

Cowlitz Hydroelectric Project
FERC No. 2016
Cowlitz Fisheries Technical Committee
Final Meeting Summary
January 10, 2024 from 9:30 – 2:30

FTC Representative Attendees:

Travis Nelson	TPU
Bryce Glaser	WDFW

Additional Attendees:

Peggy Miller	WDFW
John Serl	WDFW
Josua Holowatz	WDFW
Brian Gale	WDFW
Jamie Murphy	TPU
Kris Warner	WDFW
Todd Hillson	WDFW
John Best	WDFW
Scott Gibson	TPU
Melora Shelton	TPU
Steve Manlow	LCFRB
Michael Boyles	BPA
Laura Wolfe	LCPUD
Russell Page	LCPUD
Bill Sharp	Yakama Nation
Ann Weckback	Lewis County
Katie Buchan	USFS
Lyn Wiltse	PDSA Consulting / Facilitator

Public Attendees: Larry Pryor, Randy LeDuc

2024 FTC Meeting Dates: In-person meetings will include a remote option. Feb. 6, Mar. 5 (in person), Apr. 2, May 7, June 4 (in person), Aug. 6, Sept. 3 (in person), Oct. 1, Nov. 5, Dec. 3 (in person)

Approval of December Meeting Summary

The revised version of the December FTC Meeting Summary was reviewed and approved with clarifying edits and will be posted for public review.

Updates

Hydro Operations – Melora (presentation emailed on January 9)

Meliora began by reminding everyone that things are very dynamic currently due to uncertain weather conditions.

- **Inflows:** These were generally below historical values, except for above average inflows in December. High storm inflows decreased into January. While December was wet it was also warm which impacted regional snowpack.
- **Storage:** Snowpack below average at Paradise (77%) and in general throughout the region; the average condition at White Pass is an outlier. Riffe’s elevation increased from about 700 ft

- Phase 2: The lower-level parking area associated with North Taidnapam Boat Launch is still in the design/permitting phase. It will include a WQPP.
- Temperature monitoring locations: Travis will set up a meeting with appropriate stakeholders to discuss how data is being reported and the need/want for additional monitoring locations.
- Matt met with Ecology on January 9 to discuss the next steps for Satellite Rearing at Energy Northwest's (EN) site. More information on this will be forthcoming.
- Cove Lane Culvert Replacement: This is still in the permitting/contracting phase. It will include a WQPP.

Action Item: Travis to set up a Teams call with interested FTC members to review and assess whether there are data gaps in water temperature data from regulatory and M&E perspectives, and if so, how best to address them.

Fish Facilities

Separator:

- Jamie reported on Eric's behalf that coho returns have dropped off with only 120 fish returning to the separator in the second half of December. Numbers leaned toward NORs and there were very few Lower River HORs that would go to the Tilton.
- 40 fish returned last week, 10 of which were winter run steelhead, and the others were coho.
- Only 9,079 coho were put into the Tilton. Only 8 coho returned to the separator since Christmas. The coho HOR target goal to the Tilton is 12,000 adults.

Broodstock Collection:

- 100 coho not needed for brood were released into Lake Scanewa.
- Steelhead HOR collections started December 9. Ten males and ten females were sent to broodstock collection as of yesterday. (The goal is 150 males and 175 females.)

Mayfield Counting House:

- While the Chinook juveniles had been looking great, mortality increased to 16% (caused by Copepods and Nematodes) over the last three weeks of December.
- Bypass mode began at the end of December and will continue through the end of March. During that time, migrating fish will be diverted into the counting facilities for a 24-hour period each month to see what is in the system.
- Clarification: During bypass mode all fish are passed downstream into the tailrace, passing through the louvers and to the secondary separator. They are not handled.

Cowlitz Falls Fish Facility

The facility is currently undergoing off-season maintenance (until March 15). Tacoma is currently hiring day and night technicians for the 2024 season and welcomes any recommendations.

Cispus Release Site (Tom Music Bridge)

Laura reported LCPUD is currently reviewing the response they received from the USACE to ensure their ability to comply. For the HPA, WDFW has questions re the special use permit that has now expired. This is between Tacoma Power and the FS. Jamie noted Tacoma is currently working on the Special Use permit and will send the documentation to Laura when complete so the PUD can finish the HPA.

Bryce asked if there is a checklist of what has been accomplished and what is outstanding. Is the special use permit all that remains? Laura responded the PUD plans to go through the SEPA process themselves. Their portion of that should take a week or two. Otherwise, with the Corps' Nationwide

permit, Ecology doesn't require a Water Quality Cert. They are now just needing to wait for the right timeframe to do the work there. During the permitting process, LCPUD and USACE discussed the work happening during the summer of 2024.

Bryce suggested looking at developing another site or interim action as it appears we will miss the spring Chinook period again (was really challenging last year). Laura explained the PUD is open to alternatives. While they are responsible for finding a release site, they are not required to actually release the fish. Perhaps we should form a subcommittee to consider some secondary options.

Laura reminded all the alternate release site at Copper Canyon continues to be a possibility in case the reservoir gets too warm. Also, the PUD is working with the FS to try to work on an alternate site on the other side of the river. Katie will help put Laura in touch with the Forest Ranger.

Action Items:

- Jamie: Send Special Use Permit documentation to Laura when complete.
- Travis and Bryce: Follow up with Eric, Jamie, and Scott about ideas alternate options.
- Katie: Help put Laura in touch with the FS Ranger on an alternate site.

Monitoring & Evaluation Subgroup

Bryce reported appreciating the detail provided by the consultant working on the M&E plan. The goal is to have a final draft out at the end of February. In the meantime, WDFW is providing additional input and will meet again to review the plan. Scott noted Tacoma has asked for more time to review WDFW comments. He hopes these can be addressed at the next meeting.

Bryce talked with Matt Bleich regarding the email distribution on offline discussion regarding fall Chinook transport and coho jack transport issues. Bryce sent out this information to the M&E distribution list, including Stephen Lewis. The goal is to keep working on the M&E plan over the next couple of months. The implementation timeline depends on when Tacoma can gain the resources to support this effort more fully. Following up on the need to develop a charter for the M&E subgroup as identified in the FTC protocols, WDFW will take the first shot at drafting a charter based on the CRR Subgroup charter and get it to the subgroup to review and then to the FTC.

Downstream Adaptive Management Technical Work Group (TWG)

John reported this group met on January 5 to review/finalize the DD with plans for upcoming season. He reviewed the recommendations outlined in the draft DD 2024 CFNSC Evaluation recommendations to try to improve fish capture efficiency (FCE) at Cowlitz Falls:

1. Develop an alternative study design for FTC performance monitoring that considers increasing the frequency of mark release events while decreasing the number of marks released at each event. This will also extend the performance monitoring period.
2. Develop a hydraulic temperature model in the Cowlitz Falls Dam forebay during the late summer Chinook salmon migration to inform adaptive management actions.
3. Perform retrospective analysis of acoustic studies to determine spatial and temporal patterns as fish first approach Cowlitz Falls Dam.
4. Evaluate management practices, develop a study design to evaluate a suite of upper and Lower Cowlitz River release locations for coho salmon parr that are collected at the Cowlitz Falls Fish Facility. Simultaneously develop a recommendation for interim management actions based on available information.

Bryce noted there are two other work products that have not yet been discussed by the TWG. These include updating the Charter and the Downstream Adaptive Management Plan. He suggested that it

may be more appropriate to include these two work products in the FTC workplan rather than in the DD with plans for the upcoming season.

Action Item: Travis to send the draft DD to Lyn to distribute to the FTC with the expectation that a decision will be made at the February FTC meeting.

2023 Gravel Augmentation Summary

On January 3 Travis sent out an email outlining implementation of SA Article 10 through 2023. Tacoma placed 800 cubic yards of gravel in 2023. They will continue placing at least 500 cubic yards annually, also making up the debt from not placing gravel in 2017-2020 (currently 713 cubic yards) by 2025 in line with the 2023 supplement to the gravel placement plan. Melora provided additional background on the 2023 supplement for newer meeting participants.

LCPUD Dam Operations

Presenter: Russell Page

Russell has been dealing with weather and power outage issues. Dam operations have been fairly normal since the early December flood when they passed 37K cfs at the project. High flows were accompanied by a lot of matted debris and silt which was deposited in front of their units. The District made an emergency declaration and is mobilizing to remove the sediment asap. They are erecting a crane today and hope to start debris removal shortly. They have notified Ecology, BPA, and other agencies that this is occurring. They will follow best practices re dumping site, material containment, etc. Russell anticipates the work will take two months, weather cooperating.

Drawdown for Debris Barrier moorage site will occur in early February, and they should be back to full pool the first week in March.

Debris Barrier work should occur in the fall after fish collection.

Anyone planning to show up onsite should let Russell know ahead of time so he can inform the contractors, etc.

Cowlitz Restoration and Recovery Fund / Habitat and Production (HAP) Subgroup

Presenters: Melora Shelton and Steve Manlow

Melora noted that are in a slower period now after wrapping up the 2023 grant round the end of the year. The subgroup will begin looking at potential HAP projects at their next meeting on January 17 at 1pm. All are welcome to join.

CRR Program 2024: FTC Engagement

Grant Round

- April: draft applications (available)
- April/May: Applicant presentations and/or site visits (FTC invited, feedback)
- May: meeting, application updates
- August: meeting, proposals introduced to FTC
- September: meeting, funding recommendations proposed (draft DD)
- October: FTC meeting, FTC makes funding determination (finalize DD)
- November: FTC meeting, contingency for funding determination

Other

- March/April: FERC Annual Report 30-day review (6/1 to FERC)
- Q4: Updates to CRR Program Documents, , if needed
- Regular updates at FTC meetings
- Opportunities to join HAP Subcommittee meetings, *including next week (1/17, 1:30pm)*

LCFRB/SFRB Update: Steve noted the LCFRB is gearing up for the next grant round. This includes updating the grants manual to reflect changes from the last FTC meeting and also from the lessons learned process. They are also finalizing the grant calendar and will allocate one day for field review of CRR projects this year, there may also be virtual presentation for CRR and/or SFRB proposals. 2024 looks to be a robust year for CRR, SFRB, and riparian project funding, and additional targeting investment funding through the RCO. Steve is aware of at least one CRR proposal in development.

Public Comment Period #1 - Agenda related

Larry Pryor:

- How does the Disease Management Plan drive actions or treatments? (Thanked Travis for forwarding him a copy of the plan.)

Jamie: The plan addressed causes, treatments, as well as a path forward.

- What will the M&E Subgroup be monitoring and evaluating?

Bryce: This is prescribed in Chapter 10 of the FHMP and Appendix C that has summary of data gaps and future monitoring needs. There should be a baseline monitoring component. Each species section of the FHMP also includes monitoring needs by species. The existing monitoring being done is via task order from Tacoma to WDFW on adult abundance monitoring in the lower Cowlitz (Chinook, coho, steelhead). An example is the work to estimate Chinook abundance and percentage of hatchery vs. natural spawners. The plan will have details of how to prioritize these in the future and may also require some directed studies.

- How will these activities benefit the recreational fishery? What is success? What are the SARs in the Cowlitz (escapement plus harvest)? He doesn't think Hatchery managers know the current status of these things.

Bryce: The M&E Plan will touch on hatchery needs and that will also be covered in the annual operating plan. The SAR piece is ongoing. A lot of work has been around Spring Chinook. There is currently a focus on standardizing an approach to do SAR analysis that everyone agrees to.

Kris: WDFW is working in standardization and best practices for the western region.

- Larry's calculation for Fall Chinook SAR is .0040 based on numbers of releases from 2020. This means almost all the fish released are not returning back to the Cowlitz River. That needs to change.

Bryce: We are working to finalize the plan. A high priority is fall Chinook survival issues in the Cowlitz and the Toutle Basins. This has been identified for further evaluation. Bryce committed to connect Larry with Kris and also Anja (working on the Lewis).

- What is the proper way to address the FTC? Email to Travis?

Travis: Send it to me and I will follow up with you.

- Improving hatchery efficiencies and returns matters not only to recreational fishermen, but to the wild fish programs as well. Wants this to be an FTC priority.
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Topics for February 6, 2024 FTC Meeting

- Updates incl. Hydro Ops, Water Quality, Fish Facilities, Cispus Release Site, Marine Mammals Protection Act, Fisheries
- LCPUD Cowlitz Falls Dam Operations
- Preview of 2024 FTC Work Plan
- Downstream Adaptive Management TWG
- Monitoring and Evaluation Subgroup – Approve DD
- CRR Fund / HAP Subcommittee
- Preview March FTC (in-person) Meeting Topics

Meeting Evaluation

- Appreciated flexibility with the agenda timing.
- Nice to get out early.
- Happy so many could attend on this date to avoid overlap with New Years' Day.
- Hoping for better attendance in February.

Josua's Inspirational Quote

"Life is full of beauty. Notice it. Notice the bumble bee, the small child, and the smiling faces. Smell the rain, and feel the wind. Live your life to the fullest potential, and fight for your dreams." – Ashley Smith

Closing Remarks

Travis ended the meeting by thanking everyone attending. He expressed appreciation for how supportive members of this team have been and continue to be of each other. It's always good to be nice to each other and enjoy each other.

Parking Lot

- Presentation by Tacoma's Power Management Group and/or from Grant PUD re improving SAR
- Review Steelhead Kelt Recycling Program