

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

FTC Representative Attendees:

Travis Nelson	TPU
Bryce Glaser	WDFW
Amy Kocourek	NMFS
Jonathan Stumpf	TU

Additional Attendees:

Anne Baxter	ECY
Peggy Miller	WDFW
Josua Holowatz	WDFW
John Serl	WDFW
Kris Warner	WDFW
Todd Hillson	WDFW
Kevin Young	WDFW
Sean Toomey	WDFW
Jamie Murphy	TPU
Matt Peter	TPU
Eric Shoblom	TPU
Steve West	LCFRB
Steve Manlow	LCFRB
Denise Smee	LCFRB
Michael Boyles	BPA
Laura Wolfe	LCPUD
Joe First	LCPUD
Katie Fielding	Cowlitz Indian Tribe
Lyn Wiltse	PDSA Consulting / Facilitator

Public Attendees: Larry Pryor, Randy LeDuc

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

Approval of March Meeting Summary

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

Updates

Hydro Operations (presentation emailed on April 1)

Matt described the following:

- Inflows: March inflows were at 92% of the historical average with the Cowlitz Basin receiving 64% of average precipitation. Overall, inflows water year to date are 91% of average precipitation.

- Kosmos Cleanup: Tacoma expects to get comments back from Ecology on the Remedial Investigation (RI) report by the end of this week. Tacoma’s feasibility study is being drafted.

Fish Facilities

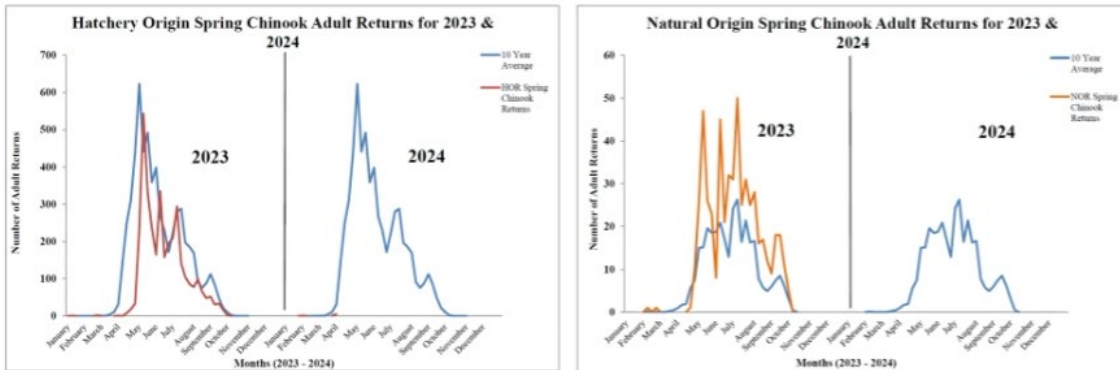
Separator:

- Eric noted returns are picking up and the numbers of HOR and NOR winter-run steelhead are above average.

Winter Steelhead: Hatchery and Natural Returns to date

Run Timing: November 2023-July 2024			
Week Ending	Total		
	Returns	Hatchery	Natural
Season to date	2,153	1,729	424
29-Mar	474	382	92
Weekly 5-Year Average	409	354	55
Season 5-Yr. Average to Date	1,374	1,168	206

- Five HOR Spring Chinook have returned so far.



Broodstock Collection:

- Collection of winter-run steelhead brood for the Tilton program is on schedule with males and females and the UCR Programs (running a little behind).

Mayfield Counting House:

- The Counting House began operating again on April 1. Per the 2024 Protocol:
 - Chinook and coho smolts receive snout CWTs.
 - Steelhead and cutthroat receive dorsal sinus CWTs.

Rainbow Plants:

- 13.6K catchable trout (6.8K lbs) have been planted to date between Swofford Pond near Riffe Lake and South Lewis County Park Pond in Toledo.
- In April 13.6K trout were planted at Mayfield.
- A total of 50K lbs of trout are planned to be planted annually to support local fisheries.

Cowlitz Falls Fish Facility:

- Tacoma kicked off their 2024 season with operations beginning on March 15.
- Spillway flumes were brought online March 25.
- Tagging is occurring Mondays and Thursdays, per the DD.

- Last season's Annual Report is undergoing final review by Tacoma and should be out to FTC in the next week or so.
- Smolts to date:
 - 124 steelhead
 - 32 cutthroat
 - 28 Chinook
 - 25 coho
- Fry Collection:
 - 1,752 Chinook
 - 1,210 coho

Mayfield Downstream Fish Passage Remodel

This is still undergoing management review at Tacoma. Stay tuned.

Coho Net Pen Project

This will be discussed at the May meeting after Eric has discussed details about the CWT strategy with WDFW.

Cispus Release Site (Tom Music Bridge)

Eric was pleased to announce Tacoma has secured their USFS Access Agreement from Special Uses Program Manager Joel Nowak for the maintenance work on the Cispus release site. A 14-day SEPA review is underway. The HPA is written and ready for attachments and a 45-day review. Permitting may be complete as early as the end of May. Next steps include securing a contractor for work in late July if all goes according to schedule.

Monitoring & Evaluation Subgroup

Bryce noted the subgroup has not met in some time. He and Todd have been working with the consultant on the M&E Plan and hope another draft will be out for FTC review in the near future. Travis reported that all vacant Tacoma positions have now been filled except for the fish passage biologist. Tacoma's new Science Manager started on March 25. She will attend next month's meeting.

Downstream Adaptive Management Technical Work Group (TWG)

John reported at the last meeting for this group they discussed mark recapture efforts for this year. They are now tagging up to 50 fish twice per week. They have been able to get some tags out to spring Chinook yearling smolts. This should improve FCE efforts going forward. The CFNSC Downstream Passage Annual Report should be out to the FTC shortly for a 30-day review.

2024 FTC Protocols

Presenter: Travis Nelson

Travis reported on his initial thoughts around what the protocols might be for the public to do presentations at FTC meetings. He is getting feedback from Bryce and Josua, Peggy, and Eric on this and welcomes input from others as well. He will have something more formal to share at the May meeting. He shared the following initial suggestions:

- Presentations occur during second public comment period
- Presentations limited to a maximum of 10 minutes
- Request must be submitted to FTC 2 months in advance
- Presentation to be considered for approval by FTC 1 month in advance

- Presentation must be ultimately approved by FTC 2 weeks prior to intended date of presentation
- Subjects must be related to topics included in the Settlement Agreement

Peggy suggested expanding the Settlement Agreement topic to include the license itself, and possibly the Bi-Op as well. Bryce offered that perhaps the chairperson or a subgroup of the FTC be designated to review the presentation ahead of time to ensure it is appropriate - is related to license documents, etc. He also suggested expanding the 10-minute limit to 15-20 minutes to allow time for comments/discussion. This discussion will continue among the group via email.

LCPUD Dam Operations

Presenter: Joe First

Joe provided the following update:

Debris Removal at Trash Rack: When Advanced American finishes with the debris barrier, the District will get a contractor on board to remove debris – could be as soon as June. They will coordinate with Tacoma and this work will not require a drawdown of Lake Scanewa.

Debris Barrier Repairs: Everything is proceeding on schedule. They are currently prepping the interior upper chamber for coating. They still plan to move the debris barrier in late July to mid-August. After the fish facility closes on August 31, the District will lower the reservoir for 8-10 weeks. During this time the contractor will put some new cathodic protection on the debris barrier. In planning this work, they are aware this is a lower-than-normal water year.

Boat Barrier Replacement: This should be at 100% design in 2 weeks. There will be anchor points on the north and south side of reservoir. Construction is anticipated to occur in the October/December 2024 timeframe. This will not require a drawdown.

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

Presenters: Steve Manlow and Steve West

Steve M walked through the proposed DD amendment (amendments go through the same process as DDs) for an increase in cost, scope, and time as requested by the Cowlitz Indian Tribe (CIT):

- Initial Project Cost (IPC): \$194,200
- Requested Cost Increase (RCI): \$168,000
- Requested project end date be extended from 12/31/24 to 3/15/25.

Steve M reviewed the goals and objectives of restoring Cispus flood plain connectivity. The additional funding would be used to complete sonic borings for each of the three proposed bridges on the Cispus Road per the preferred alternative. He further explained it was more effective and efficient to do the additional geo tech work now vs. later. This will result in a more robust preliminary design and shorten the timeline for completing a more robust preliminary design, and securing implementation funding.

All were asked to send any edits/comments to Melora and Steve by April 23 to allow for time to integrate them into the version we will review to approve at the May meeting. Bryce noted much appreciation for how thorough the DD is.

Steve W reported they are heading into the last week 2024 grant round for habitat projects. Draft proposals are due April 8. Site visits for CRR project proposals will be onsite on May 6 (FTC invited). So far there are three potential CRR-specific projects:

- Cispus Phase 5
- Hall Creek Construction
- A potential habitat or hatchery project on Silver Creek

Action Item: All send any questions about this to Steve West and copy Melora by April 23.

Public Comment Period #1 - Agenda related

Larry Pryor: Thank you very much for the great hydro operations reports. He is concerned about hydro and water quality. Fish are impacted particularly in the Upper Cowlitz by water hardness and other chemistry changes that give fish signals to move into smoltification, fish growth, health, etc. He recommends the work on this by Dr. Jesse Trushenski, Director of Science at Riverence Holdings. Eric: Water hardness changes with rain events, etc. It is pretty dynamic. After 16 years of managing hatcheries, he isn't aware of any hatchery facilities reacting to water chemistry changes. He welcomes Larry to follow up.

Randy: Thanked Eric for the presentation on the fish returns. It's nice to keep the fish top of mind, especially the returning fish.

Larry: The M&E group - he hopes they are independent and not trying to defend past activities. What comparatives are being used? Priest Rapids Hatchery/M&E efforts are to be lauded. SARs follow HSRG standards.

Todd: We are setting up our baseline and directive studies based on discussions with WDFW and Tacoma. After we get our numbers in line, we can then look at results in terms of SARs and then we can compare ourselves to other programs, recognizing it's never apples to apples.

Bryce: This group is working on developing the M&E Plan (a Tacoma responsibility). They are very interested in monitoring key components to allow for adaptive management in the future.

Topics for May 7, 2024 FTC Meeting

- Updates incl. Hydro Ops, Water Quality, Fish Facilities (including an update on fish runs), Cispus Release Site, Mayfield Downstream Fish Passage Remodel, Coho Net Pen Project
 - LCPUD Cowlitz Falls Dam Operations
 - Per the Work Plan –
 - FTC Protocols – Guidelines for public presentations (20 min)
 - Downstream Adaptive Management TWG (Charter)
 - Monitoring and Evaluation Subgroup (Charter)
 - CRR Fund / HAP Subcommittee – DD Amendment
 - Preview June In-person FTC Meeting Topics
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Public Comment Period #2 – Any topic

Larry: NOR SARs collection releases coming out of CF. Most coho are 1+. In 2021 36K coho were released into the upper basin. In 2023 163K 1+ coho were captured. Catching 16 fry per female. He calculates 5.5% SAR Coho NORs. How many to take upstream for a sustainable fishery?

Larry: Managing adult returns/SARs. In 2021 a letter was sent to FERC by Jamie Herrera Butler complaining about the decline of the fishery. Tacoma's response included looking forward to working

with the public on this. Their response also listed a commitment to improving survival rates for NOR and NOR fish and to adaptively manage the resource.

Randy: Thanked Travis for help in getting the dock put into Riffe Lake. He requested frequent updates on boat access to the lake. This will be a continuing problem. Some anglers are giving up. He doesn't want to see that happen. In some cases, fishing is all they have to look forward to.
Travis: Yes, he will see that boat access is added to the Hydro Operations report.

Randy: Is there a Plan B for predators at the mouth of the river this year or will it be a wait, and see?
Bryce: WDFW is working to get additional funding for the next biennium. There is also interest in broadscale predation mgt along the Columbia – not sure if this would impact the tributaries. The current focus is what would trigger an emergency response. Bryce will follow up by giving Randy the names of the folks in the WDFW wildlife program who are more familiar with this. Currently no hazing program has been planned.

Steve M (via Chat): WDFW and CRITFC are asking Congress for a \$5 million appropriation for the pinniped work as well.

Larry appreciates hatchery folks working on fish health including Kris Warner and Jesse Trushenski and Beaver Creek. He is interested in a new feed product that moves fish into smoltification.

Randy: There are so many fish issues that are too numerous. He requested a subgroup be formed that has to do with strictly fish issues. This group could provide reports on things that are most concerning to the angling community, who would appreciate getting more direct information on a regular basis.

Eric: Will add a link to the FTC site to the weekly fish report, which currently gets 4K plus hits.

Larry has yet to meet anyone who works in hatcheries that doesn't want to do a good job. There is a need to shift from a production model to adult returns. What's the problem?

Meeting Evaluation

- Good presentations
- Well attended with good participation
- Strong sense of collaboration

Josua's Inspirational Quote

This winter was pretty mild. The last six months have been long and wet. The recent brief glimpses of spring seem so sweet. "If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome." Anne Bradstreet

Closing Remarks

Travis thanked everyone for their participation. – especially Randy and Larry carrying the torch for the public. As he has said in the past, Tacoma couldn't do this without everyone's hard work and commitment.

Parking Lot

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