

**TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM
CONFERENCE CALL NOTES
May 7, 2004
COE RESERVOIR CONTROL CENTER - CUSTOMS HOUSE
PORTLAND, OREGON**

1. Greeting and Introductions

The May 7 Technical Management Team conference call 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 Henriksen at 503/808-3945.

2. Lower Snake Project Operations to Pass Large Numbers of Fish.

Turner said the Corps had requested this conference call to discuss the issue of how to pass the large numbers of juvenile fish now moving down through the Lower Snake system. He noted that there was a special RSW operation at Lower Granite on Wednesday night; spill was reduced during nighttime hours at Bonneville by 25 Kcfs, to 100 Kcfs, in consideration of energy equivalency.

On Thursday, fish numbers at Lower Granite were low enough to allow them to transport the fish, so no spill operation took place last night, Turner continued. Fish numbers have now increased again, said Turner, and we wanted to discuss the most appropriate operations for fish and power at Lower Granite, Little Goose and the Lower Columbia projects. There was a conference call this morning concerning this issue, said Turner; we were unable to reach consensus, and so we wanted to bring this issue before the full TMT.

Dave Hurson provided an overview of current passage conditions in the Lower Snake. Hurson noted that there is a difference in how the small and large fish are treated at Little Goose; at Lower Granite, the fish are all just lumped together. We have four barges available, of either 50,000 or 23,000 pound fish capacity. At Lower Granite, they've just started to fill the third of 10 raceways – the numbers aren't really coming in yet. At Little Goose, we can load up to 40,000 pounds of fish today; we can then hold any additional fish over until the next barge arrives tomorrow. I'm going on the assumption that the Lower Granite barge will be filled tonight, he said; the question is, what happens if we collect so many fish at Little Goose that they exceed the capacity of today's barge and tomorrow's barge?

The group discussed loading numbers and raceway capacity (60,000 pounds at Little Goose). Hurson noted that, even if fish are held over beyond the day's barge capacity, they would only stay in the raceways for a total of 24 to 36 hours. He said he isn't worried about raceway capacity at Little Goose. Dave Statler said he is concerned with transporting these fish at maximum capacity, given the stresses they have already undergone. And are you making sure that the last fish you're collecting are the ones that are held over until the next day? David Wills asked. Yes, Hurson replied, and they will be the first fish on the barge the next day.

How is the species composition running between steelhead and chinook? Bob Heinith asked. At Lower Granite, we collected 603,000 smolts today, about 360,000 of which were hatchery and wild steelhead, Hurson replied. Yesterday, it was three-quarters chinook and one-quarter steelhead at Lower Granite and two-thirds chinook and one-third steelhead at Little Goose. Today, they collected about 175,000 chinook and 157,000 steelhead at Little Goose, said Margaret Filardo -- the split is now closer to 50-50. The group devoted a few minutes of discussion to how the fish at Little Goose are treated according to size; Hurson said the large and small fish are held and loaded separately. In response to a question from Turner, Filardo said the number of steelhead collected at the Lewiston trap has increased tenfold in recent days, which gives some indication of the steelhead numbers currently moving down the Clearwater system into Lower Granite pool.

In response to a question from Henriksen, Hurson said his concern is that fish will arrive in such large numbers at Little Goose that they will take up more than two days' barge capacity -- we've only seen 1.8 million of the 8 million+ steelhead that are estimated to be moving down the Snake River this year, he noted. Hurson said that, in his opinion, the Lower Granite plan worked well the other day. My suggestion is that, when we hit the 40,000 pounds of fish collection for the day, we begin spill at Little Goose -- 16 Kcfs of bulk spill at 8 Kcfs per bay, he said.

Wills said the salmon managers discussed this issue earlier this afternoon and developed a quick SOR laying out a recommended strategy to handle large numbers of fish at Little Goose. That recommendation is to use a trigger -- the one Dave has described would work -- to begin spill at Little Goose, following the BiOp criteria for fish passage, since this is an emergency. Specifically, we recommend initiating the BiOp spill pattern during these emergencies, in order not to exceed the capacity of the collection and holding facilities at Little Goose. We feel that the federal agencies have an obligation to fulfill their BiOp requirements and do what is best for fish, Wills said.

From NOAA's perspective, said Paul Wagner, we did not sign off on this SOR, primarily because we're willing to live with something less than the BiOp spill operation, in part because of the action agencies' insistence that this be revenue-neutral. I'm not sure how that concept got introduced into this equation, said Wagner; the Regional Forum process is focused on BiOp implementation, and I'm not sure why revenue neutrality should be an overriding concern.

John Wellschlager replied that, to BPA's knowledge, an emergency does not yet exist. With respect to revenue neutrality, it creates problems for Bonneville to suddenly reduce generation, in terms of meeting load and in terms of financial hardship. We thought the operation we arrived at during Wednesday's TMT meeting worked well, he said; if doing an exchange hour per hour isn't acceptable, perhaps we could make it up by reducing spill over the next couple of days at John Day or another project. I understand, said Wagner, but the BiOp is intended to maximize survival, and a no spill condition at the Snake River projects would be detrimental at this point in the passage season. He added that he has analyzed the financial impact of Wednesday's Lower Granite operation, and it was very small -- about \$35,000. Wellschlager replied that energy prices go up significantly when BPA has to replace lost generation on very short notice.

The group discussed the offsets that were provided following the 2001 power emergency. Scott Bettin noted that all of these projects have functioning bypass facilities; why, all of a sudden, aren't we using them? Why not collect to a certain point, then use the bypass system, then, once that capacity is exceeded, spill? The best available science, based on adult return rates, tells us that spill passage returns more adults than bypass, replied Russ Kiefer. Right now, based on the flow year we're in, we've agreed that maximum transport is the best option for fish. But at a time when we're overloading our transport capacity, available science indicates that spill is better for the fish than collection and bypass, Kiefer said. The bottom line is that, by this weekend at Little Goose, they will be collecting more fish than they can safely transport. The question is, can we use adaptive management to do what's best for fish and spill then, rather than collecting and bypassing them? Kiefer said.

My perception is that, while we were able to craft an operation that worked for everyone on Wednesday night, people have come to this meeting asking for something more, said Wellschlager. The problem is that, while Bonneville wants to make this revenue-neutral, the salmon managers would like to make this biologically neutral, Kiefer said. And we have proposed adjusting spill at other projects in the coming days, Wellschlager replied. I appreciate that, and in that spirit, perhaps some sort of an agreement can be worked out, said Kiefer.

So the Corps has proposed that, as soon as fish collections at Little Goose reach 40,000 pounds in a day, spill would begin at Little Goose at a volume of 16 Kcfs, over two bays, and would continue until 6 a.m. the following morning Silverberg observed. Is that acceptable? The salmon managers have submitted an SOR requesting spill up to the BiOp level, which would be about 45 Kcfs, Wills replied. Doesn't that BiOp spill volume apply only when we're spilling 100% of the fish? Wellschlager asked. It wouldn't be 100%, Wagner replied. But it would be significantly more than the fish numbers that are currently passing via spill? Wellschlager asked. Correct, Wagner replied.

Everyone is aware that the salmon managers' request is for BiOp spill volumes – 45 Kcfs – at Little Goose? Ron Boyce asked. Yes, Silverberg replied – we're just trying to find a compromise that works, given the constraints everyone is under. Boyce reiterated that, from the salmon managers' perspective, given the fact that we are within the fish passage plan criteria, the BiOp spill operation has the best chance of avoiding a detrimental situation for fish, without the need for this operation to be revenue-neutral. Statler said the Nez Perce Tribe agrees with Oregon's perspective. Boyce suggested that revenue neutrality is a policy issue, not one that can be decided at TMT. Wills agreed, saying that the salmon managers, BPA and the Corps have laid out their recommendations; he suggested that this issue be elevated to IT as soon as possible.

Turner noted that, in the absence of TMT consensus on this issue, the operation laid out in the fish passage plan is to bypass fish once collections begin to overwhelm the capacity of the collection and transport systems. Cindy Henriksen reiterated that a state of emergency does not yet exist; it is not an emergency if the raceways fill up with fish – that happens almost every year. She noted that the salmon managers had reviewed and agreed with the operations laid out in the Fish Passage Plan. Statler replied that the salmon managers have put forward their recommendations in the spirit of adaptive management, based on the best available science.

The group discussed whether or not an emergency actually exists at this point; Turner said that, in his view, it does not, because project personnel are not seeing unusual levels of fish mortality. We convened this call because we're trying to get contingency procedures in place, because we see a potential problem, he said. And given the good fish passage conditions we currently have in the Snake River, and the numbers of fish currently moving down through the system, we would like to keep the fish in the river, said Wills – this is not a normal year.

So what is the action agencies' response to the SOR? Boyce asked. At this point, there are three options on the table, and we do not have consensus, said Silverberg. That means it's up to the action agencies to make the call. Again, the fallback position is to follow the Fish Passage Plan and bypass the fish if raceway capacity is exceeded at Little Goose, Turner said. Actually, I think I've heard that all of the salmon managers, and even BPA, agree that some level of spill would be best for those fish, said Kiefer – even Bonneville has agreed that they might be willing to provide some volume of spill, as long as the operation is revenue-neutral. I would hate to see the Corps discard that consensus and bypass the fish, he said. In the absence of an agreement at TMT, we would have no choice, Turner said.

The discussion continued in this vein for some minutes. Ultimately, Henriksen asked whether BPA is willing to provide the requested spill. Given the fact that we have a contingency plan in place, and can't reach resolution on the revenue neutrality issue, I would have to answer no, Wellschlagler replied. Given that fact, is there a desire on anyone's part to elevate this issue to the IT? Silverberg asked. The salmon managers unanimously agree that the issue of revenue neutrality is inappropriate in a situation such as the one we're in, Wills said. With respect to what happens over this weekend, he said, there is no disagreement that it is up to the Corps to make the operational decision.

The discussion returned to the question of what constitutes an emergency. Silverberg observed that, although BPA may disagree, the salmon managers clearly feel that an emergency exists in the sense that there is the potential for serious harm to the fish this weekend. Hurson reiterated that procedures are in place to deal with an emergency, even if it occurs over the weekend; again, he said, we're seeing 0.25% mortality at Little Goose, currently, and it's one of our safest facilities for bypassing fish. Project personnel are monitoring the situation closely, he added, and will continue to do so.

Ultimately, the Wills said the Fish and Wildlife Service would like to elevate this issue. The TMT framed the issue to be elevated to the IT as follows: "Are adaptive management strategies for improved fish survival not identified in any plan required to be revenue-neutral if they are to be implemented? Also, is it appropriate for technical personnel, rather than policy-level personnel, to make such decisions?" Silverberg said she will put this question in written form and will distribute it to the TMT and IT membership for discussion at IT as early as possible next week.

So to summarize, said Silverberg, there is consensus among the salmon managers that spill would be the best strategy for fish, if the fish numbers arriving at Little Goose exceed the capacity of the collection and transportation facilities at that project, but there is not consensus

on the volume or duration of that spill, nor is there consensus that this operation should be revenue-neutral to Bonneville. In the absence of this consensus, Corps personnel at Little Goose will closely monitor the situation over the weekend and, if an emergency arises, take the input received at today's meeting into account, and take the steps they consider appropriate.

With that, today's conference call was adjourned. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle.

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