bob Witsell – GE
Graeme Taylor – Stantec
Pat Blau

Introductions and Agenda Review: After introductions, Ben Floyd reviewed the agenda.

Meeting Summary Action: The Task Force (TF) approved the May meeting summary and Lara Floyd will post the final notes to the website.

ACE update: Jeff said as of the end of May ACE had \$180,000 in the bank with \$500,000 in committed funds. Most work has been invoiced but the final LimnoTech, White Bluffs Consulting and Spokane River Forum invoices will be coming in. The last AXYS bill has come in. There is \$300,000 in invoices waiting to be paid and \$130,000 in the bank account. They are figuring out the final contract amendment with Ecology that needs to be signed by the end of June. Annie said the draft is with contracting now and she will follow up today. She said it may not be signed by June 30, but it will still be ok to move forward.

Rob said they are working through the administrative items and ACE will need to remain as a viable entity to pay bills and close out the contract. The ACE board will get together and go through the official process of ending ACE as a 501(c)3 organization after everything is done. The websites will be discussed later, and Jeff will be pre-paying some things soon.

ChemForward Pigment Resource Pilot QAPP Approval: Doug gave an overview of this project that came from the work group and from input by participating ink and pigment manufacturers, and publishers. Some companies have developed a formulation of yellow ink that is non-diarylide and the team hopes to put this ink in place, working with the Lewiston Tribune.

ChemForward developed the QAPP shared with the Task Force to identify how work on this project would be conducted. There were some comments from Gary Jones that ChemForward provided responses to, and Doug felt like the comments were adequately addressed. It will also likely go through another revision, if the project receives future funding. The project is consistent with everything the work group has tried to accomplish and they hope to keep the momentum going forward.

Lauren Heine (ChemForward) said there were 45 comments and they addressed all of them. When they submit the project proposal for future funding, if funding is received, they would likely make additional changes to the QAPP also in finalizing it and the project work plan. Gary suggested some specific performance testing, but they need to align with the tests the printers use. The project also makes use of the pigments database work done previously.

The TF approved the QAPP as an acceptable work product, noting it could be subject to further revisions.

Petitioning EPA on PCBs allowable under TSCA Report Approval: Doug gave an overview of the project. It is a compilation of their work to scope the petitioning process. The document was shared with the TF for review and only two sets of comments were provided. AKWA-DC addressed the comments.

Ann Robertson (AKWA-DC) went over some of the comments received and she adjusted some of the language to be precise about additional studies being needed for iPCB prevalence, exposure and ubiquity in the environment. She included examples provided to the Task Force over the past decade and a half to strengthen the technical underpinning of the report statements. Regarding whether stakeholders will be able to comply with stricter water standards she changed it to say “may be able to comply” instead of “will likely be unable to comply.”

Comments/Questions:

- Lisa said this is an excellent document and there are a lot of ideas for next steps similar to the QAPP that was just presented. In the TF transition document being shared later in the meeting, we don't have next steps included at this time, but she is hoping to add these details next week. With the two documents just presented, there is more we can do, and she hopes things continue forward.

The TF approved the report.

Tech Track Work Group (TTWG) Preliminary Draft Reports: Lisa said the TTWG has met multiple times to move through the final set of reports due to lab results and they need to confirm elevations of some monitoring wells. All were completed with a one-week review process. As a result, there was a recommendation to call these preliminary draft reports and requesting approval as acceptable work products to be finalized at a later date.

- Sediment and Biofilm – Sampling by Ecology in 2018-19 showed elevated PCB concentrations downstream of the Mission Avenue bridge and the TF decided to conduct the follow up analysis in 2022. Seven locations were sampled. They saw one hotspot downstream of Iron Bridge. No consistent special trends or PCB fingerprint were identified.

Findings: Sediment – Elevated PCB concentrations are very patchy over space and time – Nature of the magnetic anomaly downstream of Iron Bridge merits further investigation. Biofilm – PCB concentrations are generally consistent from year to year – Greater spatial resolution provided by 2022 data suggests distributed sources.

The TF approved the preliminary draft report as an acceptable work product.

- Expanded synoptic survey – Prior Mass Balances were prepared in 2014 and 2018 and this latest work added stations to provide more spatial resolution than prior assessments. Three outliers were identified at Mid-Point, Greene St and Upriver Dam but overall results were similar concentrations as in 2018. Also see a loss of PCBs from above to below Upriver Dam. Regarding PCBs in catch basin solids, the detection dog had identified elevated concentrations in the Springfield stormwater service area. The results were not higher than those observed elsewhere. The results of the 2022 sediment and biofilm sampling provide additional insight into the nature and distribution of PCB contamination in Mission Reach, but do not definitively identify the contributing sources.

Lisa said they asked LimnoTech to do a next steps section at the end of every report. Regarding the artesian well, there are a number of suggestions of what might be contributing to it, and further evaluation of this as a source is a high priority going forward.

The TF approve the preliminary draft report as an acceptable work product.

- SPMD – Water Column Trend Assessment – First round of TF monitoring was done in 2020-2021 and there were 3 rounds of sampling to capture season flow regimes. They only received lab results for summer low and moderate flows. SPMDs deployed for spring high flow and were delivered to Ecology for subsequent lab analysis. Concentrations were greatest at Trent Avenue in both low and moderate flows. It is premature to conduct trend assessment until results from high flow are available.

The TF approve the preliminary draft report as an acceptable work product.

- Groundwater flow direction – The purpose is to collect available well data in Mission Reach area and draw conclusions of available data about groundwater flow direction. Lisa said this report contains a lot of information pulled together which they didn't have before of potential sources, monitoring well elevations, general groundwater direction and discussions about a basalt interface area near a lot of industrial activity. Lisa said this report

contains a lot of information pulled together which they didn't have before of potential sources, other sources, monitoring well elevations, general groundwater direction and talks about basalt interface which is an area that there was a lot of industrial activity. This report could be helpful in future for additional sources in the Mission Reach area.

The TF approve the preliminary draft report as an acceptable work product.

- GE fingerprinting – GE has a Superfund NPL site located between Upriver Dam and Greene St. EPA had developed a scope of work to conduct a similar evaluation but the firm that was on call to do the work was conflicted because they had also done work for GE at this location, the Task Force was able to take the work on.

Findings: End members consistent with those found in GE wells contribute to a 22% increase in biofilm PCBs immediately downstream of GE site. Congener patterns resulting from mass balance assessments consistent with those found in GE wells. No conclusions were drawn regarding how much of the above contribution is caused by GE – Recognition that other sources of PCBs may exist between GE site and river.

Comments:

- What are next steps if we want to clearly link the impacts seen in the river to GE? Dave said additional well monitoring closer to the river and monitoring between GE and the river. Right now, they just have data near the GE site.
- In your slideshow, you said samples were near and on the GE site, but I thought no samples were monitored on the site itself. Dave said they have 1668 data for all wells on the map shown earlier in the presentation.
- For the GE area, it is supposed to be a gaining reach? If it is, how wide is the potential plume and how deep? What is the volume of water going to the river? Ben said this is just to pin down sources and where signal is coming from.

The TF approve the preliminary draft report as an acceptable work product.

SRRTTF transition update and websites transition: Ben gave an overview and how at last month's TF meeting there was a discussion about what is left to do from technical and administrative standpoints, and what potentially could be completed in the future through the new Ecology toxics advisory group process standpoint. Lisa will be adding some discussions from TTWG and next steps to this document as soon as possible. WBC will make sure it gets emailed out and on the TF website.

Comments:

- A member asked about the statement of withdrawing from the TF once the advisory group is formed and asked Adriane about the process. Ecology anticipates in September they will have the advisory group ready to go. Ecology anticipates in September they will have the advisory group ready to go and there is a meeting scheduled on September 27 for the first meeting.
- We need some release of the obligation from the state for participating on the Task Force [as an alternate to everyone sending in withdrawal from the Task Force letters]. It seems the best method would be the state agency saying there is no longer an obligation, and we

shouldn't have to resign or provide a letter of withdrawal. Adriane said that is what the MOA says about withdrawal.

- Lisa asked the other entities besides the dischargers and what their intentions are for withdrawal when the TF ends? Various responses were provided.
- Mike Anderson said per the agreement they need to resign from the TF that no longer exists, and it is written in the permit of the dischargers. Is it possible to have some kind of generic resignation letter or a willingness to transition into the new organization? Ben suggested to let the Ecology process get going and then figure it out later. Adriane said there is nothing in the MOA that states how it should end. We anticipate being the last ones and will hold the TF open as long as necessary to meet any concerns with permittees and we will not pull the rug out from anyone. ACE is a different thing and is ok for it to end.
- Is there a requirement for attending meetings between now and the next meeting at the end of September? No

Websites recommendation – Ben gave an overview of prepaying for websites, domains, etc. Ecology cannot prepay for professional services like Anne Francis. Adriane said they will go over to an Ecology Listserv instead of Constant Contact, but it may be helpful to keep it for 6 months. The recommendation is up to \$1,800 for ACE to prepay for the different website items.

The TF approved ACE prepaying for the website and support service items discussed.

Ecology Advisory Group Transition Update: Annie shared the transition schedule timeline. They will be going through an Ecology bid process to get a facilitator in place and hope to have the facilitator in place by the September meeting. They will work to formalize an advisory group based on the Ruckelshaus assessment. There won't be a finalized report until July 31 and any funds needed will come from Ecology.

Comments:

How are you going to pick the representatives for the group? Annie said they would like to keep the core group that are here now but also engage with Riverkeeper, the Tribes, Sierra Club, and others in the community. Adriane said they are moving forward and have a great foundation for putting the group together and will have something of substance by the meeting in September.

Ruckelshaus Assessment Update: Kara Whitman and Chris Page gave the presentation. They were asked by the Department of Ecology to do this assessment about engaging the community in mitigating toxics in the Spokane River watershed. They will have it out for review by July 10 before finalizing the assessment. He asked for suggestions of anyone else they should interview. They went through a high-level summary of findings.

Public Comment: Pat Blau said that he had read all the recent work that had been conducted by the Task Force and the results that have been achieved, and while there has been a lot of work done, he said after conducting his review his thought was "Where's the beef?" Or in other words where is the reduction of PCBs in fish tissue? Several years back when he was working for Kaiser, the partners worked together to make significant PCB reductions in fish tissue, but it hasn't really improved much since these past gains.

The next meeting will be held on September 27 at 8:30 am at the Spokane County Water Resource Center.