

# Columbia Basin Collaborative Habitat Work Group

## Meeting Summary

February 24, 2023 from 9:00am – 12:00pm PT/10:00am - 1:00pm MT

### Attendees

**Work Group Members in Attendance:** Amelia Johnson (Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board), Bob Lessard (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Brandon Rogers (Yakama Nation Fisheries), Casey Justice (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Conor Giorgi (Spokane Tribe of Indians), Cynthia Studebaker (United States Army Corps of Engineers), David Bain (Orca Conservancy), Jeff McLaughlin (Bureau of Reclamation); 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), Norman Semanko (Quincy-Columbia Basin Irrigation District), Patty Dornbusch (National Marine Fisheries Service), Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries), Tracy Bowerman (Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board)

**Observers in Attendance:** Cathy Kellon (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Daniel Bertram (Governor’s Office of Species Conservation), Danielle Nelson (Torrey Advisory Group), Dennis Rohr (DRohr & Associates, Inc.), Heather Nicholson (Public), Jerry Klemm (Port of Lewiston), Scott Turo (United States Department of Agriculture), Stuart Crane (Yakama Nation Water Resources Program)

**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) Recap of I/RG Meeting and Consensus Process, 2) Straw Poll of Recommendations for Meeting – Green Light/Red Light, 3) Habitat Discussion of 1 "General Recommendation, 4) Habitat Discussion of 1 "NOAA 5-Year Review Recommendation", 5) Discuss Recommendation by Region/Impact, 6) Confirm Next Steps, Upcoming Meeting Topics, and Summary.

### Recap of I/RG Meeting and Consensus Process

Amira recapped key takeaways from the Integration/Recommendations Group (I/RG) meeting held on January 26, 2023. Recommendations from work groups should specify the geographic area, scope, scale and timeline for each action. It is also important to link recommendations to the quantitative goals of the Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force (CBPTF). Work groups are encouraged to identify achievable actions during this first phase of recommendation development. The goal of achieving consensus was also defined as producing recommendations that no members of the work group oppose passing on to the I/RG.

Work group members shared the following reflections from the I/RG meeting:

- The I/RG is looking to identify support for proposals produced in the past by other groups and requests new actions to add to the list of existing recommendations.
- The meeting highlighted the importance of thinking about social, cultural, and economic considerations given the importance of social factors as they relate to restoration efforts.

- The need for funding for both programs and infrastructure as well as personnel to implement programs is significant.
  - A broad funding recommendation may require greater specificity regarding how it will assist the CBC in meeting goals. This could include identifying timelines, geographies, stocks that will benefit, and existing work demonstrating where success can be expected. The broader funding recommendation could include a suite of specific recommendations.
  - Dedicated funding is required to support projects in the long-term given that any efforts will take time to achieve measurable results.
  - It is important to communicate to the I/RG that funding is needed to ramp up existing programs as opposed to focusing on the creation of a few “magic” solutions.
  - Consider building proposals that tap into non-salmon sources such as parks and education. Steps to do so could include, but not be limited to:
    - Conduct educational outreach to build consensus among the public, thus making it safe for politicians to increase budgets,
    - Increase the capacity for volunteers to assist with recovery,
    - Project salmon non-recovery at current funding levels, in contrast to specified benefits of recovery at higher spending levels.

Amira reviewed the process for submitting recommendations to the I/RG, discussed how those recommendations will be managed by the I/RG, and described the iterative process through which the I/RG may return recommendations to the work group for refinement. If a recommendation is fully discussed by the I/RG but a consensus cannot be reached, then that recommendation will not go forward from the Columbia Basin Collaborative (CBC).

### Straw Poll of Recommendations for Meeting – Green Light, Red Light

Amira explained that the group would complete a poll to determine which recommendation the meeting time would be spent developing. The group would complete a poll to select a recommendation from the five General Recommendations and one poll to select a recommendation from the six NOAA 5-Year Review Recommendations.

Group members ranked the five General Recommendations in the following order:

1. Recommendation from the Science Integration Work Group (SIWG): To ensure all sectors are implementing actions to reduce threats to salmon and steelhead, it is imperative that each State: 1) call upon local, state and federal land use and regulatory managers to update their respective policies, incentive programs and regulations to ensure they achieve no-net-loss of floodplain and riparian habitats and watershed functions; 2) fully fund monitoring programs to evaluate effectiveness of such programs at the Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU) scales, and publicly and consistently report on results and adaptive management responses; and, 3) ensure alignment between active restoration work, land use programs and all-H recovery efforts, in light of climate change.
2. Increase Funding: Increase funding for existing habitat restoration and protection programs and monitoring, increase funding flexibility for projects that are beneficial to salmon recovery overall and find future funding sources / resources, particularly for highly impacted stocks.

3. Coordination and Increased Efficiencies: Increase capacity for landowner engagement and provide incentives for private landowners to increase participation in salmon recovery, including work on water acquisition and exchanges and projects that establish and maintain screens of water diversions.
4. Coordination and Increased Efficiencies: Build capacity and cross-coordination with agencies, Tribes, and non-government organizations, and build better opportunities for technical and financial assistance with the creation, writing, and management of grants by encouraging efficiencies in funding and grant programs and streamline reporting processes.
5. Coordination and Increased Efficiencies: Streamline processes for regulatory compliance with federal agencies.

The group would focus the meeting on building out the Recommendation from the SIWG which reads: **To ensure all sectors are implementing actions to reduce threats to salmon and steelhead, it is imperative that each State: 1) call upon local, state and federal land use and regulatory managers to update their respective policies, incentive programs and regulations to ensure they achieve no-net-loss of floodplain and riparian habitats and watershed functions; 2) fully fund monitoring programs to evaluate effectiveness of such programs at the Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU) scales, and publicly and consistently report on results and adaptive management responses; and, 3) ensure alignment between active restoration work, land use programs and all-H recovery efforts, in light of climate change.**

Group members ranked the six NOAA 5-Year Review Recommendations in the following order.

1. Implementation Strategies: Support and enhance the recommendations from the 5-year review: Prioritize projects that improve population resiliency to the impacts of climate change by conducting actions that restore riparian vegetation, streamflow, and floodplain connectivity and to re-aggrade incised stream channels can ameliorate temperature increases, base flow decreases, and peak flow increases.
2. Implementation Strategies: Support and enhance the recommendations from the 5-year review: Implement habitat restoration at a watershed scale to at least 20 percent of floodplain and in-channel habitat in a watershed to increase salmon smolt production.
3. Implementation Strategies: Support and enhance the recommendations from the 5-year review: Implement habitat improvement actions consistent with best practices for watershed restoration and enhance local- to basin-scale frameworks to guide and prioritize habitat restoration actions that integrate a landscape perspective into decision making.
4. Implementation Strategies: Support and enhance the recommendations from the 5-year review: Enhance floodplain management and reconnect stream channels with their floodplains. Consider reintroducing beaver and low-tech process-based methods that will facilitate widespread, low-cost floodplain restoration across larger areas, increasing the productivity of freshwater habitat.
5. Implementation Strategies: Improve water management, including maximizing water that is currently managed (ex: develop opportunities to buy water for fish from landowners)
6. Implementation Strategies: Encourage nutrient enhancement in Basin waterways

Following the completion of the poll, the group discussed the overlap and interconnectedness of each recommendation from the NOAA 5-Year Review and decided to combine the top four-ranked recommendations into a singular recommendation.

### Habitat Discussion of 1 “General Recommendation”

Group members began to discuss the selected General Recommendation which reads: **To ensure all sectors are implementing actions to reduce threats to salmon and steelhead, it is imperative that each State: 1) call upon local, state and federal land use and regulatory managers to update their respective policies, incentive programs and regulations to ensure they achieve no-net-loss of floodplain and riparian habitats and watershed functions; 2) fully fund monitoring programs to evaluate effectiveness of such programs at the Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU) scales, and publicly and consistently report on results and adaptive management responses; and, 3) ensure alignment between active restoration work, land use programs and all-H recovery efforts, in light of climate change.**

Amira shared the recommended action form on the screen and invited group members to review comments that had been added during the previous meeting. Group members discussed the following suggestions, comments, and questions:

- Tribal land use and regulatory managers should be included in part one of the recommendation.
- Language for part one may need to be reworded to accurately reflect the authority that local, state, and federal regulatory managers have regarding the protection of listed species.
- Language for part two should be adjusted given the lack of authority that regulatory agencies have over influencing funding amounts. Potential solutions include specifically citing the role of non-government organizations in lobbying for funding, or to change the focus from funding to restoration priorities.
- The recommendation should include language that specifies increasing the amount of funding for developing functioning habitat and increasing restoration, in addition to the emphasis placed on funding needs around monitoring.
- The recommendation should include language that emphasizes the importance of achieving net ecological gains, which includes no-net-loss, and provide clarity about what is meant by both terms. Group members suggested including a goal metric.
- Include language that clarifies whether recommendations are referring only to species covered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) or other regulatory authorities.
- Language outlining the importance of water management, and the benefits of improved water management for species recovery, should be included in the recommendation.
  - To avoid redundancy, change part one to specify calling on regulatory agencies to update their water and land management policies.
- Include both restoration and mitigation programs under the list of entities that could implement the action.

Work group members did not express opposition to moving this recommendation forward once finalized. A small group of work group members volunteered to complete the missing sections of the recommended action form over the coming weeks and produce a final recommendation.

## Habitat Discussion of 1 “NOAA 5-Year Review Recommendation”

The four recommendations pulled from the 5-Year reviews were added to one recommended action form. Through discussion, the work group decided to label the recommendation as **Support and enhance the recommendations from the 5-year review**. Group members discussed the following suggestions, comments, and questions:

- Implementing the five-year status review recommendations is a first step toward achieving the Columbia Basin Partnership (CBP) goals for listed stocks. De-listing species represent the low range goals of the CBP.
- It is important to note that Habitat changes must work in cooperation with efforts in other sectors, and so the beginning of the recommendation should include the wording “such actions include, but are not limited to...”
- As this recommendation will target listed stocks, it is important to keep in mind that there will need to be supplemental action to address additional stocks not covered by the five-year reviews.

Group members worked together to build out the recommended action form. The following topics were discussed regarding the form:

- Group members discussed expanding the focus of the five-year review recommendations beyond just floodplain management.
- In discussing the time frame for implementation, members acknowledged that implementation within five years would be challenging.
  - A topic for further discussion is identifying existing constraints on the timely implementation of large projects, and what would need to happen to increase the pace of large project implementation.
  - Members discussed including an example of a project comparable to those suggested in the five-year reviews as a way to help the I/RG understand existing constraints on projects and begin thinking about ways to address them.
- Include language that links the recommendation to the stocks highlighted in the CBP, thus outlining a direct link to the stocks the CBP is trying to address.

Work group members did not share opposition to moving this recommendation forward once finalized. A small group of work group members volunteered to complete the missing sections of the recommended action form over the coming weeks and produce a final recommendation. The facilitation team will provide support with wordsmithing.

## Discuss Recommendation by Region/Impact

Amira introduced a series of discussion prompts with the goal of adding geographic specificity to the recommendations, to better understand which stocks will benefit and begin to think about prioritization of projects. The group discussed the following prompts:

- What are priority areas for watershed restoration and maintenance?
- Where can recommendations be implemented in the near term?
- What are region-specific challenges?
- Are comparable actions already being implemented in other parts of the basin?

Group members shared the following comments:

- One group member shared that several Upper Columbia and Snake River stocks have hit their Adaptive Management Implementation Plan (AMIP) early warning triggers. The AMIP, developed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries for the [2008 Federal Columbia River Power System \(FCRPS\) Biological Opinion](#), tracks the abundance of different stocks and triggers a warning if a stock's abundance remains negative for a determined period of time.
  - The Nez Perce Department of Fisheries has conducted a quasi-extinction threshold analysis of stocks in the upper snake that could also be priorities.
  - Priority stocks are also identified in the FCRPS Biological Opinion and the [NOAA Rebuilding Paper](#).
- Group members suggested that recommendations should be aligned with the phase 2 heat map as it outlines areas for priority.
- Group members suggested that, as priorities for habitat are both for population and stock as well as watershed specific, it is important to make all habitat project a priority.

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

Amira summarized next steps and encouraged members to complete the feedback survey so that the facilitation team can continue to be responsive to the needs of the group. The following next steps were shared with the group:

#### **Action Items**

- **All:** Please complete a brief Estuary, Tributary & Mainstem Habitat Meeting 5 survey to share feedback on the meeting by **end of day 3/6**.
- **All:** Please complete a Doodle Poll to schedule the March and April Estuary, Tributary & Mainstem Habitat Work Group meetings by **end of day 3/8**.
- **KW:** Draft a meeting summary and circulate it to the workgroup by **end of day 3/21**
- **Small Groups:** Work to complete the recommended action forms for the General Recommendation and NOAA 5-Year Review Recommendation by **end of day 3/17**.

The meeting concluded at 11:51 AM PT/12:51 PM MT