

COLUMBIA RIVER REGIONAL FORUM
Technical Management Team
Conference Call
December 1, 2003
Facilitator: Donna Silverberg

The following is a summary of the process discussion between members of the Technical Management Team on 12/01/03. The notes are not intended to be a verbatim account of the meeting nor do they serve as the official “record”. They are intended to highlight discussion points, decisions, and actions.

12/3 TMT Field Trip:

TMT members discussed logistics for the upcoming TMT field trip this Wednesday, December 3rd. Folks that are interested should meet either at NOAA for a ride (at 8 am), or at the boat ramp at Beacon Rock at 9 am. Others are welcome to meet at the Charburger in Cascade Locks from 12:30-2 pm for a post-field trip TMT discussion. Anyone who would like to walk around the sites (rather than stay in the boat) during the tour is strongly encouraged to bring appropriate attire (hip waders, etc.).

BPA Request for Zero Flow at Snake River:

Cathy Hlebechuk, COE, informed the group that historical data for Snake River flows from December 1-February 29 was made available as a link to today’s TMT agenda. The data listed the times per hour that Snake River flows were below 1 kcfs from Dec.-Feb. during the last two years. Scott Bettin, BPA, requested zero flows in the Snake River for a 24-hour period to provide BPA with flexibility for cost effective operations. He requested information on the biological impacts to steelhead by implementing a zero flow operation.

Chris Ross, NOAA, offered that 100-150 returning adult steelhead passed Lower Monumental per day from November 15-26. He also said that, according to studies, zero nighttime flow would have little to no impact on returning adults, and zero daytime flow would have some impact on returning adults. Scott Bettin offered that, from 2000-2002, 3-12% total hours of zero flow were operated during December-February. Cathy Hlebechuk reminded the group that the COE takes guidance from a written Water Control Manual that requires agreement with the fish managers to operate at zero flow only when there are “very few or no actively migrating fish” in the Snake River. Russ Kiefer, Idaho, said that, during the first half of December, between 335 and 6,375 adult steelhead passed Lower Granite in the previous four years.

Idaho would require a policy discussion before making a decision about changing to a zero flow in the Snake River.

NOAA agreed to a zero nighttime flow, and minimum daytime flow to accommodate adult Steelhead passage.

Oregon expressed an interest in gathering and assessing relevant data, then discussing the issue at Wednesday’s TMT meeting. Oregon is pleased that BPA is engaging with regional partners on this issue this year. Oregon does not agree to the zero nighttime flow at this time.

Nez Perce agreed with Oregon to look at the data before making any changes to operations. Nez Perce does not agree to the zero nighttime flow at this time.

USFWS is not comfortable with zero flow, but agreed to zero night time flows (if operating at zero flow is a must) and would like to look at the data before making any changes.

BPA expressed frustration that this is an old issue that was put forth early, and stalling a decision to move forward would be costly for BPA. A suggestion was made to include this issue in the Water Management Plan so TMT can plan to have the discussion earlier in future years.

Next Steps:

- The group agreed to move forward quickly to make an informed recommendation regarding BPA's zero flow request.
- The Salmon Managers will request data from the FPC, then review and discuss the data during tomorrow's FPAC meeting.
- The Salmon Managers will email the results of that discussion to [Cathy Hlebechuk and Scott Bettin](#) as soon as possible.
- The full TMT will discuss the issue during Wednesday's TMT meeting. Anyone who does not plan to attend the meeting on Wednesday should provide comments to [the COE and BPA](#) before that time.
- If a consensus is reached to move forward before Wednesday, [COE and BPA](#) should be notified so they can go ahead with the proposed operations.

Editor's notes: added edits from Rudd Turner, Corps of Engineers.

**TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM
CONFERENCE CALL NOTES
December 1, 2003
COE RESERVOIR CONTROL CENTER - CUSTOMS HOUSE
PORTLAND, OREGON**

1. Greeting and Introductions

The December 1 Technical Management Team conference call was chaired by Cathy Hlebechuk 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.

Scott Bettin began the call by noting that December 1 is the traditional date on which the action agencies can go to zero flow at the Snake River projects. We would like the flexibility to do that, beginning tonight, he said. Are you talking zero flow 24 hours a day, or zero nighttime

flow? Chris Ross asked. The Blue Book says zero flow period, Bettin replied. What is the purpose of this operation? asked another participant. To shift flow from light-load periods to heavy-load periods, Bettin replied.

Bettin asked about the biological impacts of such an operation. Cathy Hlebechuk noted that, last year, after December 1, the Snake went to zero flow (1 Kcfs or less) on an as-needed basis, but only from midnight to 6 a.m., and only through February 29. Ross noted that there was a two-week outage at Lower Monumental beginning November 15; video counts showed 100-150 adult steelhead per day passing Lower Monumental during that period. Greg Haller said 50-150 adult steelhead, primarily from the Clearwater, are passing Lower Granite currently on their way upstream to spawn. There are also juvenile Clearwater fall chinook overwintering in the Lower Granite pool, before outmigrating next spring, Haller said. Would going to zero flow impact them? Bettin asked. If juveniles are migrating, then zero flow obviously stops their migration, replied Ross -- if they're overwintering, then we'll see them next spring. Other studies have shown that zero nighttime flow is not a detriment to adult steelhead passage at this time of year, he added.

Hlebechuk read the relevant passage from the Water Control Manual, which permits zero Snake River flow on a limited basis during this time of year, when only a few adult steelhead are passing the Snake River projects daily, during nighttime hours and weekends. This is what we're using for project guidance right now, she said.

*Editor's note: here is the specific passage from the Snake River water control manuals. Lower Granite, Lower Monumental, Little Goose and Ice Harbor have the same passage. "From December to February, "zero" minimum project discharge is permitted on a limited basis. Under an agreement between the Corps of Engineers and the fishery agencies, zero riverflow is allowed for water storage during low power demand periods (at night and on weekends) when there are few, if any, actively migrating anadromous fish present in the Snake River...Water stored under zero riverflow conditions may maximize power production from the Columbia River Basin system, but zero riverflow operations are not recommended at *, when fish are actively migrating in the Snake River."*

**Project name in water control manual is same as project; i.e. in Lower Granite manual it is "Lower Granite", in Little Goose manual it is "Little Goose", etc.*

Is there other input we need on this issue? Bettin asked. It seems to me that the question of what is "few" is open to interpretation, said Russ Kiefer; in looking at the data from the past four years, we've seen between 334 and 6,000+ adult steelhead passing Lower Granite during the first two weeks in December. Counting at Lower Granite stops on December 15, he said, so we don't have a clear picture of the fish passage situation after that date. Kiefer said he will need to check with policy personnel at IDFG before he can make a call on what constitutes "few." Do I understand correctly that you need salmon manager concurrence with this operation? he asked. Not necessarily, Bettin replied – at this point, however, we're asking for your input.

Bettin noted that, in 2002, the Snake went to zero nighttime flow during only 13 percent

of the available hours from December 1-February 28; in 2001, it was 6 percent of the time; during 2000, 3 percent of the time. Haller said the Nez Perce Tribe isn't a big fan of zero flow, even at night, because there are still adult fish migrating through the system. Ross said NOAA Fisheries is willing to support zero nighttime flow, but is not willing to support zero Snake River flow during daytime hours, even on weekends, because daytime zero flow delays adult passage but zero nighttime flow does not. So a delay of a day would be a significant biological impact? Bettin asked. I'm not going to say so, Ross replied.

Kiefer reiterated that he would like to discuss this issue with others at IDFG before agreeing to support the zero nighttime flow operation. Bettin observed that IDFG's Steve Pettit agreed to the zero nighttime flow operation last year; he added that he had hoped to begin the zero nighttime flow operation tonight. Ron Boyce said that, once again, all of the relevant information is not on the table; there is still a lot of uncertainty and conflicting data about even the zero nighttime flow operation. He suggested that it would make sense to look more closely at the available historic data, current passage numbers and the potential effects of the zero flow operation on incubating steelhead eggs in the Lower Snake before making this decision. Haller said he agreed with Boyce.

Bettin suggested that BPA be given the flexibility to implement the zero Snake River flow operation, given the fact that it has never been implemented more than 13 percent of the time, until the TMT can then revisit the data Boyce is requesting at Wednesday's TMT meeting. Kiefer said he is most concerned about the potential impacts of this operation on fall chinook redds below Lower Granite. Ross said the evidence, as he understands it, is that fish pick areas with good upwelling conditions to spawn. As long as the redds are watered up during the zero-flow period, he said, egg to smolt survival should remain high.

How much fluctuation would there be in, say, the Little Goose tailwater elevation during a typical zero-flow event? Ross asked. A few tenths of a foot, Bettin replied. In response to another question, David Wills said the Fish and Wildlife Service would not oppose going to zero flow during nighttime hours at this point. Given that fact, said Silverberg, is anyone uncomfortable with BPA going to a zero nighttime flow operation at the four Lower Snake projects, on an as-needed basis, beginning tonight? Haller said the Nez Perce Tribe would not be comfortable with beginning the zero flow operation before the TMT has an opportunity to discuss all of the relevant data. It was agreed that Wills will ask the Fish Passage Center to assemble some historic and current adult steelhead passage data for Lower Granite.

In the meantime, said Silverberg, it sounds as though the TMT is going to be unable to reach a consensus recommendation on the zero nighttime flow operation at the Lower Snake projects at today's meeting. We will discuss it further at Wednesday's TMT meeting, she said.

Bettin noted that this is a very old issue, one that comes up every year. I asked that we implement this operation two weeks early, he said, yet here we are discussing it today as if it's a surprise issue. Rudd Turner noted that one new twist this year is that BPA is asking for the flexibility to implement the zero flow operation 24 hours a day, something that the data does not support. What if we took that off the table and went to zero nighttime flow only? Bettin asked. I think we asked that question earlier, and there were some parties who were uncomfortable with that operation until they've had a chance to look more closely at the available data, Silverberg

replied. Bettin said that, to him, some parties appear to be seeking to delay the implementation on the zero flow operation this year.

I hear your frustration and can understand where it's coming from, said Silverberg – can we get everyone's commitment to move forward with this as expeditiously as possible, and to try to make a decision on this issue on Wednesday? Silverberg asked. Yes, was the reply. In response to a question, Bettin said the potential financial impact of this operation, for Bonneville and the region, is approximately \$50,000 per night of implementation, the approximate value of moving 400 MW of energy from light-load into heavy-load hours.