

Columbia River Regional Implementation Forum

Water Quality Team
July 2008
Memo for Discussion Purposes

Background

The 2008 BiOp suggests that issues and discussions about management should continue at the Regional Forum teams. At this time, little additional guidance exists about how or what these technical teams should do. This has led to numerous questions and recent discussions about what the appropriate roles should be for the teams and what they should do. In light of this, DS Consulting conducted a series of ‘interview’ calls to Water Quality Team (WQT) members and participants to get their feedback on the current forum(s) for discussion of water quality related issues and their suggestions for the future of the WQT.

Current Status / Should the WQT Convene at this Point?

In short, there was consensus among former and current WQT members/participants that there is little need to convene a WQT meeting in the immediate future. Participants’ reasoning behind this was primarily due to a lack of certainty around whether the states’ decision will be to remove forebay TDG monitors, coupled with a broad range of interpretations of what level of influence and decision making authority the WQT may have under the direction of the new 2008 BiOp. Some responders also noted that there are considerable time/resource concerns for their agencies at this point in the season.

All responders noted that the Adaptive Management Team (AMT) process, convened by ODEQ and WADOE, has fulfilled its intended task to consider TDG/TMDL and to provide technical feedback to the states. The nearly identical membership of the AMT and WQT and the monthly meeting schedule from November 2007 – June 2008 temporarily eliminated the need or desire on the part of participants to attend WQT meetings in addition to AMT meetings. There is little doubt that the effects of ongoing litigation and limited decision making authority for WQT members have also contributed to a decline in region-wide commitment to discussing water quality issues in a collaborative forum such as the WQT.

Specific Suggestions for the Future of the WQT

Most notable was that there was agreement from all participants that there continues to be a need in the region for ongoing discussion of all the water quality issues that are important to WQT members and their agencies: temperature, toxics/contaminants, habitat and continuing the conversation around TDG/TMDL and their effects on fish. Many participants noted that a “big question” is what model or criteria should be used to control mainstem Columbia River temperatures and total dissolved gas (TDG.) They added that this model should be guided by a Regional Forum team in some way, and be supported by policy-level guidance, in order to best meet regional needs.

Participants also noted their support for continued facilitation of WQT meetings – AMT meetings did not use a neutral facilitator and some suggested the meetings may have been more efficient had there been assistance from a third party facilitator.

As part of the “interview” process, participants were asked to describe what their ideal WQT structure would look like. A bulleted summary of their key suggestions is below:

- WQT meetings should address all water quality related issues in the upper, mid and lower Columbia River and continue to serve as a forum for sharing monitoring/study results and bring new technical information to light.
- Specific guidance and direction from the new 2008 BiOP and agency policy makers will support an effective WQT and engage team members.
- The WQT structure and process should be consistent with other Regional Forum teams; meetings should continue to be open to the public, with more formal input provided by team members.
- The TDG management process currently in place consists of one NOAA and two COE reps – a more inclusive process and broader discussion of the “judgment calls” that are made would help create a greater understanding of ongoing water quality efforts for other regional representatives and agencies.
- The WQT would attract participation from EPA by addressing/discussing the workplan priorities submitted to the Federal Caucus; the EPA workplan includes the following:

Monitoring

- Determine the contribution of major tributaries to the loading of toxic chemicals, focusing on a selected suite of toxic chemicals of concern.
- Conduct screening-level analysis in the mainstem Columbia for emerging contaminants, such as personal care products and pharmaceuticals.
- Develop and implement a monitoring plan to identify PCB sources in the mid and Lower Columbia River.
- Support the toxic effects monitoring work that NOAA and USGS are doing relative to fish and wildlife.
- REMAP (\$384K) and RARE (\$50K) sampling and monitoring work on toxic chemicals in water and fish tissue.
- Major fish tissue sampling effort (over 4000 samples) planned for the Upper Columbia River; Lower Columbia River toxic sites assessment work for abandoned sites under Superfund; Hanford 'in water' risk assessment under the Hanford cleanup program.

Implementation Work

- Promote additional Pesticide Stewardship Partnership projects (like the Hood River project) for additional Columbia River tributaries.
- Promote TMDL implementation where we have TMDLs that address toxic chemical contamination (like the Yakima irrigation project)

The feedback shared by individual participants has been very valuable to DS Consulting in assessing the current status and future for the WQT. In addition to following up with

WQT members on the suggestions above, DS Consulting is prepared to support the future of the WQT meeting process in the following ways:

- Build WQT meeting agendas, assist with between meeting communication, and ensure that WQT meetings are as efficient as possible.
- Draw participants out from their positional views and focus more on collaborative, open technical discussion that allows for flexibility.
- Provide outreach efforts to other interested parties (such as those who attend FPAC and CBFWA meetings), to invite them to attend WQT meetings.
- Clearly communicate the course of actions ongoing in the region, define expectations and goals for WQT members – and make sure we're getting there!

In closing, we believe this inquiry has lead to thoughtful input and advice from WQT members about the future of WQT efforts. We plan to follow-up with NMFS, the WQT chair and the IT chairs and look forward to additional input from others on how best to move forward with this information. Specifically, we will look to the regional experts to determine when would be a good time to reconvene the group and on what specific topics for the agenda.

Respectfully submitted by

DS Consulting

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