

**COLUMBIA RIVER REGIONAL FORUM**  
**TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM**  
October 15, 2010 Conference Call  
**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.

**Albeni Falls SOR #USFWS/IDFG 2010-1**

Russ Kiefer, Idaho, thanked everyone for taking time to discuss the SOR for Albeni Falls operations. He described the request submitted on behalf of USFWS and IDFG to draw Lake Pend Oreille to a minimum winter elevation of 2055' by 11/15 and for the duration of the winter to support spawning kokanee as an important food source for listed bull trout. He added that a parallel effort to reduce predators in the lake in order to recover declining populations was working well. He also acknowledged that the recommendation was partially based on the number of kokanee females expected to spawn in the lake, and because of this, the request could not be submitted sooner. He suggested that the decision tree used to develop the recommendation was intended to strike a balance for all needs in the system, including power, recreation, and listed chum below Bonneville and resident kokanee in the lake.

Russ walked the group through the decision tree, which was included on the last page of the SOR. He noted that factors included in the development of the SOR included the water supply forecast (third week of September), number of female kokanee spawners, percentage of chum dewatered the previous year and the previous two years' lake elevation. Given the La Nina forecast this year, fall precipitation was expected to be above average; less than 70,000 females were expected to spawn in the lake this year; greater than 10% of the chum were dewatered last year; and the lake was held at 2051' the previous two years. All this led to the recommendation to hold the lake at elevation 2055' this year. Again, Russ suggested that the desire with the decision tree is to fairly distribute the benefits from Albeni Falls operations, and he felt that this recommendation would do that.

Paul Wagner, NOAA, said he agreed with Russ's characterization about the intent of the decision tree, and acknowledged that the recommendation was largely based on the water supply forecast. He shared observations from the gill net commercial fishery which indicate that the chum run may be early this year, and suggested that NOAA's interest is for an appropriate start date and sustainability of chum operations.

Tony Norris, BPA, asked what population of kokanee would be needed to support bull trout, to which Russ Kiefer and Jason Flory, USFWS, responded that the goal is to have abundant numbers to provide a healthy food source for bull trout and to meet sport fishery demands in the lake. Once both populations are recovered, Russ indicated that

modifications to the decision tree would be easier to accept. Tony Norris shared that rate payers pay for much of the costs for this operation and stated an interest on their behalf to understand when those costs might start to 'tail off'. Russ acknowledged that aspect and said he appreciated the region's support for this operation, and reminded everyone that Lake Pend Oreille is not a reservoir.

Tony Norris shared BPA's preference to operate the lake to a 2053' elevation; however, he said they would not object to the SOR this year. BPA would like to work with IDFG, USFWS, Kalispell Tribe and other stakeholders to find a different outcome next year. Tony added that the chum operation is supported by flow augmentation from Grand Coulee, and that an earlier start date for chum operations will have a direct impact on Grand Coulee.

Steve Barton, COE, shared the COE's perspective that the rationale supporting the recommendation was sound; he also acknowledged BPA's preference for a higher elevation and said the COE reserves the right to take in to account all compelling information to aid in operations decisions.

With that, TMT members present on the call were polled for their support of the recommendation:

- Montana – No objection
- Idaho – Supports the recommendation
- USFWS – Supports the recommendation
- NOAA – No objection
- Reclamation – No objection
- BPA – No objection for this year
- COE – Supports the recommendation

**Planned Operation:** Given no stated objections to the operation, the COE planned to draw Lake Pend Oreille to elevation 2055' by 11/15 and maintain until the end of spawning or 12/31, whichever occurs first. The lake will be held at a 1.5' operating range. The top of the winter flood control curve is 2056'.

**Columbia River Regional Forum**  
**TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM OFFICIAL MINUTES**

**October 15, 2010**

Notes: Pat Vivian

**1. Introduction**

Today's unscheduled TMT conference call was chaired by Steve Barton (COE) and facilitated by Erin Halton (DS Consulting). Representatives of Idaho, USFWS, COE BPA, BOR, IDFG, Montana, NOAA 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. Albeni Falls Operations – Lake Pend Oreille SOR-USFWS/ IDFG-2010-1**

Russ Kiefer (Idaho) began today's discussion of this SOR, linked to today's agenda. The decision tree on page 3 of the SOR has been developed to guide the complex decision every year regarding the winter minimum control elevation of Lake Pend Oreille. The purpose of this process is to make a decision that gives equal weight to multiple uses of the lake – power production, chum salmon, bull trout, recreation and the local economy.

This year, based on the decision tree analysis, the SOR requests a minimum control elevation of 2,055 feet and presents the justification for that request. Because kokanee are an important resource for listed bull trout, and kokanee abundance in Lake Pend Oreille has been declining, IDFG has been studying kokanee recovery for the past 15 years. This work consists of two main efforts: (1) reducing predation from nonnative rainbow and lake trout; and (2) improving egg-to-fry survival. Predation control efforts appear to be paying off, as 59,000 female kokanee adults were available to spawn in the lake this year.

Area residents, represented by the North Idaho Lakes Commission, would prefer an elevation of 2055 feet every winter, Kiefer explained. However, if not for chum protection flows downstream, IDFG would advocate drafting the lake to 2,051 feet every fourth winter, thus allowing wave action to clean the gravel spawning beds. Such cleaning leads to higher egg-to-fry survival in subsequent years because female spawners are able to dig deeper redds in clean gravel.

In general, it's more beneficial to provide water for chum and power during a dry fall, and the converse is true when conditions are wet. The goal of the decision tree is to provide water releases from the lake when they offer the greatest opportunity to benefit power production and listed chum salmon, and keep an extra 4 feet in the lake when it will most benefit resident fish and the local economy.

Tony Norris (BPA) asked whether a specific population of kokanee could be expected to support enough listed bull trout for them to recover. Kiefer couldn't give a precise number but explained that enough kokanee are needed to support a healthy resident fish and bull trout population – enough eventually to reopen what used to be a large recreational fishery that provided significant economic activity. Jason Flory (USFWS) agreed there's no specific number of kokanee associated with bull trout recovery. When Idaho proposes reopening the recreational fishery, Kiefer suggested that would be a good indication that kokanee have recovered in sufficient numbers to support listed bull trout as well as the sport fishery. We're not there yet, he said. BPA would like at some point to establish at what point the Lake Pend Oreille decision tree can be removed from the bull trout BiOp, Norris said.

Kiefer walked TMT through the steps in the decision tree, which starts with the National Weather Service precipitation forecast for November-January. When the forecast is above normal, as it is in this La Nina year, providing an extra 4 feet of water from Lake Pend Oreille will have less benefit for power and might actually make spawning conditions worse for chum, increasing the risk that redds will be dewatered. The second step in the decision tree is to consider whether there are more or less than 70,000 estimated kokanee spawners in the lake. For the past two winters the lake elevation has dropped to 2,051 feet, meaning the gravel at that elevation has been well cleaned and will provide good spawning conditions if it's covered this year. So keeping the lake elevation at 2,055 feet could result in higher egg-to-fry survival. The decision tree also considers the percentage of chum redds dewatered last year. A higher percentage shifts the decision toward 2,055 feet elevation.

Paul Wagner (NOAA) agreed with the recommendation as well as the decision process behind it, based on predictions that winter 2010-11 will be a wet La Nina winter. He recalled that last year, chum protection flows had to be terminated in mid-March, and more than 10% of the chum redds were estimated to have been dewatered. This year could bring a good-sized chum run, perhaps spawning earlier this year than in other years.

BPA expects to be able to provide the appropriate spawning elevation for chum below Bonneville Dam this winter. Chum spawning protection flows are expected to claim approximately half a foot of elevation out of Grand Coulee reservoir, or 3.5 feet per week. Norris explained that BPA had put together a proposal for an alternate operation at Lake Pend Oreille but has withdrawn the request and doesn't oppose the SOR as it stands. Other TMT members were polled on the SOR:

- **Montana** – No objection.
- **USFWS** – Supports the SOR.
- **NOAA** – No objection.

- **BOR** – No objection.
- **BPA** – No objection.
- **COE** – Supports the SOR.
- **Idaho/IDFG** – Supports the SOR.

Hearing no arguments against the SOR, the COE will implement it as written, managing the Lake Pend Oreille elevation to 2,055 feet, starting no later than November 15, with a half foot operating range, ending December 31 or when spawning is declared over, whichever occurs first. BPA’s request for a clearer definition of bull trout recovery was noted. Barton added that 2,056 feet elevation will be the upper end of the flood control refill curve at Lake Pend Oreille until March.

### ***3. Next Meeting***

The next TMT meeting will be October 20 at NOAA. The agenda will include meeting minutes review, Libby operations, Albeni Falls operations, the WMP, planning for chum flows and the usual operations review.

<b><i>Name</i></b>	<b><i>Affiliation</i></b>
Russ Kiefer	Idaho
David Wills	USFWS
Steve Barton	COE
Scott Bettin	BPA
John Roache	BOR
Tony Norris	BPA
Andy Dux	IDFG
Jason Flory	USFWS Spokane
Glen Trager	Iberdrola
Tom Le	Puget Sound Energy
Richelle Beck	DRA
Rob Allerman	Deutsch Bank
Russ George	WMC
Jim Litchfield	Montana
Doug Vine	Thompson Reuters
Paul Wagner	NOAA
John Hart	EWEB
Margaret Filardo	FPC