

COLUMBIA RIVER REGIONAL FORUM

TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM

October 6, 2010 Meeting

FACILITATOR'S SUMMARY NOTES

Facilitator: Erin Halton

Notes: Robin Gumpert

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.

Meeting Minutes

The 9/29 Official Meeting Minutes and Facilitators’ Summary were open for review. Some TMT members needed more time to review the Official Minutes, so the review period will be extended and TMT will look to finalize the 9/29 and 10/6 sets at the 10/20 face-to-face TMT meeting.

NOAA Juvenile Survival Memo

Paul Wagner, NOAA, shared a memo from the NMFS Science Center with preliminary juvenile survival estimates for 2010. The final numbers, he noted, might change by a percent or two. Paul shared some of the highlights from the memo:

- Snake River yearling Chinook wild and hatchery numbers were above the 10-year average, while the Lower Granite to Bonneville reach showed a 57% survival rate – this was average, and, given the low flow year, a good percentage.
- Snake River steelhead survival, normally in the 40s and 50s percentile range, was 69% in 2009. Because of the high rate last year and the low flow conditions, it was ‘remarkable’ that survival this year was 61%. The scientists suggest the improvements to survival since 2007 were due to changes in dam operations, infrastructure modifications (e.g. spillway weirs, bird wires and The Dalles spillwall) and more in-river fish.
- Survival percentages for both Chinook and steelhead in the Columbia were about average.
- Transported fish saw the lowest percentages since 1995: Spring Chinook wilds were 38.2%, hatchery fish were 22.6%; steelhead wilds were 36.8% and hatchery fish were 34.8%.
- The highest survival percentage for Chinook was in the Lower Granite – McNary reach. The highest survival percentage for steelhead was in the Lower Granite – Bonneville reach. Sockeye from Lower Granite to McNary also showed a strong percentage.

Paul said that additional details of the juvenile survival counts would be shared at the TMT Year End Review. In response to a question, he added that NOAA will look at other survival studies to see how well they track with NOAA’s counts, as well as to evaluate

for BiOp survival standards. Finally, he said that the preliminary results would be presented and discussed at this year's AFEP review, scheduled for November 29-December 3.

Libby Operations

Doug Baus, COE, provided a summary of Libby operations to date that led to the current operation of 9 kcfs out of Libby to manage for the higher flows that had entered the basin over the last few weeks. Joel Fenolio, Seattle District COE, shared the latest model run depicting inflows and operations. The graph projected that if it were continue to operate at 9 kcfs outflows, the project would reach the targeted 2439' elevation around 10/18. The COE acknowledged that the projected date had changed again, due to inflows staying in the 9 kcfs range over the last week, but that inflows had begun to recede some over the last couple days. The current elevation was 2441.15'.

TMT discussed the possibility of ramping down outflows sooner in an effort to provide good biological conditions for a smoother, more gradual transition to lower flows.. This would move the operation away from an elevation target (2439') and focus instead on flows. They discussed the biological impacts (Jason Flory, USFWS, suggested that a gradual ramp down operation such as was being discussed would be acceptable to the project), BiOp requirements (some said the project was no longer operating under BiOp restrictions), and impacts to other operations (how would chum operations be impacted from holding Libby to the 2439' target vs. ramping outflows down sooner?).

TMT members present – Montana, Washington, NOAA, USFWS, CRITFC, BPA, Reclamation and the COE – were polled on the following new proposed alternative operation that was discussed today that could be implemented pending additional coordination: ramp down to 8 kcfs using acceptable ramp rates starting this Friday, 10/8 and then drop outflows to 7 kcfs on 10/9 and hold the project there through the end of October. TMT members present did not object to the proposed operation; however, as members said they needed to discuss the operation internally with their respective agencies to confirm support, and agreed to communicate back to the COE by mid-day on Friday 10/8.

Process next steps: The COE will coordinate internally and with TMT members not represented at the meeting today to discuss the new proposed operation that was presented at TMT today. After the coordination process is complete the COE will provide TMT with an email update on the plan that will be implemented to complete the Libby operation. The COE expects the additional TMT coordination to finalize the operation will occur via email and/or conference call by mid-day on Friday 10/8. TMT member feedback regarding the proposed operation discussed today must be shared with the COE by noon on Friday, 10/8. The COE will share an operations update at the next TMT meeting.

Albeni Falls Operations

Doug Baus, COE, shared that the COE is awaiting an SOR for Albeni Falls operations, and is currently operating to reach elevation 2057.5'. TMT will revisit this operation at their 10/20 meeting.

Autumn Treaty Fishing

Tom Lorz, CRITFC, reported that a COMPACT meeting was scheduled for this Thursday, 10/7, to discuss and determine whether to request further treaty fishing operations. Tom will email the COE with any such requests as soon as they are known.

Operations Review

Reservoirs – John Roache, Reclamation, reported on Hungry Horse and Grand Coulee. Hungry Horse was at elevation 3539.53', with 1.2 kcfs outflows; gauge work below the dam was scheduled for next week and would continue for up to a week of in-water work. While it was not anticipated to have any impacts on Columbia Falls minimums, John said he coordinated with Brian Marotz, MT FG&R and will likely start the work on Wednesday 10/13. Grand Coulee, he reported, was at elevation 1278.8'. Karl Kanbergs, COE, reported on COE projects. Libby was at elevation 2441.5', with 7.9 kcfs inflows and 9 kcfs outflows. Albeni Falls was at elevation 2060.09' with 17.4 kcfs inflows and 24 kcfs outflows. Priest Rapids outflows averaged 77.5 kcfs; McNary averaged 106.2 kcfs (higher than the previous few days); and Bonneville averaged 112.6 kcfs (also higher than previous days). Karl closed with a comment that the system had not experienced extreme low flows to any great extent this year.

Fish – Paul Wagner, NOAA, reported on the adults: Fall Chinook counts totaled 450,000 at Bonneville, with daily counts in the range of 3,500-1,700 (decreasing trend). Steelhead counts totaled 400,000 at Bonneville, with dailies ranging 1,300-485. Similar trends were seen in the Snake, with Snake River Fall Chinook counts around 1,000/day at Lower Granite (35,000 total) and steelhead total counts at 151,000; sockeye counts at Lower Granite were 2,201. Fall Chinook jacks were not tracking as strong this year as they did in 2009. Juvenile migration, he reported, was nearly done – about 1,000/day were seen at Lower Granite, from the Clearwater.

Power System – Nothing to report.

Water Quality – Nothing to report.

Next TMT Meeting: Face to face 10/20 at NOAA

Agenda items include:

- Meeting Minutes Review
- Libby Operations Update and Phase II Storage Accounting
- Albeni Falls Operations
- Water Management Plan
- Operations Review

Reminder: The BPA presentation on June high water event will be held on 10/12 at BPA. See the 9/29 TMT agenda for a link to the details.

Columbia River Regional Forum
TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM OFFICIAL MINUTES

October 6, 2010
Notes: Pat Vivian

1. Introduction

Today's TMT meeting was chaired by Doug Baus (COE) and Karl Kanbergs (COE) and facilitated by Erin Halton (DS Consulting). Representatives of the COE, USFWS, Montana, NOAA, BOR, BPA, CRITFC and others attended. This summary is an official record of the proceedings, not a verbatim transcript. Anyone with questions or comments about this summary should give them to the TMT chair or bring them to the next meeting.

2. Meeting Minutes for September 29, 2010

Review of meeting minutes for September 29 was postponed until the next TMT meeting on October 20.

3. NOAA Juvenile Survival Memo

Paul Wagner (NOAA) briefed TMT on the Science Center's annual memo containing preliminary estimates of juvenile survival in 2010. He noted that the final numbers might vary by a few percentage points, but the report gives a good idea of how PIT tagged juveniles fared this year in terms of survival percentages.

Snake River yearling Chinook salmon (both hatchery and wild) had a survival estimate of 57% from Lower Granite tailwater to Bonneville tailwater, which was above the 10 year average. From McNary to Bonneville, the estimate was 73.8% which is nothing special for that reach. However, from Lower Granite to McNary, the survival estimate of 77% is one of the highest ever seen.

Snake River steelhead had a surprisingly good estimate of 61% survival from Lower Granite to Bonneville in 2010 – much better than 2007, a similar low-flow year with a survival estimate in that reach of only 39%. Last year's estimate of 69% for steelhead was phenomenal in comparison to the typical estimates in the high 40th or low 50th percentile. One possible explanation for the big improvement in survival rates is that features added to the hydro system since 2007 – e.g. the spillway weirs at John Day, Little Goose and Lower Monumental dams; bird wires at John Day; the spill wall at The Dalles – are effective in improving survival odds. From McNary to Bonneville, an estimated 78.7% of steelhead survived in 2010, a very good number for that reach. Snake River sockeye survival estimates are close to 55% which is considered good in comparison to past results. For the upper Columbia from McNary to Bonneville, the survival estimate is 62%, nothing extraordinary for that reach.

Bill Muir of the Science Center will give a more in-depth presentation on juvenile survival findings at the TMT year-end review. Jim Litchfield (Montana) asked how these estimates relate to the BiOp performance standards of 93% and 96% survival. Wagner said this will be tracked but didn't have a definitive answer today. He noted there have been additional survival studies on the lower river from John Day to Bonneville Dam using acoustic tagged fish. Preliminary information on the acoustic tag research will be presented at the AFEP review on November 29-December 2, 2010, Dave Wills (USFWS) noted.

Transportation: Estimated percentages of yearling Chinook and steelhead that were transported from the Snake River in 2010 were among the lowest seen in the last 15 years, Wagner reported. High spill percentages accounted for much of that decline in numbers of transported fish. Preliminary estimates of non-tagged wild and hatchery spring Chinook smolts that were transported in 2010 are 38.2% and 22.6% respectively. For steelhead, the transport estimates are 36.8% wild and 34.8% hatchery smolts.

4. Libby Operations

Doug Baus (COE) gave a recap of Libby operations in recent weeks. Significant precipitation during the week of September 20 led to higher inflows than expected and an unscheduled TMT meeting on September 22 to consider alternative ways of meeting the 2,439-foot end of September elevation target at Libby. At that meeting, TMT members either supported or didn't object to a COE proposal to move the elevation target out to October 3-9 rather than meet it on September 30. The goal of modifying the operation was to minimize adverse biological impacts downstream of Libby Dam.

At the next TMT meeting September 29, the COE reported that the elevation target of 2,439 feet would be attained on approximately October 15. Today Joel Fenolio (COE Seattle) walked TMT members through the latest modeling of Libby operations, which shows the elevation target of 2,439 feet extended to October 18. Inflows however have dropped dramatically in the past few days, Karl Kanbergs (COE) reported. And current weather trends indicate there will be no rain in the interior Kootenai basin that feeds Libby reservoir.

With the September 30 BiOp elevation target collaboratively extended, TMT considered alternatives today for Libby operations until the next TMT meeting October 20.

One option the COE suggested was holding outflows at 9 kcfs until the end of this week, then ramping down over the weekend. Or, for a more gradual ramp down, the operation could target elevation 2,439 feet at the end of October by ramping down to 8 kcfs soon, then to 7 kcfs for the rest of October. The COE needed to confer internally and with other stakeholders not present at today's

meeting before committing to this specific operation. Other meeting participants also said they needed more internal discussion before casting a definitive vote.

The COE wanted to hear initial feedback from TMT members on today's new proposal to ramp Libby down to 8 kcfs on October 8, then to 7 kcfs on October 9 or 10, holding 7 kcfs out until elevation 2,439 feet is attained, pending further consultation. This led to discussion of whether a conference call on Friday, October 8, would be needed to poll TMT members in time to raise any objections before the ramp down begins. Fenolio noted the ramp rates at Libby are a maximum of 2,500 cfs per day from October 6-9.

TMT members present gave their views of the alternative Libby operation presented today:

- **Montana** – Favors a more gradual ramp down operation, targeting elevation 2,439 feet on October 31. Gave conditional approval of the COE proposal, pending internal consultation. Favored TMT notification of Libby operations via email rather than a Friday call, allowing time for any serious objections to be raised.
- **NOAA** – A ramp rate of 7 kcfs appears to be acceptable, pending confirmation that it's consistent with the BiOp. Suggested a faster ramp down to move water now into Grand Coulee reservoir for chum operations beginning November 7, but it was noted that Grand Coulee is at 1,287 feet elevation or 2 feet from full.
- **USFWS** – Supports NOAA's concept of providing water for chum. Wants to confer with the other Salmon Managers before giving definite approval of the proposal. Generally favors a gradual ramp down.
- **Washington** – No objections to proposed operation; will double-check internally.
- **CRITFC** – No objections to proposed operation; will double-check internally.
- **BPA** – Would like the project to ramp down as soon as possible. Prefers to target specific flows rather than an elevation. Doesn't expect these releases to "make or break" the chum operation.
- **BOR** – No objection to proposed ramp down.

After additional coordination internally and externally the **COE** will notify TMT via email in the next day or two regarding Libby operations. This includes a potential Friday TMT call to poll stakeholders.

5. Albeni Falls Operations

The COE is awaiting an SOR on the Lake Pend Oreille winter operation, Baus reported. Until the SOR is received, the COE will operate the project to a mid-month elevation of 2,057.5 feet. TMT will revisit this operation at its October 20 meeting.

6. Autumn Treaty Fishing Summary

The treaty compact will meet October 7 to count the tribal catch and determine whether further allocation remains under the harvest agreement, Tom Lorz (CRITFC) reported. If so, there will be 1 or 2 additional days of fishing next week. The COE will notify TMT if a tribal fishery SOR is received.

7. Operations Review

a. Reservoirs. Hungry Horse is at elevation 3,539.53 feet, discharging 1.2 kcfs. The project has been gradually ramping down this week to minimum flows. Next week outflows will be limited to 1,000 cfs to accommodate work on the gauge below the dam. At present, it looks like that operation will meet the Columbia Falls minimum flow requirement, but there's a possibility it could fall short. BOR has been coordinating this with Montana. Grand Coulee is at elevation 1,287.8 feet, close to full.

Libby is at elevation 2,441.15 feet, with inflows of 7.9 kcfs and releases of 9 kcfs. Albeni Falls is at elevation 2,060.09 feet with inflows of 17.4 kcfs and average releases of 24 kcfs. Average releases at Priest Rapids are 77.5 kcfs.

Dworshak is at elevation 1,519.0 feet, with inflows of 1.3 kcfs and outflows of 1.6 kcfs. Lower Granite outflows are 21.5 kcfs. McNary outflows are 106.2 kcfs, but ranged from 78-100 kcfs over the previous 4 days. Bonneville outflows are also higher at 112.6 kcfs compared to the range of 81-112 kcfs over the previous 4 days.

b. Fish. Adults: Fall Chinook and steelhead migration is active, with fall Chinook counts between 3,500-1,700 per day at Bonneville Dam. Passage to date is 455,000 fall Chinook at Bonneville, well above the 10 year average. Fall Chinook passage at Priest Rapids Dam was around 26,000 fish per day, which is close to the 10 year average. Spring Chinook passage at Priest Rapids exceeded the 10 year average. Steelhead passage, however, at Priest Rapids fell below the 10 year average. Steelhead passage has slowed to 485 fish per day at Bonneville, with a high count for this week of 1,300 fish per day. Approximately 400,000 steelhead have passed Bonneville so far this year, which is less than the 10 year average. For Snake River fish, fall Chinook passage is close to 1,000 fish per day, with a record-setting total of 35,000 fish, well above the 10 year average. Steelhead passage of 151,000 fish was also good but not

record-setting in the Snake. Sockeye passage is nearly done. The latest count at Lower Granite is 2,201 fish per day.

Juveniles: Passage is nearly done, with 1,000 smolts from the Clearwater River passing per day at Lower Granite and Little Goose.

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

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

3. Next Meetings

The next TMT meeting will be in person October 20. The agenda will include review of meeting minutes, a Libby operations update and phase 2 accounting item, an Albeni Falls update, the WMP comment period, and the usual operations review. Subsequent TMT meetings are scheduled for November 3, 10 and 24. The annual TMT year-end review will be on December 8.

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