

COLUMBIA RIVER TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM

August 16, 2012

DRAFT 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.

McNary Transportation: SOR 2012-4

TMT revisited McNary transportation discussion with an SOR submitted by FPAC Chair Paul Wagner, NOAA, and signed by NOAA, USFWS, CRITFC, ODFW, IDFW and WDFW. (Nez Perce was not able to sign on but Dave Statler said today that the tribe and all FPAC managers fully supported the SOR.) Paul said that current data on the benefits of transportation to fish are not available as all studies at McNary have ceased prior to August 16. That said, he described the request and biological rationale, which included:

- Average water temperatures in the McNary Forebay have ranged between 68.5-68.9°F from August 8-14, with daily maximum temperatures as high as 69.5°F. Average water temperatures in the McNary tailwater have ranged between 68.6-69.0°F from August 8-14, with daily maximum temperatures as high as 69.2°F (<http://www.nwdwc.usace.army.mil/tmt/documents/ops/temp/201208.lcol.html>).
- The August 3-9, 2012 McNary Dam Temperature report issued by the PSMFC Smolt Monitoring Program recorded daily average water temperatures in Raceway #1 between 67.8-69.7°F with daily maximum temperatures between 69.1-71.8°F (see attachment).
- Daily maximum air temperatures in the Tri-Cities area are expected to approach or exceed 100°F over the next five days, making it likely that water temperatures will continue to increase.
- Special sampling protocols have been implemented at the Bonneville and John Day Dam Smolt Monitoring Facilities in accordance with criteria defined in the 2012 Fish Passage Plan to reduce the frequency of sampling of juvenile fish when temperatures at those facilities are >70°F. While no such protocol currently exists for the McNary Juvenile Fish Facility (JFF), the salmon managers believe it is not prudent to hold fish for an extended period at this facility, especially when the flow in the river is in the 200 kcfs range.
- A new juvenile outfall has been constructed at the McNary project which should improve survival at this project.

Russ Kiefer, Idaho, added that data indicate that this proposed operation will likely return more adults than would occur with the transportation operation.

Corps Decision and Planned Operation: Doug Baus, Corps, said the Corps does not plan to implement the SOR. They acknowledge the current temperature situation at McNary Dam, and said they will follow the special operations described in the Fish Passage Plan to minimize mortalities. Mortalities at the McNary Juvenile Fish Facility have been $\leq 1\%$, and temperatures are normal for this time of year and consistent with past transportation operations in August; therefore the Corps has determined that an operational adjustment is not necessary at this time. Without an indication of elevated mortalities or abnormally high temperatures, the Corps does

not believe it is prudent to make a change at this time. The Corps is aware of the region's concern and is monitoring the situation closely. If the Corps becomes concerned with the level of mortality observed at the JFF, the Corps will respond by taking immediate corrective steps to switch to bypass operations and return fish to the river. He said the information the Corps currently has indicates there will be higher smolt to adult return rates (SARs) from truck transportation rather than keeping the fish in river.

Salmon manager response –

The salmon managers offered their responses to the Corps' decision:

- We know that stress can produce delayed mortalities and would prefer preventive action be taken, rather than waiting until we see a problem before taking action. Mortalities could be occurring even if they are not seen at the project.
- The salmon managers reached consensus on the adaptive management approach they outlined in the SOR and strongly urged the Corps to implement their request.
- The recommendation is based on unique and new conditions we have now and is intended for this year only.
- The biologists believe their approach would return more adults and that it is more cost effective than transportation.

Dave Statler, Nez Perce, added that he was frustrated with the decision process, saying a unilateral decision was made by the Corps based on administrative documentation rather than biological considerations, and saw this as a break down in the TMT process.

Next steps: Paul Wagner asked the Corps to consider modifying transportation operations to limit the amount of time the fish are held, possibly transporting fish on the same day they were collected. Doug Baus said he would explore options with the Corps' Walla Walla District and revisit this with TMT next week. **TMT agreed to hold a conference call next Wednesday, 8/22.**

Columbia River Regional Forum
TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM – OFFICIAL MINUTES

August 16, 2012

Notes: Pat Vivian

1. Introduction

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

2. SOR 2012-4 Truck Transport from McNary Dam

This call was scheduled to follow up on TMT's discussion yesterday of possibly suspending truck transport operations at McNary Dam due to the concern regarding increasing temperatures in the raceways. As requested yesterday, Paul Wagner, NOAA, presented the consensus recommendation from FPAC as a system operational request (SOR) with supporting biological documentation. SOR 2012-4 advises that truck transport at McNary be suspended for the following reasons:

1. Average temperatures in the raceways were between 67.8 and 69.7 degrees F from August 8-14, with a maximum hourly reading of 71.8 degrees F and more hot weather coming. At these temperatures, it is not advisable to handle fish. Sampling is reduced to twice weekly at the Bonneville and John Day Smolt Monitoring Facilities under similar conditions.
2. Although the last transport study in 2002 correlated truck transport with greater smolt to adult return rates (SARs), since that time a number of fish mitigation improvements have been made to the hydro system. These changes would tend to reduce the comparative benefits of transport vs. in-river migration. McNary and John Day dams have 24-hour spill, compared to no spill in 2002. The McNary bypass was in poor condition and has since been replaced and relocated. Construction of The Dalles spill wall and spillway weirs at John Day have improved juvenile passage conditions considerably. Also, spill patterns have been altered to benefit fish.

Baus informed TMT the COE will not be implementing the SOR. With below average juvenile mortality rates of less than 1%, the COE is not concerned that transport operations would cause any increase in mortality at this time. The COE acknowledges temperatures approaching 70 degrees F but there is an extensive array of temperature probes throughout the project and the COE is monitoring

the situation closely. Temperatures tend to be elevated during the month of August at McNary Dam. Additionally, there are procedures identified in the 2012 Fish Passage Plan that minimize impacts of temperature on the juvenile transportation operation. The COE is operating in accordance with these procedures and has not observed elevated mortality at this time. If a problem develops the COE will take corrective action immediately which would include switching to full flow bypass and returning collected fish to the river.

When asked why the SOR would not be implemented, Baus said the 2001-02 data indicate that proceeding with truck transport will result in greater smolt to adult return rates. Therefore, the COE plans to proceed as identified in the FPP and initiate collection tomorrow at McNary unless a problem becomes evident.

The Salmon Managers present on the call disagreed with this decision, noting that the SOR represents the consensus opinion of fish biology experts in the region. (Although there was no time to sign the SOR before it was presented to the COE, the Nez Perce Tribe documented its support in an email.) Nez Perce, Idaho and Washington representatives emphasized that while no conclusive data exist to make a relative comparison of transport vs. in-river migration in 2012, the temperatures in the McNary raceways are known to stress fish which could lead to latent mortality. Several Salmon Managers stated their views of the decision to proceed with transport:

- **Washington** – Just because no mortality has been observed doesn't mean that mortality is not occurring. A fish doesn't have to die to be negatively impacted by improper handling at these temperatures. Holding fish in the McNary raceways presents a significant risk; waiting until a problem is seen would be a mistake.
- **Idaho** – Not initiating transport this year would both be likely to return more adults and save money. It makes no sense not to implement the SOR in light of current conditions and biological information.
- **Nez Perce** – For two reasons this decision mocks what should be a collaborative team process: (1) The decision is being made unilaterally despite compelling biological information to the contrary. (2) It appears to be based on administrative documentation rather than on real-time biological considerations for fish. Requested specifically that these comments be included in the record.
- **NOAA** – Supports the SOR. This year's high flows, in combination with conditions at McNary, present a unique opportunity to suspend truck transport to benefit fish. Given current temperatures in the McNary raceways, holding fish doesn't seem to be the best course of action.

Agrees with Washington that if we wait until a problem is observed, it will be too late.

Wagner then suggested the COE consider collecting and transporting fish on the same day to reduce holding time and to avoid holding them in the raceways for up to 48 hours. Baus said the COE will evaluate that suggestion and report back to TMT. A conference call was scheduled for August 22 to revisit the McNary truck transport operation. In the meantime, Baus will notify TMT members via email of any significant developments regarding the McNary transport operation.

3. Next TMT Meeting

TMT scheduled an August 22 conference call for an update on McNary truck transport. The next TMT meeting in person will be on August 29 at NOAA's Portland office.

Name	Affiliation
Dave Wills	USFWS
Russ Kiefer	Idaho
Paul Wagner	NOAA
Doug Baus	COE
Dave Statler	Nez Perce
Scott Bettin	BPA
Ann Setter	COE
John Roache	BOR
Lisa Wright	COE
Derek Fryer	COE Walla Walla
Barry Espenson	CBB
Rick Kruger	Oregon
Richelle Beck	Grant PUD
Steve Hall	COE Walla Walla
Tom Lorz	CRITFC/Umatilla