

# COLUMBIA RIVER REGIONAL FORUM

## TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM

### MEETING NOTES

March 21, 2001

CORPS OF ENGINEERS NORTHWESTERN DIVISION OFFICES – CUSTOM HOUSE  
PORTLAND, OREGON

TMT Internet Homepage: <http://www.nwd-wc.usace.army.mil/TMT/index.html>

### FACILITATOR'S NOTES ON FUTURE ACTIONS

Facilitator: Donna Silverberg

The following is a list of items the Technical Management Team (TMT) discussed at its last meeting that will require future action or discussion:

**Current System Operations:** COE noted its current goals of meeting power needs and refilling the reservoirs, while keeping headwaters at a minimum and Grand Coulee refilling, to the extent possible. The precipitation for March is running at 60%.

Power Status – BPA is meeting its load for the northwest and will exchange power with California only if it is returned within a 24-hour period.

Fish Status – To date, 15 chum were found in Hardy Creek and 1282 were found in Hamilton Springs. Early to mid-April is the normal peak for Hamilton Springs. This week, 36 chum were found at Ives Island, while 130 were found there March 16.

**SOR 2001 C – 1:** A handout was distributed describing CRITFC's request for spring 2001 tribal fishing. Kyle Martin explained that this is an important treaty harvest opportunity that allows both ceremonial and substance fishing. The tribes are asking for operations to be within one foot from pool at BON, TDA and JDA from 3/26 through 3/31, 4/2 through 4/7, and 4/9 through 4/19. The group was reminded of a lawsuit pertaining to this issue from 1977. Kyle reported that elevations have a big impact on tribal fishers.

**ACTION:** The Action Agencies will check with their executives and get a written response to the tribes regarding this request as soon as possible.

**Recommended Operations:** COE proposed a two-week operation consisting of the following: keep headwaters at minimums, fill Grand Coulee to the extent feasible, and operate to meet power needs. This operation would continue for two weeks unless there are drastic changes in the weather or other conditions. If there are big changes in the weather or other conditions (such as fish needs) that require use of headwaters, a TMT conference call will be assembled to inform the group of the situation. In such a situation, the emergency protocols will be used. TMT agreed with this operation.

Regarding Vernita Bar: TMT agreed that the Vernita Bar policy group should meet before its

scheduled March 29 meeting. Scott Bettin will brief TMT on the outcome of the meeting via email and decide if a TMT call is necessary. COE noted that they are not a party to the VB discussions; however, they urged other TMT members, who are part of the group, to develop a conservative water operation since the fish are a healthy, unlisted stock.

RE: MOP – COE noted plans to operate the IHR and LWG pools at MOP +1 to MOP +2 in 2001, to maintain the Federal navigation channel since no dredging occurred this winter to protect the redds below the projects.

**Water Management Tools:** The COE circulated possible products or tools they could produce to help TMT in its decision making process. These tools included: the “Family of Curves”, which show probabilities of refill, “Volumes Available Histograms” which show confidence of refill and volumes, and HYSSR Model Runs. The COE noted that the old SSARR spreadsheets might mislead people because the flow data are extremely predictive. The new data might show actual and forecasted flows graphically to give a more realistic picture for management purposes. The group gave feedback and said that all the products would be helpful. The COE proposed to have them for each meeting, updated weekly.

**ACTION:** COE will post the new tool drafts on the TMT web site as examples for any additional comments from the group or others.

**The Role of TMT this year:** The group heard a brief update on last week’s Regional Executives meeting. Due to the high impacts and stakes of this year, the executives may be involved in some of the operations decisions facing the region. This means that TMT will not have as strong a lead role in developing operations and there will need to be more time for issues to get to the executive level before the action agencies can commit to operations or answer SORs.

As a result of this change in process, the action agencies suggested that TMT meet earlier in the week and bring biological and water supply information to the table to discuss. TMT would develop a recommendation, send it to the executives to review, and then get back to TMT with a decision. Members noted that TMT is helpful because it provides a place for sovereigns to get together, look at data and collaboratively develop an operation proposal. It also allows everyone to understand why issues are important to the various participants and sovereigns.

Question: Can TMT move to Tuesday afternoon to allow more time to get Executive input? The salmon managers felt it would be difficult for their process to work if it is too compressed by time. They agreed to raise the issue at their next meeting. In the meantime, TMT decided to move the meetings to Wednesday mornings beginning with the next meeting.

**Action:** Salmon managers will review the possibility of a Tuesday meeting. Christine Mallette will send the Oregon proposal to Rudd for circulation to others if she is given the go-ahead.

**Next Meeting Agenda:** The meeting will be held **Wednesday, April 4 from 9-12**. Topics to be discussed are: water conservation at locks, feedback on COE work products/tools, Water

Management Plan: TMT process issues (Meeting day); Objectives, priorities and criteria; and Guidelines, and an update from the executives.

## **Meeting Minutes**

### ***1. Greeting and Introductions***

The March 21 Technical Management Team meeting, held at the Customs House in Portland, Oregon, was chaired by Rudd Turner of the Corps and facilitated by Donna Silverberg. The following is a distillation, not a verbatim transcript, of items discussed at the meeting and actions taken. Anyone with questions or comments about these minutes should call Turner at 503/808-3935.

Silverberg welcomed everyone to the meeting, then led a round of introductions and a review of the agenda.

### ***2. Current System Conditions.***

Rudd Turner said the system is currently being operated for refill and power needs -- hence the variation in Bonneville and Grand Coulee flows over the past several days. The headwater storage projects are all releasing minimum outflow. Over the past week, Bonneville day-average discharge has fluctuated between 116 Kcfs and 135 Kcfs. Turner noted that the chum operation ended at 7 a.m. March 16. Since that time, the tailwater elevation below Bonneville has fluctuated with discharge; it has been as high as 14 feet and was also below 10 feet for at least a few hours.

Libby elevation, as of midnight last night, was 2388.6 feet; at 4 Kcfs discharge, Libby is drafting at a rate of about a tenth of a foot per day, Turner said. Dworshak continues to refill slowly; project elevation, as of midnight last night, was 1505.2, up two feet from last week at this time. Turner noted that inflow to Dworshak has increased over the past few days, and the project is now filling at a rate of about half a foot per day. Dworshak is releasing minimum discharge, about 1.5 Kcfs. Flows are also on the rise in the Lower Snake River; day-average flow yesterday at Lower Granite was 34.9 Kcfs.

Pat McGrane reported that Grand Coulee is now at elevation 1223 feet; the project is essentially passing inflow of about 75 Kcfs. The project has filled about two feet since last Friday, when the chum operation ended. McGrane added that Reclamation has now begun pumping from Lake Roosevelt into Banks Lake, an operation that is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. Hungry Horse elevation is now 3493 feet, with inflow of 400 cfs and outflow of 2.5 Kcfs.

In response to a question from Jim Nielsen, Scott Bettin reiterated that the chum

protection operation ended as scheduled last Friday; flows in the lower river were higher than some expected primarily because Snake River flows are on the increase. We did shift the operational priority to refill on Friday, Bettin said, and have been able to fill slightly at Grand Coulee while meeting load.

Turner added that the March mid-month forecast is now available; the predicted runoff volumes have continued to decline from the March final, with forecast January-July runoff at The Dalles now 57.6 MAF, or 54% of normal. Turner added that March precipitation to date has been a little better than were January and February precipitation levels, but is still only 60%-70% of normal.

With respect to power system status, Bettin reported that the federal system is currently able to meet load. As most of you are aware, he said, they are experiencing rolling blackouts in California; we were not able to send them any energy yesterday because they could not return it within a day, as per the agreement that is currently in force.

Moving on to the status of the fish runs, Scott Boyd noted that more than 400 adult spring chinook passed Bonneville Dam on March 19, considerably more than the 6-7 fish that would be seen on that date in a normal year. With respect to chum emergence, David Wills said that, through March 20, a total of 1,282 chum fry have been captured at the Hamilton Springs trap, and a total of 15 fry at the Hardy Creek trap. The normal peak of the Hamilton Springs outmigration is early to mid-April, Wills added.

### ***3. System Operational Requests.***

On March 21, CRITFC submitted SOR 2001 C-1. This SOR, supported by the CRITFC member tribes, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, requests the following specific operations in Zone 6 (Bonneville to McNary Dams) during the 2001 spring season Treaty fishery (6 a.m. March 26 through 6 a.m. March 31, 6 a.m. April 2 through 6 a.m. April 7, 6 a.m. April 9 through 6 a.m. April 14):

- Bonneville Pool: Operate the pool within 1 foot from full pool (msl elevation 77-76)
- The Dalles Pool: Operate the pool within 1 foot (from msl elevation 159.5-158.5)
- John Day Pool: Operate the pool within 1 foot (from msl elevation 264.5-263.5).

Kyle Martin spent a few minutes going through the details of this SOR, the full text of which is available on the TMT web site. Martin noted that these operations are particularly crucial this year, because the 2001 spring fishery is of unprecedented importance to the CRITFC member tribes. The anticipated escapement of more than 360,000 adult spring chinook to the Columbia River will create harvest opportunities tribal fishermen haven't seen in more than 60 years, Martin said.

Bob Heinith added that the tribes would ask the operating agencies to recognize that there was litigation on this issue back in the late 1970s; it had to do with power peaking, which was

making it very difficult for tribal fishermen to access the treaty fisheries. The courts basically interpreted the treaty rights as including the ability of tribal fishermen to gain access to their fishery; the case ended up in a settlement agreement between the Corps, Bonneville and the tribes, Heinith said. Mr. Sampson wanted to make it clear that we have already plowed a lot of legal ground on this issue, said Heinith; it is essential this year to hold the pools stable at these requested elevations during the ceremonial and subsistence fishery.

Which pools did the settlement agreement cover? Bettin asked. All three in Zone 6, Heinith replied. And did the settlement agreement specify the pool elevations or ranges to be maintained? Turner asked. No, Heinith replied – it essentially says that the Corps and Bonneville have a responsibility to create conditions that will allow treaty fishers to exercise their treaty rights. I was also curious whether Kyle Martin has received any responses to the survey he sent out last year, asking tribal fishermen about the specific impacts of these operations, Bettin said. Kyle did receive some responses, Heinith replied, and the response rate was not high. However, Heinith stated, the important thing is to talk to the fishers themselves – Kyle and I attended a meeting yesterday with about 50 fishers from the Yakama Nation, and they were complaining about the same sorts of impacts we have listed in this SOR. The important thing is that we give these people the opportunity to get out there and get the allocation they have worked hard to negotiate in *U.S. v. Oregon*, Heinith said – these fish are present in Zone 6 for a limited amount of time, and then they're gone.

Bettin said that, in terms of the impacts to the power system, the pool elevations requested in this SOR would limit the amount of energy available during certain peak hours. In the BiOp, only one pool – John Day – is limited to 1.5 feet of fluctuation during the treaty fishing season; this SOR limits all three pools to a one-foot operating range. Basically, it's something we're willing to take into consideration, said Bettin, but we can't give you an answer at this time as to how we'll operate.

From the Corps perspective, said Turner, recognizing that this is a multiple-use system, as well as the fact that the majority of the nets are deployed in Bonneville pool, we have been regulating for a 1.5-foot range – 75 feet to 76.5 feet – at Bonneville. In years past, he said, that seems to have worked acceptably for all concerned, and is consistent with the agreement that was reached between Ted Strong and General Fuhrman several years ago.

Heinith disagreed, noting that the Zone 6 treaty reserve area covers all three pools, not just Bonneville pool. During this upcoming fishery, there will be a lot of people fishing who haven't fished for decades, Heinith said; for that reason, there is going to be a lot of fishing activity in The Dalles and John Day pools as well as Bonneville pool.

When can we expect to receive an answer to this SOR from Bonneville and the Corps? Heinith asked. We're seeing this request for the first time at today's meeting, so you'll need to give us a couple of days to evaluate it, Turner replied – we should be able to let you know by the end of the week. Turner also noted that Heinith had told IT/TMT the previous week that the tribal fishery wouldn't begin before the beginning of April. This request proposed beginning the regulation a week earlier than that. He added that there may be a conflict with the pool elevations

needed for the orifice test at Bonneville, 74.5-75.5 feet, which is scheduled to run through March 27. The test was scheduled on the assumption that the tribal harvest wouldn't begin before April 1, Turner explained, adding that the tribes' request for a 77-foot elevation at Bonneville is half a foot above the normal full pool at that project.

#### ***4. Recommended Operations.***

The action agencies would like to develop a two-week operation, if possible, as called for in the Biological Opinion, Turner said; that two-week period to begin Monday, March 26 and end Sunday, April 8. The Corps' recommendation is to continue to release minimum outflow from the headwater storage projects while continuing to operate the system to meet power system needs and filling Grand Coulee to the extent feasible.

One complicating factor is the need to maintain a 65 Kcfs minimum flow at Vernita Bar, said Bettin – with temperatures on the rise and Snake River flows coming up, it may be possible to back off somewhat at Vernita Bar and store more water if we choose to do so. Who does that question go to? Silverberg asked. Probably to the Hanford Stranding Policy Committee, Nielsen replied. Actually, it sounds to me as though this is an issue that needs to go to the Vernita Bar Settlement Agreement parties, said Heinith – it's pretty well spelled out in that agreement. However, that agreement was written before the 2000 BiOp was written, said Bettin – I don't disagree that it needs to go to the Vernita Bar Settlement Agreement parties, but it is a little awkward because the TMT is supposed to be able to make decisions on things like storing water as called for in the BiOp.

I guess the real question is whether or not the TMT is willing to live with whatever the Vernita Bar parties agree to, Paul Wagner observed. Nielsen noted that the Vernita Bar Settlement Agreement is a court-ordered settlement, so it has some standing in law. I think the 2000 FCRPS BiOp has some standing in law as well, Bettin replied; the Settlement Agreement does say that BPA can back the Vernita Bar flows off if we're below the threshold of 43.7 MAF, which we are this year. In other words, we're well within the range in which this clause could be enacted, he said, recognizing that we would need to bring the parties to the Vernita Bar Settlement Agreement together and notify them of our intent.

After a few minutes of further discussion, there was TMT consensus that a meeting of the Hanford Stranding Policy Committee should be convened as soon as possible to discuss this issue. The next question is whether or not the TMT is comfortable with accepting the recommendation of that group, or whether a conference call should be scheduled to discuss their recommendation, Silverberg said. I think we'll need to see what the Policy Committee recommends, said Bettin. Ultimately, it was observed that the Mid-Columbia Coordinating Committee has a scheduled conference call tomorrow; Nielsen suggested that the appropriate parties be contacted to participate in that call. Bettin agreed to send an email to the TMT informing them of any decisions reached at tomorrow's conference call.

Turner said that, from the Corps' perspective, given the nature of the 2001 water year, it would be appropriate for the Vernita Bar parties to reach agreement on the lowest possible flows

needed to protect the majority of the Hanford Reach chinook population this year, similar to the approach the TMT used to protect the chum spawners below Bonneville this year. This is a very poor water year, he said, and it simply isn't going to be possible to protect every fish, particularly given the fact that we're talking about a healthy, non-listed population, better able to take a hit than some of the listed stocks.

The discussion returned to the desire to develop a two-week operation, so that the TMT no longer has to meet every week; there was general agreement that, if weather, fish migration, power system or flow conditions change dramatically, or if it becomes necessary to declare a power system emergency, it will be necessary to convene a TMT conference call. Otherwise, there was general agreement that the proposed two-week operation – continue to operate the system to meet power system demand, keep headwater storage projects on minimum outflow and fill Grand Coulee to the extent feasible – will continue for the next two weeks. In response to a question from Steve Pettit, Turner said it is possible that, if power system and flow conditions change dramatically for the worse, Dworshak discharge could be increased, but only if increased discharge from Libby and Hungry Horse proves insufficient to meet load.

Nielsen observed that the BiOp contains an April 3 planning date for the initiation of spill in the Snake River. We're very much aware of that, Bettin replied; that would be for Ice Harbor only, and we're waiting for the Executives to give us clear direction – we will implement whatever they decide.

Nielsen asked about the current plans for the initiation of transportation from the Lower Snake projects. Turner replied that, at this point, the plan is to begin transport on the regular date laid out in the Fish Passage Plan; he added that the 2001 Fish Passage Plan was signed by the Corps last Friday, March 16. The plan is now being mailed out, said Turner, so you should be receiving a copy very soon.

If the power situation in California worsens, could that precipitate a power system emergency call? Pettit asked. I wouldn't think so, at least in the absence of an Executive Order, replied Robyn MacKay – we've let them go dark so far when they were unable to return energy.

Moving on, Turner informed the TMT that the Corps plans to operate the Ice Harbor and Lower Granite pools at one foot above MOP this year, or a range of MOP +1 to MOP +2. The purpose of this operation is to maintain authorized depths in the Federal navigation channel until dredging can occur, he explained – maintenance dredging was scheduled for this winter, but was deferred due to biological concerns associated with sedimentation. So, said Turner, we wanted to let you know that those two pools will be operated one foot higher than normal. Has the Corps consulted with NMFS on this issue? Nielsen asked. Yes, Wagner replied, and NMFS concurs with the planned operation.

##### ***5. Review of 2001 Water Management Plan.***

Turner directed the TMT's attention to the most recent draft of the 2001 Water Management Plan, dated February 16, as well as the most recent draft of the "IT/TMT Matrix of

2001 FCRPS Operating Priorities,” dated March 20. We wanted to spend a few minutes going through this matrix to ensure that each agency’s recommendations are accurately represented, said Silverberg, because at last Friday’s meeting of the regional executives, the request was made that the federal parties use this matrix as the basis for a straw dog proposal for how the system should be operated this year. The regional executives will be meeting again in two weeks, Silverberg said; before they once again take up this matrix, they wanted some additional discussion to occur at TMT and IT, to make sure that everyone’s priorities are accurately represented.

Malette said that, in light of the discussion at and new assignments from Friday’s regional executives meeting, Oregon is not yet ready to share its 2001 operational proposal with TMT – I need to confirm that what I have is in fact the final draft of that proposal before it can be added to the matrix, she said.

The group briefly discussed the matrix; ultimately, Turner asked that any comments or corrections be provided directly to Jim Ruff at NMFS by close of business tomorrow, Thursday, March 22. Malette said she will provide a copy of the Oregon proposal to Ruff as soon as the final draft has been approved.

Turner then distributed an updated “family” of refill probability curves for Libby, Hungry Horse and Dworshak, reflecting the March final water supply forecast. He noted that these curves include the June 30 reservoir elevations recommended in the current federal operating proposal – 2439 feet at Libby, 3540 feet at Hungry Horse and 1580 feet at Dworshak -- 20 feet below full for each project. The group spent a few minutes going over this information; Turner noted that the Corps will be updating these curves on a monthly basis as the monthly final forecasts become available.

Turner also went through some of the other forecasting tools available for TMT use during the 2001 in-season management period, including the Corps’ most recent HYSSR model runs, with an eye toward discovering which of these tools the TMT finds most useful. The group devoted a few minutes of discussion to this information, offering a variety of suggestions and generally positive comments. The TMT also discussed the future of weekly TMT spreadsheet, which is based on SSARR runs, in light of the Corps’ concerns that the spreadsheet is somewhat misleading because some in the region tend to view them as fact, rather than as projections of what is most likely to occur.

Ultimately, Turner asked the other TMT participants to review all of this information, and to provide any comments they may have about the utility of these various forecasting tools to him, with an eye toward further discussion at the April 4 TMT meeting. It was so agreed.

The discussion then turned to the role of the TMT in this highly unusual water year. As everyone is aware, Turner said, TMT has been meeting jointly with the IT to try to reach agreement on a set of operating priorities for 2001; the two groups have now split apart again. There have also been regular meetings of the federal executives and, more recently, of the regional executives, involving the states and tribes as well as the federal executives, where

seasonal operating priorities are being discussed, Turner said. It is important for the TMT to affirm a role for itself in this atypical management year, he said; what that role might be is really up to us to develop.

Silverberg went briefly through some of the decisions made at last Friday's meeting of the regional executives; she noted that, at the end of that meeting, the State of Washington suggested that the federal government describe the decision-making process, with an opportunity to discuss concerns left open to the region. At the end of the day, however, Washington's view was that the final decision should be left up to the federal parties, with input from the states and tribes, given the emergency nature of this year's water supply situation. Montana agreed with Washington's suggestion, Silverberg said; they urged that these conversations also involve the Northwest Power Planning Council, to the greatest extent practical. Oregon agreed with the Washington and Montana positions, said Silverberg, but suggested that there is also a need to develop a strategy. To that end, Oregon suggested that the federal parties use this matrix of operational recommendations to develop a straw-dog proposal, for presentation to the regional executives at their next meeting.

That raises the question of what the most appropriate role may be for the TMT this year, Silverberg said – is it to identify and elevate any issues that arise? Is it to function as more of a liaison between the technical personnel and the executive-level decision-makers? Turner observed that, while the TMT participants have generally been comfortable putting forward and approving operational recommendations in this forum, they are less so this year, because of the critical tradeoffs between biological and economic impacts, and issues like the effects of the TMT's decisions on BPA's fundamental financial viability.

The action agency thinking was that we may want to meet earlier in the week this year, to discuss the flow forecast along with operational and biological information, and attempt to work out a tentative agreement, Turner said. We could then provide that recommendation to the federal or regional executives, and give them a day or two to make their decision. We could talk about the possibility of meeting either Wednesday morning or Tuesday afternoon, Turner said, given the need for that extra level of coordination.

The group devoted a few minutes of discussion to this issue; ultimately, the state and tribal salmon managers said that, from their perspective, it would be difficult at best to attempt to hold the TMT meetings on Tuesday afternoons because much of the biological and flow forecast information needed to inform the TMT's recommendations would not be available at that time. It was agreed that it may be possible for the TMT to meet on Wednesday mornings, but that a move to Tuesday afternoon meetings probably would not be feasible this year.

The group also discussed the TMT's traditional SOR-based system for developing recommended operations; Nielsen said that, in his view, it is useful for the salmon managers to have an opportunity to develop operational requests based solely on what is best for the fish, without consideration for non-biological needs.

Others, such as Bettin, wondered whether, given the unusual nature of the 2001 water

year, it might make sense to shelve the formal SOR-driven recommendation process for this year, or at least to develop any needed SORs as a group at the TMT's weekly meetings. Ultimately, Silverberg asked the salmon managers to discuss this issue further at next Tuesday's FPAC meeting, and to report back at the April 4 TMT meeting. It was so agreed.

To be clear, then, said Turner, it sounds as though the TMT does want to continue to work as a Regional Forum group this year, that it is not interested in giving up its recommendation-making role to the federal or regional executives, and that the TMT participants do want to continue to meet regularly through the season, to exchange information and develop operational recommendations. Silverberg polled each of the TMT members, each of whom agreed with Turner's statement, with the recognition that, for this year only, an additional layer of process may be in place as the TMT's recommendations are approved by the federal or regional executives.

**6. Update on NWPPC Request for TMT Decision Rationale.**

Discussion of this topic was deferred to a future TMT meeting.

**7. Next TMT Meeting Date.**

The next face-to-face meeting of the Technical Management Team was set for Wednesday, April 4. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.

**TMT PARTICIPANT LIST**

**March 21, 2001**

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