

COLUMBIA RIVER REGIONAL FORUM

TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM

MEETING NOTES

May 30, 2001

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

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

(conference call)

FACILITATOR'S NOTES ON FUTURE ACTIONS

Facilitator: Richard Forester

The following notes are a summary of issues that are intended to point out future actions or issues that may need further discussion at upcoming meetings. These notes are not intended to be the “record” of the meeting, only a reminder for TMT members.

Hanford Reach/Vernita Bar Update:

John Lukas reported that the attempt to keep fluctuations within 60 kcfs in the week of May 21 has not been uniformly successful due to dispatcher error (using gage data instead of dam data). This week the average fluctuation should be within 60 kcfs range. Future fluctuation reports will be part of operations report.

Upper Snake Water Delivery:

Pat McCrane (BOR) reported that flow augmentation out of Payette is winding down, ending tomorrow. Idaho Power will be responsible for minimum flows after tomorrow.

Spill for Fish Passage:

Rudd Turner reported on the addition of McNary and John Day to the spill program on May 25, 2001. The 300 Megawatt-month level will be reached by Saturday. The Regional Executives meeting this Friday, June 1 will discuss spill and whether to extend it beyond this weekend. The Northwest Power Planning Council analysis will be out, which will be considered in making decisions on this matter. There may be non-hydro resources available.

TDG Update:

Gas levels appeared acceptable thru out the system, except on May 23th at Bonneville as read at the Camas-Washougal gage. Bonneville spill was curtailed for a few hours, which resulted in reduced TDG levels from 116.2% to 115.4% on May 24th. TDG dropped further to 110.4% by May 28th.

Albeni Falls Operation:

Howard Schaller (USFWS) reported that lake levels were five feet higher than last week, reducing the urgency of the previous discussions. A goal to have the lake full by August may be

acceptable for bull trout. There do not seem to be any bull trout passage problems. Tressel and Gold Creeks could be impacted because 20% of their trout are early migrants. Filling of the reservoir can be delayed until July because it is only 3 feet below expected levels. Bull trout enter the tributary in the end of July. Bull trout research shows that the lake could remain at its current elevation until mid- to the end of July before refilling without any real detriment to the bull trout. USFWS supports the previous SOR proposal (2001-4) from the salmon managers; however, we are now past the lake level (2054) when the SOR was submitted, and the project is operating at or close to the power house capacity and filling at 1 foot per week. COE is operating at or close to power house capacity at Albeni Falls and they plan to continue operating according to the NMFS and USFWS BiOps until they receive compelling information to do otherwise. The current operation is consistent with the BiOps. Several public questions were raised as to the impact of releasing water from Lake Pend Oreille. Paul Wagner from NMFS said that under the final litigation settlement, specific elevation targets are more flexible. Salmon Managers are likely to have a conference call soon to discuss whether a new or revised SOR may be needed in light of new conditions.

ACTION: Any new information and/or proposals will be discussed at the next TMT meeting. [SOR # 2000-5, asking to pass inflow at ALF, was received later the same day, 30 May. A TMT emergency conference call was set for 31 May to discuss the SOR.]

June 6 Face-to-Face Meeting, 9-12:

Meeting items are:

- COE update on barge incident at Ice Harbor
- CRITFC sun spot cycles effect on climate
- COE/NMFS temperature modeling MASS-1 results
- TDG update
- Hanford update
- Process discussion (How we fit into the regional process and TMT guidelines)
- Lower Granite upper forebay operation request (refill 2 feet outside of MOP)

Meeting Minutes

1. Greeting and Introductions

The May 30 Technical Management Team conference call, held at the Customs House in Portland, Oregon, was chaired by Rudd Turner of the Corps and facilitated by J. Richard Forester. 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.

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

2. Hanford Reach Update.

Joe Lukas reported that, for the week of May 21-28, the average flow at Priest Rapids Dam was 76 Kcfs. At a conference call on Monday, it was agreed to keep the fluctuation limitation at 60 Kcfs. We weren't very successful in doing that, Lukas said, particularly late in the week, on Thursday and Friday – flows during the week were as low as 60 Kcfs and as high as 140 Kcfs for a few hours at a time. Lukas explained that the cause of this deviation was a communication problem with the night shift dispatchers at Priest Rapids; they were using the USGS gauge, rather than the dam data, to set flows at the project. The problem has now been rectified, Lukas said, and they will be using the dam data in the future. Again, he added, most of those fluctuations were of short duration.

On the biological side, said Lukas, field crews sampled 80 random sites, finding only 19 subyearling chinook. Index seining sampled 4,764 juveniles this week, a slight jump from the 3,500 sampled the previous week. Average fork length on the fish sampled this week was 45.5 mm, Lukas said, so the fish are starting to grow beyond peak stranding susceptibility size. Lukas added that, by June 10, the Hanford Reach juveniles will be 400 CTUs beyond the end of emergence, so we're nearing the end of this operation.

In response to a question from Wagner, Lukas said the 60 Kcfs flow fluctuation limitation will remain in effect through Sunday, June 3, after which an 80 Kcfs fluctuation limitation will be implemented. It sounds, then, as though we can expect another two to three weeks of reports on the Hanford Reach stranding operation, said Turner.

3. Upper Snake Water Delivery Update.

Pat McGrane said Reclamation began flow augmentation out of the Payette system on May 25. We're currently releasing 1,020 cfs from the Payette, he said; that operation is expected to continue through Sunday, June 10, although there may be a short ramp-down period prior to that date. Reclamation is also releasing 300 cfs at Milner, ramped down from 1.5 Kcfs over the past two weeks. That operation will end tomorrow. When the river gets down to 200 cfs, said McGrane, Idaho Power will be responsible for maintaining the minimum flow of 200 cfs according to the terms of their FERC license. We're still working on the 2001 release from the Boise system, McGrane said, but whether or not that will be possible is still up in the air – in other words, we may be done for the year, he said. It was agreed to revisit this topic under "Current Operations" at next week's TMT meeting.

4. Albeni Falls Operation.

Howard Schaller reported that, since last week's TMT meeting, Lake Pend Oreille has gained about 5 feet in reservoir elevation – it is currently at elevation 2059, 3.5 feet from full. With respect to the issues we've been discussing surrounding bull trout spawning access at lower lake levels, said Schaller, because these fish are fall spawners, it looks as though, from a biological perspective, there shouldn't be any problem if Lake Pend Oreille isn't quite full during the mid-end of July period; as long as the lake is full by August 1. In mid-July, any biological impacts would be confined mainly to Trestle and Gold Creeks, where there are some earlier migrants entering those systems – perhaps 20% of the total spawning populations in those

systems, Schaller said. It is unknown at this time whether the current lake elevation would impact those earlier migrants detrimentally. At this point, said Schaller, there don't appear to be any bull trout passage problems, which means that, from the Fish and Wildlife Service's standpoint, there would be no problem with holding Lake Pend Oreille less than full, at least for now.

So you're saying that if we maintain the current elevation through the end of July, that will be OK? Mike Gerald asked. We're saying that, from a biological perspective, we could pass inflow for the time being, as long as Lake Pend Oreille is full on August 1, Schaller replied. The majority of the bull trout start to enter the tributaries in mid-July, he said. Where are you getting your information? Doug Marx asked. This is from IDFG trap information, Schaller replied.

So is the Fish and Wildlife Service proposing a pass inflow operation from now until the end of June? Turner asked. We're simply providing information, Schaller replied; we're not proposing anything. In response to a question from Marx, Schaller replied that, from the available information, IDFG estimates that 20% of the Trestle Creek population enters the tributary from June through the end of July. The bulk of the population, again, are fall spawners, Schaller said.

Steve Pettit asked whether, with this information in hand, the Fish and Wildlife Service now supports SOR 2001-4. Yes, we support it, Schaller replied, based on the fact that we don't think there will be a significant biological impact, and the fact that we're already at elevation 2059. The SOR was submitted when the lake was at elevation 2054, he added. The essence of the SOR was to pass inflow up to powerhouse capacity, Christine Mallette noted. That is the current operation at Albeni Falls, Turner said; we're filling the lake, while operating at or close to powerhouse capacity to achieve a fill rate of one foot per week. Over the past week, the lake has filled 1.3 feet.

If you accelerate outflow, would you be spilling at Albeni Falls? George Eskridge asked. Inflows yesterday were 36 Kcfs, so yes, we would be spilling, Turner replied. What is powerhouse capacity, currently? Margaret Filardo asked. They're running at capacity now, Turner replied. Vern Parry added that generating capacity at Albeni Falls is influenced by project head; the higher the reservoir elevation, the higher the generating capacity.

The field data then indicates that we are at the minimum acceptable elevation for bull trout passage? Gerald asked. I said we're trying to optimize bull trout passage, Schaller replied. Wouldn't full pool provide optimal passage conditions? Eskridge asked. We are having serious difficulties in trying to provide flow augmentation for all listed species, including migrating juvenile chinook and steelhead, through the Upper and Mid-Columbia reaches, as well as good bull trout spawning conditions, Schaller replied – that is the Fish and Wildlife Service's concern.

What is the Corps' perspective? Gerald asked. We need to have NMFS and the Fish and Wildlife Service discuss this new information, in light of the change in reservoir elevations since the SOR was submitted, Turner said, to see whether they want to put a new proposal on the table.

What is the probability that any additional water from Albeni Falls will make it past Grand Coulee? Eskridge asked. Will this really help conditions in the salmon migration corridor, given the potential negative impacts of this operation on bull trout, winter refill probability and the local economy? The question is, will Grand Coulee reach 1280 by June 30? McGrane asked. If that happens, then any additional water released from Lake Pend Oreille will make it through Grand Coulee. I'm not sure what the current probability is of that happening, he said; it has to do with power demand, runoff pattern and Canadian releases. The current project elevation is 1271 feet; we still have a month to achieve the target elevation of 1280 feet, so I'm fairly confident that we will – in other words, said McGrane, if we delay refill at Albeni Falls, that water will likely be passed downstream at Grand Coulee.

Again, how much will this operation improve conditions for salmon downstream, in exchange for the negative impacts on the local population? Eskridge asked. It's water from upriver, Paul Wagner replied; if it gets trapped at Grand Coulee, it doesn't help migrating salmon. We're at about the 65% point of passage right now, he said, and entering prime time – if the yearling spring chinook don't pass through the system by about the second week in June, they don't pass at all, so this is an important time in the migration. We want to provide as much water as we can, before the window of opportunity closes, Wagner said.

If lake refill is delayed, said Marx, there has been a lot of talk up here about an additional volume request in the fall, such that the lake elevation would be lowered earlier than normal. There hasn't been any discussion of that, Wagner replied; the water in the fall is needed for chum salmon spawning in the late October-December time frame. In other words, he said, with respect to fall releases from Albeni Falls, the plan is to stick with the traditional timing. The Corps' planned operation is to get to full (elevation 2062.5 feet) by June 30, remain full through August 31, then draft a foot during September, Turner added. The project will then draft to 2051 ft. by mid-November.

What kind of compelling information would you be looking for in order to change that operation? Gerald asked. Some sort of recommendation from NMFS and the Fish and Wildlife Service, Turner replied. Can we request that any written recommendation, whether in the form of a revised SOR or some other form, be provided to us if you receive it? Gerald asked. Certainly, Turner replied – the SORs, SOR justification and the meeting minutes are all public and available.

I'm a bit confused, said Wagner – last TMT meeting, there was significant discussion of the status of the migration and the desire to increase flows. The other outstanding issue was the USFWS position on the bull trout situation; that information has now been presented. Does the Corps need something more formal from NMFS and the Fish and Wildlife Service? Wagner asked. My interpretation of the Settlement Agreement is that we are not bound to achieve a specific Albeni Falls elevation by a specific date, Wagner said, but that the Corps can make the call consistent with meeting the project purposes. That is the heart of the issue for us, said Eskridge – recreation is one of those project purposes, and the Corps operating other than how we ask is not meeting the project purposes.

So NMFS didn't support the SOR because they felt they were precluded by the settlement agreement, but now you feel that NMFS is no longer bound by that agreement? Marx asked. Essentially, that is my interpretation, yes, Wagner replied.

Cindy Henriksen went briefly through the background for this issue, then noted that, at this time, the Corps has not seen a proposal to change the operation at Lake Pend Oreille. The Corps appreciates the information the Fish and Wildlife Service has generated, she said, but in the absence of a new proposal, the Corps will continue with its planned operation, which is to fill Lake Pend Oreille by June 30. Would such a proposal take the form of an SOR? Marx asked. Probably, Henriksen replied; we would certainly need something clear, in writing, from NMFS and the Fish and Wildlife Service. So is SOR 2001-4 now dead? Marx asked. We have just received the requested information from the Fish and Wildlife Service on bull trout spawning, so that is unknown at this time, Henriksen replied.

In response to a question from Eskridge, McGrane said there is no specific recreational elevation required at Grand Coulee; again, he said, the plan is to fill to elevation 1580 by June 30. But will you let all of the additional release from Albeni Falls go, or will you catch some of it? Eskridge asked. If we're not on track to fill to 1280 by June 30, some of the additional flow could be captured in Lake Roosevelt, McGrane replied. If you continue to fill Lake Pend Oreille, obviously, none of that water will make it down below Grand Coulee; if you delay refill, and release some additional water from Albeni Falls, then there is a good chance that water will make it downstream, said McGrane.

Let me make a process suggestion, said Turner – Cindy and I have both stated the Corps' planned operation. If that operation is to be changed, again, we need to receive a formal written proposal. So again, is SOR 2001-4 dead? Marx asked. The Corps does not plan to implement SOR 2001-4 as written, Turner replied. And what is our opportunity to provide input into whatever new SOR is submitted? Ralph Slediger asked. I would anticipate a conference call among the salmon managers to discuss this new information, possibly with the result that a new SOR is generated, Mallette replied; that is not a given, but it is a possibility. Any SOR would then be submitted to the Corps, she said; that SOR would then be posted to the TMT website.

Slediger asked a series of questions about the TMT process, the "rules of engagement" and the opportunities for the public to provide input to the TMT process. There are a lot of questions here about the TMT charter and process, Schaller said; I would suggest that you call the Corps or NMFS directly to obtain the information you desire. Eskridge asked if there is a document that outlines the TMT decision-making process; Turner directed him to www.nwd-wc.usace.army.mil/TMT/index.html, the internet address at which supporting documents – such as the 2001 Water Management Plan's Appendix 4, "TMT Guidelines," can be obtained. That lays out the SOR process, as well as the parameters for providing public input to this technical process, Turner said.

When will the salmon managers' conference call take place, and can we participate in it? Marx asked. We don't know when the call will take place at this time, Mallette replied; I would be willing to take your suggested participation to the other members. That would be a precedent-setting occasion, if it occurs, in my 25 years of participation in FPAC, said Pettit. I'm not making

a recommendation one way or the other, he said, I'm just saying it will be a precedent-setting event.

5. Spill For Fish Passage and Studies.

Turner reminded the TMT that spill began at The Dalles and Bonneville on May 16. In addition, he said, spill started at John Day and McNary on the evening of May 25. Agreement was reached among the Federal Executives to extend the spill operation to the next two projects on the spill priority list; we are now spilling 12 hours at 30% of instantaneous discharge nightly at John Day, and 12 hours every other night at 30 Kcfs at McNary. Turner noted that tomorrow night is the last authorized night of spill at John Day and McNary. Essentially, he said, we are providing spill at McNary during non-collection periods, when fish are being bypassed through the project.

With spill at the two additional projects, Turner said, we're spilling about 20 MW-months per night; the spill program to date has used between 215 and 220 MW-months. At this rate, we'll reach the 300 MW-month limit by this Saturday, June 2, he said. The Regional Executives meet this Friday, and spill will be discussed at that time. The Executives are reviewing a Council analysis that shows that some additional non-hydro resources may be available later this year, Turner said, so they will be discussing whether or not to extend the spill program past this weekend at Friday's meeting. He added that Bonneville continues to spill 50 Kcfs for 12 hours nightly, while The Dalles continues to spill 30% of total river flow at The Dalles nightly.

Turner touched on the spill levels provided for studies at The Dalles during the past week -- 40% for the first two days of the test and 30% for the last two days of the test. In response to a question from Chris Ross, Turner said NMFS, in the form of Paul Wagner and Gary Fredricks, were consulted about the change from four days at 40% spill to two at 40% and two at 30%.

6. TDG Update.

Nancy Yun said there is little of consequence to report on the TDG front. The Dalles tailwater is below 115%; John Day is just over 115%, but is looking good on the 12-hour averages. TDG levels below McNary are within standard levels. Below Bonneville, on May 23, the 12-hour average shot up to 116.2% at Camas/Washougal, Yun said; spill was subsequently stopped at that project from about 8:30 p.m. to about 3 a.m. As a result, she said, TDG levels dropped down to 115.4% on May 24 at Camas/Washougal. It looks as though the cause of this exceedance was a combination of warm weather and the 40% spill level during the test at The Dalles, Turner said; the Corps then made the decision to stop spill at Bonneville. Yun added that TDG levels were just over 114% at Camas/Washougal on May 25; since then, TDG levels have continued to decline to near 110%. Turner added that the Corps sent out an email to the TMT describing the spill curtailment operation; since that date, there have been no further spill curtailments.

7. Next TMT Meeting Date.

The next face-to-face meeting of the Technical Management Team was set for Wednesday, June 6 from 9 a.m. to noon at the Custom House in Portland, Oregon. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.

Attendance List

Name	Affiliation
Scott Bettin	BPA
Scott Boyd	COE
Mike Butchko	Power X
George Eskridge	Idaho State Representative
Margaret Filardo	Fish Passage Center
J. Richard Forester	Facilitation Team
Russ George	Water Management Consultants Inc.
Mike Gerald	Sand Point (ID) <i>Daily Bee</i>
Richelle Harding	D. Rohr & Associates
Cindy Henriksen	COE
Jim Litchfield	Montana Consultant
Ningjen Liu	IdaCorp Power Co.
Joe Lukas	Grant PUD
Robyn MacKay	BPA
Christine Mallette	ODFW
Kyle Martin	CRITFC
Doug Marx	Attorney, Lake Pend Oreille Idaho Club
Pat McGrane	USBR
Steve Pettit	IDFG
Chris Ross	NMFS
Glen Traeger	Avista Energy
Rudd Turner	COE

Paul Wagner	NMFS
Victoria Watkins	PYRA
Nancy Yun	COE