

Columbia Basin Collaborative Science Integration Work Group

Meeting Summary

Monday, November 6, 2023, from 9:00 – 11:00am PT/ 10:00am – 12:00pm MT

Attendees

Working Group Members in Attendance: Bob Lessard (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Dennis Daw (Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone/Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation), Scott Hauser (Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone/Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation), John Cassinelli (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Patty Dornbusch (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Michelle Rub (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), David Bain (Orca Conservancy), Art Martin (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Jay Backus (Port of Clarkston), David Doeringsfeld (Port of Lewiston), Kevin Scribner (Salmon-Safe), David Moskowitz (The Conservation Angler), Gary Marston (Trout Unlimited), Haley Ohms (Trout Unlimited), Crystal Callahan (University of Idaho McClure Center), Crystal Callahan (University of Idaho McClure Center), Cynthia Studebaker (US Army Corps of Engineers), Susan Camp (US Bureau of Reclamation), Charlene Hurst (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Michael Garrity (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries)

Observers in Attendance: Dennis Rohr (D. Rohr & Associates, Inc.), Stuart Crane (Yakama Nation), Alex Conley (Yakima Basin Fish & Wildlife Recovery Board), Heather Nicholson

Facilitation Team: Samantha Meysohn (Kearns & West), Angela Hessenius (Kearns & West)

Welcome, Agenda Review, and Updates

Samantha Meysohn, Kearns & West (K&W), provided an overview of the agenda and meeting guidelines. The topics included: 1) Review of Recommended Actions from Topic-Specific Work Groups and 2) Confirm Next Steps and Action Items.

Review of Recommended Actions from Topic-Specific Work Groups

Samantha provided a brief overview of each recommendation and the SIWG discussed the recommendations with a focus on the following questions: 1) How do the actions integrate with other efforts and limiting factors in the basin? 2) Which stocks are being benefited in this round of actions? And which limiting factors are being addressed? 3) Are there stocks or limiting factors that need more attention in future recommendations?

Recommendation 1: Maintain and Improve Mainstem Reach Survival Estimates and Smolt to Adult Return (SAR) Data by Installing PIT Tag Detection Systems at Key Mainstem Hydropower Projects

This action was developed by the Hydropower Work Group. The recommended action would maintain and improve mainstem reach survival estimates and Smolt to Adult Return (SAR) data by installing PIT tag detection systems at key mainstem hydro-projects so that reach-based juvenile salmon and

steelhead survival and SAR estimates can be generated throughout the Columbia and Snake River basins. Maintaining and improving reach-based survival estimates will allow for changes in reach survival to be identified, investigated, and addressed. Improving juvenile detections at key projects (and downstream of Bonneville Dam) will allow for more accurate estimates of SARs from different evolutionarily significant units (ESUs)/ distinct population segments (DPSs) and populations within the Columbia River Basin. Recommended key projects and structures include: Wanapum Dam juvenile bypass; Wanapum Dam adult fishway; one McNary Dam surface spillbay; Bonneville Dam spillway; and the Columbia River estuary (where these “downstream” detections are needed to make survival estimates to Bonneville Dam and could serve as the basis for generating SAR information for ESUs/DPSs and populations within the Columbia River Basin – including the Willamette River basin).

SIWG Feedback and Discussion:

- Fishery managers have faced challenges acquiring funding for full SAR monitoring of wild populations in the upper rivers. Most mitigation systems are set up for hatchery fish since tagging technology previously did not support tagging wild fish.
- SIWG members asked which projects are included in the “key projects” referred to in the recommendation. The recommendation identifies key projects and discusses issues that would be addressed. For example, at Lower Granite Dam, spilling at high volume has made PIT detection more challenging. At Wanapum Dam, there are very few fish passing through the fish bypass system where PIT detectors are currently located.
- This recommended action is highly integrated with other efforts and limiting factors in the Columbia River Basin. This is an overarching monitoring effort that would allow fishery managers to improve precision for population estimates for SAR and in-river survival rates. This information would help gauge progress towards the Columbia Basin Task Force (CBPTF) goals on a stock-by-stock basis. This action is primarily about addressing data gaps which will support adaptive management of several limiting factors, including hydropower operations, habitat, and predation.
- Some SIWG members expressed that they would like to see more specificity in the recommendation about where estimates are possible now with reasonable certainty, how much those return estimates could be improved by this action, and how those estimates will lead to improvements in the hydro system or management actions. It is always beneficial to have better data, yet this effort will take significant money and time and it is already possible to estimate SAR in some reaches.
 - The Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) has a 20-year database for estimating reach survivals throughout the system. Since 2018 when maximum spill started being implemented, the precision around these estimates has gone down and estimates for the last three years are very low.
- SIWG members also noted that the recommendation is not specific about who should pay for and install the PIT detection technology. The recommendation would be strengthened by clarifying who the recommendation is directed to and who is being asked to support this action.
- This monitoring depends on the ability both to tag fish and to detect them. A lot of juvenile traps have already been placed in the system, and this action would leverage infrastructure investment that has already been put into the system.

- This action would more precisely define where mortality happens and help focus on bottlenecks.
- This action would address several major data gaps, such as data for survival estimates in the Upper Columbia and the contrast between the Snake and the Upper Columbia reaches. This would significantly benefit the whole basin. It would also improve data sensitivities for each of the basins, including climate change effects.
- The benefits to individual stocks are project specific. For the Lower Granite Dam, the Snake River stocks are most likely to benefit. Improved detection at McNary Dam is very important for the Upper Snake stocks. Improvements at Bonneville Dam and in the estuary would benefit all stocks. More generally, the overall recommendation would benefit all listed stocks.
 - SIWG members noted that it is important to describe not only which stocks will benefit, but also the magnitude of those benefits. The recommendation should be specific and clear about what the benefits are to each stock, reflect the tradeoffs, and specify which areas should be focused on first and why.
 - The recommendation could be strengthened by tying each key project or location with the specific stocks that would benefit from the action. Since this recommendation would be a large undertaking, it could be prioritized by stock.
- SIWG members noted that this recommendation is a key part of a comprehensive monitoring strategy that is needed. While this action is vitally important, other actions will be needed for comprehensive monitoring in the basin.

Recommendation 2: Find a Dedicated Source of Funding for the Purpose of Increasing Salmon Production to Support and Sustain a Stable and Guaranteed Source of Fish in the Upper Snake for Tribal/Non-tribal Harvest

This action was developed by the Blocked Areas Work Group. This recommendation is to increase hatchery production by creating a new or expanding an existing hatchery facility with the production being dedicated to the Upper Snake River Basin and the goals outlined in the Partnership. Increased production would allow for a dedicated source of fish for ceremonial/subsistence fisheries and future reintroductions into select tributaries in the Upper Snake River.

SIWG Feedback and Discussion:

- The Upper Snake River has been blocked by federal and private dams for 100 years, and fishing opportunities for Upper Snake River tribes have been lost as a result. The CBPTF goals call for 9,500-13,500 returning unlisted hatchery-origin Spring/Summer Chinook and Summer Steelhead adults for the Upper Snake. This recommended action would either build a new hatchery or expand a current hatchery to produce four million smolts annually to achieve these goals. All fish in this hatchery facility would be non-listed fish and would likely come from Hells Canyon or Rapid River. The benefits of this action include that it would put higher numbers of fish in the river, providing more fish to harvest downriver and reducing fishing pressure on Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed stocks.
- This action would integrate well with other efforts in the basin. Opening the habitat in the upper basin could help advance salmon and steelhead recovery throughout the Columbia Basin. It would also increase the non-ESA listed fish available for harvest. Increases in salmon abundance would result in harvest to be shared with the Upper Snake River Tribes and the States.

- This action is aligned with achieving the quantitative and qualitative goals within the CBPTF Phase 2 Report.
- This effort aligns well with the ongoing project at Grand Coulee and Chief Joseph Dams. That initiative could be used as a source of information on how that effort impacted factors downstream.
- This recommended action is also consistent with the recent Presidential [Memorandum on Restoring Healthy and Abundant Salmon, Steelhead, and Other Native Fish Populations in the Columbia River Basin](#) and actions asked of federal agencies by the Biden administration.
- SIWG members raised a concern related to disease management. The recommended action includes strategies to manage this risk in the long-term plan, which specifies that any stocks used would be examined for disease potential.
- There could be unintended consequences of this action related to predation.
 - Some SIWG members shared that increasing the number of outmigrants could promote greater predation. Increased avian presence and predation has been observed with increased numbers of hatchery fish, particularly if they are all released at the same time.
 - Other SIWG members shared that it is also possible that the recommended action could alleviate predation impacts since an increased number of smolts in the river system could reduce predation pressure on other stocks.
 - Others shared that the scale of this action may not be enough to have a measurable impact, since the four million smolt output called for in the recommended action is very small compared to the total smolt production in the system, so the impact on predator food budget would be minimal.
 - SIWG members suggested potentially having this recommendation reviewed by the Avian Predation subgroup and having a structured risk assessment included as part of implementation for this recommended action.
- SIWG members noted that any new hatchery program in the basin would need to undergo ESA consultation, which would include a NOAA analysis that evaluates these risks and impacts. They also noted that this action relates to harvest allocations that are determined in the *United States vs. Oregon* process, and appropriate coordination would be needed.
- This action would likely benefit all stocks in the Columbia River, with a significant benefit to the Upper Snake River stocks above the blocked area. SIWG members noted that the main benefits of this recommendation are to fisheries by increasing the number of fish available for harvest. Others noted that increasing the number of fish could also create challenges for other limiting factors and the dynamics of downstream fisheries.
- The goal of this action is to gain regional support acknowledging that that Upper Snake Tribes have lost the cultural benefit of access to fish and that the only way to restore fish in the Upper Snake is to increase production. This is still a long-term goal and the intention of having this as a CBC recommendation is to demonstrate regional support when seeking funding for this effort. There are many uncertainties remaining and additional work that would need to happen to implement the action.

Recommendation 3: Send Letter to Local Land and Water Managers Requesting Support for Net Habitat Gain

This action was developed by the Habitat Work Group. The recommended action is that CBC I/RG partners would draft and send a letter calling upon state, county and local land and water managers (e.g., land and water use and regulatory managers) to update their respective water and land management policies, incentive programs, restoration funding priorities, and regulations as appropriate to achieve optimally functioning aquatic habitat for salmon and steelhead. Following the initial distribution of this letter, additional recovery organizations working in the Columbia Basin would be encouraged to distribute this letter and draft similar letters in line with their mission.

SIWG Feedback and Discussion:

- This recommended action acknowledges that funding for habitat restoration has increased but that regulatory and policy protections are not keeping pace with restoration actions. The approach developed by the Habitat Work Group is to draft a letter that would be signed by the I/RG and sent to state and local water managers to identify the need for greater regulatory and policy protections to provide for net habitat gain.
- Habitat is identified as a high or medium impact for two thirds of all stocks. This action could potentially benefit all stocks in the Columbia River basin.
 - The action takes a broadcast approach. It is expected that the letter will get more responsiveness in some places than others, and there is no way to predict locally where the letter will receive the most traction.
- This action is complementary to the recent Presidential [Memorandum on Restoring Healthy and Abundant Salmon, Steelhead, and Other Native Fish Populations in the Columbia River Basin](#). The Biden administration has asked federal agencies to use their authorities to help achieve salmon and steelhead recovery goals; this recommendation makes a similar request of state and local agencies.
- SIWG members noted that changes need to be made to some state policies and rules. The draft letter asks the recipients to look at existing policies and rules that may need to be updated. The intent behind sending the letter to local and state managers is that local managers make individual permit decisions and the states can push implementation and ensure that the rules are applied equally for everyone.
- SIWG members noted that there would be value in circulating the letter beyond the land and water managers. For example, it could also be sent to state legislative committee staff who could lead in changing laws.
 - Once the letter has been signed by the I/RG, the hope is that the letter would be distributed more broadly to entities such as recovery boards and watershed councils. Other groups and organizations would be able to use the letter to advocate for actions and policies that would promote net habitat gain.
- It could be beneficial to add a list of resources (e.g., grant programs) that are available to state and local agencies for habitat restoration. This could help encourage the managers to take action and inform them of resources and programs that they may not be aware of.

- SIWG members recommended that in addition to the initial outreach, there should be multiple follow-up communications and reminders to encourage implementation and build broad buy-in for the importance of this action.
- SIWG members also suggested including a contact list with the individual staff who the letter would be sent to and their contact information.
- Another benefit of the action is that the draft letter includes information on how to contact their state I/RG representative. The intent is to make managers aware of this key moment for salmon recovery and encourage them to be involved.

Confirm Next Steps and Action Items

Action items from this meeting included the following:

- **All:** Review the draft SIWG Narratives and Report Cards and the two draft SIWG recommendation concept statements that will be provided to the I/RG for direction and feedback.

Samantha thanked everyone for participating and adjourned the meeting.