

COLUMBIA RIVER REGIONAL FORUM

TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM Conference Call

March 9, 2007

FACILITATOR'S SUMMARY NOTES ON FUTURE ACTIONS

Facilitator: Robin Harkless

Notes: Erin Halton

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.

Spring Creek Hatchery Mortality / SOR #2007-3

An emergency TMT conference call was convened on Friday, March 9 at 3:00 to discuss SOR 2007-3. The SOR is linked to the agenda on the TMT web page. Smolt monitoring reports showed an 8% mortality rate, normally around 1.5%, in the Spring Creek smolts collected at Bonneville Dam on March 9. Susan Guttenburger, (USFWS, Lower Columbia River Fish Health Center), said that the mortalities examined showed no de-scaling or sign of virus or bacteria, and that all of the released fish had passed their detection tests before leaving the hatchery. BPA reported nothing unusual going on at Bonneville, other than the un-installed TIES cranes and some excavation work at the Rock Creek/Stevenson site. All TMT members present on the call (NOAA, BPA, COE, USFWS, ID, and BOR) expressed concern over the mortality rate.

Dave Wills, USFWS, said that the salmon managers drafted SOR #2007-3 with the intent of moving the fish away from the Bonneville power house and providing a spread the risk operation to try to decrease mortalities. The request was for immediate 85 kcfs minimum spill at Bonneville dam, continuing until 95% of the hatchery releases passed (likely around Wednesday, 3/14). A poll was taken on TMT member's position on SOR #2007-3:

- Oregon: Not present on the TMT call but signed on to the SOR
- Washington: Not present on the TMT call but signed on to the SOR
- Idaho: Did not sign on to the SOR, but did support the request
- CRITFC: Did not support or oppose the SOR
- NOAA: Signed on to and supported the SOR
- USFWS: Signed on to and supported the SOR
- BPA: Wanted additional information to better inform a decision
- BOR: Did not oppose the request, and deferred to the COE
- COE: Needed more information before making a decision

Cindy Henriksen, COE, noted the COE's concern for the fish mortalities, and suggested that if new information was presented that indicated the bypass system at Bonneville was causing the mortalities, the COE would change course to implement a spread the risk operation. With the current information, the COE believed the best operation would be to continue operating the B2 corner collector and not to provide spill at the project.

Gary Fredericks, NOAA, joined the TMT call with an update: the numbers of mortalities coming through Bonneville had dropped, and the hatchery fish appeared to have been dead for more than one day. When asked, he responded that the cause of mortalities seemed to pass and that additional spill would not likely provide a benefit to the remaining passing fish.

ACTION/NEXT STEPS:

Fredericks said he planned to further investigate – examine the bypass facility, use float balloons, and further inspect upriver. Dave Wills, USFWS, agreed to coordinate with Jerry McCann, Fish Passage Center, to track mortalities over the weekend. TMT members agreed to be notified via email following further monitoring and to leave their schedules open for an ‘as-needed’ follow-up call on Monday, March 12th at 11 a.m.

Update: Cathy Hlebechuk, COE, sent a follow-up email to TMT on 3/10:

- * Bonneville Dam project manager Jim Mahar and his team made some small changes at the Bonneville second powerhouse on the advice of an agency fishery biologist.
- * The sample size of fish collected overnight was 65 fish with 2 mortalities.
- * In a call with Dave Wills (USFWS) this morning he confirmed the numbers. We all agreed the passage index is diminishing, and the incidence of mortalities is down.
- * With this, the Corps will stay the course and continue to operate the Bonneville second powerhouse corner collector without additional spill at the spillway.
- * The second Spring Creek Hatchery release group of 1.16 million fish is expected to start arriving at the dam later today and continue over the next four days.
- * We decided not to initiate a TMT call today for further discussion, but if either of us receives any new information for the remainder of the weekend, we'll share it with each other and decide where a TMT call is warranted.

The next face to face meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 14th at 9:00 am. Note there is a new security system at the COE, so arrive early to sign in!!

**Columbia River Regional Forum
Technical Management Team
Emergency Conference Call
March 9, 2007**

1. Welcome and Introductions

Today's TMT emergency conference call was requested by NOAA Fisheries in response to an increase in mortality of Spring Creek hatchery Chinook collected in the samples at the Bonneville Juvenile Monitoring Facility during March 8 and 9 sampling.. The call was chaired by Cindy Henriksen (COE) and facilitated by Robin Harkless, with representatives from COE, USFWS, BPA, NOAA-F, CRITFC, BOR, the FPC, and the Spring Creek National Fish Hatchery on the line. The following is a summary (not a verbatim transcript) of the topics discussed and decisions made during the call. Anyone with questions or comments about these notes should provide them to the TMT chair or bring them to the next regular TMT meeting on March 14.

2. Bonneville Dam Operations (SOR #2007-03-March 9, 2007)

Rich Domingue (NOAA-F) introduced this request to provide a minimum 85 kcfs of spill at Bonneville Dam to provide listed Spring Creek Hatchery subyearling fall Chinook with an alternate route of passage from the juvenile bypass system, continuing the spill until the bypass system has been ruled out as the source of increased mortality. Smolt monitoring personnel at the dam reported 4.5% mortality on March 8 and 8% mortality on March 9, compared to a typical mortality rate of 1 to 1.5% for these fish. No immediate cause has been identified. Until we know what's going on, Domingue said, it would be prudent to spread the risk and spill fish to minimize the number of fish collected.

There were 30 mortalities, which looked like fresh mortalities, taken from the bypass facility, Susan Gutenberger (Fish Health Center) reported. No physical trauma, wounds or descaling were apparent. The fish had recently eaten, which makes illness highly unlikely. Whatever killed them – a toxin, suffocation – probably struck quickly, she said. The center is running tests to rule out viruses and bacteria, but Gutenberger was 95% sure the fish didn't die of disease. Fish collected at Spring Creek Hatchery looked healthy, with no signs of disease or mortality. If they died of a virus, we'll know within 3-4 days, but otherwise the results of testing won't be available for another 2 weeks, Gutenberger said.

The fish went through a pre-release health inspection and were apparently healthy when they left the hatchery, Larry Marchant (Spring Creek National Fish Hatchery) said. In the March 9 sample, Jerry McCann (FPC) said, at least four fish had missing eyes, and two had severed heads, with another few fish showing possible injuries.

Russ Kiefer asked, is anything unusual going on at the Bonneville 2nd Powerhouse? Only the absence of TIEs due to a broken crane this year, but while having the TIEs in place might direct more fish through the powerhouse, it shouldn't affect how they go through it, COE representatives said.

A participant asked, how will the COE make its operational decision, given that all the salmon managers virtually support spill (or, in the case of CRITFC, don't oppose it)? Onsite information from NOAA Fisheries biologist Gary Fredricks, currently on his way to the dam, is needed to make an informed decision, Cindy Henriksen (COE) said. If issues are found in the bypass system, options could be explored for closing the bypass. Until we have further information showing the bypass is a problem, the decision is to maintain current operations through the corner collector, Henriksen said.

Domingue suggested thinking in terms of a lesser rate of spill if 85 kcfs isn't feasible. Gutenberg asked whether toxic substances used somewhere around the dam or gate wells can be ruled out as a cause of mortality. That's a possibility, particularly with construction happening in the area, Henriksen said. Gutenberg asked whether the COE had already made its decision on the SOR or wanted to discuss the information heard today. We made a decision with the previous SOR regarding the Spring Creek Hatchery, Henriksen said. The COE is highly concerned about the mortalities, but won't change its current course of operations without further information regarding the cause.

Harkless asked the TMT members to air their views on the SOR. The purpose of the SOR was to buy time and err on the side of caution until the cause of the deaths can be identified, David Wills (USFWS) said. The 1.2 million additional subyearling Chinook released from the hatchery today will reach the dam in about 28-30 hours, or mid-day on Saturday, he said.

Power demands are usually lower on weekends, which would allow more spill, Russ Kiefer (IDFG) said. When more information comes in over the weekend, it will be difficult for the TMT to respond quickly. He urged the COE to spill over the weekend to protect this listed stock, then reconsider on Monday in light of new information.

Robyn MacKay (BPA) agreed with Henriksen that more information is needed before altering the dam operations. There are construction activities in the Bonneville forebay to clean up a landslide, which could have caused the mortalities, Henriksen said. Without spill, maybe fish are holding in the forebay longer than they should, Margaret Filardo (FPC) said. She emphasized that the deaths over the past two days appeared to be very recent.

MacKay asked how mortality rates in the bypass system compare with those for fish on other passage routes. The bypass system offers the only

opportunity to collect and observe fish, a participant said. BOR's biggest concerns are, how would the spill affect Grand Coulee storage and the ability to maintain a 13' tailwater for chum redds, while meeting the April 10 upper rule curves, John Roache said. However, Reclamation does not oppose spill and defers to the COE on how they will decide to operate Bonneville Dam.

Domigue asked, what process will the COE go through to garner additional information, and what might cause the COE to choose spill? If we choose a different operation than the corner collector, and found mortality reduced at the bypass, with the condition of fish returning to expected levels, COE would reduce spill again – but that decision hasn't yet been made, Henriksen said.

Harkless called for a vote of TMT members on the SOR. NOAA signed and supports it, Domingue said. IDFG didn't sign the SOR but supports the request, Kiefer said. WDFW and ODFW representatives signed the SOR, although they didn't participate in today's conference call, Gutenberger noted. USFWS supports the SOR, Wills said. BPA would like to see what additional information comes to light, MacKay said. BOR doesn't oppose spill and defers the decision to the COE, Roache said. CRITFC can't support a spill request because of an agreement between BPA and the Tribes but doesn't oppose it either, Kyle Dittmer said.

At this point, Gary Fredricks (NOAA) joined the conversation by cell phone, reporting from the dam where he had just looked at a fish sample. All the mortalities looked old except one fish, he said. Two things were happening: the number of fish coming through the dam had dropped dramatically in the past few hours, and those coming through looked like they'd been dead for more than a day. This caused Fredricks to think that whatever trauma they encountered had ended, but he still couldn't say why the fish died. He saw no signs of injury or any indications of a problem with the bypass system, and suggested that something in the reservoir might have killed them. The mortality rate in the sample he had just observed was 25%.

Fredricks found a few dead fish in the collection channel. He said he would pass water balloons through the bypass system to test it for anything that might cause injury, even though he doubts that's the source. There were a few more gulls than usual scavenging half a mile upriver, but not at the dam itself. Asked whether he believed spilling would reduce mortality, Fredricks said no. The live fish coming through the bypass were unharmed, and typically the injury rate is three times the mortality rate if there's a problem with debris or a broken screen. The most likely explanation he could offer was that the fish ran into trouble before they got to the dam.

If this theory is correct, there should be a decline in sampling mortality on Saturday, Filardo said. Dave Benner (FPC) and Fredricks agreed to be in contact

over the weekend. David Wills (USFWS) offered to be the emergency connection between TMT and the COE if anything of note came to light from tomorrow's sampling.

Based on available information including Fredricks' report from the dam, Henriksen said the COE would continue to operate the dam with just the B2 corner collector as planned. If mortalities continue to be excessive, or harm to fish is found, the COE may request another TMT call or consider spilling.

Liz Hamilton, a member of the public, asked, if fish are coming into contact with debris from a landslide, would they continue to be guided to the corner collector? If so, would spill solve that problem? She expressed concern that the decision to forego spill was initially based on low mortality rates, which is not the case now.

3. Schedule Next TMT Conference Call or Meeting

The TMT tentatively agreed to another conference call at 10 am on Monday, based on what is learned over the weekend. Henriksen said she would send an email to all TMT members if Dave Wills reports any new findings over the weekend. Henriksen reiterated that at this point, COE didn't plan to add a spill operation at Bonneville Dam, but that decision is subject to review over the weekend. If there is no conference call Monday, the next TMT meeting will be Wednesday, March 14. This summary prepared by BPA contractor Pat Vivian.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>
Cindy Henriksen	COE
Bernard Klatte	COE
Jim Adams	COE
John Kranda	COE
Rod Turner	COE
Susan Gutenberger	Lower Columbia River Fish Health Center
Margaret Filardo	FPC
Jerry McCann	FPC
Dave Benner	FPC
David Wills	USFWS
Rich Domingue	NOAA-F
Gary Fredricks	NOAA-F
Robyn MacKay	BPA
Dan Spear	BPA
Dan Feil	BPA
Scott Bettin	BPA
Tony Norris	BPA
Kyle Dittmer	CRITFC
John Roache	BOR
Larry Marchant	Spring Creek National Fish Hatchery

Russ Kiefer
Liz Hamilton

IDFG
Public