

Columbia Basin Collaborative Integration/Recommendations Group

Meeting Summary

June 26th, 2024, 11:30 am – 3:30 pm PT/12:30pm – 4:30 pm MT
Hilton Garden Inn Boise Downtown, Boise, ID

Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Agenda Review

Liz Mack, Kearns & West, opened the meeting and invited Devon Boyer, Shoshone-Bannock Tribe, to lead the group in an opening prayer and land acknowledgement. Mike Edmonson, State of Idaho, then provided opening remarks.

Liz noted that there were observers, both in-person and virtually, joining the meeting. Liz then reviewed the agenda items and the meeting guidelines.

Updates from Around the Region

Liz invited the Integration/Recommendations Group (I/RG) members to introduce their teams and to share any updates that were pertinent to the CBC.

The I/RG members shared the following updates:

- Multiple members shared updates within the Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative (CBRI). One member noted that the Columbia River Working Group, hosted by the Environmental Protection Agency, met in May in Spokane and that the group has dispersed \$80 million via 57 grants with funds originating from the Clean Water Act.
- Multiple members provided updates on fishing operations in the Columbia Basin. Multiple members highlighted the limited runs seen in Idaho this fishing season.
- Members noted their organization's involvement with other forums and processes in the Basin, such as the Phase 2 Implementation Plan (P2IP) Environmental Assessment and the Columbia River Treaty. Multiple members noted collaboration between various agencies and stakeholders outside of the CBC on a number of these processes.
- A few members noted personnel changes in their organization and changes in representation on the I/RG.

External Forum Updates

Liz introduced members to provide updates on External Forums.

Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative

Michael Garrity, State of Washington, went over the formation of the Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement (RCBA) between the six sovereigns and the US Government. Members of the six sovereigns highlighted that there are over 50 commitments from the US Government for the CBRI and a tracking tool is being developed to monitor these commitments. The six sovereigns are coordinating closely with the Federal government, focusing on near-term needs, but have yet to address larger goals. One member noted that one of the commitments is to develop a basin-wide strategy for salmon recovery, starting with the mid-Columbia area, with an initial draft submitted by the six sovereigns.

The group had the following questions:

- Question: What are some ways the CBC can interact with the CBRI?
 - Answer: The six sovereigns have submitted an initial draft of actions to the US Government to build a basin-wide strategy for salmon recovery. Once that list is shared, the CBC signing on and supporting that list would be helpful.
- Question: What are the best ways for other sovereigns to engage with the six sovereigns? One member noted that the CBRI is a sensitive area for sovereign entities in the basin that are not a part of those six.
 - Answer: This is an item that the CBRI has considered and hopes to have a clear answer on soon.

Additionally, members of the six sovereigns shared they are happy to answer any questions formally or informally.

Presidential Memo and US Government Commitments

Nik Blosser, Executive Director of the Columbia River Task Force, introduced himself and went over the Task Force's involvement in carrying out the US Government Commitments. Nick noted this involves working to address the environmental compliance process, National Environmental Policy Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act, with a primary focus on the programmatic assessment of the P2IP. Agencies, including federal, state, and Tribal entities, are co-leading these efforts.

Roland Springer, Bureau of Reclamation, provided additional updates about the US Government Commitments to support the Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement. He noted that one such commitment is conducting the Water Supply Replacement Study in Washington and Idaho. Roland also shared that the Tribal Circumstances Analysis was released online on June 18 and, while not exhaustive, is intended to illustrate the harms that come from the federal dams in the Columbia Basin. Lastly, federal representatives discussed various ongoing actions, including funding and compliance processes. Representatives encouraged anyone with questions to reach out to the sovereigns.

The group had the following questions and comments:

- Question: How will stakeholder engagement happen within the RCBA and how will it incorporate voices that aren't on the task force?
 - Answer: *The RCBA is taking transparency and engagement very seriously. For instance, on the Water Replacement Study, there were public meetings this week on the study with good participation. The federal partners used a variety of methods to get the word out about those meetings and engagement methods will vary by commitment.*
- Question: In the interim between the completion of the study and the potential removal of the Lower Snake River dams, does the Bureau of Reclamation anticipate recommending any changes to the system given that there could be a relatively long timeline before breaching occurs?
 - Answer: *The focus of this study is technical analysis. There will be more discussion on decision making after the study. As a result of this study, I don't expect to see any near-term changes.*

Phase 2 Implementation Plan

BJ Kieffer, Spokane Tribe of Indians, provided an update on P2IP. He noted that 2024 activities are consistent with previous years. Roland noted that fish passage studies with various agencies are

ongoing, including the Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Fisheries Research. State of Washington representatives noted their support for the P2IP.

The group had the following questions and comments:

- Question: For adult releases, how many are anticipated this year and how many are needed for a good study?
 - *Answer: Adult releases are around a few hundred, and many more juveniles. There needs to be more study of behavior in and around the facility. More studies will be conducted in specific sub-basins. Also, some of these fish are meant for cultural purposes.*

Columbia River Treaty

Representatives noted that they are unable to provide comprehensive info publicly during active negotiations, but they look forward to sharing more info when appropriate.

The group had the following questions and comments:

- Question: The flood control provision of Columbia River treaty might expire in September. How are representatives anticipating and preparing for that possibility?
 - *Answer: Negotiations for that provision are ongoing. The parties involved are hopeful they'll come to a solution that will be workable in the United States. Discussions in Canada are still in progress. Agencies have been working on planning operations to anticipate various outcomes of the treaty and hope to be able to share more about it publicly this summer.*
- One member noted that more outreach would be beneficial to parties not involved in the Columbia River Treaty process.

Status of Salmon Runs and Ocean Conditions

Ocean Conditions

Brian Burke, Northwest Fisheries Science Center, thanked agencies such as the U.S. Navy and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for their collaborative efforts and highlighted the alarmingly low marine survival rates for salmon, which can be as low as 1%. He emphasized the significant impact of rising ocean temperatures, referencing the 2014-2016 heat wave known as "the blob," and shared projections indicating continued temperature increases. Brian noted that most ocean animals are ectothermic and rely on ocean temperatures for body regulation. Traditional indicators like the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) are becoming less reliable as the ecosystem changes, complicating the tracking of salmon survival. He stressed the need to study all ecosystem changes to build more accurate models.

Brian also discussed the Juvenile Salmonid Ecosystem Ocean Survey (JSEOS) catches and highlighted a significant data gap in understanding the impacts of ocean predators on salmon populations. This lack of data hinders informed management decisions. He emphasized the interconnectedness of river and ocean systems, noting that freshwater conditions affect marine survival, and management actions in the freshwater environment can impact ocean survival. He noted that the size of fish when they enter the ocean and how much they are able to grow in the ocean environment are directly connected to the freshwater experience and the origin point of these fish. To demonstrate, Brian highlighted survival data of fish from various watersheds in the Columbia Basin. Brian stated that ocean conditions are generally worsening, predation is a key concern, and more data are needed to inform effective management strategies.

The group had the following questions and comments:

- Question: A figure showed that fish in the Walla Walla Basin grow particularly well in the ocean environment. Is there any knowledge base as to why those fish do particularly well?
 - *Answer: It's not clear right now as this is very new data. It could be hatchery practices; it could also be behavior.*
- Question: The size distribution differences of fish when they reach the ocean and how much they're able to grow in the ocean seem to be important. Why is that?
 - *Answer: Predation is the biggest driving force in survival. The reason size is important is because of its relationship to predation so even some rudimentary info on how these predators interact with the fish would be beneficial to identifying management actions.*
- Question: The presentation said that the adult to smolt ratio for Spring/Summer Chinook is 1%? How was that figure developed?
 - *Answer: Yes, that figure is the average of various Passive Integrated Transponders (PIT) tag data the agency looked at. More information on methodology and sources can be shared after the meeting.*
- Question: In regard to the carryover effects slide which compares the size of fish in the ocean and how much they are able to grow once in the ocean environment, what is the sample size of that data and when that data was collected?
 - *Answer: The data are relatively recent, and NOAA is still in the process of understanding it fully. These fish were caught in June 2021, and they had been in the ocean for a period ranging from one day to a month and a half. Each bar on the graph represents data from 5 to 25 individual fish, totaling a few hundred fish. The objective is to identify the extent to which marine growth and survival can be attributed to freshwater impacts, as this will determine the factors that fishery managers may be able to manage.*
- Question: In terms of range expansion, are there changes in spiny dogfish populations in relation to predators and, if so, does that affect salmon smolts?
 - *Answer: The answer to that is unknown. It is possible that spiny dogfish are a strong predator on salmon smolts, but we have no information on their diet or the impact of climate-driven range expansion on their distribution. It is possible that spiny dogfish could possibly survive better than salmon.*
- Question: Has any research been done on natural run timing?
 - *Answer: In the past six or seven years of collecting data, NOAA has been trying to target wild fish, but 95% of what is caught is hatchery fish. This makes it hard to say anything quantitatively about wild fish in the ocean without using hatchery fish as surrogates.*
- One member pointed out that there is a large survival rate difference between northward and southward fish which isn't explicitly noted in the presentation.

Status of Salmon Runs

Tucker Jones, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, presented the status of salmon runs in the Columbia River. This presentation compared forecasts and actuals for many stocks. Tucker noted that the forecast methodology has changed recently to be more accurate, which in turn has made it so forecasts are lower in 2024 than they would be otherwise. He also noted that for 2024 the abundance levels are similar to 2023, and all stocks combined have reached 70% of the CBPTF's low abundance goals. Summer Chinook, spring Chinook, fall Chinook (total) and coho salmon have all gone down in terms of overall numbers. Summer steelhead (B-index), chum salmon, and sockeye salmon have seen an increase in overall numbers. Tucker also went over the Snake River Management Plan.

Liz noted that the CBC was interested in tracking progress towards the Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force (CBPTF) Phase 2 Report quantitative goals and asked the group if there was interest in doing future stock-by-stock updates.

The group had the following questions and comments:

- Question: The summer steelhead stock is broken up into an A and B index. For those two indexes, is there a specific geographic or is it evenly spread?
 - *Answer: Most of the Bs return. A specific geographic distribution has not been observed.*
- Members discussed the possibility of working with StreamNet to get an annual report of stock-by-stock goals. Some members noted they would like to see data of individual basins.
- Multiple members shared appreciation for the updates of stocks and would like to see more updates at I/RG meetings in the future. One member noted that more generalized information could be helpful moving forward.
- Multiple members stated that stock-by-stock updates were important for the goals of the CBC and essential for legal and regional management goals.
- Members discussed data timing, noting that return data will always have a lag in reporting. Additionally, members noted that limited resources and staffing make annual updates difficult. Members discussed using the NOAA Five-Year Report as a benchmark data set. One member noted that the NOAA reports are often delayed and cover only 80% of stocks in the basin.
- One member stated that the CBPTF goals are a combination of both hatchery and natural origin fish and reminded members that both sets need to be counted to be consistent with the goals as they are written.

Loss Assessment in the Upper Snake

Dennis Daw, Upper Snake River Tribes (USRT) Foundation, went over the forming of the USRT Foundation, which is comprised of the Shoshone Bannock, Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone, Shoshone-Paiute, and Burns Paiute Tribes. Dennis noted that, historically, 10-16 million anadromous fish returned to the Columbia River Basin, but the current 10-year average of Chinook crossing Bonneville is just 700,000. The study aimed at quantifying the historically available anadromous fish in the Upper Snake. The research found over 1.1 billion weighted habitat index of stream habitat is available in the Upper Snake and estimated the distribution of this habitat by damshed. Dennis also went over the Hell's Canyon Fisheries Resource Plan which aims to establish sustainable, harvestable populations upriver, following the Upper Columbia United Tribes' model. This plan determined that a variety of impacts led to declines in spring/summer Chinook populations, but dams ultimately caused extirpation of these fish in certain watersheds. Recently, an Independent Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB) review was completed by Northwest Power and Conservation Council and the report is pending. USRT hopes to use that report to model the potential of current habitat conditions in the Upper Snake River for anadromous fish suitability and complete a loss assessment for all other anadromous fish species.

- Question: Do the figures used in this report for spring Chinook assume full habitat use?
 - *Answer: Yes, these figures assume full habitat use.*
- Is there a timeline on finishing the losses documentation for the other species of steelhead, fall Chinook, coho, etc.?
 - *Answer: There is no specific timeline as it is funding dependent. USRT has submitted a funding request through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but that agency has not released*

their fiscal year budget. If USRT is awarded that funding, then next summer is likely when that documentation will be finished and released.

Next Steps and Summary

Liz then previewed the next day's agenda.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00pm PT.