

Cowlitz Hydroelectric Project
FERC No. 2016
Cowlitz Fisheries Technical Committee
Final Meeting Summary
February 4, 2025 from 9:30 – 2:30

FTC Representative Attendees:

Melora Shelton	TPU
Bryce Glaser	WDFW
Andrew Luymes	ECY

Additional Attendees:

Anne Baxter	ECY
Thomas Starkey-Owens	ECY
Josua Holowatz	WDFW
Brian Gale	WDFW
John Serl	WDFW
Kris Warner	WDFW
Kevin Young	WDFW
Todd Hillson	WDFW
Sean Toomey	WDFW
Larona Newhouse	WDFW
Peggy Miller	WDFW
Sean Luis	TPU
Matt Bleich	TPU
Matt Peter	TPU
Jenise Bauman	TPU
Scott Gibson	TPU

Chris Vaughn	TPU
Eric Shoblom	TPU
Michael Boyles	BPA
Ann Weckback	Lewis County
Joe First	LCPUD
Steve West	LCFRB
Lyn Wiltse	PDSA Consulting / Facilitator

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

Remaining 2025 FTC Meeting Dates: Mar. 4, Apr. 1 (no foolin'), May 6, June 3, Aug. 5, Sept. 2 (day after Labor Day), Oct. 7, Nov. 4, Dec. 2

Approval of January Meeting Summary

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

Updates

Announcements

- Lyn announced she has begun cutting back on work and June will be her last FTC meeting.

- We were pleased Andrew could join us as he is working one day a week through mid-March.
- The initial Transition Plan (for Fall Chinook) presentation will take place at the March FTC meeting, as will the Cowlitz Restoration and Recovery (CRR)/Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Hatchery Associated Production (HAP) follow up.
- Tacoma is still operating under interim Project Managers (PM) for the Trout Hatchery and Mayfield Remodels and would appreciate any recommendations for permanent hires.

Hydro Operations (Presentation provided Feb. 3.)

- Inflows: January inflows were only 61% of the historical average, drivers included low precipitation (44% of average for Cowlitz Basin) and cooler-than-normal temperatures regionally in the last half of the month.
- Storage: Riffe Lake elevation is 720 ft (near recent and below long-term averages). Boat ramp closures are anticipated at 719 ft (Melora to notify WDFW). Upper Cowlitz basin snowpack is in the normal range. The Snow Water Equivalent Storage graph was much appreciated: https://nwcc-apps.sc.egov.usda.gov/awdb/basin-plots/POR/WTEQ/assocHUC8/17080004_Upper_Cowlitz.html
- Outflow: Outflow from Mayfield was consistently above the minimum flow (4.2K cfs), discharge range 5-10K cfs reflects early side flow management and later regional cold. There were no flow or ramping exceedances.
- 10-day Forecast: Well below normal precipitation and temperatures continue. Inflows on decreasing trend from 3.6K cfs and continued draft at Riffe Lake. Outflows will likely increase later in the week with more cold weather. The current climate outlook is tilting cold and wet through springtime. Colder and drier conditions are anticipated through the end of February.

Water Quality

- Matt P reported there were no spill events or water quality monitoring for Total Dissolved Gas (TDG), etc. since the last FTC meeting.
- Tacoma is still working to collect additional water quality data as covariates to the upcoming Cowlitz Falls North Shore Collector (CFNSC) Passage Study and the Coho Parr Study.

Related Project Updates

- Kosmos: Tacoma will conduct additional sampling in March, to determine whether copper should be listed as a contaminant in accordance with the Water Quality Protection Plan (WQPP).
- Trout Hatchery Remodel: Drilling operations continue, these actions are to understand the water supply and inform the remodel design and should conclude up by the end of February.
- North Taidnapam Boat Launch Improvement Project: When spring reservoir elevations allow, Tacoma will complete Phase 1 and move forward with Phase 2 (lower-level parking area, trail, ADA loading platform, etc.). Phase 2 is currently out for permitting.
- Mayfield Dam: In March – April Tacoma will be injecting dye in the spillway adjacent to Mayfield Dam in an effort to determine if leakage is infiltrating into the gallery. Matt noted since they will be using Green Gobbler dye, there is the potential for the pool below the dam to turn a little green. They are coordinating with WDFW and ECY about the timing/notifications on this.

Fish Facilities

Separator:

Eric reported that, as expected, returns in January were low. All 37 fish collected last week were winter-run steelhead.

- Coho: Ended the season above the 5-year average with 58.7K adults, 14.1K of which were NORs. They ended up just short of the goal to transport 12K coho to the Tilton by the end of the season. They reached the goal of 50% NOR broodstock (concluded end of December). Coho broodstock collection Spawning ended mid-January with the egg take goal easily met.
- Winter Steelhead: Returns were in upward trend through January and are expected to increase this month and next. 338 have been collected so far, 100+ above the 5-year average to date. Collection began Dec. 1 (rather than Feb 1) to extend the run earlier for the lower river program. All 150 males and 118 of the 175 females needed have been collected for that program. Collection for the Tilton has also begun and is going well. He noted only 10% of the NORs can be retained for broodstock to protect overmining NORs from spawning naturally. For each NOR kept for brood, two integrated NORs are sent upstream for demographic replacement.
- Spring Chinook will begin to return in March, followed by summer steelhead in early summer and fall Chinook in late summer.

Release Sites: Tacoma staff fabricated a new funnel entrance for the Franklin Bridge at the Packwood site. It is very sturdy and should last a long time. Also new gravel was put down. All release sites are in good working order.

Mayfield Coho Net Pens: Net Pens 1 and 2 are low density and, have half the mortality (0.1%) of the higher density pens (0.25%). This is much better than the 2% mortality in the hatchery. Eric expects the mortality to increase across the board as we move into the spring as temperatures rise, poundage increases, and smolting begins. He also noted these upcoming decisions:

- Apr. 1: Decide whether to proceed with CWT group for BY 2024 coho. If so, they will need to purchase the CWTs 90 days ahead.
- May 23: Complete phase 1 evaluation and recommendations. Send out a draft DD with a formal recommendation.
- At the June FTC meeting: Seek FTC approval to move to Phase 2.
- Aug. 15: Consider securing outside funding for ongoing support.

Capital Projects: Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Remodel: Indications from initial drilling were disappointing, so additional drilling and testing of new well locations continues at the Trout Hatchery. Stay tuned.

M&E Subgroup

Jenise reported the Subgroup last met on Jan. 15. She reminded all that the M&E Plan is posted on the FTC website. <https://www.mytpu.org/about-tpu/services/power/about-tacoma-power/dams-power-sources/cowlitz-river-project/cowlitz-fisheries-committee/>

Life Cycle Modeling – Jenise noted in comparing the model used by USGS for coho with the Integrated Population Models (IPM), the Subgroup is leaning toward using the IPM for the Cowlitz. With the help from WDFW folks who have considerable experience with these models, they are starting to outline information needs, etc. A consultant will be hired to help with this. The Subgroup also discussed Transition Plans and how best to present them. She announced Bryce will be sharing an update on how to communicate the Transition Plans to the FTC. She closed by thanking those who sent example templates for Charter development. She looks forward to sharing a draft Charter at the March FTC Meeting.

When the Subgroup meets again Feb. 19, they will also discuss Jack Tipping's steelhead rearing proposal (also referred to as CCA proposal, making sure it fits within the Steelhead Transition Plans,

etc.), consolidating M&E data into a single location, as well as marking strategies and reviewing species-specific studies.

Annual Program Review

Save the Date – Cowlitz Science Conference and Program Review – April 16. Calendar invite will be sent out the week of 2/3. Jenise reminded all that the date for the APR /Science meeting is April 16 and it will be held at the Veterans Memorial Museum. She will follow up with Bryce and Todd about re-envisioning some of the topics from last fall's APR meeting and will be lining up speakers to present new/updated information. Note: The APR is an annual review of hatchery programs. It takes place over a 3-month period and considers public comments, etc. Section 12-4 of the FHMP describes the review process.

Transition Plan Update (Presentation provided Feb. 5.)

Presenter: Bryce Glaser

The M&E Subgroup has been working collaboratively to create a Transition Plan template that can also be used with all species. The Transition Plan discussions will kick off at the March in-person FTC meeting starting with fall Chinook. In the meantime, Bryce reviewed the structure of the plans and emphasized the original program (pre FHMP update) for each species will be described along with the details of the new program. He reviewed the key components of the transition plans and reminded all that our recovery goals include healthy and harvestable levels.

He concluded by noting that most Cowlitz populations are in recolonization status within the Recovery phase. One of the key metrics is Smolt to Adult Returns (SARs). Performance metrics for the hatchery program include using pNOB to calculate the Proportionate of Natural Influence (PNI), which is important for integrated programs. It is important to understand the influence of NORs on the overall population (limiting the HORs on the spawning grounds, etc.). He also noted we have shifted from hard NOR targets to having goals for those (pNOB targets) and letting those vary depending on the abundance and our needs, thus allowing for optimal habitat utilization.

Downstream Adaptive Management Technical Work Group (Presentation provided Feb 5.)

Presenter: Chris Vaughn

Mayfield Counting House

Chris reminded everyone that the counting house is put in bypass mode each year from Jan. 1 through March 31. During these months, the facility is operated in 24-hour cycles once each month. The first took place on Jan. 28 (3 Chinook and 1 coho juvenile counted). The next operation will be Feb. 18.

Cowlitz Falls Northshore Collector

Chris was pleased to report two seasonal day-shift staff have been hired and the night shift seasonal staff from last year will be returning. Sean Luis explained Tacoma is reviewing passage methods within the Cowlitz basin (Mayfield vs. CFNSC). He noted there has been a lack of a basic framework for the passage configurations and fish handling processes. This will be tied into the M&E Plan, using relevant VSP parameters to provide a foundation for future studies. Sean reviewed a flow chart of the proposed approach for this.

DD 2025-02: CFNSC Evaluation Recommendations

Chris reviewed the three recommendations outlined in the DD 2025-02 that was sent out a week prior to this meeting and asked for feedback with the intent of finalizing the DD at the March FTC meeting.

Action Item: All to send any additional edits by Feb. 18 to Chris so he can send an updated version of the DD out a week in advance of the March meeting.

LCPUD Dam Operations

Presenter: Joe First on behalf of Nate Anderson

This year's sediment removal in front of unit trash racks is still scheduled for March 3-28.

Kiona Creek Enhancement Project – Completed 100% design. The design includes adding wood structures, vegetation, etc. They will be seeking grant funding at the end of Q1.

New Fishing Pond – This is at 10% design. They are hoping to be at 100% design this year and will then go through a couple of years of permitting with construction in 2027-28. The pond is projected to be deeper and have 11 acres of surface water. This will be good for both the anglers and fish.

Sluice Gate Repair – They are still getting the permitting process in place and are currently coordinating with NOAA on this.

Boat Barrier Replacement – The two north anchors have been poured. The contractor will build the form and pour the south anchor in the next few weeks. After that they will install the boat barrier across the reservoir.

Capital Projects: Mayfield Downstream Passage Remodel

Presenter: Matt Bleich

Matt reviewed DD 2025-01 on the Mayfield Juvenile Bypass System. The DD was reflected in the PPT presentations at the last two FTC meetings and sent out the day before this meeting outlining Tacoma's recommendations on their preferred alternative for improvements to the bypass system. Specifically, the DD recommends approval and support of the 25% design of alternative 3b (moving the Counting House and eliminating the sagging bridge). After receiving FTC support, they can move forward with funding in hopes of completing construction by 2028.

Bryce reported once they have an internal conversation with their engineering folks they will get back to Matt with any questions. Lyn noted that Amy Kocourek let her know that while she was unable to attend this meeting, she has submitted a ticket to their engineers. WDFW looks forward to hearing who is taking the lead on this from NOAA so they can coordinate their review and feedback. Matt again offered Tacoma's support in those discussions.

Action Item: All to send feedback to Matt B by Feb. 18 if at all possible so he can get a revised draft out for review a week ahead of the next meeting.

FTC Work Plan / Protocols

Presenter: Melora Shelton

Tacoma is seeking additional feedback on the draft 2025 Work Plan and Protocols which will be finalized at the March FTC meeting. No DD is associated with these. These are to be considered living documents, and we will continue to update them as needed.

Melora also projected the updated draft Work Plan and asked about any updates (not related to Transition plans) that should be added to the schedule. E.g., discussion/decision making around coho net pens. Peggy asked that Gravel Augmentation updates (before and after actions) be listed. WDFW will be providing additional written feedback on protocols and work plans. Feedback is also welcome at the March meeting.

Tacoma has continued to work on protocols for public presentations and will be meeting with stakeholders on that topic later today along with roles in preparing for, stewarding, and responding to public presentations. Stay tuned.

Action Item: All: Send any additional feedback/edits to Melora by Feb. 18 if possible so she can send out any updates for review a week ahead of the next FTC meeting.

CRR Program

Presenters: Steve West and Melora Shelton

2025 Habitat Grant Round: Steve reported the grant round opened on Jan 13. Draft applications are due March 17. Proposal presentations (hybrid and site visits) for all eligible projects will take place April 15-24. May 8 has been reserved for CRR proposal presentations.

HAP Subgroup: Melora announced the HAP grant round opens tomorrow (Feb. 5). Letters of intent are due March 3, followed by pre-application meetings with interested parties. Draft applications are due on April 7. The schedule is posted at MyTPU.org/CRR. The Subgroup last met on Jan. 27. Discussion included initial M&E feedback on the CCA study idea (also referred to as Jack's proposal; for which they received a letter of support from the WA Chapter of CCA). The M&E Subgroup will provide feedback and identify potential questions. Both groups meet next on Feb. 18 so M&E can update HAP, allowing initial feedback to CCA before the Mar. 3 letters of intent are due. There was also conversation around a Friends of the Cowlitz (FOC) project idea to reboot juvenile rearing in the ponds at Toledo that were used previously. Melora will distribute the HAP subcommittee notes for additional detail.

Action Items:

- Melora: Send out the CRR HAP Subgroup notes from the Jan. 27 meeting to the FTC.
 - Melora: Send out the existing CRR Charter a week ahead of the next FTC meeting for review at that meeting.
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Public Comment Period #1 - Agenda related

Jack: Expressed much appreciation to Eric and hatchery staff for the success of the Net Pen project. This is good for spring Chinook as well as Coho.

Larry: What water quality parameters are you testing for at hatcheries, who's doing the testing? He is disappointed there are no protocols yet for members of the public to make presentations to the FTC. Also, he has been doing comparatives with SARs. According to the HSRG guidelines, weekly escapement reports, etc., in 2024, for most species were less than 1%.

Topics for March 4, 2025 FTC Meeting – in person at Chehalis Veterans Memorial Museum

- Updates incl. Hydro Ops, Water Quality
- Initial Update on FHMP Transition Plan Implementation – Fall Chinook
 - APR / Science Meeting

- Fish Facilities, Satellite Rearing Ponds, Cispus Release Site, Mayfield Downstream Fish Passage Remodel, Coho Net Pen Project, Trout Hatchery Remodel
 - Mayfield Downstream Fish Passage Remodel - Approve DD 2025-01
 - LCPUD Cowlitz Falls Dam Operations
 - FTC Work Plan / Protocols – public presentations
 - Downstream Adaptive Management TWG
 - Monitoring and Evaluation Subgroup – Approve DD 2025-02
 - CRR Fund HAP Subcommittee
 - Preview April FTC Meeting Topics
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Public Comment Period #2 – Any Topic

Larry: Recently visited the Barrier Dam Tackle Shop and was pleased to see a FOC group meeting there. In Lewiston, he attended a Steelhead Exposition for Clearwater River. He saw Chris Foster (formerly with Tacoma and now with USFWS and in charge of Dworshak Hatchery funding) who gave him a great tour. Larry was impressed by significant returns of steelhead, coho, and springers there.

Meeting Evaluation

- Well attended once again.
 - Liked the new graph on the Hydro Status Update - tells a more accurate story for the basin.
 - Appreciate the flexibility of people coming and going, participating via phone as needed.
 - Had good use of the Chat for information sharing.
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Josua's Inspirational Quote

“A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures on the doctor's books.” — Irish Proverb

Closing Remarks

Melora thanked everyone for taking the time to join the meeting. She looks forward to the next meeting in person (with remote option). She is excited about the refocus on how we work together to ensure these meetings are as productive as possible. Much appreciation for those helping to improve the protocols.

Parking Lot

- Review Steelhead Kelt Recycling Program