

Columbia Basin Collaborative Integration/Recommendations Group

Meeting Summary

November 14, 2024, 10:00 am – 4:00 pm PT/11:00am – 5:00 pm MT

The Marcus Whitman Hotel & Conference Center, Walla Walla, WA

Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Agenda Review

Liz Mack, Kearns & West (KW), opened the meeting and invited Jeremiah Bonifer, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) and Kevin Scribner, Salmon-Safe, to provide opening remarks. Liz noted that there were observers, both in-person and virtually, joining the meeting. Liz then reviewed the agenda items, which included updates from around the region, external forums updates, SDM Steelhead Pilot Project Sub-group Report, Funding Sub-group Report, Assessment & Trends Sub-group Report, and next steps, and then reviewed the hybrid meeting guidelines.

Updates from Around the Region

Liz invited the Integration/Recommendations Group (I/RG) members to introduce themselves and to share any updates that were pertinent to the Columbia Basin Collaborative (CBC).

The I/RG members shared the following updates:

- A few members noted personnel changes in their organizations and changes in representation on the I/RG, while others noted likely upcoming changes with the incoming new federal and state administrations in early 2025.
- Multiple members provided status updates on other forums and processes that they participate in across the Basin; these were discussed and covered in greater detail during the External Forum Updates discussion.
- Multiple members highlighted the upcoming 10-year plan from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) regarding mid-Columbia (“mid-C”) Basin steelhead.
- Multiple funding opportunities from [NOAA Fisheries](#) were shared, including two titled [Restoring Fish Passage Through Barrier Removal Grants](#) and [Restoring Tribal Priority Fish Passage Through Barrier Removal Grants](#), which will remain open through February 2025, and two that will be released in the coming weeks.
- Several group members shared updates specific to the Walla Walla sub-basin of the Columbia River, including a pilot study, ongoing projects, and funding updates.
- A group member provided an update on the Structured Decision Making (SDM) mid-C Steelhead Pilot Project, a sub-group of the CBC I/RG, and noted that a full report out and discussion on this sub-group would occur later in the meeting.
- Several group members highlighted the importance of the efforts of the CBC and expressed their continued commitment to the process.
- Multiple group members gave updates on fish returns and stock statuses across the Columbia Basin.
- A group member highlighted the upcoming [Mighty Columbia conference](#).

External Forum Updates

Liz invited several I/RG members and guest presenters to share updates on external forums in the Columbia River Basin.

Columbia River Treaty

Jill Smail, U.S. State Department, provided an update on the amendment of the Columbia River Treaty. She explained that in July an agreement in principle was reached with Canada and noted the usefulness of the work of the Phase 2 Implementation Plan (P2IP) during negotiations. She noted that public meetings were held after the announcement of the agreement and that sharing information with the public remains a priority. She explained that another priority is flood provision changes with Canada (as of September 2024). She shared that pre-planned flood control would benefit both the U.S. and Canada, and that this was a factor in timing the announcement of the agreement in principle in July. She highlighted the collaborative work of the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) with Canadian entities and that this enabled the agreement to proceed on a temporary basis while the amendment is drafted. She also explained how several short-term agreements ahead of the formal agreement could span up to 2-3 years. Jill then invited Roland Springer, Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to speak more on operations for the upcoming year. Roland noted that Reclamation has been working closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) to develop models of potential flood risk management and that they will publicly share operations for the 2025 water year in early December 2024.

Jill clarified that they are not prioritizing power needs over environmental concerns, but that power coordination needed to be addressed first for logistical reasons. The flood control agreement must first be in place with consideration given to how to implement flow augmentation under the modernized treaty. Jill then invited Michael Tehan, NOAA Fisheries, to speak. Michael noted that the new treaty will include new flow augmentation but that until the treaty is finalized, there will need to be annual agreements. He also noted that an indigenous advisory body will be an important aspect of the modernized treaty.

Jill concluded by noting that those working on the treaty will soon announce upcoming meetings and will continue to post information relevant to the amendment process on U.S. and Canada government websites.

The group had the following questions and comments:

- Question: Does the Okanagan River play a role in negotiations?
 - *Answer: It does not play a direct role, but there is relevant existing work with similar parties.*
- Comment: A group member expressed concern about the fish and environmental elements not being prioritized in the amendment process.
 - *Response: The current treaty is still operational. There will be a new process under the new amendment, but the current treaty is the reason for the current sequence of actions. The concern for the environmental aspect of the amendment was noted and appreciated.*

Northwest Power & Conservation Council Fish & Wildlife Addendum Process

Patty O'Toole, Northwest Power & Conservation Council (NWPPCC), introduced the upcoming NWPPCC Fish & Wildlife Program Addendum Process. She shared background information about the NWPPCC and highlighted the NWPPCC's power planning and Columbia River Basin Fish & Wildlife programs. She noted

that the current program consists of the 2014 Fish and Wildlife Program and the 2020 Addendum and highlighted current program strategies. Patty then reviewed the six-step amendment process, reviewed important dates, and outlined how individuals can submit recommendations and comments.

The group had the following questions and comments:

- Comment: A group member highlighted the complimentary nature of the CBC with the NWPCC.
- Comment: A group member noted that NWPCC adopted the Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force (CBPTF) report vision and goals.
 - *Response: The NWPCC goals are specific to the hydropower systems and the Council only adopted language from the report that was specific to the effects of hydropower systems.*
- Question: When can federal and state agencies and Tribes weigh in on the Columbia River Basin Fish & Wildlife Program Amendment?
 - *Answer: Everyone weighs in at same time, during the public comment period. The NWPCC will also prepare a public review draft which will be shared for additional comment.*

Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement

Nik Blosser, Council on Environmental Quality, shared updates on the Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement (RCBA) and the Columbia River Task Force. He highlighted that BPA is in the process of finalizing two funding agreements totaling \$300 million. He also shared status updates on the Cold-Water Refuge Priority Plan, the Mid-C 10-year Plan, and the Ocean and Estuary Action Plan which are all in various draft stages and are anticipated to be finalized by the end of the year. Nik also reviewed a series of studies related to the replacement of the lower Snake River dams, which will each have opportunities for public engagement. These include the Reclamation water supply study, US Army Corps of Engineers regional transportation study, and the regional energy needs study led by the Department of Energy and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory. Nik also noted that several Tribes are currently developing the Pacific Northwest Tribal Energy Program. He also highlighted his goal to create greater transparency on the implementation of these commitments with a [website](#) to provide updates. He shared that he has no information from the incoming administration about their thoughts on the Columbia River and that he is focused on delivering commitments this year while awaiting direction from the new administration in the new year.

The group had the following questions and comments:

- Comment: A group member provided additional information regarding the water supply replacement study, noting that there will be a two-month comment period and in-person open houses in early February.
- Question: Regarding the energy discussions, how should interested individuals engage once that information has been finalized?
 - *Answer: There will be a standalone website for the regional energy needs study. Once that website is live, it will be linked on the main [Columbia River Task Force website](#).*
- Question: Are BPA's funding commitments durable through the change in administration?
 - *Answer: The federal caucus is operating under the assumption that they are moving forward with existing funding commitments.*
 - *Another group member noted that Congress would need to appropriate the funds, so they are not guaranteed.*

Phase 2 Implementation Plan

Brent Nichols, Spokane Tribe of Indians, provided an update on P2IP being led by the Upper Columbia United Tribes (UCUT). UCUT recently completed the third year of studies and transported over 2,000 adult Chinook into blocked areas in the Spokane River watershed. He noted that they initiated a fish passage design project and are planning juvenile survival studies for 2025. Brent also shared that the Programmatic and Environmental Assessment for Fisheries Research has been released for public comment and is available on the [Reclamation website](#).

Upper Snake River Habitat Assessment

Scott Hauser, Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation (USRT), highlighted that USRT has received funding to conduct a loss assessment of spring/summer Chinook, will likely receive funding to conduct a phase 2 loss assessment of fall Chinook, and has received funding to conduct a habitat assessment of the Upper Snake River. He also shared that USRT held a workshop with Reclamation on October 29-30, 2024, that was successful and well-attended. Scott added that there will be an additional workshop likely in early February that all I/RG members are welcome to attend. He thanked Reclamation staff for their contribution to acquiring significant funding for the three-year salmon collection and transport project, which will begin in early 2025.

Dennis Daw, USRT, shared that during the workshop, they examined preliminary modeling and received valuable feedback. The workshop also yielded additional data sharing which will be incorporated into the modeling effort and that new results will be shared at the upcoming workshop. USRT will host another workshop to collect input on the fish collection and transportation process including stock assessments, fish location and prioritization strategies, risk assessment, costs, and how to source fish. He reiterated USRT's desire for feedback and collaborative input.

The group had the following questions and comments:

- Question: A group member asked about the project scope and the role of the Hells Canyon complex.
 - *Response: The entire Snake River basin will be examined, though certain areas will be prioritized.*

Avian Predation

Liz Mack shared that the CBC Predation Work Group is not currently active, but that some members of the Avian Predation Sub-group have self-organized to continue meeting. Art Martin, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW), reported on these avian predation management efforts. Art noted that the CBC Predation Work Group developed a recommendation to manage avian predation in the estuary by reducing the double-crested cormorant population at Astoria-Megler Bridge. Art shared that ODFW, and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) have recently partnered to implement that CBC recommendation and develop a plan for bird displacement. He explained that the group plans to look at avian predation management actions for the area between Bonneville Dam and the Pacific Ocean in a comprehensive, collaborative approach with a management strategy for all 27 nesting populations in the estuary.

The group had the following questions and comments:

- Comment: Several group members thanked Art and others for their leadership and continuing the avian predation work.

- Question: Will additional recommendations to the I/RG from the avian work group be brought forward at future I/RG meetings?
 - *Answer: Since the work group is paused, there will be no further recommendations brought forward to I/RG. When or if the CBC decides to reengage the work groups, the two groups could merge, but the self-organized group will continue to work in the meantime to develop recommendations outside of the auspices of CBC.*

Structured Decision Making Steelhead Pilot Project Sub-group Report

Liz Mack invited Sam Meysohn, KW, to provide an overview and updates on the Structured Decision Making (SDM) Steelhead Pilot Project Sub-group. Sam reviewed the topics discussed and key takeaways from the previous sub-group meetings held in July, September, and October and previewed upcoming meeting topics for the group. She then shared a question from the sub-group asking what guidance the I/RG can share on the proposal for expanding work group participation beyond members of the I/RG and participating organizations to provide additional expertise and insights relevant to the Mid-Columbia and SDM.

The group had the following questions and comments:

- Comment: A group member highlighted an example from the San Joaquin Valley regarding SDM and emphasized the importance of utilizing existing tools while also addressing any existing gaps.
- Question: What assumptions went into the Salmon Analyzer tool developed by the CBPTF? Is the tool now outdated?
 - *Answer: The group continues to examine current tools to see what is most appropriate to use for this process. Bob Lessard, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fisheries Commission (CRITFC), has helped to clarify aspects of the Salmon Analyzer for the group. The group hopes to also analyze Social, Cultural, Economic, and Ecological (SCEE) values and ecology, which Bob has been involved in as well. Overall, the group hopes to build on existing information rather than start from scratch.*
- Question: In developing additional tools, would they be taken to the Independent Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB)?
 - *Answer: Yes, taking tools to the ISAB could be the next step.*
- Question: Would the Salmon Analyzer and the SDM pilot project apply to the Mid-C Steelhead 10-year Recovery Plan?
 - *Answer: The Salmon Analyzer was developed and used as a coarse model at a basin-wide scale for 23 stocks. Since the SDM Pilot Project focuses on a single stock, the mid-C steelhead, much more detailed data and models exist. The Salmon Analyzer will not be used in place of a life cycle model but might be used for incorporating SCEE values to support buy-in from a broad set of stakeholders who could carry the recovery strategy to Congress to get funding for stock delisting.*
- Comment: Multiple group members noted that there is a lot of foundational information and significant federal legislation specific to the mid-C that could support the work of the subgroup. The mid-C work could build upon congressional authorizations and policy bills already in place and then leverage this to support work in other parts of the basin.
- Comment: The I/RG supported the addition of new sub-group members as needed and identified by existing sub-group members, with the request that the Kearns & West facilitation team circulate suggested new members to the I/RG for review.

- Question: What is the scale of the SDM? Can it be scaled to cover the whole basin or does it need to be applied by sub-basin?
 - *Answer: The SDM is likely not scalable to be applied basin wide. If the pilot effort is successful in delisting one stock, then that framework could be applied to another stock and transferred sub-basin to sub-basin, with necessary modifications. The pilot process is being thoroughly documented to inform the development of this framework. The I/RG would decide which stock the SDM would be applied to next.*
- Comment: Several group members noted that the goal needs to be healthy and abundant stocks, not just delisting. However, others noted that delisting is included in the CBPTF goals and that if one stock is positively impacted then it will likely benefit other stocks as well.

Funding Sub-group Report

Liz Mack introduced the Funding Sub-group and invited Angela Hessenius, KW, to share updates from the group. Angela reviewed the context of current CBC funding, past sub-group meetings that occurred in August and October. The Funding Sub-group developed a funding proposal for the I/RG including funding considerations and short-term and long-term funding recommendations.

Group members had the following questions and comments:

- Question: How would the CBC apply for funding? Through which entity?
 - *Answer: Past funding for the CBC came from the states who applied for Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund (PCSRF) funds from NOAA. These funds have been routed through Washington state for contracting. A new cycle of PCSRF funding will open in early December 2024.*
- Question: Does the CBC have a fiscal status that allows it to receive philanthropic funds?
 - *Response: Several group members agreed that setting up a non-profit could be a valuable avenue to explore for long-term funding.*
- Comment: A group member noted that congressional direct spending requests are an avenue for funding to explore but would require a congressional champion. State agencies cannot pursue this option, so other CBC members would need to lead this effort.
- Comment: A group member noted that there are a variety of Reclamation opportunities that can be explored.
- Comment: Several state representatives shared that they would check whether any state agencies have extra funding available that could be dedicated prior to the end of the fiscal year. However, these funds would likely not meet the full needs of the CBC.
- Question: How much funding is needed per year and who holds the facilitation contract?
 - *Answer: The cost has fluctuated and can be scaled up or down to meet the needs and interests of the CBC. The current facilitation contract is held with Washington but is funded jointly by the three states. There is currently sufficient budget to hold one more hybrid I/RG meeting in early 2025 and continue the sub-groups, if desired. Kearns & West can provide additional information and considerations for decision making.*
- Comment: Several group members noted that it would be helpful to have a memo that outlines the CBC funding needs, including low and high bookends for facilitation support.

The I/RG decided that instead of continuing the Funding Sub-group, I/RG members will be invited to join upcoming Project Team meetings to continue the discussions on next steps for the CBC's immediate funding needs.

Assessment & Trends Sub-group Report

Liz Mack introduced the Assessment & Trends (AT) Sub-group and invited Sam to share updates from the sub-group. Sam reviewed the context for the group's creation, which stemmed from the June 2024 I/RG meeting, and the outcomes of the three past meetings held in August, September, and October. She shared the proposal that the AT Sub-group developed for I/RG consideration and questions from the sub-group for the I/RG, which included 1) where funding for this effort would come from and 2) where the dashboards would be housed.

The group had the following questions and comments:

- Comment: A group member noted the current AT proposal does not include SCEE values, but these should be incorporated in the future if the group continues.
- Comment: Group members shared that it would be helpful to report consistent, standardized data against the CBPTF goals. Group members noted the value of having a common set of facts that all users across the basin could reference. Significant staff time is required to format the data for sharing with StreamNet, so agencies and tribes would need support for this. This support would be necessary prior to developing a public-facing dashboard, which would also be valuable. Partnering with other groups would help to accomplish this effort.
- Comment: Multiple group members agreed that tracking fishery data against the CBPTF goals is vital and requires funding. Several group members noted that they have connected with StreamNet staff to discuss what resources would be required and reported that \$150,000 per full-time equivalent (FTE) position would be needed for StreamNet, state agencies, and Tribes, respectively.
- Question: Could the four states provide funding for this effort through congressional earmarks or other funds?
 - *Answer: This is an ongoing need, so earmark funding would not be appropriate. However, there are champions in the Pacific Northwest who could support a congressional direct spending request. Accessing philanthropic money could be another avenue for the long-term.*
- Comment: Several group members suggested submitting comments to the NWPCC Fish & Wildlife Program amendment process recommending that the NWPCC fund this monitoring need.
 - *Response: Kearns & West and AT Sub-group members can draft a recommendation that I/RG members can use to submit to the NWPCC Fish & Wildlife Program amendment process. Members also noted that this recommendation could include broadening StreamNet access so that entities who cannot currently use the platform would also benefit.*
 - *Response: Multiple group members also supported the idea of additional effort focused on education and outreach to foster public engagement with the topic.*
- Comment: A group member noted that NWPCC may push back against this request since their mandate is specific to impacts from the hydropower system.
 - *Response: A group member quoted language from the NWPCC Fish & Wildlife Program stating that NWPCC is not responsible for meeting CBPTF goals but that they will track progress against the goals as an indicator. This language can be leveraged to ask BPA/NWPCC to provide funding for StreamNet.*

Next Steps and Summary

Liz previewed the next day's meeting agenda, which includes time for discussing next steps for the CBC recommendations and the CBC work plan.

Action Items

- Please see the November 15 I/IRG meeting summary notes for a comprehensive list of action items.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00pm PT.