

# COLUMBIA RIVER TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM

June 13, 2012

## Facilitator's Summary

Facilitator: 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.*

### **Lower Monumental Transition from Spring to Summer Spill Operations Transition**

Discussions about this topic began at TMT on 6/6 and continued through SRWG leading up to today's TMT conference call. Doug Baus, Corps, described the memo that was linked to today's agenda as an action agency pre-decisional document with a refined operations plan based on discussions held at SRWG. Three options were considered for transitioning Lower Monumental Dam (LMN) from spring to summer spill operations:

- Align summer operations with performance standard testing and fish run timing (subyearling Chinook) per guidance in the 2010 Supplemental BiOp as well as the Fish Operations Plan. These documents provide for adjustments in the initiation of summer spill based on subyearling Chinook run timing. Because there is a presence of fish and the study test has begun, begin summer operations immediately. The 2010 Supplemental BiOp states, "The actual start of summer spill at Snake River projects will be initiated when subyearling Chinook salmon exceed 50% of the collection for a 3-day period for each Snake River project anytime after June 1 (RPA Table 2 Footnote 6)." The 2012 Fish Operation Plan states, "Spring spill operations will continue through June 20. However, fish run timing and research schedules may require an earlier transition date to summer operations to assure that research occurs during the bulk of the migration. Such changes will be coordinated through TMT," as well as, "Summer spill operations approximately June 21 through August 31 (pg. 13)."
- Follow Fish Operations Plan guidance that says to spill to the gas cap until June 20 and transition on June 21 to summer spill operations (17 kcfs).
- Third option discussed at SRWG: Use alternative criteria to transition to summer spill when:
  - the daily average river flow is  $\leq 85$  kcfs at LMN
  - and river flow is forecast (see forecast hyperlink below) to remain below 85 kcfs for 7 consecutive days at LMN, then transition to the summer spill operation at LMN
  - If the above criteria are not met by June 20, then summer spill would begin on June 21 at LMN as stated in the FOP. These criteria would only apply to the summer 2012 spring to summer spill transition at LMN, since this recommended alternative is different than transition criteria stated in the 2010 Supplemental BiOp.

Some salmon managers clarified that they did not recommend the above third option, but said it was discussed at SRWG. The memo was put together by an action agency representative in response to the discussion at SRWG. The Corps offered that involuntary spill is ongoing and

they would begin the transition to summer spill operations as soon as flows would allow (possibly using the above third option criteria if there was regional consensus). Additionally, the action agencies indicated that LMN would be moved from position 6 to 8 on the spill priority list in order to spill in accordance with the 17 kcfs summer spill operation for performance standard testing. This last issue was not discussed any further.

TMT members were polled on their level of support for the third option described above:

- Oregon – Objects to any operation that transitions LMN to summer spill sooner than the June 21 trigger date described in the FOP, and will elevate this issue as needed.
- Idaho – Would not object to the third option
- Washington – Was not informed enough to state a position
- Montana – Not present for today’s call
- CTUIR – Prefer the June 21 FOP option, but will not object to the third option
- Colville – Prefer June 21 FOP option, and objects to the third option
- NOAA – Can see the merits of all options, and would not object to third option
- USFWS – Prefers the June 21 FOP option, but will not object to the third option
- BPA – Supports the third option and transitioning to summer spill operations as soon as possible
- Reclamation – Supports the third option and Corps’ decision
- Nez Perce – Was not in attendance for the meeting but provided the Corps with the following email response after the meeting, “...cessation of spill operations prior to June 20 is not advised. ... NPT would object to early cessation of spring spill for performance testing of summer spill.”
- Corps – Hearing objections, needs to coordinate with internal policy and legal team and get back to the region with a decision, as soon as possible.

### **Next Steps** –

As soon as possible, the Corps will make a decision and share it with the region via an email to TMT. If anyone objects to the decision, it can be elevated in the RIOG process by notifying their RIOG representative who may raise the issue to the Senior Hydro Team Chair, who would then coordinate a conference call of the Senior Hydro Team to develop a RIOG Policy Briefing Paper with the assistance of technical team members. All TMT members will brief their RIOG and Senior Hydro Team representatives on this issue and give them a heads up that a follow up meeting may be convened in the near future. This item will also be on the 6/20 TMT agenda.

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

**June 13, 2012**

Notes: Pat Vivian

**1. Introduction**

Today's TMT conference call was chaired by Doug Baus, COE, and facilitated by Robin Gumpert, DS Consulting. Representatives of Oregon, BPA, NOAA, USFWS, COE, BOR, the Colville Tribe, CRITFC/Umatilla Tribe, Idaho, Washington and others attended. This summary is an official record of the proceedings, not a verbatim transcript.

**2. Lower Monumental Dam Summer Spill Operations**

The purpose of today's meeting was to continue the regional dialogue regarding the transition at Lower Monumental Dam (LMN) from the spring spill operation of spilling to the 115/120% TDG gas cap 24 hours per day (currently 26 kcfs) to the summer spill operation of spilling 17 kcfs 24 hours per day. Today's TMT meeting continued a June 7 Studies Review Work Group (SRWG) discussion regarding the Corps' proposal to transition from the spring to summer spill operation to coincide with performance standard testing currently underway at LMN as specified in the Reasonable and Prudent Alternative (RPA) in NOAA Fisheries' 2010 Supplemental Biological Opinion (BiOp) and in the 2012 court-ordered Fish Operations Plan (FOP).

Today's discussion focused on the date the Action Agencies (AAs) will switch from the spring to the summer spill operation at LMN. There are differing opinions on the appropriate date to make the transition due to how the transition date is described in the BiOp vs. the FOP.

The BiOp states:

- "The actual start of summer spill at Snake River projects will be initiated when subyearling Chinook salmon exceed 50% of the collection for a 3-day period for each Snake River project anytime after June 1." (RPA No. 29, Table 2)

The FOP states:

- "Lower Snake River Projects: Spring spill operations will continue through June 20. However, fish run timing and research schedules may require an earlier transition to summer operations to assure that research occurs during the bulk of the migration. Such changes will be coordinated through TMT." (page 9)
- "Summer spill will begin on June 21 at Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower Monumental and Ice Harbor dams..." (page 9)
- "Summer Spill Operations Approximately June 21 through August 31."

During the SRWG meeting on June 7, the AAs advocated for transitioning to summer spill operations at LMN immediately in accordance with the BiOp criteria, as subyearling Chinook salmon had exceeded 50% of the collection at LMN for 3 days and BiOp performance standard testing had begun. The AAs communicated their concern

that delaying the transition to summer spill operations would negatively impact their summer performance standard test of subyearling Chinook passage at LMN during the summer spill operation. The AAs interpret the FOP to allow for an earlier transition date to be coordinated to assure the test captures the bulk of the subyearling Chinook run, as intended in the BiOp.

Not all SRWG members shared the AA's perspective on the date LMN should transition to the summer spill operation. Some of the concerns expressed regarding making a change on approximately June 7 were: 1) a preference to wait until June 21 (as mentioned in the FOP) since current flows were not indicative of summer-like flow conditions, and 2) there needed for additional time to discuss this change with their respective agency representatives.

There was a lack of consensus among SRWG participants regarding the AA's desire to make the transition to the summer spill operation on June 7, in accordance with the BiOp criteria. Several SRWG participants felt more comfortable with making the change at a later date based on hydraulic triggers and forecast information similar to the criteria used to make the spillway weir crest height change at Little Goose Dam. This was intended to strike a balance between the gap in the transition date (June 7 vs. June 21) in order to satisfy the concerns of some SRWG participants. The following criteria were defined as a potential alternative trigger to initiate the transition to the summer spill operation at LMN (applicable to 2012 only).

- Observed daily average inflow at LMN of less than 85 kcfs;
- and, forecasted inflows at LMN below 85 kcfs for 7 consecutive days.

This information was distributed to SRWG participants via email on June 11 and had been posted to today's TMT agenda to facilitate discussion.

Baus clarified that, as of today, the conditions at LMN had met the criteria defined by SRWG – the actual daily average inflow was <85 kcfs, and was forecasted to remain <85 kcfs for next 7 days. Further, the criteria defined in the BiOp have also been met - LMN subyearling Chinook salmon have been exceeding 50% of the collection for at least 3 days. Therefore, considering that criteria defined in the BiOp and by the SRWG has been satisfied, and that summer performance standard testing is currently underway and the AAs intent of the test is to assess the performance of subyearling Chinook passage at LMN at the summer spill operation of 17 kcfs, the AAs propose to transition to the summer spill operation at LMN as soon as involuntary spill conditions at LMN allow, possibly as soon as this evening. The AAs contend this proposal is consistent with language in the FOP that allows for an earlier transition to summer spill operations to be coordinated based on run timing of subyearling Chinook salmon, as called for in the BiOp.

Baus and Tony Norris, BPA, added that in order for the AAs to achieve the summer spill rate at LMN of 17 kcfs, the AAs would move LMN down on the spill priority list from position #6 to position #8 in order to provide better conditions for performance

standards testing. This would allow Lower Monumental to achieve a spill rate of 17 kcfs for testing at a flow rate consistent with summer operations.

The Oregon and Idaho representatives commented that their recollection of the SRWG call was that a COE employee had suggested the third alternative, not the Salmon Managers as identified in a recent email regarding the SRWG meeting. TMT members gave their views of the AA's proposal:

- **Oregon** objects to switching LMN from spring to summer spill prior to June 21. Making the change prior to June 21 would compromise the remainder of the spring migration. Oregon's preference is to operate within FOP guidelines, which call for spill at Snake River projects to the gas cap until the end of the day on June 20, followed by summer flows of 17 kcfs beginning on June 21. If the AAs decide to change LMN spill from spring to summer prior to June 21 despite Oregon's objection, Oregon would elevate to RIOG.
- **Idaho** agreed there is some uncertainty whether the BiOp or the FOP takes precedence in these sorts of situations. Considering that the alternative trigger defined by SRWG had been met, Idaho did not object to the proposed operation being implemented as soon as this evening if spill conditions allow.
- **CRITFC/Umatilla Tribe** would prefer to change spill on the date specified in the FOP, and believes the performance standard test is to test existing conditions rather than one specific spill operation. Did not object to the AA's proposed operation.
- The **Colville Tribe** objects to changing to the LMN summer spill operation prior to June 21. Would prefer to spill to the gas cap through June 20. Spring migrants are still in the river and need the water to pass.
- **NOAA** sees justification for both sides of this debate and did not object to the proposed operation.
- **USFWS** would prefer to use the June 21 criteria identified in the FOP for the start of summer operations, but did not object to the operation as proposed.
- **BPA** and **BOR** both support the proposal to start summer operations at Lower Monumental as soon as this evening if involuntary spill conditions allow.
- **Washington** attended today's meeting but did not express an opinion.
- **Nez Perce** objects to changing to the LMN summer spill operation prior to June 21 (Nez Perce did not attend the TMT meeting but this response was provided to the Corps via email after the TMT meeting on June 13).

In consideration of Oregon, Nez Perce, and Colville's objection to the AAs proposal to transition to the summer spill operation at LMN based on criteria defined in the BiOp and the FOP, as well as the SRWG alternative criteria, the COE will delay a decision on whether to implement the summer spill operation until additional policy and legal coordination is completed. The COE will inform TMT via email as soon as a decision has been reached.

Gumpert advised TMT members to brief their RIOG representatives as soon as possible on this issue in the event that the Senior Hydro Team chair, Ritchie Graves (NOAA Fisheries), contacts them to set up a RIOG meeting. One goal of that meeting would be to prepare a policy briefing paper documenting all perspectives on the issue.

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

The next TMT meeting will be held in person on June 20 at the COE NW Division office in Portland.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Rick Kruger	Oregon
Scott Bettin	BPA
Tony Norris	BPA
Paul Wagner	NOAA
David Wills	USFWS
Doug Baus	COE
John Roache	BOR
Derek Fryer	COE
Sheri Sears	Colville
Margaret Filardo	FPC
Tom Lorz	CRITFC
Holly Krebs	Chelan PUD
Ruth Burris	PGE
XX	Thompson Reuters
Lisa Wright	COE
Laura Hamilton	COE
Barry Espenson	CBB
Russ Kiefer	Idaho
Richelle Beck	Grant PUD
Peter Richardson	Junsket
Charles Morrill	Washington