

**TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM
CONFERENCE CALL NOTES**

April 30, 2002

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

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

1. Greeting and Introductions

The April 30 Technical Management Team conference call to discuss Grand Coulee operations in support of spring flow augmentation was chaired by Cindy Henriksen 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 Henriksen at 503/808-3945.

2. Grand Coulee Operations and Spring Flow Augmentation.

Henriksen explained that today's meeting was requested by the Bureau of Reclamation. Tony Norris said Reclamation is concerned with the timing of the freshet, and continuing to draft Grand Coulee past its flood control rule curve elevation of 1245 feet. We've seen a variety of forecasts recently, Norris said; however none of them predicts that the freshet will begin for at least 10 days, and in the interim, Grand Coulee is drafting a foot per day. This digs a big hole in Grand Coulee, he continued; when refill begins, flows in the lower river will drop significantly. Reclamation would prefer to draft no more than a quarter-foot per day from Grand Coulee after today, said Norris; we would like to see Grand Coulee elevation go no lower than 1240 feet on any date. Norris added that the current Grand Coulee elevation is 1245.8 feet, with current flow at McNary in the 225 Kcfs range.

The point is that we have some very diverse forecasts over the next 10 days, none of which show a significant increase in local inflows below the project, Norris said. To maintain 225 Kcfs, we will need to draft the project at least a foot per day. We don't want to have an abrupt transition in flows, hence we're giving the fishery agencies five feet in which to transition to a soft landing, he said -- they can shape that five feet any way they want to, but once the project reaches elevation 1240, we're not willing to go below that elevation. Norris added that Reclamation's position is that 1240 feet is the minimum elevation at which it can protect cultural resources and continue to pump into Banks Lake; we consider that more than fair, he said.

My understanding was that we agreed, at last week's TMT meeting, that Grand Coulee would be at elevation 1238 by the end of this week, said Paul Wagner. It depends on which forecast you believe, said Norris; if flows increase or decrease, fine, but Reclamation is unwilling to draft Grand Coulee below elevation 1240, regardless of what McNary flows are.

Ron Boyce expressed the concern that the number of juvenile outmigrants in the river is now starting to peak. You need to consider the fact that flows have been dropping steadily since

April 16, said Michelle DeHart; they've gone from 319 Kcfs at McNary on April 16 to 217 Kcfs yesterday, and the passage indices reflect that. From a biological standpoint, she said, it would be a very bad idea to drop flows at this point in the season. Boyce agreed, noting that it is his understanding that Grand Coulee refill is not a concern this year. All we're talking about is shaping that runoff to keep flows up now, then refill later, he said. I don't think what Reclamation is proposing is a good-faith effort to implement the BiOp, said Chris Ross.

We're talking about an operation that will avoid a sharp decrease in flows later, said Norris; once the freshet begins and flows pick back up, the fish will start moving again. The fish are already moving, said DeHart; the problem is that they are moving slowly because flows are so low. Perhaps there is an opportunity to shape flows so that they're higher now, as fish are really starting to move, in order to get as many fish as possible out early, rather than later in May.

Henriksen observed that it was not a change in operation that has caused flows to recede from their April 16 level; they increased in response to the rain event in mid-April, and have now receded because temperatures have been cool and precipitation low. This is a natural recession, in other words, Henriksen said – we haven't changed the operation at any of the federal projects.

To get back to my question, said Ross, is the Bureau concerned that Grand Coulee will not refill this year? It's a question of how low you want the flows to go later, said Norris – the bigger the hole we dig now, the lower flows will be later when refill begins. Boyce observed that, at some point, the water will come; this is not a refill issue, he said, and once the freshet begins there will be plenty of water to both refill Grand Coulee and meet or exceed the flow target at McNary.

It's not a refill issue – it's an upstream vs. downstream equity issue, Pat McGrane replied. Also, 1240 is a pretty hard constraint because of the Banks Lake pumping. The pumps do work below elevation 1240, through, said Ross – just at diminished efficiency. They work, McGrane replied, at the cost of additional damage to the units. Also, he said, as was mentioned before, the tribes are extremely sensitive to drafting Grand Coulee below 1240 feet, from a cultural resources protection perspective. The fact of the matter is, it is always difficult to meet the flow targets in April, before the weather warms up and the freshet begins, McGrane said.

In response to a question from DeHart, McGrane said Banks Lake is currently about 2.5 feet from full. Lori Postlethwaite said that, if Banks Lake pumping is reduced because Grand Coulee elevation drops below 1240 feet, it will be difficult to keep up with irrigation demand, particularly if Banks Lake elevation sags more than five feet from full. We're delivering 7.6 Kcfs in irrigation water from Banks Lake right now, and we're barely keeping up, she said. Is that a hard constraint? Boyce asked. We can't draft Banks Lake below five feet from full, said McGrane.

What we're saying is that, until the freshet begins, we would like to see an operation where the salmon managers ramp discharge down to where Grand Coulee elevation is stabilized at 1240 feet, McGrane said. I sympathize with the fact that we couldn't be above the flood control elevation at Grand Coulee earlier in the month and we don't want to be below flood

control now, said McGrane, but it's just hard to know how things are going to shake out, in terms of runoff shape, in early April. Every forecast we're looking at says we're looking at a foot-per-day draft to maintain the current flow in the lower river, McGrane said.

In response to a question, Henriksen said Libby continues to release 4 Kcfs; Albeni Falls is passing inflow, and is not filling significantly. Libby flows will increase in response to the sturgeon SOR on May 15, Henriksen said. Will Libby go to 8 Kcfs tomorrow, as the SSARR run said? Ross asked. We probably won't need to do that, Henriksen replied; we think there is too much volume in the Libby portion of the current SSARR run.

The 2000 FCRPS BiOp requires project operators to attempt to meet the flow objectives on a weekly basis, said Ross; it doesn't sound as if Reclamation wants to do that next week. The BiOp also says we're unlikely to achieve those flow targets this time of year, McGrane replied -- 48% in April and 64% in May, over the historical record; I think what we're seeing here is the fallacy of the monthly modeling. Many years the weather stays cool in late April and early May; the freshet hangs up, and it becomes very difficult to meet the targets in late April and early May. If we can't agree on the operation Reclamation is proposing, said McGrane, I suggest that we elevate this issue to the IT.

The other thing we're seeing is that, year after year, the fish operation functions as the shock absorber for all of the other river uses, said DeHart -- the bottom line is that, right now is a very poor time to decrease flows in the lower river. If we have to suffer through a low-flow period, from a biological standpoint it would be better for that to occur later in the spring period.

I'm hearing, then, that the salmon managers would prefer that flows be much lower in late June, when we're refilling Grand Coulee heavily, rather than now, Henriksen observed. In response to a question from Wagner, Henriksen and McGrane said that, if Reclamation's 1240-foot draft limit at Grand Coulee is implemented, depending on whose forecast you believe, week-average flow at McNary would fall to between 160 Kcfs and 200 Kcfs for the week ending May 12. If we draft Grand Coulee to elevation 1228, she said, we can keep flows up around 210 Kcfs on a weekly average. The point is that these are very diverse forecasts, said McGrane; our "soft-landing" proposal operates independently of these highly variable forecasts.

Where would Grand Coulee end up if we continue with the current operation? DeHart asked. Based on the SSARR, Grand Coulee would be at 1238 feet on May 5, Henriksen replied; if we continue to draft a foot and a half per day, we would be at about 1228 feet on May 10. That would give us 210 Kcfs at McNary, on average, through May 10, she said.

What can you tell us about the effects of the natural recession on passage indices? Henriksen asked. All of those numbers are available on the FPC web page, DeHart replied; historically, we would expect the passage indices going up right now. I think everyone in the region agrees that there is a flow-travel time relationship, she said. I would say we're experiencing normal conditions, given the natural recession, Henriksen said. The passage indices are flat right now, which has the effect of pushing the fish back into May, DeHart replied. So the lower flows you requested later in May would be preferable, from a biological standpoint, to lower flows now? Henriksen asked. First of all, no one is requesting lower flows in May, DeHart

replied; if you look at the SSARR, flows at McNary are expected to be in the high 300s once the freshet begins. Tom Bergeron went through some of the most recent passage indices for chinook and steelhead, noting that steelhead indices are dropping at an alarming rate.

Wagner suggested that the rest of this conversation be postponed until Thursday, when better information will be available and everyone will be back in town; in the interim, he said, we would recommend that a minimum McNary flow of 210 Kcfs be maintained. That's somewhere in the middle of where the various flow scenarios put us, he said.

Keith Underwood said the Spokane Tribe objects to going below upper flood control rule curve, at Grand Coulee; we expect Reclamation to respect their treaty trust responsibilities and maintain Grand Coulee elevation at or above 1245 feet, he said. McGrane briefly recapped Reclamation's proposed operation, noting that Reclamation's seems to be the minority view at today's meeting. Again, said Underwood, the Spokane Tribe expects that 1245 feet is as low as Lake Roosevelt will be drafted in 2002. Wagner reiterated his suggestion that a minimum flow of 210 Kcfs at McNary be maintained until Thursday, when the TMT can reconvene. Are you suggesting that we elevate this issue to the IT? Henriksen asked. No, I think TMT can resolve this with a little more internal discussion and deliberation among the agencies, Wagner replied.

It sounds to me as though we have a dispute, said Henriksen; I'm not sure we'll have any more information on Thursday that will significantly inform this debate. If no one wants to raise this issue to the IT, I'd say we have a consensus that we will draft Grand Coulee to elevation 1240, Henriksen said. Steve Pettit said IDFG is concerned about any sudden drop in lower river flows. The other thing that concerns me is that Grand Coulee has not been drafting at a foot and a half per day, said Wagner; Grand Coulee was at 1248 a week ago, and it's at 1245 per day. The project is now drafting at just over a foot per day, Norris replied.

The discussion continued in this vein for some minutes, with various TMT participants reiterating their positions. The question, as I hear it, is one of priority on weekly flow augmentation, and concern about setting a lower draft limit, Henriksen observed. Boyce suggested that the action agencies put together some better numbers about the relative impact of the various operational scenarios discussed at today's meeting. I would suggest that we not call this a dispute at this point, and address it further at Thursday's IT meeting, said David Wills.

Ultimately, it was agreed to request that the TMT reconvene at 11 a.m. Thursday, asking the IT to adjourn for lunch an hour early so that the TMT can attempt to resolve this issue. If it is not possible to resolve it, then the IT will take it up after lunch. Tom Lorz added that CRITFC has submitted a new SOR covering treaty fishery pool elevations, which are the same as those requested in CRITFC's last SOR; whether or not we continue to request that the SOR be implemented will depend on the outcome of this issue, said Lorz.

With that, the conference call was adjourned. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.

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