

# COLUMBIA RIVER REGIONAL FORUM

## TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM

December 8, 2004

### 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.

#### **Vernita Bar Update:**

Paul Wagner, NOAA, gave a report for Chris Carlson, Grant County PUD, who was not able to be on the TMT call today. A survey was done on November 28<sup>th</sup> that indicated the protection level should remain at 65 kcfs. This level will remain as such for the rest of the year, and no more surveys will be taken.

#### **Issues for Further Discussion from 2004:**

TMT members are interested in furthering discussions about key lessons learned from 2004 to help with management in 2005. Issues listed so far included low flow years, communication, and transportation.

**ACTION:** The facilitation team will gather information from TMT members about additional topic ideas and thoughts on approach for discussing the issues. This will be an agenda item at the next face to face meeting on January 5<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Chum Update:**

Ron Boyce, Oregon, reported on the Ives Island survey results through December 7<sup>th</sup>. Chinook and chum are still spawning – 130 chum and 186 chinook were counted in the area. Numbers are similar to those in 2003. The chum operation appears to be successful this year. Dave Wills, USFWS, reported on Hamilton Springs and Hardy Creek live chum surveys. On 11/19, zero were found at Hardy and 29 at Hamilton. On 11/24, 4 were found at Hardy and 60 at Hamilton. On 12/03, 40 were found at Hardy and 134 at Hamilton.

BPA, the COE and BOR discussed raising the day time minimum tailwater elevation at Bonneville to provide flexibility to manage the increase of water in the system. They requested that the elevation be raised by .5', which should not impact spring refill targets.

**ACTION:** TMT members agreed to the proposed change to the tailwater, which will be changed effective today (12/8). The tailwater elevation will range from 11.7-12.1'. The operation will maintain the highest redds unless/until TMT determines that it is impractical to do so.

#### **Water Management Plan Comments:**

The COE has received comments from the BOR. The water quality section will be

updated by Friday. CRITFC, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, USFWS and NOAA are planning to submit comments by the end of the year. Question: Will the WMP be brought in line with the new BiOp (e.g. transportation operations)?

**ACTION:** Paul Wagner will review the WMP for consistency with the 2004 BiOp and report to the TMT at the next meeting.

It was noted that it might make sense to wait for the final agency record of decision before finalizing the WMP. It was also suggested that the process of developing the plan could be improved to increase a sense of ownership.

**Lower Snake Projects:**

Cathy Hlebechuk, COE, summarized last year's TMT coordinated agreement for operations at the Lower Snake River projects. The projects were operated at zero nighttime flow for up to six hours between 6pm-6am, from December 1-the end of February. Per this agreement, the action agencies planned to begin the zero flow operation at all four projects as soon as possible. Idaho raised the question: If significant fish movement occurs in February, would the action agencies end the zero flow operation early to accommodate them? The COE responded that no counts will be done until March and encouraged the salmon managers to review the University of Idaho study that indicates that there may be no effect of zero nighttime flow on migrating fish. It was noted that failure to detect an impact does not necessarily mean no impact. Idaho believes that if fish are moving, the operation should change to a more 'normative' river to accommodate their movement.

**COE Building Move:**

The COE will be moving from the Customs House to a new location on December 18<sup>th</sup>: 1125 NW Couch St, Conference Room 4A34 in the Brewery Blocks 4 Building. There will be tighter security so folks are encouraged to come early to TMT meetings. Also, if you are a member of the public and plan to attend the TMT meetings regularly, contact Cathy Hlebechuk at 503-808-3942 so she can register your name into the security system. If you are not in the system, you will need to call Cathy, Cindy Henriksen, or Rudd Turner if you plan to attend the meeting. The first TMT meeting in the new building will be held on Wednesday, January 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Status of Operations:**

*Reservoirs:* Cathy Hlebechuk, COE, reported that Libby is currently at elevation 2429', with inflows of 5 kcfs and full powerhouse, 25 kcfs, out. The COE is operating the project to reach elevation 2411' by the end of December. Albeni Falls is passing inflows, at 20 kcfs out. Dworshak is filling slightly, at elevation 1532.8'. Lower Granite is operating at 20 kcfs in and out. The RSW at Lower Granite will be moved to Ice Harbor in February. The field trip to view this RSW was scheduled for Tuesday, December 14<sup>th</sup> at 8 AM. Anyone interested needs to contact Cathy Hlebechuk – space is limited! Bonneville is releasing 140-150 kcfs. The tailwater range, effective today, will be 11.7-12.1'. Grand Coulee is at elevation 1286.5'. Hungry Horse is at elevation 3541', and will remain so through the end of December.

*Fish:* Cindy LeFleur, WDFW, reported that Washington posted a pre-season outlook for 2005 passage on the Fish Passage Center web page. The forecast so far predicts that numbers will be down from '03 and '04.

*Power:* The power system is currently operating to manage the influx of water.

*Water quality:* There was nothing to report at this time.

*Other:* Tony Norris reported that the BOR is moving its offices, and all employees will be without computer and phone communication during the week of December 20<sup>th</sup>. Phone numbers will remain the same.

**TMT Meeting Schedule:**

There may be a TMT call on chum on **December 15<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 am**. There will be no TMT meeting on December 22<sup>nd</sup>. The following face to face meeting will be held on **January 5<sup>th</sup>**. There will be a discussion on the WMP: transport and spill triggers. A process meeting will also be scheduled for sometime in January. The action agencies and salmon managers have or are scheduled to have planning meetings before that time.

Upcoming Meeting Dates: 1/19, 2/2, 2/16, 3/2, 3/16, 3/30

***1. Greetings and Introductions.***

Today's meeting, held at the Corps' Reservoir Control Center in Portland, was chaired by Cathy Hlebechuk and facilitated by Donna Silverberg. The following is a summary (not a verbatim transcript) of the items discussed and decisions made at that meeting. Please call Hlebechuk at 503/808-3939 with questions about these notes.

***2. Vernita Bar Update.***

Paul Wagner reported that the last Vernita Bar ground redd count was conducted on November 28 to determine the 2004-'05 critical flow elevation. The results of the survey were as follows:

Redd Count by Flow Level

60-65 Kcfs: 55 redds  
65-70 Kcfs: 18 redds  
Above 70 Kcfs: 6 redds  
Total redds: 79

Wagner noted that redds were not counted below 60 Kcfs, because the 2004-'05 critical elevation had already been set at 65 Kcfs. Since the November 28 survey, 23 more redds have been counted within the 60-65 Kcfs elevation band, nine new redds have been documented between 65 and 70 Kcfs, and three new redds above 70 Kcfs. The

protection level will remain at 65 Kcfs for the remainder of the year. He added that there will be no further redd counts this year.

### ***3. Issues for Further Discussion from 2004 Lessons Learned.***

If you recall, said Silverberg, we discussed this issue at the last TMT meeting; she asked whether the other TMT participants had had an opportunity to give the lessons learned topic further thought. I think it deserves further thought, said Wagner, but the salmon managers have had no formal conversations about it, as yet. Silverberg said she will contact the TMT members by phone in advance of the next face-to-face TMT meeting on January 5 to discuss their concerns. Some of the items that have been touched on include communication, the fact that there are often larger forces at work than TMT during low-flow years; and the limits on TMT's operational flexibility in low-flow years.

### ***4. Chum Update.***

Ron Boyce provided this update. He noted that, in the most recent spawning ground survey, on December 7, field personnel observed 186 fall chinook redds and 132 chum redds, as well as 29 live fall chinook and 49 live chum. Spawning, in other words, continues in full swing. Most of the spawning is taking place in Section 2, at the confluence of Hamilton Creek. Things are progressing as expected, and this year's operation appears to be successful, said Boyce. David Wills added that Fish and Wildlife Service crews have been surveying chum spawning at Hardy Creek and Hamilton Springs; the most recent survey, on December 3, found 40 live chum in Hardy Creek and 134 live chum in Hamilton Springs. In response to a question from John Wellschlager, Boyce said the total spawner numbers for 2004 are mirroring those for 2003 pretty closely.

Wellschlager said BPA has been talking with the Corps about the possibility of raising the Bonneville tailwater by 0.5 feet, given the large slug of water that is expected to be coming downstream as a result of the current precipitation event. We think we can do that without impacting spring refill targets, he said; in any event, we're going to need some tools to manage through this. You can't constrain flow to 11.5 feet below Bonneville? Boyce asked. Not for the coming week, at least, Wellschlager replied – we're running out of storage space at Grand Coulee. You would increase the tailwater elevation by half a foot and maintain that through emergence? Wills asked. Yes, Wellschlager replied, noting that the half-foot increase in Bonneville tailwater elevation translates into a 5 Kcfs increase in Bonneville outflow, to about 130 Kcfs. The group devoted a few minutes of discussion to the BiOp language regarding chum operations, specifically, its requirements with respect to the restrictions on tailwater elevations through emergence.

Wellschlager said that, currently, to manage the tailwater elevation, tributary/local flow and tidal effects must also be factored in with Bonneville outflow. We're also looking at the anticipated increase in Bonneville inflow, and at the decreasing storage capacity at Grand Coulee, he said. One option, to deal with these factors, is to raise the

minimum tailwater elevation, Wellschlager said; we may also need to have some excursions outside the nighttime tailwater fluctuation constraint of 7 feet. We're proposing to raise the current tailwater range from 11.3-11.7 to a range of 11.7 to 12.1 feet, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., effective today. And it would stay that way through February? Cindy LeFleur asked. It would stay that way through the end of spawning, and after that, we'll do what the BiOp tells us to do, said Wellschlager – if we exceed the 135 Kcfs threshold discussed in the BiOp, we'll have a little more operational flexibility through emergence. In response to another question, Wagner said the position of the highest redd is the first criteria the TMT will look at in determining the minimum incubation flow.

After a few minutes of further discussion, no TMT objections were raised to this proposed change in operation.

##### ***5. Water Management Plan Comments.***

Hlebechuk said that, so far, she has received comments only from the Bureau of Reclamation on the draft 2005 Water Management Plan. Kyle Martin said Bob Heinith is still working on CRITFC's comments. Boyce said ODFW was sidetracked by the issuance of the new BiOp and Updated Proposed Action. Both ODFW and CRITFC said they will submit their comments by Christmas week. WDFW, IDFG and the Fish and Wildlife Service also plan to submit comments some time in the next two weeks.

Boyce asked why the 2005 WMP is not fully consistent with the UPA, particularly with respect to transportation. The action agencies replied that, until the Records of Decision are issued, it isn't known precisely how they will respond to the UPA, operationally. We're still studying it, in other words, said Wellschlager. In response to a question from Boyce, Wellschlager said Bonneville plans to issue its ROD on the UPA by mid-December. Shouldn't we wait to finalize the Water Management Plan until we know how the action agencies are going to respond to the UPA? Boyce asked. That makes sense from our perspective, Wellschlager replied. However, said Hlebechuk, we need to continue to make progress on the draft WMP.

Boyce added that, in his view, the process for developing the annual WMP can be improved; it's not much of a collaborative effort, he said, which means that the salmon managers have very little ownership of that document. When all you're asking us to do is to submit comments that will be put into an appendix, that doesn't give us a lot of incentive, he said.

##### ***6. Lower Snake Projects – Annual Winter Operational Flexibility.***

Hlebechuk said that, in the Water Control Plan, the Lower Snake projects have gone to zero nighttime flow from December 1-February 29, traditionally. TMT discussed that last year, and we reached an agreement to implement zero flow for no more than six hours out of eight between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. Our plan is to go to that operation at all four projects immediately, although Ice Harbor will need to generate at night to provide heat for the powerhouse.

Russ Kiefer noted that, in some years, when conditions warm up in February, significant movement of steelhead is seen. If we see those fish start to move in February, is there some flexibility to alter this proposed operation? Kiefer asked. Hlebechuk replied that counting won't begin at the lower Snake projects until March 1, when counting will begin at Lower Granite. She added that a 1998 study by the University of Idaho concluded that limited periods of zero nighttime flow during February did not significantly impact steelhead migration, although there was some evidence of delay. The fish ladders will be out of service for maintenance from January 3-February 18 at Lower Granite and from January 3-January 27 at Little Goose, added Larry Beck.

Kiefer noted that, just because there is no counting doesn't mean there are no fish moving; if conditions warrant, he said, it would be best if we can go to a more normative river condition.

Silverberg observed that there is some time between now and February; she encouraged the salmon managers and the action agencies to think further about this issue, and come prepared to discuss it, if necessary, at the January 5 TMT meeting.

### ***7. Corps of Engineers Move Logistics.***

Hlebechuk noted that the Corps' move to their new quarters in the Brewery Blocks 4 building (1125 NW Couch St.) will take place on December 17. The TMT meetings will be held in conference room 4A34. Security at the new building will be tighter; visitors will need to pre-register through Hlebechuk, then, on meeting days, check in at the security desk on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor to obtain a security badge. She suggested that the TMT participants arrive early for the first meeting, until more is known about the increased security procedures.

### ***8. Status of Operation.***

The Corps reported that Libby was at elevation 2429 feet as of midnight last night, with 5 Kcfs inflow and 25 Kcfs outflow, full powerhouse discharge. The December final forecast shows 99% of normal for the Libby basin, which puts the December 31 flood control target at 2411. The project has been weekly load shaping, and will continue to adjust outflow to reach elevation 2411 by December 31. Albeni Falls continues to pass inflow, about 20 Kcfs, operating within 0.5 feet of its winter elevation limit. Dworshak: 1532.8 feet, filling nicely, releasing minimum outflow. Lower Granite's average outflow has been in the 20 Kcfs range over the past week; outflow may increase to near 30 Kcfs with the current precipitation event. Bonneville outflow has been in the 140-150 Kcfs range, on average, over the past week. Reclamation said Grand Coulee is currently at elevation 1286.5; the current elevation at Hungry Horse is 3541, and the project is releasing 1.4 Kcfs.

LeFleur said she has released a "first look" pre-season forecast of chinook and coho numbers for 2005; the bottom line is that it looks as though pretty much everything will be down in 2005, compared to 2004. The forecast is available via the FPC homepage.

Wellschlager said there are no significant problems to report with the power system; the action agencies are attempting to manage the ongoing precipitation event and the higher flows that will be coming down the system.

**9. Next TMT Meeting Date.**

The next Technical Management Team meeting was set for Wednesday, January 5, then every two weeks thereafter. It was agreed that, if necessary, the TMT will convene via conference call next Wednesday, December 15. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle.

TMT Meeting Participant List  
December 8, 2004

Name	Affiliation
Donna Silverberg	Facilitation Team
Robin Harkless	Facilitation Team
Cathy Hlebechuk	COE
Tony Norris	USBR
Paul Wagner	NOAAF
Mike O'Bryant	CBB
Ron Boyce	ODFW
Russ Kiefer	IDFG
Cindy LeFleur	WDFW
Dave Benner	FPC
Kyle Martin	CRITFC
Russ George	WMCI
John Wellschlager	BPA
Nic Lane	BPA
Laura Hamilton	COE
Ruth Burris	PGE
David Wills	USFWS
Larry Beck	COE

Glenn Traeger	Avista
Tom Le	PSE
Bruce MacKay	Consultant
Margaret Filardo	FPC