

# Columbia Basin Collaborative Habitat Work Group

## Meeting Summary

Tuesday, August 29, 2023 from 3:00pm – 5:00pm PT/4:00pm - 6:00pm MT

### Attendees

**Work group members in attendance:** Amelia Johnson (Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board), Bob Lessard (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Cynthia Studebaker (United States Army Corps of Engineers), David Bain (Orca Conservancy), Erik Neatherlin (Governor Inslee’s Salmon Recovery Office), Jay Hesse (Nez Perce Tribe Department of Fisheries Management), Jeff Fisher (Seattle City Light), Jeff McLaughlin (Bureau of Reclamation), Jennifer Lord (Bonneville Power Administration), Jim Brick (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Kris Hommel (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Lynne Krasnow (National Marine Fisheries Service), Mike Edmondson (Idaho Governor’s Office of Species Conservation), Patty Dornbusch (National Marine Fisheries Service), Patty O’Toole (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Stephen Waste (United States Geological Survey), Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries)

**Observers in attendance:** Cathy Kellon (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Chanda Littles (United States Army Corps of Engineers), Dennis Rohr (Drohr & Associates, Inc.), Heather Nicholson (Public), Jerry Klemm (Port of Lewiston), Stuart Crane (Yakama Nation Water Resources Program), Erich Hester (United States Department of Energy)

**Facilitation team:** Samantha Meysohn, Amira Streeter, and Colin Johnson (Kearns & West)

### Welcome, Agenda Review, and Updates

Amira Streeter, Kearns & West, welcomed the workgroup members and provided meeting guidelines as well as a review of the agenda. The meeting agenda included: 1) Update on the “NOAA 5-Year Review Recommendation”, 2) Review of Current Recommendation Concepts and Next Steps, and 3) Confirm Next Steps and Action Items. Amira reviewed the Summer-Fall 2023 Columbia Basin Collaborative (CBC) work plan and provided a look ahead at upcoming meetings for the Habitat Work Group. Amira then introduced Samantha Meysohn, Kearns & West, who would assume the role of facilitator for this and future meetings.

A work group member requested clarification on the September stakeholder caucus meetings, and how that meeting will impact the recommendation development by the work groups. Samantha stated that the caucus meeting will provide an opportunity for members of the work groups and the Integration/Recommendations Group (I/RG) to discuss the CBC process and identify areas for refinement in the current charter. The outcome will not negate any ongoing work, rather it will try to strengthen and enhance the process.

## Update on the “NOAA 5-Year Review Recommendation”

The work group reviewed the timeline of the NOAA 5-Year Review recommendation. I/RG members had shared a desire to see more prioritization of the 5-Year Review actions regarding how future benefits would support the achievement of Columbia Basin Partnership (CBP) goals, as well as more specificity on how the I/RG would be value added. A subgroup of Habitat and I/RG work group members came together to identify a step forward for the recommendation. The outcome of this meeting was a spreadsheet that, once complete, would expand the level of detail for each of the proposed actions and include obstacles to implementation. Work group members were asked to fill in the requested details on the spreadsheet following the CBC Habitat Work Group meeting in May.

In June, the subgroup met to review the spreadsheet and felt that more information was needed to clarify the I/RG role, add prioritization, and add greater specificity on the projects that align with the 5-Year Review. Samantha asked the work group to consider the value added of the CBC, and what next steps could look like for the recommendation.

Work group members shared the following comments and questions:

- The actions identified in the 5-Year Review represent a portion of the necessary actions to achieve recovery goals. No single funding entity will be able to fund all the necessary projects and programs to achieve delisting, and so the value added of the CBC could be to advocate for and coordinate federal funding for increased habitat work.
  - Much of the work that is needed in the Columbia Basin is already identified, and there are watershed decision-making bodies that can effectively allocate funding to implementers once it is available.
  - It would be helpful to have greater programmatic level funding, rather than focus on the project level.

Samantha previewed four potential paths forward for the 5-Year Review Recommendation, and invited work group members to share preferences. The four options are:

1. Continue to fill out the spreadsheet
  - a. Develop priorities based on the complete information
  - b. Put forward the top 10 projects
  - c. Engage with the Recovery Boards/similar to help determine priorities
2. Determine priorities
  - a. Develop criteria for prioritization
  - b. Engage with the Recovery Boards/similar entities to help determine priorities
  - c. Put forward the top projects per region
3. Look at addressing high-level obstacles
  - a. Zoom out and look at the obstacles to implementing the 5-Year Review and focus the recommendation on those policy-level issues
4. Revisit in Fall 2023 or Spring 2024
  - a. Focus instead on no-net-loss concept or other top priority recommendations

Work group members discussed the importance of proceeding in such a way as to add value and procure the necessary resources to advance recovery efforts. Members shared support for option 3, with some members advocating for a hybrid of options 3 and 4, and provided the following considerations:

- Option 1 is insufficient because implementing just 10 projects will not achieve the CBP goals. The NOAA 5-Year Review Recommendation provides many habitat improvement recommendations that will help to reach recovery. Selectively picking and choosing projects would not support all the work that is necessary to improve habitat for salmon and steelhead.
- Option 2 does not account for changing conditions that impact prioritization on an annual basis and prevent prioritization on a basin-wide level.
- Option 3 should be expanded beyond only obstacles facing the implementation of the 5-Year Review actions to include obstacles facing all habitat restoration actions.
- Developing a spreadsheet that identifies obstacles could be valuable across the basin.
  - Current obstacles include funding, permitting, capacity, landowner engagement, and a need for policy support and awareness. The CBC can provide value by identifying and advocating for recommendations in these areas.
- Pertaining to Option 4, the I/RG had shared feedback about wanting to see recommendations focused on protecting existing habitat. Moving forward with the no-net loss recommendation that the work group has begun developing would support that.
  - A work group member shared concern that working towards no-net loss would lock in current conditions in habitats which are not viable for many species. Members suggested focusing on net-ecological gain instead.

Work group members decided to move forward by identifying obstacles to the implementation of the actions in the 5-Year Review and other recovery efforts, and to continue developing the no-net loss recommendation with a shift in focus toward net-ecological gain. The work group also supported bringing the 5-Year Review recommendation to the I/RG after the November meeting. Samantha invited work group members to begin considering obstacles to implementation. Work group members identified the following categories:

- Funding
- Capacity building (for implementation and programming)
- Policy support
- Permitting
- Coordination between entities
- Landowner engagement/support
- Awareness building
- Adaptive management and monitoring

A work group member shared that it may be valuable to reach out to recovery boards and other entities to determine if there are additional obstacles to their work. The work group members began brainstorming means of addressing the identified obstacles, and shared the following ideas:

### *Funding*

- Consider looking for dual-purpose funding. This is funding not specific to restoration work but that may include a restoration component or benefit restoration efforts.
  - Examples include funding for education programs that engage students around restoration work, or transportation projects that will replace roads currently impacting habitats.

### *Capacity Building*

- Grant agencies will often allocate a portion of funding for administration. Perhaps an ask of grantors is to allow for a percentage of funding to be designated for capacity building, at the grantee's discretion. Any portion of this allocated funding that is not used for capacity can be put back into the project.
  - This should include resources to support capacity at all stages of a project, from proposal development to monitoring and assessment studies.
  - Technical assistance on grant proposals

The work group members will continue to brainstorm means of addressing the identified obstacles at the next CBC Habitat meeting, and in the interim time before the next meeting,

### *Discussion of Current Recommendation Concepts and Next Steps*

Samantha reintroduced the list of Habitat recommendations developed prior to the group's work preparing the 5-Year Review Recommendation, and invited members to share feedback on which recommendations should be resumed. The list of recommendations include:

#### *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.

#### *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.
- 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.
- Streamline processes for regulatory compliance with federal agencies.

#### *Implementation Strategies*

- Improve water management, including maximizing water that is currently managed (ex: develop opportunities to buy water for fish from landowners).
- Encourage nutrient enhancement in Basin waterways.
- Seek to achieve consistent policies from all entities having management/restoration authorities in order to adequately support necessary restoration actions (No Net Loss/Net-Ecological Gain)

A work group member noted overlaps between the current list of recommendations and the list of implementation obstacles, and means of addressing them, identified by the group earlier.

The work group decided to focus on preparing the no-net loss recommendation to be submitted to the I/RG as it is distinct from actions covered in the 5-Year Review. The I/RG had previously shared an interest in protecting existing habitat, increasing net-ecological gain, and improving ecological function.

Samantha shared the draft no-net loss recommendation and invited work group members to review and provide feedback. Members provided the following comments:

- At the time when the no-net loss recommendation was first being drafted, Governor Inslee had requested agencies review policies and ensure they were in line with net-ecological gain.
- The original no-net loss recommendation was drafted to focus on policies and regulations to ensure habitat protection as opposed to restoration.
  - The correct entities would need to be identified to implement policies.
- Protecting habitat is cost effective but needs to be paired with restoration efforts in order to rebuild fish levels to meet CBP goals.
- Education for decision makers is needed that will emphasize the need for more ambitious goals for salmon recovery than what has previously been outlined. It is also important to highlight that bad projects could be causing harm or having diminished benefits that is not being counterbalanced by good projects.
- Habitats adjacent to public lands will require coordination among federal and non-federal entities. Landowners will also need to be engaged in order to build support for this recommendation.
  - A work group member shared an example of efforts aimed at de-colonizing flood plains, which have large benefits for fish but have been impossible to have as a policy at the state level.
  - There are conservation easements that can start to address ecological gains from restoration.
- The management of water for fish and societal growth will also need to be considered. Greater attention should be paid to water volume, water rights, and over-allocation of existing water.
- Currently, development in nearshore areas of Washington is generally permitted by local government with promise of mitigation, but regularly results in loss of habitat. The mitigation required generally does not address all impacts, and time lags in achieving no net loss are allowed. An example is the time required for replacement trees to grow.
- The current regulatory processes identified in the draft recommendation are specific only to Washington, and the group will need to determine how to make it relevant for other states.
  - Given different policy contexts across jurisdictions, the ask could be to better understand the regulatory landscape across the region. Doing so could facilitate a better understanding of how systems are responding and where weaknesses are in terms of water in the stream.
    - Some states are still working to define what net-ecological gain means within their context.

- Carrying out this recommendation may require changes to existing state policies and statutes.
- An understanding of the regulatory landscape would support the development of common reporting so that cumulative stock scale assessments can happen.

Work group members discussed developing a recommendation that would raise awareness of the need to better understand the regulatory landscape related to net-ecological gain, provide a scope for addressing that need, articulate the various authorities across the states, and identify large gaps or areas where attention should be focused. The following work group members volunteered to form a subgroup tasked with drafting the recommendation prior to the next meeting:

- Mike Edmondson (Idaho Office of Species Conservation), Erik Neatherlin (Governor's Salmon Recovery Office), David Bain (Orca Conservancy), Patty Dornbusch (National Marine Fisheries Service), Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries), and Jeff Fisher (Seattle City Light).

The facilitators will follow up with the subgroup to provide scheduling support prior to the next work group meeting.

### Confirm Next Steps and Action Items

Samantha thanked the workgroup for their time and efforts before reviewing action items from the meeting.

#### Action Items

- **All:** Complete a brief Habitat Work Group Meeting 8 survey to share feedback on the meeting.
- **All:** Continue to identify details for the policy buckets that should be addressed to implement the NOAA 5-year review recommendations.
- **Mike/Erik/David/Patty/Tom:** Please meet to revise and complete the recommendation form for the No Net Loss Recommendation.
- **K&W:** Draft a meeting summary and circulate to the work for review.

Meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m. PT/6:00 p.m. MT