

TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM MEETING NOTES

March 12, 2001, 2:00 p.m.-4 p.m.

CORPS OF ENGINEERS NORTHWESTERN DIVISION HEADQUARTERS PORTLAND, OREGON

1. Greetings, Introductions and Review of the Agenda.

The March 12, 2001 conference call of the Technical Management Team, held at the Corps of Engineers' Northwest Division headquarters in Portland, Oregon, was chaired by Rudd Turner of the Corps and facilitated by Donna Silverberg. Please note that this is a summary, not a verbatim transcript, of items discussed and decisions made at today's meeting.

2. Continued Discussion of Current System Conditions, Spring Creek Hatchery Spill and Chum Salmon Protection Operation.

Turner reported that, in support of the Spring Creek hatchery release, the Bonneville ice and trash chute was opened up Friday night; with the exception of the spill operation, the other specifications of SOR 2001-2 were implemented as requested on Friday afternoon. The water cannon at the end of the outfall was made operational on Saturday.

With respect to spill, said Turner, the action agencies and the Fish and Wildlife Service agreed to three 12-hour periods of 50 Kcfs spill at Bonneville from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. on March 10, 11 and 12. The actual spill levels has been just over 47 Kcfs, he said, because we instructed the project not to exceed 50 Kcfs. For technical reasons, we ended up at just over 47 Kcfs, Turner said.

Turner said field personnel were out Saturday night, looking at dissolved gas readings; in general, the dissolved gas readings have stayed within the acceptable range – 103%-104% in Bonneville forebay; up to 111% at Camas/Washougal and just under 102% over the chum redds. We have been holding tailwater at 11.3 feet for 18 hours a day, then going up to 11.5 feet from 9 p.m. to 3 a.m., said Turner, adding that day-average flow at Bonneville has been about 117 Kcfs since this operation began.

With respect to dissolved gas, said Howard Schaller, our readings from the boat were consistent with what Rudd laid out. Near the fike net, the readings were about 100%; they were higher near the Oregon shore. In the channel between Ives and Pierce Islands, we saw TDG levels in the ambient water of about 101%. They sampled today for gas bubble disease, Schaller added; in 104 fish sampled, we saw no signs of GBD.

The other thing we noticed this weekend, when we walked the chum area at night, is that in the edge redds, almost all of them had newly-emerged chum that would swim back into the gravel when they saw our flashlights, Schaller said. And what do you take that to mean? Silverberg asked. We'll talk about that during the chum discussion later in today's meeting, Schaller replied.

Again, we intend to continue the non-spill operations laid out in SOR 2001-2 through March 19, said Turner. Do you have any collection numbers at Powerhouse I? Scott Bettin asked. Margaret Filardo replied that no fish have been collected at Powerhouse I to date, which is not unexpected. We might have an incomplete sample by tomorrow, she said; we do have some observational information that the gulls were working the tailrace pretty heavily under the bird wires. They have also had no trouble collecting fish for the GBD monitoring, she said, so the fish are out there – we're just not able to give you quantitative numbers at this point.

Turner noted for the record that Jim Litchfield sent an email expressing the fact that the State of Montana objects to the spill that is occurring at Bonneville at this time, given the flow situation this year and the power cost. Since this spill is occurring in support of a non-listed hatchery species, Montana objects to this operation in 2001, Turner said.

Silverberg asked whether anyone of the other TMT participants objects to the spill operation, the final round of which is scheduled to take place tonight. None being heard, Silverberg said she will interpret silence as acquiescence.

Moving on to chum operations, Turner reiterated that the system is currently being operated to maintain a tailwater depth of 11.3 feet for 18 hours a day at Bonneville, going up to a depth of 11.5 feet for six hours at night. Grand Coulee continues to draft slightly, and is currently at elevation 1223. Dworshak, Libby, and Hungry Horse are still at minimum outflow. Will Grand Coulee go below 1220 this week? Kyle Martin asked. It depends on the tides and how much water we need to put out, Robyn MacKay replied; it does look like we're headed in that direction. We'll be drafting Grand Coulee across the week to get the lower river full again for the weekend operation, she added – I would say by the end of this week or early next week we will hit elevation 1220 at Grand Coulee. We will be drafting about half a foot per day, roughly, this week, she said, adding that the action agencies' objective is to avoid having to draft Grand Coulee over the weekend at a time when they would be having to sell power heavily. How much we have to fill the lower river projects this week will depend on where each of the lower river projects are, currently. Schaller said this might be critical information in deciding on the operation over the next few days.

After a moment's search, MacKay said it looks as though there will be a need to fill about one foot into Bonneville and John Day pools and 1.5 feet into The Dalles pool prior to this weekend. In response to a question, Paul Wagner said the tides are currently in a receding mode. He added that there has been some discussion among the federal parties of holding the Bonneville tailwater elevation at 11.3 feet around the clock over the next week. We're moving into a period in which there will be almost no net change in elevation from high tide to low, Wagner said; when that occurred last month, it was necessary to release upwards of 130 Kcfs

from Bonneville to maintain the 11.5-foot tailwater elevation. It sounds as though we would need to run about 125 Kcfs at Bonneville to maintain the 11.3-foot tailwater elevation, said MacKay; given that fact, you can probably assume that we'll hit elevation 1220 at Grand Coulee by Friday.

Do you have a solution? Silverberg asked. You can't draft Grand Coulee and the lower river projects to empty on Monday morning and expect to meet load, MacKay replied; we can declare an emergency, and begin drafting Dworshak, or we can cancel the chum operation – that's the physical relationship we're dealing with.

Jim Nielsen then provided some seining results from last week's field surveys at the chum spawning area. He said 56 chum were captured last Tuesday, March 6; 537 were captured on Friday March 9, and about 100 were captured during this morning's seine. That's a total for the seven seining sites? Turner asked. Correct, Nielsen replied.

Wagner said NMFS personnel have been discussing this issue; there is general agreement within the agency to maintain the 11.3-foot tailwater elevation below Bonneville around the clock through this Wednesday, at which point it will be re-evaluated at the TMT meeting. He added that, given the need to maintain an operating range at Grand Coulee, there has also been some debate at NMFS about whether elevation 1220, or elevation 1221, is really the floor at that project. My preference would be to set elevation 1221 as the floor, because that does give us some flexibility, MacKay replied. Pat McGrane said Reclamation doesn't have a strong preference either way, but would probably prefer to set the floor at 1221.

So how far along are we on the chum emergence? Bettin asked. Based on the information Jim has provided, and the fact that we saw one sac fry in our field surveys over the weekend, we're probably at about the 50% emergence point at this time, Schaller replied; we'll be at the 65%-70% point by about a week from now.

McGrane suggested that, given everything he has heard today, it probably makes sense for the chum operation end on Friday. Turner suggested that the group attempt to get as far along as possible on the short-term operation today, to allow the TMT and IT to concentrate on long-term planning at their meeting on Wednesday. Schaller suggested that the Wednesday agenda address long-term planning first, then move on to the short-term operation in the afternoon.

It sounds as though elevation 1220 is the absolute floor at Grand Coulee, although the action agencies would prefer elevation 1221, said Wagner. Really, at this point, we need to talk about feathering in the ending elevation, he said. Bonneville and Reclamation need some flexibility as to how and when they reach elevation 1220 at Grand Coulee, Turner observed.

Bettin noted that, if there is agreement to cut off the chum operation on Friday, it will be possible to drop lower river flows significantly – we'll only need to run about 80 Kcfs at Bonneville over the weekend in order to meet load, and at that point, we can start storing at the upriver projects, he said.

Basically, if we want to continue the chum operation past the end of this week, we have to talk about drafting other projects besides Grand Coulee, said MacKay. After a few minutes of additional discussion, Turner suggested that the system be operated to maintain 11.3 feet of tailwater elevation at Bonneville until Grand Coulee reaches elevation 1221; at that point, BPA and Reclamation will work together to gradually ramp flows down until Grand Coulee reaches elevation 1220. The idea is that this would make the recession in Bonneville tailwater more gradual, on the order of 2/10 or 3/10 of a foot per day, Wagner said.

What would weekday average flows be if we weren't doing the chum operation? Wagner asked. We would likely be running between 100 Kcfs and 105 Kcfs at Bonneville to meet load this week, MacKay replied.

Ultimately, Silverberg summarized the proposed operation as follows: maintain a Bonneville tailwater elevation of 11.3 feet 24 hours per day until Grand Coulee elevation reaches 1221; at that point, Reclamation and Bonneville will develop a rampdown operation to gradually achieve elevation 1220. This operation will be revisited at Wednesday's TMT/IT meeting.

Christine Mallette said for the record that Oregon would prefer to see the chum operation continue for as long as possible this year, and would urge the action agencies to seek all possible alternative sources of water to support this operation, in particular, additional Canadian storage. There is additional water in Dworshak if Oregon feels strongly that the chum operation needs to continue beyond this weekend, said MacKay. No TMT members responded in support of this suggestion.

The group briefly discussed the agenda for this Wednesday's TMT/IT meeting. With that, the conference call was adjourned. Minutes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.