

# COLUMBIA RIVER REGIONAL FORUM

## TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM

November 4, 2009 Meeting

### FACILITATOR'S SUMMARY NOTES ON FUTURE ACTIONS

Facilitator: Erin Halton

Notes: Christa Leonard

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.

#### **Review Meeting Minutes for October 21, 2009**

Dave Wills, USFWS, provided an edit surrounding fish counts in the Operations review of the official meeting minutes; Steelhead count was for all Steelhead, not just "wild" as erroneously noted. Regarding the Chinook counts; Last year's count of 10,000 referred to the Jack Fall count, specifically. No further changes to the facilitator notes or official meeting minutes were made during the meeting and both sets will be considered final once the above changes are made and posted to the web.

#### **Lake Pend Oreille Operations**

Dan Feil, COE, reviewed the current operations for TMT. He noted the target elevation of 2051.'5' was reached yesterday, 11/3, a few days ahead of schedule to accommodate a unit 2 outage. Elevation is currently at 2051.45' and will hold between 2051' – 2051.5' through the end of December. Feil reported that unit 2 will undergo annual maintenance beginning 11/24. Russ Kiefer, ID, offered his congratulations on a job well done and is looking forward to a great spawning season.

#### **Chum Operations**

Dan Feil, COE, directed TMT members to a document posted as a link to the agenda that detailed survey data as of yesterday, 11/3. He noted that two fish were observed. Paul Wagner, NOAA, directed TMT members to the Fish Passage Center site's adult passage data. 40 fish have been observed at Bonneville, which suggests that chum are in the area. Per the BiOp, the first week of November and chum in the area are indicators for beginning chum operations; FPAC, members suggested starting operations this week if possible.

Feil confirmed that the COE is tentatively planning to begin operations this Friday 11/6 at 0600 hours. He reminded TMT of the specifications that were used to guide 2008 chum operations: an elevation of 11.5' was the target, with an 11.3-11.7' operating range and higher flows and excess water passed at night. Feil said that for 2009, the Action Agencies would like to propose a similar operation with a 1700-0600 hour "nighttime" range. Tony Norris, BPA, clarified that proposed operations are based on the last teletype of 2008. He added that limits/ range will be assessed as they move ahead and as expected precipitation builds over the next few days. He further noted the presence of

water in the Hamilton Creek channel as of last week. Norris then asked if there was any radio tagging data to review; Wagner said he would see if the report data was available.

**Action/Next Steps:** Feil noted COE will send out a teletype this afternoon with the operation details: Chum Operations to commence Friday 11/6 at 0600 hours. This item will be reviewed at the TMT meeting scheduled for 11/18 or sooner if requested.

### **Autumn Treaty Fishing Review**

Kyle Dittmer, CRITFC, reviewed detailed of this most recent fishing season. He noted the season was especially long (six weeks) and that four SORs were submitted: 2009 C5-C8. He then referred TMT to a graph detailing COE compliance, posted as a link to the agenda. He noted this year had lower than normal flows, with an average of 70 kcfs. He detailed compliance for all the affected projects and reported that there were no complaints, accidents or mishaps on the river reported to law enforcement officials. Catch numbers are as follows; Fall Chinook: 83,000, Steelhead: 41,000, Coho: 14,500. Dittmer noted that CRITFC management would like to discuss operations for next year as the low flows caused a different set of platform hydraulics for fishers. They'd like to analyze what constitutes adequate minimum flows and what mechanical issues at the three Lower Columbia River projects keep COE from complying with the 1' hard constraint request. And the possibility of augmenting flows during Treaty Fishing periods. Dan Feil, COE, offered to pass the message on to COE representatives involved with the Fish Accords. Tony Norris, BPA, asked what time frame CRITFC is inquiring about. Dittmer responded that both day and night operations are in question.

Dan Feil and Doug Baus, COE, presented a document posted as a link to the TMT agenda detailing COE compliance statistics, posted as a link to the agenda. He noted that operations have been adequate the last few years and they felt that compliance of hard constraints went well. Baus noted COE was only off one hour due to the fuel barge grounding at Hood River. Feil asked Dittmer what criteria CRITFC's SOR specified hard constraints were based on. Feil further noted that the operations the Corps has been implementing throughout the season are providing good conditions for tribal fishers and that no issues or problems with the operations and conditions the Corps has provided have been identified. Dittmer indicated that while monitoring is better, not all issues get reported. CRITFC would like to see inter-agency talks develop, as it's been 11 years since the last field meetings.

**Action/Next Step:** Federal Partners will discuss issues surrounding Treaty Fishing through the Fish Accords meetings.

### **Vernita Bar Update**

Tony Norris, BPA, reported that spawning surveys showed enough redds found to initiate spawning. Official date was set as 10/20.

**Action/Next Step** Additional surveys are scheduled ahead, with the final Survey planned for the Sunday before Thanksgiving. This item will be on the agenda for the 11/18 TMT meeting.

## **Operations Review**

**Reservoirs:** Libby was at elevation 2440.5', with inflows of 4.3 kcfs and outflows of 4.5 kcfs. Albeni Falls was at elevation 2051.45', with inflows of 10.9 kcfs and outflows of 20.6 kcfs. Dworshak was at elevation of 1516.3' with inflows of 1.4 kcfs and outflows of 1.6 kcfs. Lower Granite daily average flows were 25.5 kcfs. McNary daily average flows were 118.5 kcfs, Bonneville average flows were 121 kcfs. Grand Coulee was at elevation 1288.6'. Hungry Horse was at 3544.7' with inflows around 1.0 kcfs and outflows of 1.0 kcfs.

Karl Kanbergs, COE, noted that Albeni Falls outflows were down to 14 kcfs as of 11/4. The group discussed the Libby draft methodology and that the December early bird forecast is used to determine drafts. Dworshak pre-season forecast was noted as being 104% normal, which is average but subject to change and based on SOI. Kanbergs also provided a brief update on The Dalles Spillwall; Block #35 was done today with 10 more pre-cast blocks to go. It is projected that 14 of 15 segments will be done by the end of November and the project expected to be done before the end of March.

**Fish:** Paul Wager, NOAA, referred TMT to information posted to the Fish Passage Center site. He noted that there is no juvenile monitoring at this time as facility has closed down and transport has stopped for the season. Adults are trending down: Bonneville- Fall Chinook running less than 100 per day, Jacks less than 10 per day and Steelhead 25-100 per day (wild 2 per day). He noted agencies are very optimistic for year. Cindy LeFleur, WDFW, noted that the Spring/Summer forecasts will be available in December. The Fall Coho forecast will be available in February. The group discussed how forecasting data is analyzed. Dave Wills, USFWS, asked to look at Lower Granite numbers; Fall Chinook trending down while Steelhead still going strong at 310,000 and counting.

**Power System:** Nothing to report.

**Water Quality:** No comments to discuss.

**Other/Announcements:** The TMT Year-End-Review has been scheduled for Friday, 12/11 at the City of Portland Building in downtown Portland at 1121 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The final agenda will be shared with the full TMT distribution list as soon as it is ready. Dan Feil noted that Water Management Plan comments are due next Friday 11/13. The Fall/Winter update is also up for review comments requested by 12/4, and the final version scheduled for release 1/1/2010. Dan Feil announced that he has taken a job with the Corps' Northwestern Division fish policy group. Feil will continue as the TMT chair until the December 11 year-end review, at which time Steve Barton will take over as chair thereafter, with Doug Baus as the alternate chair representing the Corps.

**TMT Schedule:** The next meeting is scheduled for 11/18.

Agenda items may include:

- Notes Review
- Chum Operations
- Vernita Bar update

**Columbia River Regional Forum  
Technical Management Team Meeting  
November 4, 2009**

**1. Introduction**

Today's TMT meeting was chaired by Dan Feil (COE) and facilitated by Erin Halton (DS Consulting), with representatives of COE, BOR, USFWS, NOAA, BPA, CRITFC, Washington, Idaho and others participating. The following is a summary (not a verbatim transcript) of the topics discussed and decisions made at the meeting. Anyone with questions or comments about these notes should provide them to the TMT chair or bring them to the next meeting.

**2. Review Meeting Minutes for October 21, 2009**

David Wills (USFWS) made two revisions to the official minutes posted for October 21, under Operations Review - Fish:

- Regarding steelhead, the third sentence beginning, "This year's count of 620,000 wild steelhead," refers to all steelhead; delete "wild."
- Regarding fall Chinook, the sentence reading, "Last year's fall Chinook count was 10,000," refers to fall Chinook jacks; add "jacks."

**3. Lake Pend Oreille Operations**

Lake Pend Oreille reached 2,051.45 feet elevation on November 3, a few days earlier than the SOR requested, Feil said. Project operators scheduled the operation early so they could take unit 2 offline because it was malfunctioning. Annual maintenance for unit 2 will begin on November 24, which should have no affect on the lake elevation. Project staff plan to maintain elevation 2,051-2,051.5 feet through the end of December. Russ Kiefer (Idaho) expressed appreciation for how well this operation has been managed.

**4. Chum Spawning Operations**

Chum surveys to date for the 2009 spawning season show that 2 fish were observed yesterday, as depicted in a graph linked to today's agenda. According to data on the FPC adult passage site, 40 chum have been observed at Bonneville Dam. Within the past week, 30 fish have been seen passing the dam, although no spawning locations above it were documented.

These findings suggest sufficient presence of chum in the area to initiate the chum spawning operation, Paul Wagner (NOAA) said. Field surveys give another indication that chum have arrived. The BiOp says the chum operation should start during the first week of November or when chum are observed in the area. FPAC recommends the 2009 chum spawning operation begin this week.

The COE plans to begin the 2009 chum operation at 6 am this Friday, November 6, Feil replied. TMT will review this operation at its next meeting November 18.

For the 2008 chum operation, the COE kept the Bonneville daytime tailwater within the range of 11.3-11.7 feet elevation, targeting 11.5 feet, Feil recalled. Last year's river flows resulted in a need to release excess water, so from 3 pm to 6 am, the tailwater elevation was allowed to rise as high as 18.5 feet. The Salmon Managers expressed a possible preference to accept the risk of having redds established at a higher elevation than 11.5 feet if some of the excess water were released during daytime hours, rather than allowing the nighttime elevation to rise excessively, Tony Norris (BPA) recalled. If a high flow situation recurs this year, it will be referred to TMT for further discussion and resolution. Heavy rains are expected over the next 4 days.

### ***5. Autumn Treaty Fishing Review***

Kyle Dittmer (CRITFC) gave a review of the 2009 treaty fishing season operation, which spanned 6 weeks this summer. CRITFC submitted four SORs to the Action Agencies requesting two conditions – 1-foot elevation bands and stable pool elevations – throughout the weeks of treaty fishing. Compliance with CRITFC's 1-foot elevation band request, which the COE adopted as a soft constraint, was very high despite the summer's low flows of around 70 kcfs:

- Bonneville Dam – 100% compliance, a 2% increase over 2008
- The Dalles Dam – 83% compliance, a 3% decrease from 2008
- John Day Dam – 100% compliance, a 6% increase over 2008.

Compliance with the 1.5-foot hard constraint was also very high:

- Bonneville Dam – 100% compliance, same as 2008
- The Dalles Dam – 97% compliance, a 1% decrease from 2008
- John Day – 100% compliance, a 1% increase over last year

Overall, the 2009 treaty fishery was a successful operation, Dittmer said. In terms of CRITFC's second request regarding absolute pool fluctuations:

- Bonneville – Had swings of 0.1 to 0.4 foot, compared to 0.1 to 1.4 foot in 2008
- The Dalles – Had swings of 0.1 to 1.8 feet, a slight increase over 2008
- John Day – Had swings of 0.1 to 0.3 feet, about 0.5 foot less than 2008

Elevation fluctuations have been reduced, Dittmer reported. Although The Dalles seemed to have the most variability, tribal fishers have not complained to date about the elevation fluctuations. There were no accidents or mishaps on the river.

Overall, the 2009 treaty fishing season was highly successful. Tribal fishers caught a total of 83,000 fall Chinook, 41,000 steelhead and 14,500 coho. CRITFC managers are nonetheless concerned about what could be done during future years like 2009 to mitigate the impacts of low-flow hydraulics on fishing platforms and nets. Dittmer conveyed a request that agency and CRITFC representatives meet to discuss options. He asked what specific mechanical and physical barriers prevent the COE from adopting a 1-foot hard constraint on elevation fluctuations at the three lower Columbia projects as requested during tribal fishing season.

Tony Norris (BPA) asked whether CRITFC envisions flow augmentation as a possible response to low flows. Over the past few years, a lot of effort has gone into managing the river for high spring flows, which tends to result in lower flows during August and September. Feil asked what drives CRITFC's request for a 1-foot elevation band as a hard constraint instead of 1.5 feet, as the operation provided appears to have been adequate, with no complaints. The 1-foot elevation band request originated in a 1998 meeting between agency officials and tribal fishers, Dittmer recalled. A lack of complaints doesn't necessarily mean there were no problems. He suggested another field meeting soon, possibly in Cascade Locks or Hood River. CRITFC and the Action Agencies will follow up on these concerns.

Doug Baus (COE) presented a spreadsheet showing that of the 2,544 hours specified in tribal fishery SORs, for 2,543 of those hours elevations at the three lower Columbia projects remained within the 1.5-foot hard constraint. The one-hour exception was due to a grounded fuel barge near Hood River.

## **6. Vernita Bar Update**

Norris gave a report on the Hanford reach fall spawning operation on behalf of Russell Langshaw (Grant PUD). A November 1 spawning survey found enough redds in the 36-50 kcfs elevation band to declare initiation of spawning. Another survey this weekend will determine whether there are any redds in the 50-55 kcfs elevation band. Initiation of the Hanford reach fall protections for spawning has begun. Russell Langshaw will give another update on spawning protections at the next TMT meeting November 18.

## **7. Other Topics**

Norris suggested that the TMT year-end review include an update on streambed reconstruction work that's been completed recently in the Hamilton Creek area.

Karl Kanbergs (COE) gave an update on The Dalles spill wall construction, which continues ahead of schedule. The leveling slab has been poured, with 10 more pre-cast blocks to be placed over the next 10 days. When that work is done, the framework will be essentially finished. Section 11 of 15

segments should be sealed off by the end of November. The wall will be officially done in March, but it could be done earlier.

## **8. Operations Review**

**a. Reservoirs.** Grand Coulee is at elevation 1,288.6 feet, ready to supply water for the chum operation. Hungry Horse is at elevation 3,544.7 feet, with inflows of 1.0-1.5 kcfs and discharges of 1.0 kcfs. It has been slowly filling over the past few days.

Libby is at 2,440.5 feet elevation, with inflows of 4.3 kcfs and outflows of 4.5 kcfs. Wagner asked when the early season calculation of the need for flood control drafts at Libby will occur. TMT will discuss this further in December, as the methodology is developed during the first week of December.

Albeni Falls is at elevation 2,051.45 feet, with inflows of 10.9 kcfs and outflows of 20.6 kcfs. Lake Pend Oreille outflows were 16 kcfs yesterday and 14 kcfs today.

Dworshak is at elevation 1,516.3 feet, with inflows of 1.4 kcfs and outflows of 1.6 kcfs. Norris asked when the Dworshak preseason forecast will be available. It's based on the September SOI (southern oscillation index) forecast which is 0.3, Steve Hall (COE) replied. The Dworshak inflow forecast is 104% of normal for 2009, which is average.

Daily flow averages are 25.5 kcfs at Lower Granite, 118.5 kcfs at McNary, and 121 kcfs at Bonneville.

**b. Fish. Juveniles** – This is the last report on juvenile passage for the season; all monitoring facilities closed for the winter as of October 31. There was a sudden uptick in smolt passage at Lower Granite over the past few days, with 656 smolts passing on October 31. More are likely still passing, and the bypass is still operating, but there will be no more official fish counts this year. Smolt passage at Bonneville continues at the rate of a few hundred fish per day.

Adults – Adult passage is trending down as well. Fall Chinook are nearing the end of their run, down to 100 fish per day at Bonneville over the past couple days. Fall Chinook jack counts are down to less than 10 fish passing per day. Steelhead passage has dropped from around 100 fish per day to 24, with just 2 of these being wild or unmarked fish.

It's been a noteworthy 2009 season, Wagner said, with jack counts auguring well for next year's returns. The spring/summer 2010 forecast for fall Chinook and coho runs will be available in mid February, Cindy LeFleur (Washington) said. Steelhead passage is still going strong at Lower Granite, Kiefer said, with 310,000 fish passing to date.

**c. Power System.** There was nothing to report today.

**d. Water Quality.** There was nothing to report today.

### **9. Next Meeting**

The next scheduled TMT meeting will be November 18. The TMT annual year-end review will be December 11. This summary prepared by consultant and writer Pat Vivian.

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