

# Columbia Basin Collaborative Blocked Areas Work Group

## Meeting Summary

Thursday, September 21, 2023 from 9:00 – 10:30am PT/10:00am – 11:30am 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), Dennis Daw (Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation), Erick Van Dyke (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Erik Neatherlin (Governor's Salmon Recovery Office), Glen Spain (Pacific Coast Federation of Fisherman's Associations), Jay Hesse (Nez Perce Tribe Department of Fisheries Resources Management), Kate Self (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Leslie Duffel (McGregor Company), Megan Kernan (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Norman Semanko (Quincy-Columbia Basin Irrigation District), Paul Arrington (Idaho Water Users), Scott Hauser (Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone/Upper Snake River Tribes), Stephen Waste (United States Geological Survey), and Tim Copeland (Idaho Department of Fish & Game), Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries)

**Observers in attendance:** Anna Brady (Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation), Cathy Kellon (Northwest Power and Conservation Council), Dirk Mendive (Congressman Russ Fulcher), Erich Hester (U.S. Department of Energy), Heather Nicholson (Public), Jody Lando (Bonneville Power Administration), Liz Fortunato (Desimone Consulting Group), Rebecca Fritz (Burns Paiute Tribe), Stuart Crane (Yakama Nation Water Resources Program), Tony Dixey (Aberdeen Springfield Canal Company)

**Presenter:** Kelly Reis (Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife)

**Facilitation Team:** Samantha Meysohn, 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 – Tributaries to the Willamette River, 2) Blocked Areas Survey, 3) Upcoming Meeting Topics, and Summary.

### Blocked Areas – Tributaries to the Willamette River

Kelly Reis, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, gave a presentation to the work group on the tributaries to the Upper Willamette River. This was the second part of a presentation on the Willamette River tributaries, the first part of which was presented at the August Blocked Areas Work Group meeting and focused on the North and South Santiam Subbasins.

### Background

Kelly began by outlining the importance of the Willamette River for the Columbia Basin. This subbasin provides a short distance to cold water for fish migrating upriver. This access to cold water refuges is especially crucial as the impacts of climate change increase. 70% of Oregon's population live in the Willamette River valley, so this region is particularly impacted by demands related to population growth

and development. Priority species include spring Chinook salmon, winter steelhead, bull trout, and Pacific lamprey. All anadromous fish moving through the Willamette River must pass through Willamette Falls, both during upstream and downstream migration, which creates a key opportunity for monitoring.

The Willamette Valley Project is operated by the Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps). This project consists of 13 multi-purpose dams. Lack of passage at these Corps dams is one of the most significant adverse impacts on upper Willamette River spring Chinook and winter steelhead and their habitats in the Willamette basin. The authorized purposes of these dams are primarily flood control but also include hydropower, recreation, irrigation, municipal and industrial water supply, fish and wildlife habitat, and water quality. The dams block access to historical habitat downstream and impact water quality and habitat. Hatchery programs have been created for mitigation. Management of these dams has a long history, and Kelly shared some of the major governance processes and documents. These include the 2008 Willamette Biological Opinion (BiOp) and litigation, the 2022 draft programmatic environmental impact statement (PEIS), which includes passage solutions in preferred alternative, and the new 2024 Willamette BiOp that is expected to be released in 2024.

### McKenzie River Basin

The McKenzie River Basin provides habitat for two listed species, spring Chinook salmon and bull trout, and this subbasin is a stronghold for spring Chinook. The local utility, Eugene Water & Electric Board (EWEB), operates two projects on the mainstem McKenzie River. The first is the Leaburg-Waltermville Hydroelectric Project, a 9-megawatt run-of-river project. EWEB has decided to remove the Leaburg Dam and power canal by 2040, and they will make a decision on the Waltermville Power Canal by 2030. The second EWEB project is the Carmen-Smith Hydroelectric Project. EWEB will implement a trap and haul fish passage program for the Trail Bridge Dam by 2030. Staff are currently using angling and have transported 40 bull trout upstream of the project with this method.

There are two Corps dams in the subbasin, both on tributaries to the McKenzie River. The Blue River Dam has no power generation and is located where there is a natural barrier to anadromy. The Cougar Dam is on the South Fork McKenzie River. Mitigation for the Cougar Dam includes 4,000 spring Chinook salmon. The project already has a temperature control tower and upstream passage facilities. By court order, the project is currently implementing operational downstream fish passage through a fall drawdown and delayed spring refill, and the Corps is required to make improvements to the regulating outlet chute by 2027. Recreation is less important at Cougar Reservoir than some other reservoirs, which provides more flexibility to operate for fish passage using deep drawdowns and delayed refills. The Corps will determine by 2028 whether to continue using the regulating outlet for fish passage or to modify and use the diversion tunnel, which would begin use by 2041. The Corps primarily uses screw traps to monitor downstream passage at Cougar Dam. PIT detection sites could be improved to help determine juvenile downstream survival but would require additional infrastructure.

### Middle Fork Willamette River Basin

The Middle Fork Willamette River is the most upstream tributary, and there are four Corps dams in this subbasin. Lookout Point Dam and reregulating Dexter Dam block more than 80% of historic spawning habitat in the watershed. In 2023, the first court-ordered fall deep drawdown will be implemented at Lookout Point. By court order, the project is also required to improve temperature conditions through operational changes. Hill Creek Dam has prioritized the use of the regulating outlet for fish passage

based on court order requirements. ODFW is advocating for up- and downstream passage solutions for this project as part of the preferred alternative in the EIS that also considers the needs of the reintroduced bull trout population. Fall Creek Dam does not have power generation and the Corps has used drawdown to pass outmigrants with good results. There is limited habitat upstream of this dam and the area is subject to wildfires. Per court order requirements, the Corps has used extended drawdowns and delayed spring refills to provide fish passage at the project.

## Conclusion

Kelly concluded the presentation by sharing some key takeaways for the CBC and the Blocked Areas Work Group. The Willamette Subbasin is important for salmon and steelhead populations, there is an urgent need for fish passage solutions at Corps dams. They need regional support to secure funding. Power deauthorization increases flexibility for fish passage solutions. Monitoring needs include sustainable funding for long-term monitoring, the ability to monitor juvenile survival downstream to Willamette Falls, and more data to populate models that will be used to inform the Willamette Valley System EIS alternatives.

## Questions and Discussion:

- What are the opportunities for funding, how can the CBC help address that need?
  - There is a need to make the case regionally in order to gain congressional support to include these measures in the Corps budget. Having a cohesive voice in the region would be helpful to make this case.
  - It is important to have a unified voice of support from the region to invest in populations in the Willamette River basin as part of the overall Columbia Basin. Since the Willamette River is contained within Oregon, it does not always get support that is directed towards the larger Columbia Basin.
- How do we balance discussions between passage and temperature at sites where improving operational passage has tradeoffs for temperature control (e.g., Fall Creek)?
  - In the Willamette River, one of the most effective actions is to ensure fish can access cold water habitats that are above the dams and support them moving upstream as quickly as possible. It is important to be mindful of the warming impacts in these systems.
  - The work group should approach these issues with the perspective that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Some projects have blocked access to critical habitat while others have fish passage—each project has a different situation relative to passage. It is important to think geographically and in terms of the benefits that can be provided and make wise decisions about tradeoffs.
  - Other reservoir infrastructure may be available (e.g., new pumped storage hydropower projects) to strategically site with minimal impacts.
  - The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is working with the Corps on temperature modeling. The results of this temperature modeling will be important to factor into all planning efforts.
  - There are elements in the Draft EIS that consider pulses of water to try to deliver cold water at key times. ODFW is interested in biological monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of this action.

- Work group members noted that there are larger scale policy processes around temperature, including the Columbia River temperature Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and Cold Water Refuge Plan. Many of the actions that are implemented on the ground will depend on water quality actions driven by the states.
- One concern work group members shared is that there is no coherent temperature modeling and that there are competing models, which makes it difficult to determine what information to integrate into operations planning.

## Blocked Areas Survey

Samantha opened this section by reminding the work group that they are taking this survey approach because the work group members advocated for the work group to take a holistic rather than a piecemeal approach to developing recommendations. This goal of hearing experts discuss the issues in each blocked area is to learn how the CBC can fit in and augment other ongoing efforts in the basin to improve fish passage.

The facilitation team reached out to previous presenters to ask how the CBC can support passage goals. For the Cowlitz and Lewis Rivers, they are currently implementing settlement agreements and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license conditions for fish passage. The CBC could echo support for continuing to implement these processes. For the Deschutes River, the CBC could advocate for fish passage connectivity at Bowman and Ochoco Dams. Other potential recommended actions include improving fish passage at Opal Springs Dam, supporting Portland General Electric (PGE) with engineering expertise and they work to design adult traps, and support water conservation and instream water rights protection.

The work group will continue to fill out the blocked areas survey table as they hear from other presenters from each of the blocked areas. Samantha asked the work group to share any additional ideas to help fill out the table and initial thoughts on suggestions for potential recommended actions.

### Questions and Discussion:

- Work group members commented that directing sufficient resources to the Willamette River Basin can be a challenge since there is so much work that needs to be done on the Columbia River mainstem. As litigation has increased, they have observed that the Corps has redirected funding from the Columbia River to the Willamette River. There is a need to think about the Corps' funding holistically and consider their entire budget. Infrastructure on the mainstem Columbia River is directly related to infrastructure funding in the Willamette. What is needed is lobbying the Corps to ask the President and Congress for adequate funding for both the Willamette and the Columbia Rivers.
  - Other work group members agreed that it is critically important to examine needs across the entire basin and that some federal entities shift resources to meet the most urgent needs. To make progress towards reaching the salmon recovery goals, it will be necessary to hold Congress and the funding entities accountable for fully funding the actions that are needed across the Basin.
- Work group members also reflected that it has been valuable to hear all the various potential actions. One of the functions of this group is to serve as a space for sharing information across the basin and be a forum where work group members can learn from each other. As a learning

space and community of practice, this group can share lessons learned and what methods were effective to help other parts of the basin learn and adapt approaches.

- Work group members also cautioned that they need to be careful of pursuing actions that are not the highest priority due to capacity limitations.
- Some of the actions currently listed on the blocked areas survey table are focused on a cohesive funding ask. Some of the actions are focused on advocating for improved fish passage or supporting existing efforts.
  - Work group members that it may be difficult to separate funding and policy-related actions since the two go together.
- One challenge is that federal projects have year-by-year funding cliffs which creates significant funding uncertainty. It would be helpful to create a plan that includes funding requests.
- Work group members discussed the best path forward to develop recommendations and take the information gathered within the actions column of the table and turn that into a cohesive set of recommendations.
  - One work group member suggested that the group should take a basin-by-basin approach and then focus on specific blockages. Local watershed and municipal groups can help contribute. By focusing project-by-project, they can start writing detailed plans for implementation.
  - Another suggested approach was to continue to learn about each specific blocked area and allow people who work in that specific area to create recommendations.
  - Other work group members expressed that the value-added from the CBC is working on a more programmatic, holistic level. The work group has demonstrated that there are strategic plans and priorities that have been developed by different groups in each of these basins. What is needed is higher level support to acquire and distribute funding to these groups to implement these plans. As a large group of diverse interests, the CBC can provide the greatest value by seeking that funding, while the salmon recovery actions will be implemented on a local level. The CBC can work on promoting a comprehensive salmon strategy for the basin and acquiring funding for the essential elements within that strategy.
  - It is easy to become engrained in local challenges and fail to realize that a lot of people are trying to implement similar strategies. By learning what efforts are ongoing in other areas, it may be possible to find economies of scale. The best value that the CBC can provide is building an understanding of what other entities are doing, showing how that work is similar or different from other efforts, and trying to develop opportunities from those similarities.

Samantha summarized that the work group will continue to learn about the other blocked areas around the basin, and then develop a comprehensive plan that considers funding needs across the blocked areas.

## 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, the Upper Snake River, and the Upper Columbia River. Work group members shared

that it would be beneficial for scheduling purposes to cover the remaining topics during one longer session and that this approach would also support the urgency of the process.

Action Items:

- **KW:** Schedule a 3–4-hour workshop in November to complete presentations on remaining blocked areas (tributaries to Snake, Upper Snake, and Upper Columbia Rivers)
- **KW:** Circulate slides from the presentation on the Blocked Areas Willamette Tributaries Part 2
- **KW:** Continue outreach to Blocked Areas presenters and ask them to share responses to “How could a recommendation from the Columbia Basin Collaborative support fish passage activities?”
- **KW:** Share Blocked Areas survey table with guest presenters to ensure accuracy

Samantha thanked everyone for participating and adjourned the meeting.

*Meeting adjourned at 10:30am PT.*