

**TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM
MEETING NOTES
November 13, 2002
CORPS OF ENGINEERS NORTHWESTERN DIVISION OFFICES – CUSTOM
HOUSE
PORTLAND, OREGON**

FACILITATOR'S SUMMARY NOTES ON FUTURE ACTIONS

Facilitator: Donna Silverberg

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.

Burbot:

USFWS and members of the Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative requested flows of 7.3 kcfs out of Libby starting December 15th for burbot spawning in SOR 2002 B-1. The requested operation, based on nine years of observations, seeks a minimum of 45 days of low outflows. It was backed by Idaho Fish and Game and USFWS biologists, who stated that the ideal operation would last 120 days. The requested 45 day minimum was suggested as a more likely “compromise” operation. BPA responded that the request would cost .5-1.3 million dollars. Given BPA’s financial situation and lack of biological information regarding burbot listing, BPA could not support this operation. Instead, the agency offered an alternative operation, which would provide 37 days at 7.3 kcfs (IF no flood control or cold snap requirements arise.)

The USFWS is court-ordered to establish whether or not burbot meet listing criteria by March 1, 2003. According to IDFG and USFWS biologists, burbot are in worse shape now than sturgeon were prior to their listing. A suggestion was made to look at the criteria for sturgeon listing and compare them to the burbot situation. When asked if there are enough burbot for successful spawning, the biologists replied that burbot are different from salmon in that one female can produce upwards of a million eggs. They felt confident that there are enough burbot for successful spawning, if proper conditions are provided.

BPA could find no other flexibility for operations in November, as they are operating for already-listed chum. Since this request is for an operation outside Biological Opinion requirements, BPA is reluctant to agree to the request, given their financial limitations. The agency was encouraged to consider the long term savings of helping to avoid listing this species. Also, it was noted that this year’s weather conditions look as though there is a high likelihood of a successful operation. BPA is trying to find a power operation that also meets burbot needs to the best extent possible.

After lengthy discussions, TMT agreed to elevate the issue to IT. The facilitator helped the group frame a policy question for IT. The following question, sent in an issue document, was asked of IT:

“Should this special operation occur in the absence of a listing? Put another way, is there a regional benefit to avoiding a listing by taking action now or should the listing occur first before the region invests BPA funding in these operations? Is there a regional benefit for BPA to spend money to increase the probability of a burbot operation from 50% to 95%?”

The issue paper also noted the factors that TMT discussed around this issue, including VARQ; forecasting uncertainties for January; and questions about existing biological information and whether it adequately demonstrates that the requested operation will provide a biological benefit.

(NOTE: The detailed issue paper was sent out to IT and TMT members before the IT meeting. This will be available on the TMT website.)

ACTION: IT will meet tomorrow, Thursday November 14, at 1:30 pm to discuss the burbot issue. The meeting place is yet to be determined.

****UPDATE**: *IT met on November 14 to discuss the burbot issue elevated from TMT. Discussions focused on how this operation tied into the NPPC’s Mainstem Provincial process and proposed amendments, BPA’s financial situation, and reports from biologists Vaughn Paragamion (IDFG) and Bob Hallock (USFWS) on the advantages of implementing a burbot operation this year given the weather forecast. Bob Hallock asked the group to consider whether listing could be avoided if the operation was implemented and whether the species might be listed if the operation is NOT implemented. BPA then proposed another alternative operation. IT turned the issue back over to TMT with the understanding that the new proposed BPA alternative operation should be discussed from a technical standpoint. The burbot biologists reiterated that the preferred operation would be to maintain flows at 7.3 kcfs for as long as possible, with a minimum of 45 days. BPA’s proposal suggested a 37 day operation at 7.3 kcfs, or a longer operation at a higher outflow. While the burbot biologists on the phone did not feel that their needs would be met with BPA’s proposed alternatives, they would like to see some sort of operation that might be beneficial to the species. No consensus was reached on this issue. Sue Ireland, Kootenai Tribe, strongly suggested that whatever burbot operation is to be implemented be first discussed with Montana, who was not represented on the call.*

ACTION: *BPA and USFWS will continue to work to find a more optimal operation that is cost-neutral and more beneficial to burbot. If no other alternative is found, then BPA’s “preferred operation” will be implemented with a steeper ramp down from full powerhouse at the end of December to get to 7.3 kcfs as soon as possible.*

Chum Operations Update:

Oregon reported results from a chum survey done yesterday. The report indicated that there are many species spawning. Oregon requested that the tailwater be increased immediately to a targeted 11.5’ elevation, with a range of 11.4-11.6’. The Action Agencies agreed to the targeted tailwater elevation, with a wider range to allow operational flexibility. Further increases in elevations will need careful consideration dependent on weather and water supply conditions.

ACTION: The chum operation, effective immediately, was increased to a target 11.5' tailwater elevation at Bonneville, with an operating range of 11.3-11.7'. The operators will attempt to maintain the target as close to 11.5' as possible.

Oregon Comments to the WMP Fall/Winter Update:

Ron Boyce distributed Oregon comments to the fall/winter update and asked the Action Agencies to append them to the update. Comments addressed chum spawning flows and Spring Creek spill.

Next Meeting, December 4:

Agenda Items:

- Vernita Bar
- CRITFC Review of 2002
- Spill Exceedances for 2002 – Laura Hamilton and Ron Boyce
- IT Guidelines

Other:

- AFEP is holding its Annual Review on November 18-21 at the World Trade Center in Portland.
- TMT has been extended a special invite to the Lake Roosevelt Forum on April 23. Shane Scott will give further details at the next TMT meeting.
- Paul Wagner handed out preliminary survival estimates for juveniles to show the type of information that is being collected. More detailed information will be provided at future TMT meetings, including methodology and actual numbers for the entire season.

1. Greeting and Introductions

The November 13 Technical Management Team meeting 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. Libby Burbot Operation Discussion.

Silverberg noted that the burbot operation and its associated System Operational Request were discussed at the last face-to-face meeting of the TMT; at that meeting, BPA offered a counterproposal, which various parties requested additional time to study. David Wills said Sue Ireland of the Kootenai Tribe and others working closely with the burbot had studied the BPA proposal and had discussed it with BPA; various ideas have been floating back and forth, he said, so I'll ask Bob Hallock to discuss them.

Hallock said the main problem has been trying to get an additional week of low burbot flows during the third week in December; we're hoping to get some additional Libby outflow now to ensure that the Libby flood control elevation is achieved by

December 15, he said. Basically, he said, nine years of monitoring tells us we need an extended period of low Kootenai River flows in order to get burbot in position to spawn. What we're looking for is a minimum of 45 days of low Kootenai flows from mid-December through the end of January, he explained – somewhere in the neighborhood of 7.3 Kcfs from Libby. If we don't begin this operation soon, said Hallock, we'll be in a situation where we need to go to full powerhouse discharge from Libby for an extended period. We're hoping for some operational flexibility, he said, but unless something has changed at Bonneville's end, we haven't found it. IDFG's Vaughn Paragamian said that, from his agency's perspective, 120 days of low flows in the Kootenai would be optimal, 90 days would be acceptable and 45 days is the absolute minimum needed.

Steve Kerns of Bonneville said his agency's concern is the cost of this operation, specifically, the fact that the Libby releases are worth more in December, when power prices will be higher, than they are in November. He said Hallock had suggested some ways that Bonneville might minimize the cost of the burbot operation, specifically, through changes to the ramping rates specified in the BiOp. The conclusion we came to is that if we're going to manage to a worst-case flow scenario, we need to start picking up Libby outflow now if we're going to do a burbot operation this year, Kerns said. The cost of the operation, from Bonneville's point of view, is somewhere between \$500,000 and \$1.3 million, depending on the price of power, he said. As Scott Bettin stated last week, because of BPA's financial situation, we're just not willing to go there right now, Kerns said.

Henriksen said the Corps had put together several modeling scenarios showing how much Libby might need to draft, and when, if two weeks of 7.3 Kcfs Libby outflow is to be provided starting in mid-December. Essentially, if we assume the current forecast is correct, we would need to increase Libby outflow to full powerhouse capacity starting November 20 and hold that until December 17. We ran additional scenarios higher-than-average and lower-than-average project inflows, just to provide bookends to the operation, she explained. The Corps' concern about all of these scenarios is that running at full powerhouse capacity leaves zero operational flexibility, Henriksen said. If we were to get a rain event around Christmas, which happens frequently at Libby, we would be left with no flexibility in our end-of-December flood control point, effectively precluding a burbot operation.

The bottom line is that the operation Bonneville is proposing offers a good chance of achieving flows within the range requested in the SOR for 37 of the 45 days, said Kerns. There are no guarantees, however, Henriksen observed – in January, we'll have a new water supply forecast for Libby, and we will calculate a January 31 flood control point and operate to meet it.

So it's all sounding very uncertain, Silverberg said. What I'm hearing, in terms of the proposal from BPA, is an operation that has a good chance of achieving the requested burbot flow of less than 10 Kcfs for 37 of the 45 days requested in the SOR, as long as there are no additional requirements for flood control, she said.

The group then devoted a few minutes of discussion to the prospects for a decision to list the burbot as threatened or endangered. Hallock said that IDFG's and the

Fish and Wildlife Service's Bonneville-funded research has yielded a significant amount of data to date; what that information tells me, he said, is that burbot are in even worse shape than sturgeon were before they were listed. In other words, he said, we feel there is a genuine biological need out there, and we would like to begin addressing it as soon as possible. Paragamian added that IDFG's burbot research has been policy-reviewed, scientifically reviewed and published in scientific journals; there is no doubt in my mind, he said, that burbot are in worse shape than sturgeon were prior to their listing.

Kerns replied that the direction he has received from Bonneville's policy staff has been clear and consistent over the past several weeks – they feel they have not been given enough information to determine whether or not this species meets the Fish and Wildlife criteria for listing as threatened or endangered. If that can be demonstrated, he said, then that needs to be done. Hallock suggested that Bonneville review the listing decision for sturgeon and compare the criteria used in that decision with the information available on burbot. The rules haven't changed, he said.

Sue Ireland said the Kootenai Tribe believes that, given the current forecast, this is a year when the burbot operation is doable. Despite Bonneville's financial situation, she said, there is a real opportunity here to implement a conservation agreement in lieu of listing. Such an agreement would allow for significantly more flexibility in the recovery of the species, she said; Bonneville could well enjoy more benefit from that flexibility in the future than they would enjoy if they just say no to this operation in 2002. The alternative to listing is a conservation agreement, Hallock added, but that would need to be based on some certainty of implementation.

The discussion continued in this vein for some minutes; Kerns reiterated that he has not been given the flexibility to agree to anything other than the operation he proposed earlier in today's meeting. Ultimately, Silverberg observed that, although parties on all sides of this issue had tried very hard to consider one another's point of view, there doesn't appear to be much flexibility to do anything other than BPA's preferred operation, which could provide flows within the SOR range on 37 of the 45 days requested. Kerns clarified that what BPA is committing to under this proposal is not a modified burbot operation; rather, it is a power operation that looks, at this point, as though it will be able to match the burbot flow request for a good part of the month of December. At Paul Wagner's request, Kerns agreed to crunch the numbers to see whether it would be feasible to begin the proposed operation two weeks earlier; Henriksen said that should not be a problem, from the Corps' standpoint.

Is there anywhere else to go from here with this issue? Silverberg asked. David Wills said that, from the Fish and Wildlife Service's perspective, this issue should be elevated for resolution at the IT level. Silverberg agreed to frame the question for IT consideration; it was agreed to convene an IT conference call for 1:30 Thursday, November 14.

3. Chum Operations Update.

Boyce reminded the group that, at last Friday's TMT conference call, the action agencies decided to continue to provide an 11.3-foot tailwater elevation at Bonneville. It was further agreed to discuss the November 12 chum survey results at today's meeting, said Boyce. An ODFW representative (identified only as "Wayne") reported that, during yesterday's survey, field crews saw 128 live adult chinook, nine live chum and 46 chinook redds in the main channel along Pierce Island. We also took a look at Woodward Creek on the Washington side, he said, and saw quite a few coho spawning at the mouth of Woodward Creek. In the channel break between Ives and Pierce Islands, crews saw no chum, but 159 live adult chinook, 85 chinook redds and two live adult coho.

The most interesting area was below Hamilton Creek, said Wayne; crews saw 76 live adult chinook, 40 live adult coho and 174 live adult chum. They also saw 14 chinook redds, 14 coho redds and 35 chum redds, and sampled the following dead spawned-out salmon: 74 chinook, 15 coho and four chum.

Boyce said that, given the number of adult spawners in the area and the very confined space in which they have to spawn, the salmon managers are very interested in achieving a higher Bonneville tailwater elevation as soon as possible. Average daily flows have been over 130 Kcfs, he said, but a lot of that water is being pushed out at night. Flows are being kept purposely low during the day, he said, adding that NMFS and BPA discussed this issue yesterday. Kerns replied that the action agencies are willing to go to an 11.4-foot-11.6-foot operating range at the Bonneville tailwater, targeting 11.5 feet, beginning today.

Boyce said that, in the salmon managers' view, 11.5 feet is the absolute minimum that should be provided at Bonneville; they would prefer a higher tailwater elevation. This is going to be a very large chinook and chum run this year, he said; although the 11.4-11.6-foot tailwater range is fine for right now, we would like to reserve the right to re-assess the operation later this month as more information comes in. That's fine, Kerns replied.

Boyce also spent a few minutes going through ODFW's comments on the spring/summer update to the 2003 Water Management Plan. Oregon's comments are available via the TMT homepage; please refer to this document for details.

4. Next TMT Meeting Date.

The next meeting of the Technical Management Team was set for Wednesday, December 4 at the Corps' Northwestern Division headquarters in the Custom House. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle, Bonneville contractor.

TMT ATTENDANCE LIST

NOVEMBER 13, 2002

Name	Affiliation
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Donna Silverberg	Facilitation Team
Ron Boyce	ODFW
Paul Wagner	NMFS
Tony Norris	Reclamation
David Wills	USFWS
Cindy Henriksen	COE
Steve Kerns	BPA
Colin Beam	PPM
Robin Harkless	Facilitation Team
Suzanne Cooper	BPA
Richard Cassidy	COE
Julie Ammann	COE
Laura Hamilton	COE
Scott Boyd	COE
Russ George	WMCI
Mike O'Bryant	Col. Basin Bulletin
Rudd Turner	COE
Tina Lundell	COE