

# Columbia Basin Collaborative Predation Work Group

## Meeting Summary

Wednesday, October 3rd, 2023 from 12:00 – 2:00pm PT/ 1:00 – 3:00pm MT

### Attendees

**Working Group Members in Attendance:** Allan Martin (Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission), Andrew Murdoch (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Art Martin (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Bob Lessard (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Casey Clark (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), David Bain (Orca Conservancy), Erik Neatherlin (Washington GSRO), Grant Waltz (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Holly McLellan (Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation), Ian Chane (Army Corps of Engineers), James Lawonn (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Jay Hesse (Nez Perce Tribe Department of Fisheries Resources Management), John Edwards (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Josh Ashline (Bonneville Power Administration), Keely Murdoch (Yakama Nation Fisheries), Marlene Wagner (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Michael Brown (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Michelle McDowell (United States Fish and Wildlife Service), Michelle Rub (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Tim Copeland (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries),

**Observers in Attendance:** Chris Magel (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Doug Hatch (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Jennifer Urmston (United States Fish and Wildlife Service), Jerry Klemm (Port of Lewiston), Kate Self (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Ralph Lampman (Yakama Nation Fisheries), Shay Valentine (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Stuart Crane (Yakama Nation)

**Facilitation Team:** Amira Streeter (Kearns & West), Liz Mack (Kearns & West), Grant Simmons (Kearns & West)

### Welcome, Agenda Review, and Updates

Amira Streeter, Kearns & West, provided an overview of the agenda and meeting guidelines. The topics included: 1) Review and Consensus Building on Non-Lethal Pinniped Recommendation, 2) Review and Consensus Building on Pinniped Removal program Extension Recommendation, 3) Avian Subgroup Update, and 4) Action Items and Upcoming Meeting Topics.

Amira asked if there were any updates from the group, of which there were none.

## Review and Consensus Building on Non-Lethal Pinniped Recommendation

Casey Clark, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, provided update on the Non-Lethal Pinniped Recommendation. The WDFW is exploring new technologies and making sure that they are accurately monitoring while also not having unintended consequences. Casey noted that he will send the draft recommendation to Amira and Grant, who will then disseminate it to the group. Amira then shared the draft text, and Casey noted this version has been updated and avoids naming specific technologies.

The work group had the following input and questions:

- Question: Are terrestrial carnivores still part of the recommendation?
  - Answer: *They were removed in anticipation of pushback to introducing carnivores to that section of the river. Instead, the recommendation includes non-lethal methods known to work, e.g., cracker shells, and pyrotechnics, even if they are imperfect. Better methods should be used in the future.*
- Members discussed the idea of adding a prioritization/effectiveness scheme to identify which non-lethal deterrence methods should be deployed when and where. Members agreed that adding any data or knowledge about effectiveness would be beneficial to the recommendation, if possible. One member noted that it can be difficult to measure the effectiveness of various deterrents, however, and if effectiveness isn't known then it should be stated to set expectations (especially in response to questions about cost-effectiveness). Recent data shows non-lethal methods to be ineffective for highly habituated animals, but data is inconclusive on non-habituated animals.
- Members noted that I/RG will likely be concerned with cost relative to effectiveness.
- Members discussed who would be responsible for implementing non-lethal deterrence methods, e.g., government agencies, tribes, and/or private landowners. Regarding private landowners, the idea of a small grant program to provide electric fences and/or sprinklers was raised. However, efficacy concerns were raised about private landowner responsibility because it could simply push animals from one location to another without ensuring they are being moved downstream. Members discussed the need for following up on hazing and removal, which would likely come from a more cohesive, system-wide effort.
- The inclusion of lethal methods for removal was discussed, with them being viewed as a last resort if all other non-lethal methods had already been exhausted.
- One member noted the ineffectiveness of current acoustic deterrence methods, and that the recommendation should state that better technologies are needed than what is currently available.

The group agreed to:

- Update wording to get the recommendation finalized.
- Share the final draft with the work group to achieve consensus at the next predation meeting.
- Share recommendation with I/RG

## Review and Consensus Building on Pinniped Removal program Extension Recommendation

Bob Lessard, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, reviewed the recommendation. Bob noted that the original permit was challenging to acquire, including decades of work and requiring congressional approval. He also highlighted the impact that pinnipeds have on salmon populations and noted that the CRIFTC and tribes can be frustrated by comparing numbers of harvest rates and pinniped consumption.

Amira asked if this recommendation is about coordinating with tribes and/or other entities and agencies to make sure they are equipped to conduct lethal removal effectively. Bob noted that this recommendation is about modifying the 120(f) permit to expand the area in which lethal removal can occur downstream of the I-205 bridge.

The group had the following input:

- Members discussed one of the areas where the group has struggled to reach consensus: authorizing pinniped removal at the mouth of the Columbia River, which could create challenges and confusion between 120(f) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act.
- Members discussed various alternatives to considering removal downstream of the I-205 bridge as an extension of the existing 120(f) permit. One member proposed the idea of recommending a separate permit for this part of the river instead of expanding the existing permit. Another member proposed splitting the recommendation into three individual proposals – the existing lethal program, the expansion of lethal program below I-205 bridge, and the non-lethal program – as opposed to rolling them together into a single recommendation. This was proposed because the three proposals are relatively unique from each other. Additionally, whereas the existing lethal program is generally uncontroversial, the expansion proposal will require more dialogue and consensus-building.
- Multiple members noted the importance of taking bold, transformative action through this process, whether that takes the form of a stepwise expansion of the boundary downstream or a separate proposal altogether. One member noted that bold action should be accompanied by a tangible goal.
- Other members expressed reservations about the recommendation, which centered around prioritizing getting funding for the current authorization (over an expansion), the desire for more research on the impact of lethal pinniped removal on fish stocks, and the acknowledgment that there is still a lot of work to be done on tributaries. One member highlighted the current lack of knowledge on predation in the lower Columbia estuary to have firmer supporting evidence if the group asks for an expansion of the permit.
- One member expressed the desire to have a subgroup meeting for the lethal recommendation, like the non-lethal subgroup.

Amira concluded the conversation by reminding members that there will be additional time for further discussion on the lethal recommendation at the next meeting. She also encouraged members to think of what needs to be asked of the I/RG and who the entities responsible for implementation should be.

## Avian Subgroup Update

James Lawonn, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Michelle McDowell, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, provided an update on the tern recommendation. They stated that plans for the tern population were different than other predation management projects as agencies aim to bolster tern environment, not reduce as the tern populations are dwindling, partially due to tactics of getting them out of the basin.

- Question: Is there a general idea of where the tern population should be?
  - *Answer: Yes, which is why it is understood that the population is currently getting dangerously low. The USFWS is funding another census for next year which will provide an even more accurate picture of the conservational state of the tern population in the Columbia Basin.*
- Question: Are there actual numbers that the agencies aim to see in the tern population?
  - *Answer: As of right now, there are no firm numbers that we want the population to hit but there are firm numbers that we don't want the population to fall under.*

## Action Items and Upcoming Meeting Topics

Action items from this meeting included the following:

- **Pinniped Subgroup (Casey):** Incorporate edits in Non-Lethal Recommendation and send to KW to send to work group for review
- **Pinniped Subgroup:** Meet to discuss the lethal removal recommendation
- **Avian Subgroup:** Meet to discuss Caspian tern recommendation
- **KW:** Write and distribute meeting summary
- **All:** Prep for Fall I/RG meeting

Amira thanked everyone for participating and adjourned the meeting.