

# Columbia Basin Collaborative Blocked Areas Work Group

## Meeting Summary

Tuesday, November 7, 2023, from 12:00 – 2:00pm PT/1:00 – 3:00pm MT

### Attendees

**Work group members in attendance:** Adam Storch (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Art Martin (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Chris Donley (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Claire McGrath (US Bureau of Reclamation), Conor Giorgi (Spokane Tribe of Indians), Dennis Daw (Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation), Eric Rothwell (US Bureau of Reclamation), Erick Van Dyke (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Kate Self (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Lance Hebdon (Idaho Department of Fish & Game), Leslie Duffel (McGregor Company), Scott Hauser (Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone/Upper Snake River Tribes), and Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries)

**Observers in attendance:** Dennis Rohr (D. Rohr & Associates, Inc.), Erich Hester (U.S. Department of Energy), Heather Nicholson (Public), John Simpson (Idaho Water Users), Lytle Denny (Shoshone Bannock Tribes Department of Fish and Wildlife), and Stephen Pfeiffer (Idaho Rivers United)

**Presenter:** Thomas Biladeau (Coeur D'Alene Tribe)

**Facilitation Team:** Samantha Meysohn (Kearns & West) and Angela Hessenius (Kearns & West)

### Welcome, Agenda Review, and Updates

Samantha Meysohn, Kearns & West, welcomed the workgroup members, provided the meeting guidelines, and reviewed the meeting agenda. Agenda topics included: 1) Blocked Areas – Upper Snake River, 2) Blocked Areas – Upper Columbia River, 3) Preparations for the Integration/Recommendation (I/RG) Group Meeting, and 4) Upcoming Meeting Topics, Next Steps, and Summary.

### Blocked Areas – Upper Snake River

Dennis Daw, Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation (USRT), gave a presentation to the work group on the history of blockages on the tributaries to the Upper Snake River. Dennis noted that this presentation is based on a [StoryMap](#) developed by the USRT.

Dennis began by providing some background information and context on the Upper Snake River Basin defined as the Snake River Basin upriver of the Hells Canyon complex. Prior to European colonization, the Snake River above Hells Canyon Dam had an estimated annual return of 1.7 million salmon and steelhead. Due to anthropogenic changes such as dam building, the habitat for these fish has been drastically reduced and salmon and steelhead runs are now a fraction of their historic abundance.

Dennis provided an overview of the blocked areas in the Upper Snake River Basin. While not a comprehensive list of blockages or barriers in the Upper Snake River Basin, Dennis walked through each of the first major high head dams built in each tributary.

Swan Falls Dam was the first dam built on the mainstem Snake River and was built to provide electricity for mining. It was completed in 1901 and was constructed with fish passage, though it never effectively passed salmon. This had a huge impact on the Upper Snake River Tribes. Idaho Power Company (IPC) purchased Swan Falls Dam in 1916.

The Boise River was initially blocked by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) construction of the Boise Diversion Dam (1912) and Arrowrock Dam (1915). These two dams were followed by two more dams in the 1950s; Anderson Ranch Dam was constructed upstream by Reclamation, and Lucky Peak Dam was constructed downstream by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps).

The upstream portions of the Malheur River were blocked by two dams constructed by Reclamation. The Middle Fork of the Malheur River was blocked by the Warm Springs Dam in 1919. The North Fork of the Malheur River was blocked by the construction of Agency Dam in 1935.

The Payette River was initially blocked by Reclamation's construction of Black Canyon Dam in 1924. This was followed by the Deadwood Dam (1931) on the Deadwood River, a major tributary to the Payette River, and Cascade Dam in 1948. Both were constructed by Reclamation. Dennis noted that the Payette River would have been the only river in Upper Snake with a sockeye run.

The Owyhee River was blocked by Reclamation's construction of the Owyhee Dam in 1932. The construction of Owyhee Dam blocked salmon migration to the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation.

The Powder and Burnt Rivers were blocked by Reclamation's construction of Thief Valley Dam (1932) and Unity Dam (1938), respectively. By the late 1930s, these dams had blocked all the tributaries in the Snake River except for the lower Malheur, Weiser, and Bruneau rivers.

IPC constructed Bliss and C.J Strike dams just upstream of Swan Falls Dam in 1950 and 1952, respectively. Due to inefficient fish passage at Swan Falls Dam, both dams were constructed without fish passage. C.J. Strike Dam was the first dam to completely block salmon and steelhead from migrating to the Bruneau River.

Following the construction of the Hells Canyon Complex in the 1950s and 1960s, salmon and steelhead were extirpated from the Upper Snake River Basin. The Hells Canyon Complex consists of three dams: Brownlee Dam (completed in 1958), Oxbow Dam (completed in 1961), and Hells Canyon Dam (completed in 1967). Fish passage was attempted at Brownlee Dam but was not successful, and mitigation is now focused on hatchery augmentation rather than attempted passage. All hatchery augmentation is downriver of the Hells Canyon Complex, and there is currently no upriver passage or upriver mitigation. As a result, there are currently no salmon or steelhead in the Upper Snake River.

All the remaining salmon and steelhead populations in the Snake River Basin are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Climate change and warming water temperatures pose additional challenges for salmon recovery. The Salmon River drainage and other tributaries in the Upper Snake Basin contain some of the most promising habitat and cold water refugia, which are important for the future of salmon and steelhead.

To conclude the presentation, Dennis reviewed some of the work that needs to be completed to address the challenges posed by blockages in the Upper Snake River Basin. One important step that has been

completed to date is the [historic loss assessment](#) of the Upper Snake Basin. The USRT are also working with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to evaluate the intrinsic potential of current habitat conditions. Other work that needs to be completed in the basin includes conducting an inventory of all blockages in the tributaries of the Upper Snake Basin, assessing which stock could be safely out planted in the Upper Snake, and assessing the cost and needs for a trap and haul fish transport program. An assessment of existing hatcheries for short-term and long-term use for production for Upper Snake Basin is also needed. One of the biggest challenges is that there are currently no dedicated fish in the Upper Snake Basin. Educational and cultural releases have been done with surplus fish, but since most of the hatcheries in the basin are not meeting their goals, there is a shortage of fish for such releases. Lastly, assessment of the release sites in the tributaries of the Upper Snake Basin for ceremonial fisheries and long-term reintroductions is needed.

### Questions and Discussion:

The work group members had the following discussion:

- In some areas in the basin, redband trout are expressing anadromy. Have there been any studies in any of these watersheds on redband trout?
  - There is one study of redband trout on Man Creek that showed they were going through smoltification and leaving the system at the same time as steelhead.
- Idaho Fish and Game (IDFG) move steelhead into the Idaho River, so there is a precedent for moving fish into blocked areas. Are there any plans to expand these efforts?
  - These efforts are still ongoing; however, they are based on excess fish, and there are currently no excess fish available.
  - Ceremonial releases come out of the state's harvest allocation and are transported, which is not a sustainable situation.
  - There is a need to increase production with production specifically dedicated to the Upper Snake River. Once that occurs, the next step would be to transport the fish.
  - The first two sites would be in the Malheur and Owhyee River basins due to the geographic proximity to the Tribes.
  - The ultimate goal of the [Hells Canyon fisheries research plan](#) is to achieve reintroductions with self-sustaining populations.
- The first ceremonial introductions received backlash, so the Tribes and IDFG have not highlighted or invited the media to cover these events.
  - IDFG and ODFW have been extremely supportive of these programs; however, there is often a backlash from members of the public when a small number of fish are moved.
  - It is important to find a dedicated source of fish for the Tribes.
- What are the opportunities for the CBC to support these needs?
  - As an initial step, moving the recommended action developed by the work group to establish a hatchery with dedicated production for the Upper Snake through the CBC consensus process would be extremely helpful.
  - The Upper Columbia River Tribes are conducting excellent work, and USRT is using their plan as a roadmap for the Upper Snake. The challenge is that there are currently no fish available to put in the river to conduct research on.

- The Upper Snake River Tribes have also been working with federal agencies on the recent Presidential [Memorandum on Restoring Healthy and Abundant Salmon, Steelhead, and Other Native Fish Populations in the Columbia River Basin](#).
- Regional support for these initiatives demonstrated through the CBC would be helpful.
- The recommended action to establish a hatchery with dedicated production for the Upper Snake was reviewed by the Science Integration Work Group (SIWG). The input from the SIWG will be summarized and sent with the recommendation to the I/RG for their consideration.

## Blocked Areas – Upper Columbia River

Conor Giorgi, Spokane Tribe of Indians, and Thomas Biladeau, Coeur d’Alene Tribe, gave a presentation to the work group on the tributaries to the Upper Columbia River.

Conor and Tom began by providing an overview of the dams in the Upper Columbia United Tribes (UCUT) territory. There are many dams affecting the five Tribes and their resources, including both anadromous and resident fish. Some of these dams currently have fish passage or planned passage, while most do not. The dams have a mix of ownership with federal, private, and Crown Corporation (Canadian) dams. The dams have multiple purposes including hydropower generation, recreation for run-of-river dams, flood risk management, irrigation, and water storage. The water, lands, and fish and wildlife resources affected by these projects are managed by a variety of different federal, state, and Tribal agencies and utilities.

Conor and Tom covered the history of fish reintroduction in the Upper Columbia Basin. Although the Tribes had been working for a long time to develop a framework for reintroduction, significant progress began in 2011-2015, including the development of the 15 Tribes’ Coalition Passage Paper. In 2019, the UCUT [Phase 1 Report](#) was released. In December 2020, the Tribes filed suit against the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). In 2021, UCUT released the [Phase 2 Implementation Plan \(P2IP\)](#). In September 2023, the Tribes and the federal government settled the litigation resulting in an agreement for BPA to provide \$200 million to fund and support the P2IP. This funding and other recent investments mark a serious amount of momentum towards reaching these fish reintroduction goals, though the implementation work is still in the beginning phases.

Conor and Tom provided an overview of the primary barriers to anadromous fish in the Upper Columbia Basin. These include Nine Mile Dam (1908) owned by Avista, Little Falls Dam (1910) owned by Avista, Long Lake Dam (1915) owned by Avista, Grand Coulee Dam (1941) owned by Reclamation, and Chief Joseph Dam (1955) owned by the Corps.

UCUT has proposed a phased approach to reintroduction. The focus of Phase 1 was on evaluating passage at high head dams. Phase 1 efforts included evaluating passage studies at hydroelectric projects, including Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee Dams; investigating the possible cost of upstream and downstream passage options; and investigating habitat availability, suitability, and salmon survival potential in habitats above Grand Coulee Dam. Almost all the funds for these Phase 1 efforts were provided by the Tribes. Phase 2 actions are outlined in the P2IP and are focused on getting fish in the water to test reintroduction. These efforts include designing and testing reintroduction strategies and fish passage facilities at Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee Dams as well as the Spokane River projects,

conducting reintroduction pilot projects, and conducting monitoring and evaluation to inform adaptive management. Phase 3 efforts will be to review the results from Phase 1 and 2 to determine implementation and inclusion of a permanent reintroduction program.

Conclusions from Phase 1 addressed some of the major concerns that UCUT heard during the initial phases of reintroduction, including that sufficient habitat was not available, reintroduction was not physically possible, and that the necessary funds were not available. Findings from Phase 1 determined that donor stocks are available, the risks are manageable, large quantities of habitat are available, fish passage technology exists, and the life cycle modeling showed that salmon survival potential is promising. Following this initial phase, additional concerns were shared including that the federal agencies do not have the necessary authorization to construct fish passage facilities at Chief Joseph or Grand Coulee. However, cultural and educational releases have been a powerful tool to demonstrate how important these efforts are and to gain more support.

The P2IP is a stepwise and scientifically adaptive approach to test the feasibility of restoring salmon to the Upper Columbia River basin that is focused on collaboration, cost effectiveness, and benefits for the entire region. Conor and Tom also described their communications efforts to share the P2IP with a broad range of stakeholders. UCUT has given presentations on the P2IP in a variety of forums, including the Upper Columbia Blocked Areas Anadromous Fish Working Group (UC BAAF), the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) process, the Columbia River Treaty (CRT), and to dozens of other interested parties, elected officials, and others. Phase 2 progress and plans include juvenile acoustic and PIT tag survival studies that are currently in progress. Other projects and studies currently in the scoping phase include rearing/acclimation facilities, passage designs (including alternatives to consider), database development, a juvenile sockeye behavior and survival study, and an adult behavior and survival study.

One significant regulatory consideration is access to preferred donor stocks, since UCUT does not yet have a dedicated source of fish. Securing access to fish is a major next step. Other regulatory considerations include developing rearing and adult collection facilities, consultation and compliance processes, and fish health and disease management. Conor and Tom concluded the presentation by sharing that more communication is expected, including outreach to fishery managers, coordination with dam owners and operators, environmental compliance, and international coordination.

### **Questions and Discussion:**

The work group members had the following discussion:

- Did UCUT face any challenges presenting the loss assessment to the Independent Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB)?
  - The Phase 1 Report received review from the ISAB, and they have had engagement with the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NPCC) through the phased approach.
  - Laura Robinson, UCUT, has been instrumental in interfacing with the NPCC.
- How involved are the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho and Kalispel Tribe of Indians?
  - The Kootenai and Kalispel Tribes have been supportive of the reintroduction effort, though their territories lie outside the historic anadromous areas. The focus for reintroduction has come more from the Spokane Tribe, Coeur d'Alene Tribe, and the

Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. These three Tribes were involved in the settlement of the lawsuit with BPA.

- What are the opportunities for the CBC to support these reintroduction efforts?
  - The Hydropower/Blocked Areas Work Group already submitted the recommended action to fund and support the P2IP to the I/RG.
  - It would be beneficial for the Upper Columbia and Upper Snake Basin representatives to discuss offline whether there are any common issues or opportunities that the CBC can support.

## Preparations for the Integration/Recommendation Group (I/RG) Meeting

Samantha facilitated a discussion to determine the key messages and activities from the work group to share with the I/RG and confirm presenters. Work group members shared that additional direction from the I/RG on the level of specificity that is intended to be included in the recommended actions would be helpful. Work group members also asked how the CBC process feedback from the Tribal caucus will be addressed. Samantha shared that the concerns and feedback shared from the Federal, Stakeholder, and Tribal caucus meetings will be discussed at the next I/RG meeting.

Dennis Daw and Scott Hauser (USRT) volunteered to present the Upper Snake River Hatchery recommendation to the I/RG. The Hydropower Work Group will designate a point person to present on the Reach Survival/ Smolt to Adult Return (SAR) Estimates recommendation to the I/RG.

## Confirm Next Steps, Upcoming Meeting Topics, and Summary

Samantha thanked workgroup members for their efforts and shared additional next steps as well as topics to be discussed at the next meeting. The remaining blocked areas to cover are the tributaries to the Snake River. Following the completion of the blocked areas survey, the work group will focus on brainstorming cross-cutting actions to address challenges with blocked areas in the basin and developing a comprehensive package of recommended actions.

### Action Items

- **All:** Please complete a brief Blocked Areas Meeting survey to share feedback on the meeting by **end of day 11/17**.
- **KW:** Revise the blocked areas survey and share with presenters to check for accuracy.
- **KW:** Circulate slides from the presentation on the Upper Columbia and Upper Snake River Blocked Areas
- **KW:** Circulate the Upper Snake River Loss Assessment and StoryMap.
- **KW:** Draft slides and talking points for I/RG Meeting.
- **KW:** Identify presenter for reach survival/SAR data recommendation.
- **KW:** Schedule next Blocked Areas WG meeting in January 2024.
- **KW:** Draft a meeting summary and circulate to the work group **by end of day 12/5**.

Samantha thanked everyone for participating and adjourned the meeting.

*Meeting adjourned at 2:00pm PT.*