

Cowlitz Hydroelectric Project
FERC No. 2016
Cowlitz Fisheries Technical Committee
Final Meeting Summary
February 6, 2024 from 9:30 – 2:30

FTC Representative Attendees:

Travis Nelson	TPU
Bryce Glaser	WDFW
Amy Kocourek	NMFS

Additional Attendees:

Peggy Miller	WDFW
John Serl	WDFW
Josua Holowatz	WDFW
Brian Gale	WDFW
Jamie Murphy	TPU
Kris Warner	WDFW
Todd Hillson	WDFW
Kevin Young	WDFW
Matt Peter	TPU
Steve West	LCFRB
Michael Boyles	BPA
Russell Page	LCPUD
Stephen Lewis	BIA
Ann Weckback	Lewis County
Lyn Wiltse	PDSA Consulting / Facilitator

Public Attendee: Larry Pryor

2024 FTC Meeting Dates: In-person meetings will include a remote option. 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 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.

Welcome!

- We were pleased to welcome to the FTC Amy Kocourek, from the WA Coast Lower Columbia Branch Base of NOAA Fisheries.
 - We were also pleased to welcome Kevin Young, who is WDFW's new Region 5 Hatchery Operations Manager.
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Updates

Hydro Operations (presentation emailed on February 5)

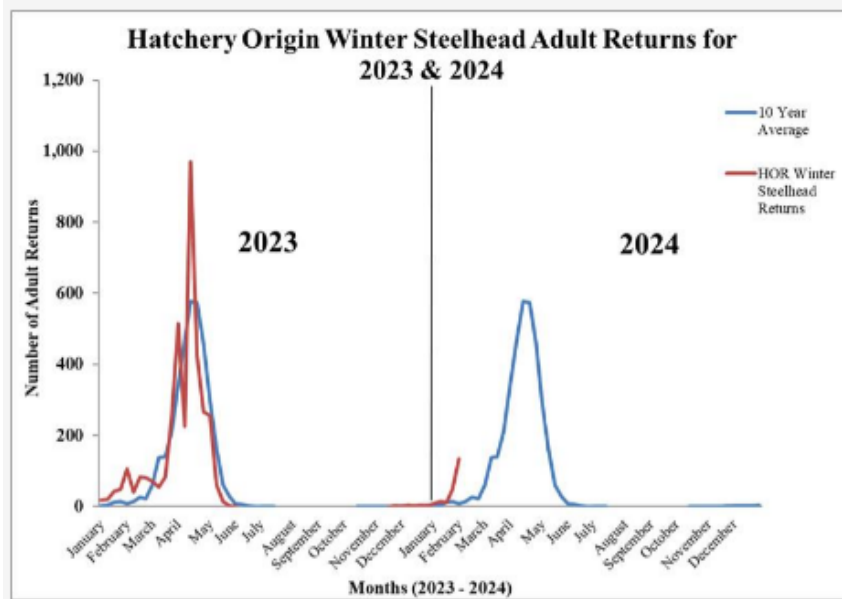
In Melora's absence, Matt P described the following:

- Inflows: These have been near normal with largely variable weather in January for which inflows were at 107% of the historical average and 114% of average precipitation. Deep cold

- A valve broke due to freezing conditions causing a 2-hour ladder outage on January 18 at the separator. Staff used the opportunity to perform the annual inspection during which no fish were found. They are now getting 11-33 winter run steelhead on a daily basis.
- The coho HOR goal for the Tilton is 12,000 adults. They have set up a transport curve to frontload transports to allow getting fish up there earlier in the season but did not reach the 12,000 cap this year. It has been a good fishery.

Broodstock Collection:

- The goal was to start on December 1 to advance the Lower Cowlitz program. So far, all steelhead HORs collected prior to February 1 were double floy tagged to maximize early return fish to advance the run. 129 males and 78 females had been collected by the end of last week, so we are close to goal. For every NOR taken to brood, two HORs are sent upstream for demographic replacement.
- Though it is still early in the season, we may be seeing an effect from our prior effort attempting to get winter-run steelhead a little earlier.
- Bryce noted he is excited about modeling work in the transition planning. As we move forward, hope the trend continues per the model.



Mayfield Counting House:

- Bypass mode began at the end of December and will continue through the end of March. During that time, it will open for a 24-hour period each month for spot checking for any abnormal migration behavior. The January spot check collected 13 juvenile Chinook and counted one coho juvenile during the 24-hour operation.

Cowlitz Falls Fish Facility

The facility is currently undergoing off-season maintenance (until March 15). Tacoma is currently seeking night technicians for the 2024 season and welcomes any recommendations. Awaiting approval of DD (likely at this meeting). The 2023 Annual Report for CF for 2023 will be to the FTC for 30-day review prior to the April FTC meeting.

Cispus Release Site (Tom Music Bridge)

Laura was unable to attend the meeting as she was helping with the Cowlitz Falls drawdown. She emailed ahead of the meeting that there isn't really an update to the release site other than Tacoma

and LCPUD are currently coordinating on permit timing. Eric added that though the Special Use permit that Tacoma was holding (covered upland access) has expired, all indications are that updating that permit should be easy. Tacoma staff visited the Copper Canyon Release site to see if it could be utilized during drawdown (which may last as long as Feb. 28). Unfortunately, they found it to be too shallow – fish would get stranded on gravel bars. Are there interim things we can do to get some temporary releases? Peggy asked if a second alternate whitewater release site downstream of Copper Canyon had been checked out. She noted it is "reservoirish" when at full pool. Note: Later in the meeting Eric put in the Chat that this secondary whitewater takeout site had been visited by Gabe McGuire who reported Tacoma fish trucks cannot get close enough to release adults at that site in the current conditions (20' drawdown).

Pinniped Response

Bryce noted an increased number of pinnipeds were seen last year in the Lower Cowlitz and they moved upstream further than had been seen in the past. Some sea lions made it all the way to the Barrier Dam. While the smelt return likely drew them in, and that is their primary food source, there has also been predation on adult salmonids. A few years ago, some changes were made at the federal level to the Marine Mammal Protection Act, giving additional management authority to the states. Some regulations to remove the mammals from below Bonneville Dam were modified to include lower river tributaries. Despite best efforts, WDFW has not yet received additional funding to respond as they would like. There is also the need to identify what would trigger the need for an emergency response in tributaries while funding for a more sustained effort is pursued. There is legislative support for this in the next WA State biennium - State Fiscal year 2025-2027. It also includes some support to address avian predation issues. Most of WDFW's regional focus is on the Cowlitz, Lewis, and Kalama currently. If funding is received, removal efforts could occur in the spring and fall. WDFW's Wildlife program will be the lead in putting the team together to address this. WDFW is also updating their website with talking points. Bryce will keep us posted on this.

- Action Item: Bryce to follow up with Randy offline and send talking point to the FTC along with link to WDFW's website. [Columbia River sea lion management | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#)

Fisheries Update

Josua noted that every year since 2018, Region 5 staff puts together a Spring Chinook Fact Sheet for Cowlitz, Kalama, and Lewis Rivers. He walked through the report which was subsequently emailed out to the FTC. [2024 Cowlitz Kalama Lewis Spring Chinook Factsheet.pdf](#) The report highlights forecasts of Cowlitz, Kalama and Lewis spring Chinook returning to the mouth of the Columbia and their respective tributaries. Currently, this document highlights forecasts as an aggregate of Hatchery (HOR) and Natural (NOR) fish. Forecast returns to the Cowlitz River are 4,577 adult spring Chinook (more than the 5-year average, but less than the 10-year average). The document also shows long-term trends in hatchery releases and returns to the mouth of the Columbia.

He reminded all that the Cowlitz hatchery releases have been consistent except for the 2022 release year (did not make brood in 2020) so with coordination through the FTC, there was some backfill fish brought in from the Kalama. These fish were marked so they could be identified when they returned to the facility. Cowlitz fish were not adipose clipped (but received a CWT) and thus not available for harvest in mark-selective fisheries. He reported feeling confident that we have enough fish to prosecute a fishery. 4,577 spring Chinook adults are forecasted to return to tributary mouth, 13% of which are NORs. Over the long term, they are hoping to see more NORs available.

Permanent rules: The Cowlitz is currently open for two adipose-clipped spring Chinook. In early March, this will change to one Adipose + Ventral clipped adult (There will be a press release on this.).

Additional information on Columbia river spring Chinook forecasts can be found at:
<https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/management/columbia-river/compact/other-information#2024>

Link to on-station hatchery escapement needs for the Cowlitz and Lewis are defined in the US v. Oregon Biological Opinion issued by NOAA Fisheries: https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/s7-usvoregon_2018-2027_mgmagmnt_final_signed.pdf

Monitoring & Evaluation Subgroup

Bryce reminded all this subgroup hasn't been meeting formally. They have been working with the consultant on the development of the M&E Plan and recently reviewed the latest draft of the plan. The consultant is currently working with Tacoma staff to address WDFW comments and then will share the updated draft. They have been dealing with emergent issues through an email chain.

Travis was pleased to report Tacoma has filled out all but one position in the science and research group. Good news! They are still interviewing for a fish passage biologist; but this means the M&E effort should "rev back up" with full engagement soon. Kudos to Scott Gibson for his wonderful support in the midst of being short staffed!

Downstream Adaptive Management Technical Work Group (TWG)

John once again reviewed the proposed studies for the coming season as listed in DD 2024-01 (emailed to all on December 30).

1. Up to 50 species per tag for each week – to more closely track environmental factors re Collection Efficiency (CE).
2. Reexamine collected temperature data with the previous CFD modeling to determine if it is possible to reduce water temperatures in front of the Northshore Collector during summers when Chinook are migrating.
3. Acoustic studies – reexamine previous studies to assess tagged smolt travel time from release to more closely assess how environmental factors affect collection at CF Dam and where smolts arrive at the dam.
4. Develop a study plan to determine the locations to release coho par that optimize adult returns.

Discussion:

Do the proposed studies have a correlation with Fish Passage Survival (FPS) estimate? There are no active studies planned for this year due to the drawdown at CF Dam. The TWG is looking at CE to ensure estimate of FPS is accurate. This year's proposed studies 1-3, are intended to provide direction in selecting actions that could improve FPS in future years. Amy would like to see a connection between the results of this monitoring and changes in management. The CF Adaptive Management Plan describes that connection more clearly than the DD. The draft of that Plan was completed in 2014 before the CF Northshore Collector (CFNSC) was built. The four study designs listed in the DD will include a link to management practices.

Bryce reminded all there are two other tasks that were not listed in the DD: Updating the Charter (to include authority and approvals between the FTC and the TWG, etc.) 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.

After discussion, the DD was approved by present voting members of the FTC. Jonathan Stumpf of TU also concurred via email prior to the meeting as he was unable to attend.

Action Item: Travis to send out to absent voting members for 7-day electronic review/concurrence.

2024 FTC Work Plan

Presenter: Travis Nelson

Travis projected the draft plan that was sent out to all on January 30. This helps us to prioritize our meeting schedules. He updated the draft per suggestions that included adding Charter development for the TWG and M&E Subgroup to the “Scheduled Updates” section. All agreed that a periodic review of charters would be helpful. He also updated the quarterly in-person FTC meeting schedule showing the next meeting to be March (vs. April).

Action Item: Travis to follow up with Matt Bleich on timing for updating/completing the Downstream Adaptive Management Plan.

LCPUD Dam Operations

Presenter: Russell Page

Debris removal started at the beginning of January and will continue through the end of February. Periodic inspection is scheduled for early March. They will test gates and pass flow through all gates March 5-7.

The drawdown for the Debris Barrier Moorage Site Rehabilitation Project began Friday, February 2 and lasted through the weekend. Sunday pm they reached 842 ft and are holding steady. This allows time for the area to dry out before the project is complete. The work will begin February 7 and will be complete no later than March 1. The contractor is optimistic they will finish sooner and will then come back to full pool.

During the last high-water event in January, they lost their downstream turbidity monitor. They have an additional monitor which they will install on February 12 when flows passing through the project are at the proper level. All other turbidity monitors are operating. The District also purchased a new turbidity monitor which they will install so there will be one on each side of the downstream bank.

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

Presenters: Matt Peter and Steve West

Matt noted the habitat portion of the CRR grant round started on February 5. The HAP round will begin on February 7. Email distributions /notifications will go out. Letters of intent are due on March 4 (required). A pre-application meeting with a member of the HAP advisory group is required and is critical to project success. These pre-application meetings are offered February 12-March 24. Draft applications are due April 1 (required).

The HAP Subgroup has met twice in January – will meet again on February 21 to discuss lessons learned and how to move forward.

Action Item: Matt will see that the summary of HAP notes from the last meeting are sent out.

LCFRB/SFRB Update: Steve West shared the following links to new LCFRB website <https://www.lcfrb.org/> which include a new and richly detailed resource map and corresponding tutorial.

- Calendar link: [2024 LCFRB Salmon Recovery Grants Manual FINAL 2024-02-05.pdf](https://www.lcfrb.org/2024-LCFRB-Salmon-Recovery-Grants-Manual-FINAL-2024-02-05.pdf)
- New Resource Map: <https://www.lcfrb.org/salmon-resource-map>

- New Resource Map Tutorial:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_TMUZN5V2R3MI4BrIRpmSo72Pq0FZj8F/view

The LCFRB opened both the CRR and SRFB grant rounds yesterday (February 5th). The LCFRB updated the 2024 LCFRB Grants Manual Appendix D (CRR), to include changes to the CRR Implementation Strategy. These changes were approved by the FTC in 2023. Preproposals will be accepted until March 22. Site visit dates (virtual or onsite) will take place April 24-26 and April 30-May 3; May 9 is the date reserved for CRR site visits (in person and onsite). At this point, there are two pending proposals.

Public Comment Period #1 - Agenda related

Larry Pryor:

- What's the forecast for harvestable springers return this year?

Bryce: Due to a shortfall in a release a couple of years ago we did not ad clip hatchery origin fish. Only the 4-year-old Kalama fish will be eligible for harvest. In March WDFW will announce a fishing rule change that only allows harvest of adipose + right ventral-clipped fish. In addition to the 660 harvestable adults returning, 1,300 will be returning for brood. As many as 1,600 are forecasted to be used for upstream transport. In aggregate, 900K were released. The forecast is based on cohort regressions – not SAR. The challenge is the ability to detect the true number of jacks that may have been caught last year. Chinook come back as 3–5-year-olds. We have to wait until all adults come back from that brood before trying to do the math on the SAR. This is our attempt to implement a fishery based on the Kalama fish we brought over. We are planning to prosecute a fishery for the whole period on those ad-RV-clipped fish.

- At last April's meeting, we discussed the 200-300 seals that were lingering at the mouth of the Cowlitz. Looks like most of the fish released from the Cowlitz were in the same window (March -June). Do release dates take into consideration predation? Lots of seals hang out at the mouth of the Cowlitz.

Bryce: The majority of the pinnipeds are following smelt. These numbers quickly dissipated once the smelt runs dropped off. There are days/not weeks of time that we can manipulate the timing of hatchery releases.

- Hoping the M&E Subgroup has as its highest priority success for adult returns for the fishery. Hopes the aim is to improve on this in the future. The subgroup needs to function independently and tell an honest story. SAR calculations should be in accordance with the NW Power Council (SAR goals of 2-6%).

Bryce: The FTC's M&E Subgroup is focused on evaluating Tacoma's compliance with license requirement. They are also interested in fall and spring Chinooks survivals. Spring Chinook SARs resulted in management changes based on that analysis.

Travis: The M&E Subgroup provides technical expertise to assist Tacoma implement its license. They are working toward setting recovery goals along with making sure they have harvestable fish.

- 2015 was the best springer run. Things seem to have been on a downward trend since then.

After talking offline with Larry, Travis agreed to bring up something for the FTC to consider: Having a member of the public present at an FTC meeting or at an Annual Program Review. He asked everyone to be ready to consider/discuss this in March for possible presentation to the FTC in April or the Annual Program Review (APR).

Topics for March 5, 2024 FTC Meeting (In-person at the Veteran's Memorial Museum, Chehalis)

- Updates incl. Hydro Ops, Water Quality, Fish Facilities, Cispus Release Site, Mayfield Downstream Fish Passage Remodel
 - LCPUD Cowlitz Falls Dam Operations
 - 2024 FTC Work Plan
 - Ecology presentation on Kosmos Clean-Up
 - Downstream Adaptive Management TWG (Charter)
 - Monitoring and Evaluation Subgroup (Charter)
 - CRR Fund / HAP Subcommittee
 - Preview April FTC Meeting Topics
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Second Public Comment Period

Larry shared his observation that sometimes it seems like these groups forget it's about the fishery.

Meeting Evaluation

- Welcome to Amy and Andrew!
- Appreciated flexibility with the agenda timing.
- Good sense of collaboration
- Awesome ice breaker (Thanks Todd!)

Josua's Inspirational Quote

Our parents and those who came before us made sacrifices for our benefit. This quote honors them. "If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace." Thomas Paine

Closing Remarks

Travis thanked everyone for their participation. As he has said in the past, Tacoma couldn't do this without everyone's contributions (hard work, experience, intelligence, etc.).

Parking Lot

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