

Cowlitz Hydroelectric Project
FERC No. 2016
Cowlitz Fisheries Technical Committee
Final Meeting Summary
November 5, 2024 from 9:30 – 2:30

FTC Representative Attendees:

Melora Shelton	TPU
Bryce Glaser	WDFW
Andrew Luymes	ECY
Bill Sharp	Yakama Nation

Additional Attendees:

Josua Holowatz	WDFW
Brian Gale	WDFW
John Serl	WDFW
Kris Warner	WDFW
Kevin Young	WDFW
Todd Hillson	WDFW
Sean Toomey	WDFW
Jenise Bauman	TPU
Chris Vaughn	TPU
Eric Shoblom	TPU
Scott Gibson	TPU
Steve West	LCFRB
Ann Weckback	Lewis County
Michael Boyles	BPA
Joe First	LCPUD
Laura Wolfe	LCPUD
Lyn Wiltse	PDSA Consulting / Facilitator

Public Attendees: Larry Pryor, Randy LeDuc, and Jack Tipping

Remaining 2024 FTC Meeting Date: Dec. 3 (Veterans Memorial Museum with remote option)
Proposed 2025 FTC Meeting Dates: Jan. 7, Feb. 4, Mar. 4, Apr. 1 (no joke), May 6, June 3, Aug. 5, Sept. 2 (day after Labor Day), Oct. 7, Nov. 4, Dec. 2

Approval of October Meeting Summary

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

Updates

Hydro Operations (presentation emailed on November 4)

Melora shared two changes for updates in WY 2025. 1) Shift to WY 1981 – prior water year for historical reference for mean daily flow by month. 2) Add 5 to 95 percentile range to the chart for WY monthly inflows and historical mean daily flows by month.

- Inflows: Low inflows since July, very low in October (53% of average) due to below normal precipitation.

- Storage: Riffe Lake drafted from 720 ft the end of September to 705 ft the end of October (8 ft below the 2017 – 2023 average). Consequently, Mossyrock ramps and N. Taidnapam are both closed.
- Outflow: Consistent outflow around 3.6K cfs ([hydrograph](#)), minimum flow is 3.5K cfs as of October 1. Downramping limits <6K cfs changed from 1 in/hr. to 2 in/hr. (24 hours) on November 1. There were no exceedances.

10-day Forecast: Typical temperatures and consistent rain beginning on Friday. Snow level is between 3K and 7K ft. Inflows initially 2.5-3.5K, may increase to >6K cfs. Riffe will continue to draft somewhat and then may begin to refill. Outflows will be maintained at 3,600 cfs unless side flows rise over the weekend. Minimum flow will reset on November 21 to about 4,300 cfs based on the 5-day average rule, potentially higher if water management occurs between now and then.

Discussion:

The Settlement Agreement states Tacoma will make a good faith effort to keep lower Cowlitz River flows between 5,000cfs and 8,000cfs to protect spawning habitat from November 1-20 when flow resets). WDFW would like more context for not providing the 5-8K flow identified for spawning and have the FTC informed of tradeoffs/risk evaluation as part of making that good faith effort. An example would be how much additional reservoir storage would be used to provide 5,000cfs of flow, and additional 1,400cfs, for the November 1-20 time period? What are the impacts of this lower reservoir elevation? Tacoma responded that it will always be a challenge to commit to higher discharge before fall inflows have come up with the risk of deeply drafting the reservoir (digging a hole) and limiting flexibility.

Action Item: Melora will reach out to Resource Operations and then share information around Tacoma's risk evaluation and rationale for their planned operations.

How does Tacoma calculate their inflows to the project? Tacoma uses an operations model that includes volumetric storage for the reservoirs to calculate the natural inflows to the entire project (not just Riffe Lake). Side flows are included in the calculation.

Fish Facilities

Separator:

- Eric reported that coho, cutthroat, fall Chinook, summer steelhead and winter steelhead are all returning. Recently, returns to the separator have been averaging 900-1,300/day. There have been two NOR winter steelhead arrivals so far.
- The spring Chinook return was fairly decent at 4,381. Eric noted that it is difficult to distinguish spring from fall Chinook at this time of year. This was discussed briefly at the last M&E meeting and is on the agenda for the next meeting. Jenise noted DNA analysis may help with this.
- Summer steelhead returns are twice as high as 5-year average.
- Coho are well above the 5-year average. Brood collection is going well. To date, half of the broodstock are NOR.
- Fall Chinook are below the 5-yr average with 2,119 to date. Brood collection has ended and is far behind the goal.
- Cutthroat trout are well below 5-year average with 735 to date. Eric noted many are returning to the area near the Trout Hatchery vs the Salmon Hatchery.

Regarding the shortfall in fall Chinook broodstock collection, Bryce noted we made a choice to adjust our demographic replacement rates. This has been helpful in broodstock collection and has increased the number of NORs being placed in the Upper Tilton. The Transition Plans identified 1K fish as the minimum transport goal. We are on the cusp of moving into the normal range. Eric agreed and said he appreciates all of the coordination on this.

Release Sites:

- We are currently using the Cispus Release Site. The site has held up well. Anglers also seem to like it. Noting the importance of giving fish sufficient space and time to disperse, Josua asked Eric to have the fish truck drivers to watch for missing fishing boundary signs. He is happy to provide replacement signage as needed.
- 8,455 coho NORs have been transported to the Tilton Release Site to date.

Mayfield Coho Net Pens: The new nets were fit-tested by WDFW hatchery staff and passed with flying colors! All necessary supplies are in hand. The pilot project coho currently reside in the stress relief ponds and will be transferred to the net pens in early December for release in May,

Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Remodel

Tacoma held a partnering meeting with WDFW to review the remodel plans and establish communication channels and protocols for issues /concerns going forward. He shared a photo of the South Wells CCTV (closed-circuit television) which is being used to assess the condition of the south well supply line. It did not find any indication of leaks or biofouling. Great news! The line held static pressure for 6 days. This is due to the pipe's design (steel in the center with concrete on the inside and outside). So far, they have drilled 5 of 12 test wells. Aquifer testing will occur mid-November through mid-December. The Kiosk that says "no parking" will be removed for a few weeks to accommodate the drilling. There will be fencing and tape around the drill rig for public safety.

For updates: <https://www.mytpu.org/community-environment/fish-wildlife-environment/cowlitz-river-project/cowlitz-fisheries-programs/cowlitz-trout-hatchery/cowlitz-trout-hatchery-remodel/>

Satellite Rearing: Tacoma continues to investigate options including facility testing at Cowlitz Falls. Stay tuned.

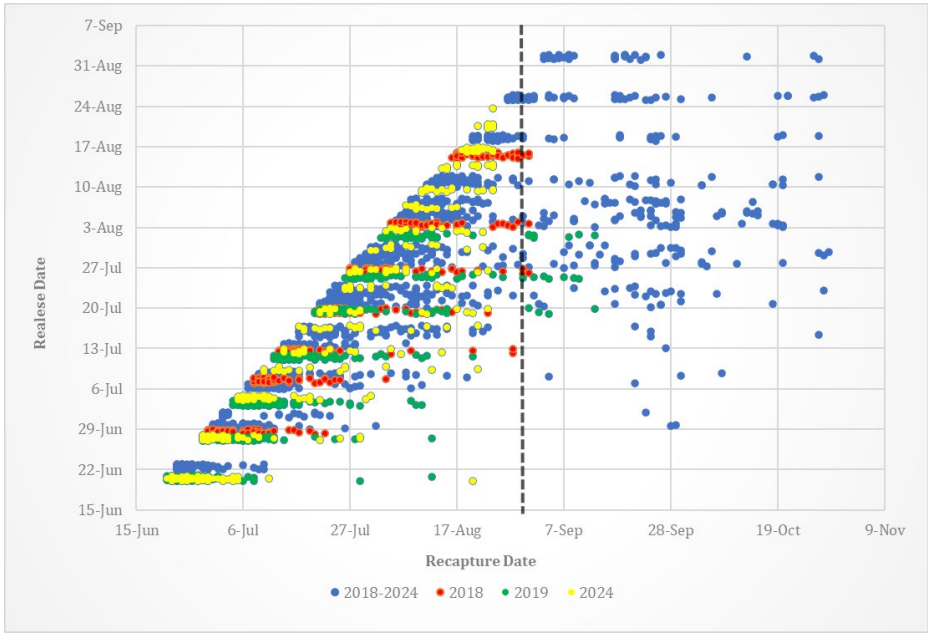
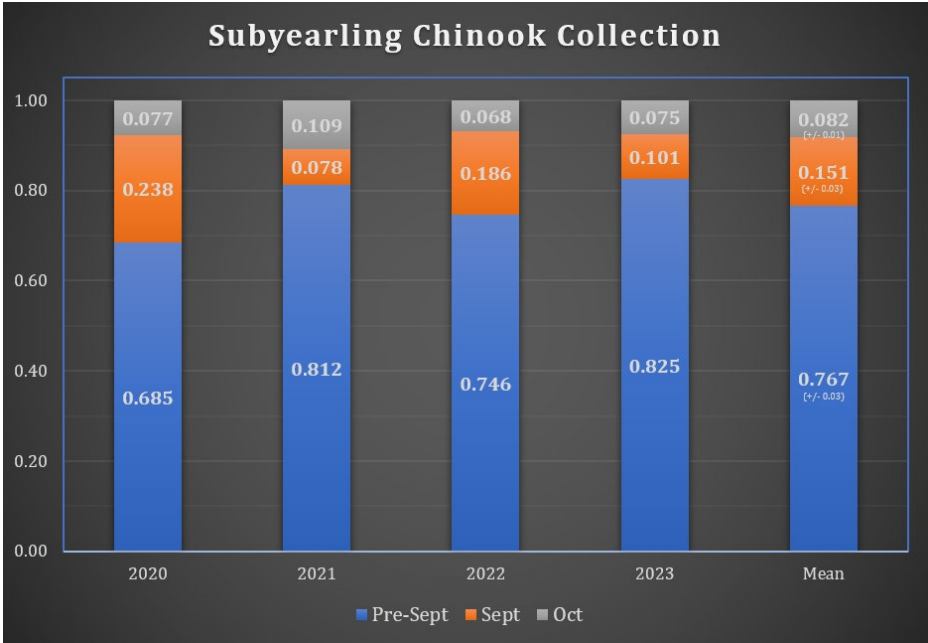
Mayfield Counting House

Chris noted we ended up close to 5-year average with the exception of Chinook. We were also a little low in cumulative smolt returns. Mortality within the Mayfield secondary separator was higher during flushing operations. However, we've seen mortality fall since initiating twice-per-week flushes of the secondary separator.

Cowlitz Falls Fish Facility

Chris reported the CFNSC 2024 Summer Summary report has been sent out to the TWG for review. Discussion of the alternative tagging strategy will inform actions in 2025. Internal contracting and SOW development are underway for the CFNSC acoustic telemetry study. The supplemental tagging study concluded last week, and the data are being processed. They will start ADV (Acoustic Doppler Velocimetry) testing to account for how hydraulic behaviors could affect fish entrance and retention.

He shared a graph showing the impact of the early (Sept. 1) shutdown of the collector due to the Lake Scanewa drawdown on sub-yearling Chinook collection.



pre-Sept 2024	12,620
Calculated total	16,454
Calculated Sept	2,485
Calculated Oct	1,349
Calculated Sept + Oct	3,834

Bryce thanked him and noted our challenge is we should be looking at FCE vs. averages based on the last 5 years. FCE loss potential is ~9%.

Monitoring & Evaluation Subgroup

Presenter: Scott Gibson

Scott reminded all that the updated draft Plan was sent out for FTC 30-day review (due end of day Nov. 6). He walked through the DD that was sent out Oct. 29. He covered the basic objectives of the M&E plan which was designed to track population status for recovery objectives and to inform the Annual Program Review. The M&E Subgroup is asking for this DD to be approved so implementation can begin. The final version of the plan will be attached to the DD which will be on the December meeting agenda for final review and approval.

Downstream Adaptive Management Technical Work Group (TWG)

Presenter: Chris Vaughn

This group will meet again on November 26 and will discuss Coho Parr Study design alternatives. Notes, agenda, and the proposal from 4 Peaks Consulting will be out the end of this week. Chris will integrate TPU and TWG Subgroup input regarding the design into the proposal with an eye toward balancing out operational needs, etc.

LCPUD Dam Operations

Presenter: Joe First

Joe was pleased to announce that the Debris Barrier Rehabilitation Project is now complete. This involved recoating the entire interior of the debris barrier. Refill began Oct. 31, and the reservoir was back to full pool on Nov. 3. They will reattach the debris barrier to the front of the dam on Nov. 7 and the Day Use Park will reopen to the public on Nov. 8.

On Nov. 12 they are meeting with the contractor to discuss the schedule for replacing the boat barrier in front of the dam. New anchors will be poured in December. The flotation portion of the boat boom will be delivered in February and the installation is scheduled to be complete in March, prior to fish collection season.

The maintenance on Unit 2 has been completed. They are ready for flood season!

Cowlitz Restoration and Recovery Fund

Presenters: Melora Shelton and Steve West

HAP Subgroup: Following September FTC guidance for some high-level answers to key questions, Melora reported on subgroup meetings and coordination with Jack regarding his steelhead rearing study idea. This included document revision and a workshop on Oct. 23 where discussion included current rearing practices and potential marking strategies. Updated materials will be distributed along with the request for additional FTC input for discussion at the December meeting; outcomes will inform Jack's next steps and assist with process and resources for support and eventually evaluation. They proposed inviting Jack to participate in the conversation at the December FTC meeting, the focus of which would be support for the development of an idea. Bryce concurred that discussion including Jack would be beneficial. Follow-up discussion would occur in January and February, ahead of the 2025 grant round.

Habitat Grant Round: Steve noted CRR grant round site visits will occur on May 8. The grant round will open in February, pending approval by their Board. All are invited to attend the next TAC meeting on Nov. 13 which will feature a couple of related presentations. Melora will send out the TAC invite.

Action Item: Melora will send out the information packet for Jack's idea and her PowerPoint presentation describing the FTC ask, and the invitation for the Nov. 13 TAC meeting.

Public Comment Period #1 - Agenda related

Larry: RMIS.org shows 2024 steelhead releases from the Cowlitz Trout Hatchery as 52.8K for summer steelhead and 299.6K for late winter steelhead. Are these numbers correct?

Bryce: Maybe those numbers only reflect the tagged steelhead. RMIS is a repository for CWT information – not WDFW's formal database for hatchery information.

Bryce will check this against the latest annual report from Tacoma (sent to WDFW in September) for release numbers to see if there's a disconnect.

Jack: Re the Mayfield migrant mortalities, what did the pathologist report say?

Chris: All we have heard is the parasites (copepods and nematodes) as expected this time of year.

Jack: Hopes the releases and returns at Mayfield migrant traps will be discussed at the December FTC meeting. Regarding Cowlitz River fall Chinook, when the 35% exploitation rate says 440 fish were harvested outside of the basin (.5% of the 82K), that does not bode well. Will there be no sport harvest allowed on fall Chinook for a number of years? We need to get beyond that.

Scott: Keep in mind, these are 4-year-olds. We have seen 20 adult Chinook from those releases returning this year. More information on this will be shared at the December meeting.

Bryce: This has been identified as a key need to be referred to the M&E Group. WDFW will coordinate with Tacoma on what can be presented in December.

Larry: Regarding coho management, the NORs seem to be biting, whereas the HORs aren't. This program doesn't seem to be successful. Integrating NORs and HORs seems to fix the issue.

John: People are catching more coho in the lower section of the lower Cowlitz this year. And yes, we are moving toward an integrated program.

Topics for December 3, 2024 FTC Meeting

- Updates incl. Hydro Ops, Water Quality
 - FTC Work Plan / Protocols incl. Public Presentations to FTC
 - FHMP Transition Plan Implementation
 - Fish Facilities, Satellite Rearing Ponds, Cispus Release Site, Mayfield Downstream Fish Passage Remodel, Coho Net Pen Project, Coho Parr Study design alternatives, Trout Hatchery Remodel
 - LCPUD Cowlitz Falls Dam Operations
 - Downstream Adaptive Management TWG, Monitoring and Evaluation Subgroup
 - CRR Fund HAP Subcommittee
 - Mayfield Downstream Fish Passage Remodel
 - Preview January FTC Meeting Topics / Confirm 2025 Meeting Schedule
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Public Comment Period #2 – Any Topic

Larry: Noted Priest Rapids has had good results from changing their broodstock management. Fall Chinook programs are related to broodstock. He sees success as adult returns back to the river and is happy to see the FTC leaning in that direction. Relicensing is coming up in only 10 years.

Meeting Evaluation

- Well attended once again

- Tech issues continued with access to the Chat and to the Teams meeting. Thanks, Melora for using email as back-up for Chat. In 2025 there will be a new Outlook entity. This should resolve such issues.
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Josua's Inspirational Quote

Fear less, hope more; eat less, chew more; whine less, breathe more; talk less, say more; hate less, love more; and all good things are yours. – Swedish Proverb

Closing Remarks

Melora thanked everyone for participating in these license implementation meetings, she was especially appreciative of the reminder to breathe! It is so helpful that we all are working collaboratively toward common ends to support the resources we all care about.

Parking Lot

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