

Columbia Basin Collaborative Predation Work Group

Meeting Summary

Wednesday, June 7, 2023 from 12:00 – 2:00pm PT/ 1:00 – 3:00pm MT

Attendees

Working Group Members in Attendance: Bob Lessard (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Holly McLellan (Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation), Tim Copeland (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Lynne Krasnow (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Michelle Rub (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), David Bain (Orca Conservancy), 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), Allan Martin (Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission), Ian Chane (US Army Corps of Engineers), Andrew Murdoch (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Chris Donley (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Joe Buchanan (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Marlene Wagner (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries)

Observers in Attendance: Doug Hatch (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Tom Lorz (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Dennis Rohr (D. Rohr & Associates, Inc.), Jeanette Zamon (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Patty O'Toole (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Tracy Bowerman (Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board), Stuart Crane (Yakama Nation)

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) Integration/Recommendations Group (I/RG) Spring Meeting Debrief, 2) Work Group Process and Work Plan, 3) Next Steps for Consensus Recommendations, and 4) Action Items and Upcoming Meeting Topics. Amira also outlined the desired outcomes for the meeting to review and finalize the short-term recommendations.

I/RG Spring Meeting Debrief

Amira provided an overview of key takeaways from the Spring I/RG Meeting. The I/RG met in mid-April, and this was the group's first time going through the recommendation review process. I/RG members expressed an interest in balancing breadth with geographic specificity in the recommendations. They also requested that the work groups connect the recommended actions with the Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force (CBPTF) goals. The I/RG also considered and discussed the social, cultural, economic, and ecological implications across all the proposed recommendations.

The I/RG reviewed four recommendations developed by the Predation Work Group and all achieved conceptual consensus from the I/RG. Next, Amira opened the discussion to hear reflections on the I/RG Meeting from Predation Work Group members who were in attendance.

- This was the first time the I/RG went through this process and many I/RG representatives have been less involved in the work group process.
- Though the I/RG is the central plenary body of the CBC, I/RG members were not always in agreement. Comments and perspectives from I/RG members were convergent on some issues and divergent at other times, including philosophical divides on issues established in the original CBC charter. For example, some members were concerned that the recommendations were too specific whereas other I/RG members thought they were too broad and wanted more specificity.
- The I/RG provided a lot of valuable feedback on the Predation Work Group's recommendations. The work group can work on developing some specific guidance on implementation to accompany the proposals that incorporate this feedback. Overall, the Predation Work Group proposals were well received.
- One piece of feedback expressed by some I/RG members in relation to the piscine predation recommendation was that enough information is available to take action and that conducting another 10-year study is not necessary. A takeaway from this discussion was that it will be important to engage with I/RG members when recommendations are more focused on conducting studies than implementing tangible actions.
- What is the vision for how the I/RG can help move these recommendations forward? Does the I/RG discuss how to acquire funding for these recommendations?
 - A lot of I/RG discussions related to funding and what requests for funding these proposals could look like.
 - The I/RG can help assess the feasibility of a recommendation from a policy perspective and help understand how proposals from the work groups relate to the CBPTF goals. The work groups are intended to develop these proposals, and in many cases, implementation is complicated since there are multiple entities that need to be involved based on authority and funding capability. The I/RG's role also includes helping to implement recommendations, including figuring out where new funding would come from and leveraging the connections of the CBC to achieve that.
 - Work group members noted that NOAA will receive funds from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) for restoration and can investigate whether those funds can be used for predation-related actions. Is the I/RG able to elevate this issue to decisionmakers who can allocate funds to implement the recommended actions?
 - Work group members should work through the hierarchy of their organizations. The approach will be different for each proposal and there may be different organizational sensitivities. The work group can explore and suggest options to the I/RG.
- The I/RG did not have time to discuss a proposal from the Science Integration Work Group (SIWG) to create a structured decision-making model. Without a clear framework and objectives, it may be difficult for the CBC to move forward. These decision-making frameworks include methods for evaluating both the technical feasibility and the political, economic, and social viability of a proposal.
- The I/RG meeting highlighted the members were willing to engage with each other and generated good conversation and feedback. The CBC process seems to have brought potential coordinators together and they can continue to engage other parties.

Amira shared a recap of feedback that the I/RG provided on each of the Predation Work Group's proposed recommendations:

1. For the recommendation to enhance and modify the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) Section 120 Pinniped Removal Program, the I/RG agreed that monitoring is needed and asked technical questions about funding and support. They also discussed the potential to maximize the existing authority by extending the removal area to below the I-205 bridge.
2. For the management of double-crested cormorants (DCCO) recommendation, the I/RG discussed how this effort would be combined with the Astoria-Megler Bridge improvements and highlighted the need for regional coordination and increased funding.
3. For the recommendation to develop a Northern pike and non-native fish monitoring program, the I/RG discussed the need for education and public outreach to make this program effective and had questions about enforcement and rapid response.
4. For the comprehensive piscine predator monitoring and evaluation program recommendation, the I/RG had general questions about the proposal, such as whether shad is included. They also suggested that the recommendation include an efficiency study on predation reduction and bounty/buyback methods and include coordination on the study design and enforcement of regulations. They also noted that tribes harvest walleye and that there are some state regulation concerns.

Work group members shared additional observations and questions about the I/RG feedback specific to the Predation Work Group recommendations.

- Coordination may have different meanings for different people. It is important to be clear about what is meant by coordination, especially when funding is involved. Historically, avian predation management has not always been well coordinated. The reason there are cormorants on the Astoria-Megler Bridge is due to a lack of coordination even though coordination was specified in the management plan as a need.
- The recommendations developed by the work groups were concise action items rather than detailed proposals, and a lot of details were intentionally not included. There is a significant difference in the level of detail in these proposals for the purposes of the CBC compared to what would be included in a management plan.
- What are the next steps for these recommendations? What level of detail does the I/RG need?
 - The I/RG achieved conceptual consensus on the recommendations and no further action is needed to revise the proposals. It is up to the I/RG to implement the next steps for moving the recommendations forward.
 - There is an interest in providing additional information on how to implement the recommendations and make them actionable, including funding and coordination needs.
- The Northern pike recommendation is different from the other proposal since they are already present in the system. There are many ideas for management actions and work group members can structure proposals around specific outcomes desired by the I/RG. Many people are working on Northern pike issues, and it would be worthwhile to include other people in a conversation about next steps.

Work group members noted that the Predation Work Group did an extraordinary job completing four recommendations and advancing them through the CBC. The work group does not necessarily need to develop another four proposals for the next round of I/RG round. This is an opportunity to pause and think strategically about which recommendations to develop next. The work group has the discretion to set its own pace.

Work Group Process and Work Plan

Amira invited work group members to share their priorities and provide input on which recommendations they would like to focus on developing to form a work plan for the next several months. The work group can work on additional recommendations this summer, and recommendations that achieve consensus in the work group will be reviewed by the SIWG and presented to the I/RG in the fall.

Amira reviewed the current status of recommendations in progress and other concepts that the group had previously discussed and expressed interest in. These included several potential systemwide actions that were identified, a non-lethal pinniped management recommendation that is in progress, and three potential avian predator species management recommendations (Caspian terns, California and ring-billed gulls, and white pelicans). Amira recommended that the work group select 1-3 ideas to focus on developing and finalizing.

Discussion:

- The systemwide actions touch on many topics beyond predation that have over. This suite of actions might benefit from working and coordinating with other topic-specific work groups to develop a recommendation focused on reducing predation risk.
 - Some of the systemwide actions could be prioritized as actions to pursue in the near term. There are effective strategies that are worth pursuing and have strong ties to the CBPTF goals.
 - The SIWG could help coordinate the effort across work groups. Since the focus on predation and this work group has been effective at developing proposals, the Predation Work Group can continue to lead on the recommendation with help from the SIWG. There may be experts needed from multiple work groups. The SIWG can help review the systemwide actions list and help identify individuals from each of the work groups to form a subgroup tasked with developing this recommendation further.
- The avian subgroup shared that the Caspian tern management recommendation could be developed for this group to review and forward to the I/RG by the fall. August is a reasonable timeframe to prepare a draft recommendation for the work group to review.
- The pinniped subgroup shared that the non-lethal pinniped management recommendation is also close to having a completed draft ready for review. The pinniped subgroup aims to complete the draft recommendation for work group review by August.
- For the MMPA Section 120 Pinniped Removal Program recommendation, it was not clear whether the I/RG feedback was to extend the current proposal beyond the I-205 bridge or to develop a separate recommendation focused on this area.
 - It was more the latter. The original proposal was focused on where there is currently legal authority to remove animals. The I/RG expressed interest in looking beyond that

area that was identified. The first step would be to start collecting data and monitoring to justify whether extending the scope of the Section 120(f) permit is needed.

- The work group could try to develop a recommendation for extending the authority to remove pinnipeds below I-205 by August.

Next Steps for Consensus Recommendations

Amira facilitated a discussion on how to make the consensus recommendations implementable and actionable. Work group members used a virtual whiteboard to brainstorm answers to the following questions for each recommendation: 1) What does it take to make the recommendation actionable? 2) Who are the right implementers and executors of the recommendations?

Enhance and Modify the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) Section 120 Pinniped Removal Program

- What does it take to make the recommendation actionable?
 - Funding for additional monitoring.
 - Coordination with relevant authorities.
 - Detailed implementation plan.
- Who are the right implementers and executors of the recommendations?
 - This is outlined in the proposal. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) are monitoring predation and the states and Tribes have the legal authority and are conducting the predator removal. There are questions of whether they have the right tools to remove Steller sea lions.
- Work group members noted that this proposal is highly focused on the Section 120(f) permits and that it is actionable in its current form. The only adjustments to the existing program were some inefficiencies identified in the current program, infrastructure needs, and the recommendation to implement an adaptive management strategy and guarantee that the USACE monitoring budget is secured.
 - The I/RG suggested creating a separate proposal for monitoring and possibly extending the program area below I-205.

Manage Double-crested Cormorants (DCCO) in the Columbia River Estuary

- What does it take to make the recommendation actionable?
 - This action has a comprehensive proposal that describes monitoring, predation reduction actions, and adaptive management.
 - The proposal would need a secure source of long-term funding.
 - Stakeholder involvement is required and there are many landowners.
 - Many decisions will be made, and it would be helpful to have a regional forum with broad representation and support to make decisions, provide context for expectations, and inform adaptive management.
- Who are the right implementers and executors of the recommendations?
 - USACE is open to providing access to other entities on lands such as East Sand Island for management purposes, but there would need to be a real estate agreement in place, which is a federal action.

- The Oregon and Washington Departments of Transportation (DOTs) need to be involved for any actions on the Astoria-Megler Bridge.
- The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) must be involved for any permits needed for take of eggs or adults protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
- The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has the authority to advise.

Develop a Northern Pike and Non-native Fish Monitoring Program

- What does it take to make the recommendation actionable?
 - Specific actions (e.g., eDNA monitoring), cost estimates, proposal development, and a lead entity to manage the project.
 - Study design and implementation schedule for non-native fish monitoring for each reservoir or reach.
 - Plans developed for each reservoir that provide a pathway for what to do with the non-native fish (e.g., remove them, keep them, encourage harvest, etc.).
 - Consistent long-term funding.
 - Easier ways to receive federal funding for invasive species and a way to submit proposals to receive consistent funding for at least 5-year increments.
 - A sub-group that includes experts from all regions that would collaborate and share ideas and results.
 - Identify the value these actions have toward meeting Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) mitigation obligations.
- Who are the right implementers and executors of the recommendations?
 - State Fish and Wildlife agencies and tribal co-managers are the primary implementers.
 - Universities can be involved to help answer research questions.

Develop a Comprehensive Piscine Predator Monitoring and Evaluation Program

- What does it take to make the recommendation actionable?
 - Long-term funding.
 - Improved methods of abundance estimation
 - Form a technical advisory group to develop the comprehensive piscine predation monitoring program.
 - Coordination among States and Tribes to ensure consistency and transferability in data.
 - Strong public outreach program.
 - Once the monitoring program is established, even before implementation, there will be a need to conduct public outreach.
 - This type of proposal could incorporate a significant citizen science program.
 - Some of these species are also game fish which will likely require public outreach from the outset.
- Who are the right implementers and executors of the recommendations?
 - State Fish and Wildlife agencies and tribal co-managers are the primary implementers.
 - Federal research laboratories can serve as a technical resource.

Confirm Action Items and Upcoming Meeting Topics

Action items from this meeting included the following:

- **K&W:** Coordinate with the SIWG and other work groups to convene relevant experts on the systemwide recommendation.
- **Avian Subgroup:** Prepare and finalize tern recommendation for Predation Work Group review in August.
- **Pinniped Subgroup:** Prepare non-lethal pinniped recommendation for Predation Work Group review in August.
- **Pinniped Subgroup:** Develop recommendation to extend pinniped removal program for Predation Work Group review in August.

Amira thanked everyone for participating and adjourned the meeting.