

# Columbia Basin Collaborative Hydropower/Blocked Areas Work Group

## Meeting Summary

Wednesday, May 31, 2023, from 12:00pm – 1:00pm PT/1:00pm - 2:00pm MT

### Attendees

**Work group members in attendance:** Adam Storch (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Andrew Gingrich (Douglas Public Utilities District), Brandon Weems (Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde), David Bain (Orca Conservancy), David Doeringsfeld (Port of Lewiston), Dennis Daw (Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone/Upper Snake River Tribes), Eric Rothwell (United States Bureau of Reclamation), Erick Van Dyke (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Glen Spain (Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations), Haley Ohms (Trout Unlimited), Jay Backus (Port of Clarkston Commissioner), Jay Hesse (Nez Perce Tribe), Jennifer Riddle (Tidewater Transportation and Terminals), Jens Rasmussen (AgriNorthwest), Jerry Rigby (Rigby, Andrus & Rigby Law, PLLC), John Simpson (Idaho Water Users), Jonathan Ebel (Idaho Fish & Game), Leslie Bach (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Leslie Druffel (McGregor Company), Michael Garrity (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Mitchell Cutter (Idaho Conservation League), Norman Semanko (Quincy-Columbia Basin Irrigation District), Ritchie Graves (National Marine Fisheries Service), Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries)

**Observers in attendance:** Dennis Rohr (DRohr & Associates, Inc.), Erich Hester (United States Department of Energy), Heather Nicholson (Public), Jody Lando (Bonneville Power Administration), John Shurts (Northwest Power & Conservation Council), Lance Hebdon (Idaho Fish and Game), Liz Fortunato (Desimone Consulting Group), Rebecca Fritz (Burns Paiute Tribe Natural Resources), Stuart Crane (Yakama Nation Water Resources Program), Ted Knight (Spokane Tribe of Indians), Tony Springfield (Public), Robert Lessard (Columbia River InterTribal Fish Commission)

**Facilitation team:** Samantha Meysohn (Kearns & West) and Mark Anthony Sebarrotin (Kearns & West)

### Welcome, Agenda Review, and Updates

Samantha Meysohn, Kearns & West, welcomed the workgroup members, provided the meeting guidelines, and reviewed the meeting agenda. Agenda topics included: 1) Hydropower – Actions to Address Needs, 2) Blocked Area Check-In, 3) Blocked Areas – Tributaries to the Columbia River Survey, and 4) Confirm Next Steps, Upcoming Meeting Topics, and Summary.

### Hydropower – Actions to Address Needs

Samantha requested an update on the Reach Survival/ Smolt-to-Adult Return (SAR) data recommendation that a sub-group has been working to refine. The workgroup developed language that characterizes SAR data, what it means and doesn't mean, and how to account for uncertainty. Since the work group had reviewed and discussed this recommendation at previous meetings, Samantha focused the conversation on holding space for any concerns regarding the recommendation rather than wordsmithing the language. The workgroup expressed no opposition to the recommendation moving on to the Integration/Recommendations Group (I/RG).

The workgroup transitioned to discussing the early draft recommendation **on improving downstream passage for steelhead kelts and overshoots**. Workgroup members were asked to provide an update on the status of drafting this recommendation and share suggested actions, comments, and questions about the early draft.

Workgroup members discussed whether a recommendation should advocate for improving downstream passage for adult steelhead kelts and overshoots at all times of the year or only during certain times of the year. Workgroup members shared that there is general support for downstream passage routes at mainstem dams and that they are currently engaged in discussions on the extent to which downstream passage is provided. Some members noted that there is less fish movement observed at certain times of the year, and argued for focusing operations to assist passage when the most fish would use such operations. Others noted that choosing specific dates for downstream passage is a challenging task. The workgroup will continue to consider what, if any, time period should be put into the draft recommendation.

Samantha asked if there were any questions for the drafters as they craft the recommendation. Members did not have further questions for the subgroup. The subgroup will continue to refine the recommendation.

Samantha invited the workgroup to brainstorm actions to address the need for **urgency to achieve success in meeting fish goals**.

Members shared the following ideas to demonstrate a sense of urgency:

- One member suggested that the current operating systems could support rebuilding salmon populations by targeting Columbia Basin Partnership goals. Regulations on hydropower operation systems have long focused on avoiding extinction. Some members expressed that a measurable timeline to achieve fish goals might support in developing greater urgency.
- A few members proposed that a basin wide assessment of policy challenges, bureaucratic hurdles, and regulatory opportunities could be helpful. Some members highlighted the legal authority and funding constraints imposed by external forces on achieving fish goals. For example, changes to the Marine Mammal Protection Act required lots of time to convince Congress to act while Pinnipeds remained largely at-risk.
- Members also shared that while there are projects in place ready to help achieve fish goals, there is a growing shortage of skilled workforce to implement these projects. Further, funding to maintain the current systems is not authorized or only partially authorized which impacts implementation and meeting fish goals. A possible solution is for the I/RG to advocate for the sufficient funding of operation and maintenance for current operating agreements. Some noted that the Army Corps of Engineers' fish passage system operation and maintenance at some mainstem federal Columbia River dams are currently only partially funded. Another possible solution is investing in innovative operations. Coordinating the appropriate stakeholders and advocates to meet with the state and federal legislatures might achieve funding goals.
- Some members suggested increasing implementation of predator reduction.
  - Samantha highlighted the Predation Workgroup's focus on predation related recommendations and the Facilitation Team is coordinating on the Predation/Hydropower overlap.

The following buckets were distilled from the discussion:

- 1) Operations, goals, and targets

- 2) Authorities, bureaucracies, and policy and regulatory assessment
- 3) Funding for workforce, operations, and maintenance

One workgroup member volunteered to support drafting this recommendation and more volunteers are needed. The workgroup will discuss who should be involved in drafting the recommendation and follow up offline.

Samantha provided an overview of the updated work plan highlighting the next few months. The meeting cadence will change from monthly to every six weeks. Samantha welcomed feedback from the workgroup on the work plan.

### Blocked Area Check-In

Samantha transitioned the discussion to focus on the Blocked Areas topics. She invited Dennis Daw, Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation, to provide an update on the Upper Snake source salmon funding recommendation concept. Dennis shared that a subgroup of the Blocked Areas work group had met to begin discussing this recommendation concept. The subgroup drafted initial language for where stocks would come from, funding for a hatchery, and an idea of the size of a hatchery that would be needed. The subgroup will not make a recommendation on where the funding should come from. A draft will be distributed at the next Blocked Areas meeting.

### Blocked Areas – Tributaries to the Columbia River Survey

Samantha transitioned the discussion to focus on two rivers in the tributaries to the Columbia River Blocked Area. Brian Paul Saluskin, Yakama Nation Fisheries, gave a presentation on Sockeye Restoration. The presentation reviewed the major storage dam blockages, major diversion dams, and status of sockeye reintroduction. Brian reviewed the historical returns of sockeye, coho, bull trout, and steelhead and the impacts of reintroduction efforts. Brian described the Yakima Integrated Plan, a holistic approach to sustainable water supply, and shared a video describing the elements of the plan. Brian shared other threats to habitat including Bateman Island Causeway, a man-made land bridge that contributes to lethally warm water and provides habitat for salmon predators. Removal of the Bateman Island Causeway is currently undergoing environmental review by USACE. Brian shared information on the Cle Elum downstream juvenile fish passage system, which will be fully operational in 2025.

Workgroup members inquired about priorities in building fish passage and ways that the workgroup could help secure funding. Brian shared that the CBC may be able to play a role in advocating for funding. There may also be an opportunity for synergy with the Science and Integration Workgroup to support the Yakima Integrated Plan.

Jerry George, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, presented on the Deschutes River Basin Fish Passage Barriers. Jerry shared where the major fish passage barriers are located along the Deschutes River: Opal Springs Dam, Crooked River-Bowman Dam, Crooked River-Ochoco Dam, Deschutes River-Big Falls, and Metolius River-Lake Creek-Suttle Lake.

Jerry shared the following highlights on the dams and fish passage barriers along the Deschutes River.

- The Opal Spring Dam provides hydropower and water supply. A fish ladder was installed in 2019.
- The Crooked River-Bowman Dam is managed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for irrigation purposes. There have been several attempts to retrofit the dam for hydropower and it does not have fish passage.

- Deschutes River-Big Falls is considered an upstream extent of anadromy in the Deschutes River. Fish barriers on Whychus Creek have been addressed in the last 15 years and flow and habitat restoration is ongoing.
- Metolius River-Lake Creek-Suttle Lake has no significant fish passage barriers but has some impediments to fish passage. The fishways do not meet current criteria.

Workgroup members inquired about blockages that are government obligations to fund where the CBC might help in improving fish passage efficiency or providing access above barriers. Jerry shared that assessments are underway to determine improvements for passage at blockages.

Samantha shared that the next meeting would feature discussions on blocked areas in the Tributaries of the Willamette.

### Confirm Next Steps, Upcoming Meeting Topics, and Summary

Samantha reviewed the Hydropower/Blocked Areas work plan and expectations for the upcoming July and August meetings, including additional needs to be discussed. Workgroup members were invited to think about resources to address internal workgroup needs. Samantha thanked workgroup members for their efforts and shared additional next steps as well as topics to be discussed at the next meeting.

### Action Items

- **All:** Review the list of proposed lists of actions (attached Tier 1 Actions to Address Needs) to generate urgency in meeting fish goals and volunteer to draft the recommendations.
- **All:** Review the updated Work Plan (attached) and provide feedback by the **end of day, 6/9**.
- **Kelts and Overshoots Subgroup:** Continue refining early draft recommendation on improving downstream passage for kelts and overshoots and share with the work group.
- **Leslie Druffel:** Draft a recommendation on achieving increased funding/capacity for improving fish passage.
- **Upper Snake Sub-group:** Continue to develop a draft recommendation and be prepared to share an updated version at the next Blocked Areas Work Group Meeting.
- **K&W:** Share the Reach Survival/SAR Data Recommendation with the SIWG and I/RG for their consideration.
- **K&W:** Share Blocked Areas survey table with guest presenters to ensure accuracy.
- **K&W:** Continue to coordinate with representatives to share short presentations on the Tributaries to the Willamette.

*Meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm PT/1:00 pm MT.*