

# Columbia Basin Collaborative

## Habitat Work Group

### Meeting Summary

Wednesday November 9, 2022 from 10:00am – 1:00pm PT/11:00am - 2:00pm MT

#### Attendees

**Work Group Members in Attendance:** Andrew Spanjer (United States Geological Survey), Benjamin Blank (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Brandon Rogers (Yakama Nation Fisheries), Catherine Corbett (Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership), Conor Giorgi (Spokane Tribe of Indians), David Bain (Orca Conservancy), Jason Karnezis (Bonneville Power Administration), Jason Neuswanger (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Jay Backus (Port of Clarkston), Jay Hesse (Nez Perce Tribe Fisheries Resources Management), Jeff McLaughlin (Bureau of Reclamation), Jim Brick (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), John Foltz (Snake River Salmon Recovery Board), Laura Brown (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Lynne Krasnow (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Michelle Rub (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Mike Edmondson (Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation), Norman Semanko (Aberdeen-Springfield Canal Company), Patty Dornbusch (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Robert Lessard (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Sean Tackley (United States Geological Survey), Stephen Waste (United States Geological Survey), Steve Manlow (Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board), Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries), Tracy Bowerman (Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board)

**Observers in Attendance:** Daniel Bertram (Governor's Office of Species Conservation), Dennis Rohr (DRohr & Associates, Inc.), Irene Martin (Public), Shane Scott (Scott and Associates)

Facilitation Team: Amira Streeter (Kearns & West) and Colin Johnson (Kearns & West)

#### Welcome, Agenda Review, and Updates

Amira Streeter, Kearns & West, welcomed the work group members and provided meeting guidelines and a review of the agenda. Agenda topics included 1) Work Plan Review, 2) Estuary Habitat Discussion Resources and Gaps, 3) Tributary Habitat Discussion Resources and Gaps, 4) Presentation: Selection of Restoration Projects, 5) Develop Short Term Recommendations, 6) Confirm Next Steps, Upcoming Meeting Topics, and Summary.

Amira introduced the Recommended Action Form developed by the Science Integration Work Group (SIWG). The form can be used by other work groups to share recommendations for the Science Integration Work Group for analysis and to pass along recommendations to the I/RG. The SIWG and I/RG will look for recommendations that cut across multiple work groups. Amira noted that the requested information may not be available for every action, and so recommendations should still be submitted even if the Recommended Action Form cannot be completed in full. The work group will first focus on identifying specific actions but encourage members to make recommendations related to policy or science that also need attention. All recommendations that could contribute to salmon recovery are encouraged.

## Work Plan Review

Amira shared the Habitat work group work plan and reminded group members that it is a living document. Amira reminded the group members that this work group will be building consensus recommendations that everyone is comfortable moving forward with. Per the work plan, meeting 2 will focus on further identifying priority habitat programs, locations, responsible entities and limiting factors. The meeting will also provide an opportunity to further understand challenges and opportunities to habitat restoration efforts. Group members agreed that efforts should extend beyond just identifying priority areas for restoration by taking a broader perspective on habitat and looking for additional bottlenecks that impact restoration.

## Estuary Habitat Discussion Resources and Gaps

Amira reintroduced the estuary habitat table with biological criteria for priority action. Group members then reviewed a list of existing estuary habitat programs. Group members were invited to provide feedback on the list and identify any gaps or missing programs. Group members shared the following comments about the program list:

- A group member, in discussing accepted salmon recovery plans in Washington, emphasized the importance of having plans that are agreed upon by multiple stakeholder entities at various levels, programmatic funding, and a review process that includes social stakeholder involvement and strong technical support.
- Group members identified that some programs listed are action based, while some are focused on monitoring, and some are collaborative groups. A good next step would be to create a more categorical list of these programs.
- The Salmon Recovery Funding Board is the associated habitat program for the Washington Governor Salmon Recovery Office.
- The Columbia Estuary Ecosystem Restoration Program (CEERP) annual meeting is in mid-December, and anyone who would like to learn more about CEERP can join.
- Several watershed groups (The Columbia River Estuary Study Task Force, Columbia Land Trust, Lower Columbia Fish Enhancement Group) are implementing restoration projects but are not listed. Some of the projects they implement address things in addition to salmon recovery, such as lamprey or waterfowl work, white tail deer, etc. It is valuable to include these implementers on this list.
- The second and third bullet should be combined. The Studies Review Work Group is a regional work group designed to facilitate federal, state, and tribal agency feedback on United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) funded research, monitoring, and evaluation. Collectively, the USACE Columbia/Snake River research, monitoring, and evaluation program is referred to as the Anadromous Fish Evaluation Program (AFEP).
- The Columbia River Basin Restoration Act, under the Environmental Protection Agency, should be included.
- Fish Barrier Removal Board and the Salmon Recovery Regions should also be included in the list of tributary entities.

## Tributary Habitat Discussion Resources and Gaps

Amira reintroduced the tributary habitat table with biological criteria for priority action. Group members then reviewed a list of existing tributary habitat programs. Group members were invited to provide

feedback on the list and identify gaps or missing programs. Group members shared the following comments about the program list:

- The list of tributary programs should also be categorized based on their role and responsibilities.
  - Does an agency or group have a responsibility to a program? Do they fund programs? Are they implementers?
  - One group member suggested putting the list into a table that categorizes by funding, policy, implementation, regulatory, geographic area, etc.
- Washington Recovery Boards are all listed separately but it's important to note that they are all nested within the program coordinated at the state level. They can be categorized by state, regional, and local level.
- The Bureau of Reclamation Tributary Habitat program is not included on this list.
- The list currently lacks a comprehensive list of Tribal habitat programs.
- Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and the Watershed Councils in Oregon need to be included.
- Amira asked group members to discuss the overarching connection between these entities, or whether the programs are disconnected from what the region is doing.
  - Efforts are piecemeal, and often decision making, funding, and implementation are disconnected, which can lead to decisions being made that are distinct from the overarching plans. Things change every step of the way which results in different outcomes than if there was a vertical chain ensuring integration and continuity between projects. This is a major problem and not one that is easy to resolve.

**An action step for the next meeting is to send a table with the appropriate categories and allow members to populate it with entities.**

### [Presentation: Selection of Restoration Projects](#)

Amira prefaced the presentations by sharing the goal of identifying a high-level view of what projects are in the works, what additional resources they may need, and what work is still needed.

**Jason Karnezis, Bonneville Power Administration (BPA)**, presented on the Columbia Estuary Ecosystem Restorative Program. The program's objectives are to take an ecosystem-based approach to restoration using an adaptive management framework. The main approaches taken involve restoring hydrologic connections between main stem and floodplains, creating or enhancing shallow-water habitat, and re-establishing native vegetation. Jason profiled three restoration projects for fiscal year 2023: Wolf Bay, Carr Slough, and Svensen Island.

Question: How is funding prioritized?

Answer: BPA has a list of projects in different phases of constructability, with the goal of always having something on-the-ground each year. However, there is not a backlog of projects that need prioritizing. All our work is focused on, and meets the goal of, rebuilding stocks by helping to make fish more resilient before leaving for the ocean.

Question: In trying to jumpstart programs to get a benefit for salmon. What programs in the estuary could we add funding to for immediate result in implementing more projects?

Answer: In the estuary, specifically, providing flexible funding for more holistic projects. Many of the easier projects have been completed, and so a lot of time and resources is spent building relationships with landowners in order to carry out projects on private land. Therefore, it is not solely a funding issue but an issue of projects taking a long time to get off the ground.

**Mike Edmondson, Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation**, shared that important steps for current projects have been evaluating local populations, identifying those necessary for recovery, estimating available habitat, identifying the most limiting life stage, and identifying habitat actions that will increase capacity to achieve higher adult escapements. Life stages have been a key focus, and were broken down by reproduction, over-summering, pre-smolt, and over-wintering. It was found that over-wintering habitat was lacking, and so focus has been placed on improving complexity of those habitats. Most Chinook production happens on private land, where changes to the land to support agriculture have historically been detrimental to habitat. Therefore, cooperation with landowners, and continuing to build a positive reputation by doing good work on private land, is needed to complete necessary habitat work. Building capacity across other Major Population Groups (MPG) could be a beneficial place to focus more funding, and landowner incentives as in important discussion to have.

Comment: The Washington Salmon Coalition (WSC) will be discussing landowner incentives in the near term, as a follow-up to a regional effort in the Lower Columbia.

Question: Do these landowners include multinational timber companies?

Answer: In the Upper Salmon Basin, no. In the Clearwater Basin, there are large commercial timber lands which may or may not be multinational.

**Jim Brick, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)**, profiled three priority projects from the Lower, Middle, and Upper Columbia in Oregon: 1) Landslide Toe, Clackamas River mainstem, 2) Wallowa Fish Passage and Flow, 3) Columbia River Steelhead Overshoot. The Landslide Toe project involves making a mile long side-channel flow annually. The Columbia River Steelhead Overshoot affects the survival of eight steelhead populations and the project aims to reduce the percentage of fish that overshoot their river of origin upon return. The Wallowa Fish Passage and Flow project aims to return sockeye to a place where they have been otherwise eliminated from due to habitat blockage. Jim shared that strategic action plans for these projects are developed by looking at various components related to habitat quality and restoration and then identifying priority areas to focus on. The ODFW also works with the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to create a map that helps identify areas where funding should be allocated for restoration projects. Jim also spoke about Oregon Focused Investment Partnerships that have provided key funding to organizations so that projects can be implemented over a span of six years.

**Brandon Rogers, Yakama Nation Fisheries**, introduced the workflow documents used for prioritization of projects, with the Upper Columbia Biological Strategy informing operations. A prioritization model using empirical data on physical and biological habitats is a recent addition to the Strategy. The Specific River Reach Assessment looks at existing habitat conditions and determines quality. The Strategy identifies places to work, and the Reach Assessment provides information on what conditions are. Brandon profiled the Nason Creek SR 207 Realignment which will relocate highway 207 out of a flood plain and allow for restoration of high priority habitat. There are currently four to six shovel ready projects in the works for the next five years. Tom Iverson stepped in to preview some of the 10-year restoration plans for watersheds in the Columbia River Basin, and the number of projects that could be

completed with additional funding. The presentation concluded with a list of 10 habitat restoration funding sources.

**Steve Manlow, Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board (LCFRB)**, provided an overview of the Washington State Salmon Recovery Board process. Five of the state's eight salmon recovery regions are located in the Columbia basin. The role of regional recovery organizations is to facilitate development of recovery plans and to oversee implementation and adaptive management of those plans. The state's Lead Entity programs play the role of facilitating project implementation, developing habitat strategies that serve as the link between what is done on the ground and recovery plans. Steve displayed an outline of the Salmon Recovery Funding Board review process and the different entities involved. An important gap that has been identified is the capacity for sponsors to maintain the flow of projects. Organizations are sized to available funding which can present a challenge if there is an influx of funding like in 2022, but this past year sponsor organizations were able to put \$18M of high priority projects on the ground. Steve profiled the Ridgefield Pits Floodplain Restoration project which involved resetting a floodplain to provide a system that will provide benefits for numerous Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed species. Steve emphasized the importance of prioritizing more than just habitat restoration, and that something to focus on is protecting habitat baseline.

### Develop Short Term Recommendations

Amira outlined the steps the group will take for developing short term recommendations.

Group members were invited to respond to the following questions on a virtual whiteboard regarding different habitats:

- Are there any actions taken right now to help restore habitat for high-impacted stocks?
- Are those actions (programs and projects) in place and successful? What changes are needed to improve chance of success and diminish challenges?
- Are there any projects that are "shovel-worthy"? Which projects are going to be highly beneficial?
  - "Shovel-worthy" is characterized by projects that are feasible within a five-year range.

One group member emphasized the importance of rising above the project level to the subbasin or population level, to consider protection, planning, monitoring, and other "actions" that help fish which never require a shovel.

### Estuary Habitat

#### *Actions to take now*

- Policy statement on importance of habitat protection and preventing loss from each state; encouraging incentives to protect existing habitat and preventing loss,
- Identifying objectives for, and providing technical and financial assistance with, the creation, writing, and management of grants,
- Increase capacity for landowner engagement,
- Encouraging efficiencies in funding programs so sponsors spend less time filling in applications - also in reporting process (need to streamline),

- Increase funding for projects that are beneficial to salmon recovery even when the projects aren't "salmon projects" - allowing for less than 100% benefit (ex: 50% beneficial project),
- More flexibility in funding holistic projects,
- Bring a holistic view to projects - ex: upriver actions benefits downstream populations; taking a population approach,
- Nutrient enhancement,
- Improving water management.

#### *Successful programs*

- Columbia Estuary Ecosystem Restoration Program (CEERP).

#### *Shovel-worthy projects*

- Svensen Island restoration,
- Wolf Bay restoration,
- Carr Slough restoration.

#### Snake River Habitat

##### *Actions to take now*

- Building capacity and cross-coordination with agencies, Tribes, non-government organizations, etc.
- Speed up regulatory compliance with federal agencies (not Snake River specific) -- streamline processes related to compliance,
- Private landowner incentives to increase participation,
- Increase capacity for landowner engagement,
- Encouraging efficiencies in funding programs so sponsors spend less time filling in applications - also in reporting process (need to streamline),
- Identifying objectives for, and providing technical and financial assistance with, the creation, writing, and management of grants,
- Nutrient enhancement (across entire Basin),
- Improving water management (project specific and policy driven),
- Floodplain management - alignment with habitat needs,
- Removing the velocity barrier in the South Fork clearwater.

##### *Successful programs*

- Bureau of Reclamation - Snake River Salmon Recovery Program

Additional habitats will be discussed in the next meeting.

#### [Confirm Next Steps, Upcoming Meeting Topics, and Summary](#)

Amira described the "homework" assignment for the group. This is to gather programmatic efforts that were captured and see if they can be distilled down to specific regions.

Amira introduced potential upcoming meeting topics, including: 1) Salmon recovery metrics and mapping tools, 2) Understanding CEERP, 3) Landowner incentives

*Meeting adjourned at 1:00pm PT/2:00pm MT*