Columbia Basin Collaborative
Estuary, Tributary, and Mainstem Habitat Work Group
Monday January 9, 2023 from 1:00pm – 4:00pm PT/2:00pm - 5:00pm MT
Meeting Summary

Attendees

Work Group Members in Attendance: Amelia Johnson (Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board), Bob Lessard (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Brandon Rogers (Yakama Nation Fisheries), Catherine Corbett (Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership), Conor Giorgi (Spokane Tribe of Indians), Cynthia Studebaker (United States Army Corps of Engineers), David Bain (Orca Conservancy), Gary James (Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation), Jay Hesse (Nez Perce Tribe Department of Fisheries Resource Management), Jeff McLaughlin (Bureau of Reclamation), Jim Brick (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), John Foltz (Snake River Salmon Recovery Board), Laura Brown (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Leslie Bach (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Lynne Krasnow (National Marine Fisheries Service), Michelle Rub (National Marine Fisheries Service), Norman Semanko (Quincy-Columbia Basin Irrigation District), Patty Dornbusch (National Marine Fisheries Service), Steve Manlow (Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board), Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries)

Observers in Attendance: Andre Kohler (Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Department of Fish and Wildlife), Brian Drake (United States Bureau of Reclamation), Cathy Kellon (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Daniel Bertram (Governor's Office of Species Conservation), Jeff Fisher (Seattle City Light), Jerry Klemm (Port of Lewiston), Irene Martin (Salmon for All), Kira Christensen (United States Bureau of Reclamation), Laura Gephart (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Lytle Denny (Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Fish and Wildlife Department), Sammy Matsaw (Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Fish and Wildlife Department), Stuart Crane (Yakama Nation Water Resources Program)

Facilitation Team: Amira Streeter (Kearns & West) and Colin Johnson (Kearns & West)

Welcome, Agenda Review, and Updates

Amira Streeter, Kearns & West, welcomed the work group members and provided meeting guidelines and a review of the agenda. Agenda topics included: 1) Work Plan Review, 2) Habitat Discussion of General Recommendations, 3) Habitat Discussion of NOAA 5-Year Review, 4) Finalize Short-term Recommendations, 5) Discuss Recommendation from SIWG, 6) Confirm Next Steps, Upcoming Meeting Topics, and Summary.

Work Plan Review

Amira reviewed the topics covered in previous meetings and set expectations for Meeting 4 per the work plan. Meeting 4 would focus on the development of long-term recommendations by Finalizing short term recommendations to go to the Science Integration Work Group and the I/RG.

Habitat Discussion of General Recommendations

Amira shared the list of recommended actions which had been developed by the work group that would holistically apply to habitat restoration and protection throughout the Basin. Members were invited to discuss the recommendations and provide any comments and concerns. Members were also asked to expand or refine the scope of the recommendations. The work group discussed each recommended action individually:

Recommendation 1: Increase Funding
Increase funding to habitat restoration and protection programs and monitoring and increase funding flexibility for projects that are beneficial to salmon recovery overall and find future funding sources / resources, particularly for highly impacted stocks.

Work group members had the following comments:

- Highly impacted stocks should be defined by habitat degradation and loss.
- Restoration funding should include money for incentives for landowners related to coordination and increased efficiencies. An example would be to include funding for permanent conservation easements with stipulations for long term habitat conservation, as well as fee land acquisition.
- Funding can be used as incentives for forestry improvements.
- Increase funding for entities that are experiencing challenges to labor capacity.
- Increase funding for implementation of floodplain, stormwater management and planning.

Recommendation 2: Coordination and Increased Efficiencies
Increase capacity for landowner engagement and provide incentives for private landowners to increase participation in salmon recovery, including work on water acquisition and exchanges and projects that establish and maintain screens of water diversions.

Work group members had the following comments:

- Landowner incentives would be allocated to landowners that wish to manage their lands.
- Funding can be used to incentivize landowners to allow beavers on their lands.
- Funding can be used for flood easements, thus paying landowners to allow their floodplain to be inundated with tidal/fluvial forces without the presence of a tide gate.

Recommendation 3: Coordination and Increased Efficiencies
Build capacity and cross-coordination with agencies, Tribes, and non-government organizations, and build better opportunities for technical and financial assistance with the creation, writing, and management of grants by encouraging efficiencies in funding and grant programs and streamline reporting processes.

Work group members had the following comments:

- All entities that have floodplain/land management responsibilities or authorities that affect fish survival in tributary habitats should engage with each other and coordinate more. This includes entities that oversee development and infrastructure projects.
    - There should be an overall adoption or improvement of policies which promote or balance floodplain health.
    - Provide funding for floodplain protection and restoration.
    - Utilize the White House's Nature Based Solutions Roadmap when proposing projects.
- Consider potential agricultural actions that could benefit salmon recovery.
    - Fruit or nut trees can provide shade, while crops such as cranberries might survive in flood plains that support salmon.
- Note that while protecting existing habitat is more cost and time effective than habitat restoration, a singular focus on protection will result in maintenance of the status quo thus keeping many stocks in poor condition.

Recommendation 4: Coordination and Increased Efficiencies
Streamline processes for regulatory compliance with federal agencies.

Work group members had the following comments.

- There should be a recognition that permitting processes often slow restoration actions.
- Entities should expand the definition of restoration projects to include any action that is beneficial to salmon and steelhead habitat, rather than limiting it to projects that are detrimental to habitat or structure.
- Agencies should disentangle restoration projects from development projects so that agencies can better anticipate impacts.
- Funding should be allocated appropriately to build capacity for the facilitation of work across multiple partners, therefore alleviating a potential pinch-point in the permitting process.
    - Fund positions that focus on coordinated design reviews of projects.
        - Example: The City of Portland currently has a model for coordinated/streamlined state to federal project reviews, permitting, etc. The model involves bringing all involved parties together to discuss expediting the process.
- Agencies should consider a broader programmatic permitting program that engages state and local agencies to help expediate permitting review.
    - Example: The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA), when working with United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) currently uses a programmatic permit that addresses a range of restoration actions, their effects, and the conservation measures applied when doing the construction, etc.

Amira shared the following two recommendations which emerged from discussion during the previous work group meeting.

Recommendation 5: Implementation Strategies
Improve water management, including maximizing water that is currently managed. For example, develop opportunities to buy water for fish from landowners.

Work group members had the following comments:

- State agencies improve the ability to manage and protect in-stream flows that result from flow or floodplain restoration projects.
- Best practices should emphasize ecological health of floodplains.
- Regarding what and where for habitat actions, increasingly available floodplain assessments should be used to guide project actions and priority areas for floodplain restoration.

Recommendation 6: Implementation Strategies
Encourage nutrient enhancement in Basin waterways.

Work group members had the following comments:

- A group member noted that surrounding habitat would need to support ongoing nutrient needs for this recommendation to work as a standalone implementation strategy.

Amira recapped the process taken by the facilitation team at a suggestion by a member to look to the NOAA 5-Year Review and incorporate the recommendations into what the Work Group was developing.

Project partners reviewed the recommendations from the NOAA 5-Year Reviews and determined that four of the recommendations were most applicable to the work groups goals. These recommendations crossed over many different stocks in the basin, as opposed to being focused on specific stocks. The identified recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 7: Implementation Strategies – NOAA 5-Year Review
Prioritize projects that improve population resiliency to the impacts of climate change by conducting actions that restore riparian vegetation, streamflow, groundwater, and floodplain connectivity and to re-aggrade incised stream channels can ameliorate temperature increases, base flow decreases, and peak flow increases.

Work group members had the following comments:

- One member suggested incorporating water management. State agencies should improve rules or their ability to manage and protect instream flows resulting from flow/floodplain restoration projects.

Recommendation 8: Implementation Strategies – NOAA 5-Year Review
Implement habitat restoration at a watershed scale to at least 20 percent of floodplain and in-channel habitat in a watershed to increase salmon smolt production.

Work group members had the following comments:

- The members requested this recommendation be edited to "a substantial portion of floodplain and in-channel habitat" from "at least 20 percent of floodplain and in-channel habitat" in order to make the recommendation applicable across the basin.

Recommendation 9: Implementation Strategies – NOAA 5-Year Review
Enhance floodplain management and reconnect stream channels with their floodplains. Consider reintroducing beaver and low-tech process-based methods that will facilitate widespread, low-cost floodplain restoration across larger areas, increasing the productivity of floodplain freshwater habitat.

- One member commented that the reintroduction of beaver habitat is a challenge on the Oregon-side of the river given the numerous requirements. Instead of reintroducing beaver, the member suggested Incorporating restoration of beaver habitat into water restoration projects to promote future beaver use.

Recommendation 10: Implementation Strategies – NOAA 5-Year Review
Implement habitat improvement actions consistent with best practices for watershed restoration and enhance local- to basin-scale frameworks to guide and prioritize habitat restoration actions that integrate a landscape perspective into decision making.

Work group members had the following comments:

- Work group members suggested that best practices should emphasize ecological health of floodplains. Additionally, available floodplain assessments should be used to guide project actions and priority areas for floodplain restoration.

- Group members suggested including an additional recommendation that would focus on the monitoring and adaptive management of habitats. This would include tracking how systems are responding to program changes and examining whether baseline conditions are holding or improving.

Group members discussed whether additional language was needed to make these recommendations more applicable to estuaries, as the language seemed focused on tributaries. Group members with an expertise in estuaries agreed that this would be valuable and shared that they would review the recommendations after the meeting.

Finalize Short Term Recommendations

Amira informed group members that the next portion of the meeting would be spent working in small groups to further develop specific actions to meet each recommendation, and then complete the Recommended Action Form for each action. Amira reviewed the Form and provided a set of discussion prompts or group members to utilize in the service of building out specific actions. Work group members were placed into four breakout rooms, each with a set of recommendations to work on. After 30 minutes in breakout rooms, members returned to the main room and a representative from each group shared an overview of the group's discussion.

Group 1:

Recommendation 1: Increase funding to habitat restoration and protection programs and monitoring and increase funding flexibility for projects that are beneficial to salmon recovery overall and find future funding sources / resources, particularly for highly impacted stocks.

The representatives for Group 1 explained that it was challenging to determine whether the first recommendation should apply to an existing program or if a new program should be created. The group settled on bolstering an existing program as this would allow for increased collaboration with stakeholders as well as greater feasibility in seeking out increased funding. The political difficulty of creating new entities or governing bodies to help with distribution of funding was identified as a challenge. Working within an existing program would require additional capacity and people for that program, and it would take time for increased funding to translate into additional programming capacity. Group members agreed that "increased funding" is a broad recommendation which poses a challenge. In trying to reconcile the goal of monitoring for the effectiveness of this recommendation, increased funding would present the potential to positively impact several stocks but establishing a baseline of where money is currently being spent is necessary first.

Recommendation 2: Increase capacity for landowner engagement and provide incentives for private landowners to increase participation in salmon recovery, including work on water acquisition and exchanges and projects that establish and maintain screens of water diversions.

The group discussed the current hiring challenges as a barrier to building capacity. This recommendation provides an opportunity for increased efficiency through allocation of extra money towards the highest priority projects, as well as the potential to institute multi-level (state, tribal, federal) plans in the basin. The group again agreed that existing programs would provide the best opportunity to build cross

coordination with stakeholders, and it would just be a matter of deciding which entity would take the lead.

Group 2:
Recommendation 3: Build capacity and cross-coordination with agencies, Tribes, and non-government organizations, and build better opportunities for technical and financial assistance with the creation, writing, and management of grants by encouraging efficiencies in funding and grant programs and streamline reporting processes.

The representative for Group 2 shared that the group began building out a recommendation shared earlier in the meeting to engage all agencies who have floodplain or land management authority that affect fish survival in the tributaries. The ask is twofold: 1) to adopt or improve policies that promote or balance floodplain health and 2) provide funding within the organization that provide for floodplain restoration. This would involve engaging with stakeholders that may not have been previously considered. Efforts could emphasize the improvement of existing programs and aim to build acknowledgement of the ecological benefit of flood plains. Benefits are multifaceted and extend beyond just species protection to flood risk mitigation and aesthetic improvements. Current research on the benefits of floodplain health is extensive, and the hope is the Integration/Recommendations Group (I/RG) would recommend these changes to all agencies whose activities impact flood plains. The ask could be made within the next year, with 10+ years expected before changes could be observed. The ability of the I/RG to enforce change is an uncertainty, and success would hinge on commitment from receiving entities to incorporate these changes. Policies stem from the development era of the last hundred years, and in that time fish have gone extinct thus necessitating a change in policy. Currently good examples exist, either involving individual landowners or entities, of what proper flood plain management can look like.

Recommendation 4: Streamline processes for regulatory compliance with federal agencies.
Group 2 ran out of time to discuss this recommendation.

Group 3:
Recommendation 5: Improve water management, including maximizing water that is currently managed (ex: develop opportunities to buy water for fish from landowners).

Group members discussed two potential actions to meet this recommendation. The first action is setting an instream flow target and striving to meet that target. The second action is to utilize nature-based solutions to integrate stormwater programs with habitats/ecosystem. The group shared examples of existing plans and agreements that could serve as models for setting instream flow targets. Those examples included: Snake River Basin Adjudication Agreement, Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, Umatilla Basin Pump Exchange. The Yakima Basin Integrated Plan was noted for successfully bringing together irrigators, salmon recovery, and flood management efforts into a plan and cultivating funding. The Yakima Basin Integrated Plan was also cited as a successful stormwater/flooding plan, in addition to plans utilized in the Lower Columbia and the Walla Walla Water 2050 plan. The group provided examples of existing funded programs, as well as state and local entities, that could be worked with. It was noted that successful programs have had complete community buy-in.

Recommendation 6: Encourage nutrient enhancement in Basin waterways.

Group members discussed the need to understand which basins and strategies this would need to be implemented in. The recommended action would be to then implement basin or project scale nutrient enhancements projects where the need has been identified. Work would need to go into determining how to achieve that goal.

Group 4:
Recommendation 7: Implement habitat restoration at a watershed scale to at least 20 percent of floodplain and in-channel habitat in a watershed to increase salmon smolt production.

Group members shared that this recommendation could be implemented through existing restoration and protection programs. This would depend on whether groups are able to increase capacity and meet the level of effort required. Benefits would be measurable improvements in habitat capacity and function in addition to a measurable response at the stock scale, likely in terms of smolt survival. Additional benefits would include climate resiliency and flood risk reduction if flood plains are restored. This action would benefit any stock where the effort was focused, with a goal of benefiting all stocks in the basin. The action could be implemented by all federal, tribal, state, local and non-government entities involved in habitat restoration and protection. Should funding become available, implementation would take about 10+ years. It would take multiple generations of fish following implementation, and the accrual of habitat benefits, before benefits were noticeable in fish. Overall costs would include costs of both recovery and acquisition and would vary by location. This action would require environmental compliance and permitting. Challenges would include a lengthy design process, funding and design cycles, identification of willing landowners, and building capacity to complete the work. A monitoring system would need to be in place to ensure monitored results are incorporated into future decisions.

Recommendation 8: Enhance floodplain management and reconnect stream channels with their floodplains. Consider reintroducing beaver and low-tech process-based methods that will facilitate widespread, low-cost floodplain restoration across larger areas, increasing the productivity of freshwater habitat.

The group shared that the process for this recommendation would be like the previous one, with the added complication that in some states beavers are considered a nuisance species by landowners and thus this can make regulatory processes more difficult.

Recommendation 9: Implement habitat improvement actions consistent with best practices for watershed restoration and enhance local- to basin-scale frameworks to guide and prioritize habitat restoration actions that integrate a landscape perspective into decision making.

This process would also largely mirror that which has been outlined in the prior recommendations analyzed by Group 4. An additional challenge noted by the group is the inability to regulate the use of best science or management practices. A lack of knowledge about best practices can be an impediment, and thus the transfer of technology and information is essential.

Amira thanked the group members for their work in building out potential actions to meet each recommendation. The goal will be to finalize recommendations before the next I/RG. Group members were asked to review the recommendations and continue filling in missing information.

Discuss Recommendation from SIWG

Amira introduced an additional recommendation shared by the SIWG and asked the group if this recommendation could be worked into the list of Habitat recommendations. The initial recommendation reads: *Seek to achieve consistent policies from all entities having management/restoration authorities in order to adequately support necessary restoration actions.*

Group members identified that many of the actions developed in support of the recommendation were in line with actions proposed by the Habitat work group during this meeting, for example the idea to "call upon local, state and federal land use and regulatory managers to update their respective policies, incentive programs and regulations to ensure they achieve no-net-loss of floodplain and riparian habitats and watershed functions". Members shared a concern that monitoring and evaluation efforts identified as part of this recommendation should be conducted at a smaller scale and could likely constitute a separate project. Members discussed whether this recommendation could be a standalone document, or whether the ideas suggested could be incorporated into an existing Habitat recommendation. If it is to be left as a standalone document, it was recommended that the sentence "However, there has been no substantive effort to increase protection of the habitat baseline and reduce threats through land use programs as called for in federally adopted recovery plans" be expanded to include water programs as well.

Confirm Next Steps, Upcoming Meeting Topics, and Summary

Amira reviewed next steps and thanked participants for their time and effort on the Estuary, Tributary & Mainstem Habitat Work Group.

Next Steps included the following:
All: Please complete a brief Habitat Meeting 4 survey to share feedback on the meeting by end of day 1/17.
All: Please complete a Doodle Poll with availability for a February work group meeting by end of day 1/17.
All: Review the Recommended Action Form document and provide feedback and additional questions by 1/24.
KW: Compile and share input from all the groups into one document that will live in the Shared Folder by 1/13.
KW: Draft and circulate a meeting summary by 1/24.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00pm PT/5:00pm MT