

Columbia Basin Collaborative Predation Work Group

Meeting Summary

Friday, January 27, 2023 from 1:00 – 3:00pm PT/ 2:00 – 4:00pm MT

Attendees

Working Group Members in Attendance: Bob Lessard (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Tom Skiles (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Holly McLellan (Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation), Tim Copeland (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Jay Hesse (Nez Perce Tribe Department of Fisheries Resources Management), Lynne Krasnow (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Michelle Rub (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), David Bain (Orca Conservancy), Bryan Wright (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Grant Waltz (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), James Lawonn (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Michael Brown (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Art Martin (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Sean Tackley (US Army Corps of Engineers), Gary Marston (Trout Unlimited), Michelle McDowell (US Fish and Wildlife Service), Casey Clark (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), John Edwards (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Andrew Murdoch (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries)

Observers in Attendance: Mark Martin (Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association), Jerry Rigby (Rigby, Andrus & Rigby Law, PLLC), Jennifer Urmston (US Fish and Wildlife Service), Amanda Ward (Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board), Mitch Silvers (US Sen. Mike Crapo (ID)), Stuart Crane (Yakama Nation), David Blodgett (Yakama Nation Fisheries), Keely Murdoch (Yakama Nation Fisheries), Heather Nicholson

Facilitation Team: Amira Streeter (Kearns & West), Angela Hessenius (Kearns & West)

Welcome, Agenda Review, and Updates

Amira Streeter, Kearns & West, provided an overview of the agenda and meeting guidelines. The topics included: 1) Recap I/RG Meeting, 2) Review Predation Recommendations, and 3) Confirm Next Steps and Upcoming Meeting Topics. Amira also outlined the desired outcomes for the meeting, which included building consensus around the recommendations and coming to an agreement on finalizing the four draft recommendations to move forward to the Integration/Recommendations Group (I/RG). The four draft recommendations are all at various stages of completion, and the work group will continue to spend time discussing any of the recommendations that are not ready for advancement to the I/RG during the next meeting.

Recap I/RG Meeting

Amira recapped the I/RG meeting held on Thursday, January 26. During this meeting, the I/RG reviewed a high-level overview of the draft recommended actions from each of the CBC work groups. Amira shared a few key takeaways from the I/RG meeting. The I/RG had questions on the scope and scale of the recommendations and directed the work groups to balance broad recommendations with more detail and geographic specificity. The I/RG also noted that the work groups should connect the recommended actions with the Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force (CBPTF) goals. Lastly, the I/RG requested that the work groups weave social, cultural, economic, and ecological considerations into their recommendations.

Amira invited other work group members who attended the I/RG meeting to share their takeaways. Work group members shared that the social, cultural, economic, and ecological considerations were incorporated into the CBPTF goals themselves, and that the work groups should focus on achieving the abundance goals. The outcome of the I/RG discussion was to elevate these concerns without creating a separate work group to address them, so the work groups should continue thinking about these considerations. Work group members also discussed the slight disconnect between the I/RG expectations for the maturity and scope of the recommendations with what is practical given the amount of time that the work groups have spent together thus far. While more work is needed to reconcile some of the specific details of the recommendations, the work completed to date is an important first step. It is important to maintain realistic expectations of what the work groups can accomplish within a few months. Other work group members reflected on the mission of the work groups. There is a sense that past groups have determined what actions need to be taken and that what is needed now are steps to implement those actions (e.g., increasing funding, streamlining permitting processes). The work groups can also generate new ideas of different actions that can help achieve salmon recovery goals. Another work group member responded to the comment from the I/RG that the work groups should be more geographically specific and shared that the work group should identify recommendations from species recovery plans and think about whether the recommendations are addressing limited factors for specific stocks. The work group should be thoughtful about how the recommended actions affect some stocks more than others.

Amira also reviewed the process for consensus on CBC recommendations. Consensus is reached when every member, at the very least, does not oppose a decision. The first step is for the work groups to reach consensus on their recommendations to share them with the I/RG. As the recommendations are being developed, every effort will be made to consider all perspectives, and the group will strive to address each other's concerns and suggestions through discussions. When the work groups reach consensus, the I/RG will then review the recommendations. If consensus is reached by the I/RG, they will forward that recommendation to the decision-making authority for implementation. The I/RG can also send a recommendation back to the work groups for revisions if needed. If consensus is not reached on a specific recommendation and the issue has been fully discussed by the I/RG, then there will not be a recommendation from the CBC.

Questions and Discussion:

- Are the recommendations considered by the Predation Work Group during this meeting going to be considered final and passed on to the I/RG?

- The discussions today will determine whether the group is ready to advance the recommendations or if there are still refinements that need to be made.
- The work group has between now and the next I/RG meeting in the spring to work on finalizing their recommendations.
- Work group members agreed that the social, cultural, and economic conditions are important and questioned whether the work groups are qualified and have the right membership to weave in these considerations.
 - Many of the work group members have a background in biology, and there are other professional disciplines that are trained to address social and economic considerations.
 - Others noted that while many of the work group members are scientifically trained, they all have varied experience and encounter social, economic, and cultural considerations in their work.
 - When developing recommendations, the work group members should consider whether there are barriers to any of the recommendations and be aware of the implications of their proposals. For example, the double-crested cormorant management recommendation has implications for the conservation community and public safety. The work group is capable of incorporating these considerations.
 - As work group members can discuss potential recommendations with others who have expertise in other disciplines, they should do so and share those perspectives within the work group discussions.
- Work group members sought clarity on the level of knowledge and perspective they are expected to bring to the work groups.
 - The work group role is to provide scientific, technical, or other analysis. Working group members from one entity could support a specific recommendation based on the technical considerations, while at the I/RG level, the same entity may not support the proposal for other reasons.
 - Other work group members agreed that they might determine that a recommendation is technically sound but that does not imply that they feel the recommendation is a priority or good policy.
 - Some work group members expressed concern over the need for consensus within the work group and the possibility of objections within the work group precluding a recommendation from going forward to the I/RG.
 - Amira clarified that if a work group member objects to a proposal, she will ask them to explain why. The work group should try to avoid being positional in these discussions.
 - The work groups should set aside positional issues and evaluate what would be meaningful for salmon recovery from a biological and ecological perspective. The work group's role is primarily technical.
 - As the recommendations progress through the other levels of consensus as the I/RG considers integrated actions and the sovereign and regional entities decide whether to implement the recommendations, those entities will weigh the policy implications.
 - The SIWG is an added resource for evaluating actions in a holistic and integrated way. They are not an additional consensus step.

Review of Predation Recommendations

Amira reviewed the draft recommendations that are currently in development by the work group. The work group reviewed and discussed each of the draft recommendations.

Pinniped: Enhancements and Modifications to Section 120(f) Sea Lion Removal Program

John Edwards, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), provided an overview of the pinniped subgroup's recommendation. This recommendation is focused on providing long term stability for the existing Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) Section 120(f) Pinniped Removal Program and expanding the program to have a greater impact. This recommendation would extend the authorization for the program, provide one-time funding for new sea lion removal equipment and to replace outdated equipment, and provide additional funding to increase the capacity to remove sea lions and process animals. This includes a program to maintain an on-call veterinarian roster, which addresses one of the major limiting factors of the program. The recommendation would also extend and fully fund the US Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) monitoring program. If this program were to end, the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) and the states would take responsibility for monitoring the program's effectiveness. Lastly, the recommendation includes research and innovation in dart usage and non-lethal deterrence (e.g., acoustic) methods. Currently, removals occur only at Bonneville and Willamette Falls since they are limited by the need for heavy equipment. The addition of a darting program would provide more flexibility and allow managers to reach beyond the two current locations for removal. The non-lethal deterrence methods could be used to help deter upriver migration, which would prevent this from becoming a greater problem in the future. John added that the program has shifted as Steller sea lions have become the primary problem. These enhancements are needed to ensure that there is a steady, ongoing program to address this need.

Questions and Discussion:

- Are all the actions in this recommendation interlinked?
 - Not necessarily, but they are all additive. The more that are implemented, the greater the benefit that will be achieved.
- Work group members commented that the acoustic deterrence component could be expanded upon.
 - The non-lethal deterrence piece is more of a research and development action than an implementation action.
 - The primary focus of the recommendation is to prove stability, fully fund, and improve upon an existing program. The non-lethal deterrence methods component is distinct.
 - Work group members decided to pull this action out and expand on it as a separate recommendation.
- Work group members discussed the monitoring component of the recommendation.
 - Without monitoring, the program would not be allowed to continue. The permit from The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) includes the need to demonstrate the program's effectiveness.
- Work group members clarified that extending the program authorization is tied to permitting and not to funding and asked whether the team expects it to be easy to get this reauthorization.
 - Yes, in the 2025 when the program is up for reauthorization, it is expected to be approved.

- Others added that the states and CRITFC are responsible for submitting a comprehensive report this year on all management actions that have been conducted under the new authorization to date. The reception of this document will be a good indicator of how supportive NMFS will be of continuing to extend this permit into the future.
- Is the total number of pinnipeds that are euthanized much smaller than the overall population?
 - Yes, a lot of analysis was conducted to determine the number of sea lions that can be euthanized.
 - Along the west coast, the overall populations of sea lions are healthy.
- Is there a metric that will be measured to tie the outcomes of this recommendation to the CBPTF goals?
 - Yes, the program managers have their own metrics that they report annually to NMFS to demonstrate the program's effectiveness.
 - Bioenergetic modeling and population viability analysis are taking place to evaluate the long-term survival of some of the stocks.
 - USACE also estimates the percentage of fish runs consumed at the dam based on surface observations and fish counts at Bonneville.

Avian: Reduce double-crested cormorant (DCCO) abundance on the Astoria-Megler Bridge

James Lawonn, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), provided an update on the avian subgroup's recommendation to implement sustained management effort to reduce DCCO abundance on the Astoria-Megler Bridge colony that was presented during the previous work group meeting. James shared that the primary substantive change that has been to the recommendation was an update to the estimated cost. Following discussions with Oregon State University on the estimated cost for this plan, the overall cost for four years was revised from \$13.5 million to \$9.5 million.

James also noted that some of the avian predator subgroup are also members of the Regional Avian Forum. Following the next forum meeting, the group is looking to further develop the other recommendations for management of other avian predator species including terns and gulls. Because there is still a lot of uncertainty about the results of manipulating predator populations, part of the avian recommendations will likely stress outstanding research needs to address these unknowns.

Questions and Discussion:

- What is the reason for reattracting cormorants to East Sand Island? Is this primarily for management or social purposes?
 - Reattracting the colony to East Sand Island is primarily for management purposes. Due to the salinity range in the Columbia River estuary, as cormorants nest further upstream, their diet includes a higher proportion of salmonids. Therefore, moving the colonies downstream reduces the overall impact of cormorants on salmonids.
- Other work group members added that there are also health and safety concerns of having the colonies on the bridge and that ODOT is interested in reducing the number of cormorants on the bridge.
 - Work group members agreed that this note about reducing public safety concerns should be incorporated into the recommendation.

- What is the level of confidence about the effectiveness of using social attraction to draw birds back to East Sand Island? Are there other nesting sites that animals might move to if attraction back to East Sand Island is unsuccessful? Are there risks of causing the birds to move upriver?
 - Work group members acknowledged that the “whack-a-mole” concept plagues avian management.
 - There is no clear answer as to whether reattraction to East Sand Island will be successful. It is known that bald eagles had an important role in the collapse of the East Sand Island colony. At the time, the colony was vulnerable to disturbances and there was an empty colony site only six miles away at the Astoria-Megler Bridge.
 - Birds are motivated to nest in the Columbia River estuary because forage fish are abundant. The recommendation also includes plans for dissuasion of colonies at other locations the colonies are likely to move to. For example, the plan includes a year of management at Longview Bridge to dissuade colonies from nesting there. The birds would prefer to be in the lower estuary, and there are only three sites that would support more than 1,000 individual cormorants.
 - The plan is not guaranteed to work, but there are no other alternatives, and the colony cannot stay on the bridge.

Piscine: Northern Pikeminnow Management

Grant Waltz, ODFW, provided an overview of the piscine predator subgroup’s recommendation to reduce northern pikeminnow in the basin via recreational anglers. Grant noted that the recommendation is still in a rough draft state. The goal of the recommendation is to address data gaps and augment predation control that is already occurring. The recommendation would be nested within the existing Northern Pikeminnow Management Program (NPMP) and consist of multiple pilot studies. One component is to improve estimates of piscine predator population size using mark-recapture studies. This would apply to northern pikeminnow, smallmouth bass, and walleye. Another component would focus on diet analysis and improving estimates of juvenile fish consumption by piscine predators. Currently, visual techniques are used to identify prey items. Another pilot study would utilize other tools for diet analysis, such as coded wire tags. If these methods show promise, they could also be applied to other predator groups (e.g., avian).

Andrew Murdoch, WDFW, also noted that the piscine predator subgroup is also working on developing other recommendations. For example, they are considering the potential use of YY brood stocks to influence the population dynamics of non-native predators such as walleye and smallmouth bass. This approach has the benefit of working on a system-wide scale rather than one fish at a time.

Questions and Discussion:

- Work group members suggested that the recommendation could also highlight the potential to look for lamprey predation using DNA-based tools.
 - Grant will incorporate the use of genetic diet analysis tools to the recommendation.
- Other work group members added that the group should be as clear as possible with the language in the recommendations to articulate the desired outcomes, including the scope of the program, the species covered, and how success will be measured.

Confirm Next Steps and Upcoming Meeting Topics

Amira reviewed the next steps for this work group based on the group's discussion and confirmed upcoming meeting topics.

Next Steps:

- **Pinniped Team:**
 - Make minor revisions to the Section 120(f) recommendation.
 - David Bain – Begin drafting acoustic deterrence recommendation.
- **Avian Team:**
 - Add language on potential health and safety concerns and make final revisions to the double-crested cormorant recommendation.
 - Begin drafting recommendations for other avian species.
- **Piscine Team:**
 - Revise the northern pikeminnow recommendation, including adding a genetic analysis component.
 - Begin drafting recommendations for other piscine predators,
 - Holly – begin developing recommendation for northern pike.
- **Systemwide Team:**
 - Present possible systemwide actions to develop into recommendations during the next work group meeting for discussion.

Amira thanked everyone for participating and adjourned the meeting.