

Columbia Basin Collaborative Habitat Work Group

Meeting Summary

Monday December 12, 2022 from 12:00pm – 3:00pm PT/1:00pm - 4:00pm MT

Attendees

Work Group Members in Attendance: Benjamin Blank (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Brandon Haslick (Burns Paiute Tribe Fisheries), Brandon Rogers (Yakama Nation Fisheries), Catherine Corbett (Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership), Cynthia Studebaker (Army Corps of Engineers), David Bain (Orca Conservancy), Gary James (Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation), Jason Neuswanger (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Jay Backus (Port of Clarkston), Jay Hesse (Nez Perce Tribe Department of Fisheries), Jeff Fisher (Seattle City Light), 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), Leslie Bach (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Mike Edmondson (Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation), Patty Dornbusch (National Marine Fisheries Service), Steve Manlow (Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board), Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries), Tracy Bowerman (Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board)

Observers in Attendance: Brian Drake (Bureau of Reclamation), Cathy Kellon (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Chanda Littles (Army Corps of Engineers), Daniel Bertram (Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation), Dennis Rohr (DRohr & Associates, Inc.), Elaine Harvey (Yakama Nation Fisheries Program), Heather Nicholson (Public), Irene Martin (Salmon for All), Kira Christensen (Bureau of Reclamation), Mark Bierman (Army Corps of Engineers), Shane Scott (Public Power Council)

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

Welcome, Agenda Review, and Updates

Amira Streeeter, 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, 5) General Recommendations for Habitat, 6) Develop Short Term Recommendations – highest priority stocks, 7) Confirm Next Steps, Upcoming Meeting Topics, and Summary.

Work Plan Review

Amira reviewed the topics covered in meetings one and two and set expectations for meeting three per the work plan. Meeting 3 would focus on the development of short-term recommendations by: 1) Identifying priority areas for restoration and protection related actions, 2) Identifying implementers, partners, and collaborators in the work, 3) Identifying challenges and potential solutions.

Estuary Habitat Discussion – Resources and Gaps

Amira and Patty Dornbusch, National Marine Fisheries Service, shared an updated set of spreadsheets which captured forums carrying out estuary and tributary habitat work in the Columbia Basin. Amira explained that the spreadsheets were meant to track forum names, types, purposes, and a description of the work performed. Amira shared that one spreadsheet is a simplified version of the other, that the goal of collecting this information in one place is to gain a clear understanding of all forums and implementers performing habitat work in the basin, and sharing what that work consists of, so that this group can identify existing gaps in those efforts.

Work group members reviewed the spreadsheets and shared the following comments:

- The work done by tribes needs more robust and specific representation.
- The Northwest Power and Conservation Council needs to be included.
- To understand what actions will have the most benefit and where gaps currently exist, these lists should be expanded to include the types of restoration work being carried out, the location of that work, and what the benefits are.
- Group members are aware of what needs to happen to affect recovery in their regions. By separating recommendations by region, Evolutionary Significant Units (ESU), and Distinct Population Segment (DPS), members in the same regions can convene and identify common issues.
- Include top-level needs and gaps by individual program broken down by region, ESU, and DPS.
- Consult five-year status reviews for recommendations to address gaps identified in the spreadsheets.

Amira shared that the project team will take the comments from the group and discuss the best ways to implement the recommended changes.

Presentations

Amira then introduced presenters who would be providing short presentations on habitat work being carried out by their respective entities.

Patty Dornbusch – 2020 Columbia River System Tributary Habitat Program

Patty shared that the purpose of the Columbia River System Tributary Habitat Program is to help address, and mitigate, effects of Columbia River System (CRS) management on listed salmon and steelhead. This is done by improving survival in fresh-water habitats as well as bolstering population indicators. The program is being implemented under the CRS Biological Opinion, which is a consultation on the operation of CRS dams. The consultation includes a package of offsite mitigation actions including estuary and tributary habitat restoration, predation control, and conservation hatcheries. The program has seen hundreds of restoration actions implemented over a broad geographic area. Funding is provided through the Bonneville Power Association (BPA) and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). Patty discussed the program framework and the different roles played by members and committees, emphasizing that a significant amount of work is carried out by local implementers. Project reports are produced annually with a comprehensive program review developed every five years. Current considerations for the program include deciding which major population groups to focus on, ensuring

actions are identified and prioritized effectively, determining how best to evaluate program benefits, as well as communicating effectively to parties within the program and beyond.

Group members shared the following comments.

- This program represents one component of a broader program that is funded through the approximately \$240 million total that the Bonneville Power Administration allocates to the Fish & Wildlife program each year.

Emmit Taylor – Nez Perce Tribe Department of Fisheries Resources Management Watershed Division

Emmitt shared that this presentation would cover how the organization goes about identifying and prioritizing projects, how funding is gained, and would review 1-3 projects that have been effective for habitat restoration. Emmit introduced the four major documents used to guide restoration work. Base funding for the program is provided by the BPA, and additional funding is found through grants. Emmit displayed the boundaries of the Nez Perce Tribe territory and restoration focus area and showed the overlay with ESUs for steelhead and Spring Chinook. A watershed assessment, or limiting factors analysis, are often used to determine which projects will have the most impact. A recent tool that has been utilized to estimate project efficacy is the Atlas process provided by BPA which compiles all data available about an area. Emmit explained that restoration work varies by geographic region given the unique needs and landscapes, and some current notable projects are focused on flow restoration, passage, road restoration, and floodplain restoration. Completing this work requires extensive partnerships, including a long-standing partnership with the US Forest Service. Emmit discussed current big lift efforts undertaken by the Nez Perce Tribe, including an effort to prevent an expansion of the Stibnite Mine.

Tracy Bowerman – Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board

Tracy shared that the mission of the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board (UCSRB) is to restore Spring Chinook, steelhead, and other at-risk species in the Upper Columbia region. The Upper Columbia is one of eight salmon recovery regions in Washington, and the UCSRB is one of the 35 lead entity organizations that are watershed based and implement habitat recovery. The UCSRB is responsible for implementing the 30-year regional recovery plan which is based on biological needs of the fish and provides a foundation for restoring population to healthy levels. Tracy described the four main watersheds where UCSRB works and highlighted partner organizations through whom the on-the-ground implementation work is completed. Restoration work is informed by two biological strategies, and Tracy described how those strategies were used to prioritize locations and actions. In 2021, completed projects included: 2 acquisitions, 1 subbasin assessment, 7 planning and design projects, and 22 restoration efforts. In addition, since the year 2000, project partners have removed 162 fish-passage barriers within the region, resulting in 190 miles of passage being made accessible to fish.

General Recommendations for Habitat

Amira introduced the recommendations activity and recapped the last meeting which saw the sharing of broad stroke recommendations amongst the group for estuary and tributary habitat. Amira shared those recommendations with the group, invited additions and comments, and asked if any of the items should be prioritized.

Amira first introduced the Estuary Habitat recommendations to the group:

Estuary Habitat Restoration and Maintenance

- 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

Group members discussed the following items regarding the list of estuary recommendations:

- A group member shared that the Science Integration Work Group (SIWG) has already created a policy statement on the importance of protecting what currently exists, which includes habitat.
- Group members defined 'holistic' as projects that have benefits beyond their immediate focus.
 - Include education funding
 - Include parks/recreation funding – habitat protection along waterways that benefit salmon
 - Include funding for maintaining and monitoring work.
- Group members discussed how projects that do not explicitly focus on salmon can still provide a significant benefit. Examples of these projects include:
 - Projects that benefit multiple species
 - Infrastructure projects such as replacing culverts when roads are being repaved
- It was noted that projects which benefit multiple species may also result in increased predation if the project results in conditions beneficial to predators

Amira noted that some recommendations, such as nutrient enhancement and improving water management, were relevant to tributary habitats as well.

Amira shared recommendations impacting Tributary Habitat with the group and invited additions and comments, and asked if any of the items should be prioritized:

Tributary Habitat Restoration and Maintenance

- 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
- Improving water management
- Floodplain management - alignment with habitat needs
- Removing the velocity barrier in the South Fork clearwater
- Policy statement on importance of habitat protection and preventing loss from each state; encouraging incentives to protect existing habitat and preventing loss

Group members discussed the following items regarding the list of tributary recommendations:

- Break recommendations into three categories 1) pace and scale of implementation and restoration, 2) coordination or efficiencies, 3) assessment and monitoring.
- Return biological monitoring efforts to prior levels.
- The policy statement developed by the SIWG is also important for tributaries as that is where a significant erosion of habitat baseline is seen.
- Habitat restoration is an essential action for mid-Columbia stocks.
- A holistic, or multi-benefit, approach will be beneficial for tributaries as well.
- Finding increased funding for existing programs.
- Identify future funding sources and resources for priority stocks as most funding sources cannot be reprioritized.
 - Consider whether funding or other restoration program elements could be consolidated to allow better prioritization and distribution in the future.
- In considering improvements to water management, it is important to include water acquisition and exchanges.
- Establish and maintain screens of water diversions within five years.

Amira reviewed the Recommended Action Form and invited participants to consider what actions can be taken for highly impacted stocks and what are potential challenges with those actions. Group members reviewed the estuary and tributary biological matrices which list the highest impacted stocks. Patty reminded the group that, in the estuary habitat table, Upper Columbia summer steelhead need to be caveated as it was determined they would not benefit significantly from recovery efforts because they do not spend ample time in the estuary. A group member also named that Columbia sockeye are doing reasonably well when compared with other species in the region, and therefore should not be considered a high-priority stock. It was shared that the goal of this work is not prioritize one stock over another, but to increase all stocks to harvestable levels.

Group members shared that a regional discussion would be beneficial for this exercise as species have different needs by region. Regional dialogue would allow for the development of specific recommendations by species. It was determined that holding regional dialogues would involve bringing additional people to the table, specifically those with regional expertise.

The group identified that the scope of the current request is large, and it would be beneficial to divide it into specific tasks. One recommendation was to begin by elevating existing recommended actions contained in the various Five-Year Status Reviews. The Reviews represent ideas that have coalesced for some time and would mark a starting point for this work, even if additional items were added to those ideas in the future. In addition, suggestions would be required for additional policy and/or funding support to implement each recommendation. Group members shared that these recommendations could provide a template to reach the goal of identifying implementable actions. It was suggested that this group can also share the message that this is an enormous undertaking and specific things are needed to hit mid- and high-level recovery goals. Identifying how much funding is needed to achieve those goals can provide clarity on what is essential, and guidance when seeking out additional funding sources. It will also be important to effectively state what challenges habitats are facing as work continues with the rest of the Columbia Basin Collaborative.

Confirm Next Steps, Upcoming Meeting Topics, and Summary

Amira reviewed the next steps for the work group, thanked the group for their participation and confirmed the following action items. Amira invited work group members to submit Recommended Action Forms if they have them. The project team will work to identify recommendations from the Five-Year Status Reviews and discuss a process to divide the work group into sub-groups.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM PT/4:00 PM MT