Columbia Basin Collaborative
Structured Decision Making Steelhead Pilot Project Sub-group

Meeting Summary

Thursday, December 19, 2024, from 2:00 – 4:00pm PT/ 3:00 – 5:00pm MT

Attendees

Sub-group Members in Attendance: Adrienne Averett (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Alex Conley (Yakima Basin Fish & Wildlife Recovery Board), Art Martin (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), B.J. Kieffer (Spokane Tribe of Indians), Dennis Daw (Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation), Gary Marston (Trout Unlimited), Jerimiah Bonifer (Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation), Jody Lando (Bonneville Power Administration), Kevin Scribner (Salmon-Safe), Rene Henery (Trout Unlimited), Steve Martin (Snake River Recovery Board), Tom Iverson (Yakama Nation Fisheries), Tucker Jones (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Urban Eberhart (Kittitas Reclamation District)

Facilitation Team: Colin Johnson (Kearns & West) and Liz Mack (Kearns & West)

Welcome, Agenda Review, and Updates

Liz Mack, Kearns & West, welcomed members to the Structured Decision Making (SDM) Steelhead Pilot Project meeting as part of the Columbia Basin Collaborative (CBC). Liz led a round of introductions to welcome new sub-group members, reviewed meeting guidelines, and provided an overview of the agenda. The meeting topics included: 1) SDM Methodology, 2) Scenario and Actions, and 3) Update the Workplan.

SDM Methodology

Liz invited Kevin Scribner (Salmon Safe) to present on takeaways from an article that discussed prototyping SDM processes. The goal in discussing the article was to create a better understanding of the structured process that the CBC could follow and identify which steps the Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force (CBPTF) have already completed. Kevin outlined six steps drawn from the article that outline the SDM process:

1) Identify the problem and decision situation including spatial and temporal extent.
2) Identify explicit quantifiable objectives.
3) Generate explicit management alternatives (candidate actions) that can be taken to meet the objectives.
4) Cooperatively produce qualitative conceptual diagrams to help predict the consequences of potential management actions on objectives and to rule out implausible alternatives.
5) Analyze tradeoffs among competing objectives (i.e., the consequence of the management alternatives) and categorize and rank management alternatives.
6) Use sensitivity analyses to examine the sensitivity of decision-making to model parameters and inputs.

The article explains that ecological models may not make ideal Decision Support Models (DSMs), as ecological models strive to capture realism and complexity inherent in ecological systems and may be more complex than is needed. The article recommends that natural resource managers and scientists strive toward the development of requisite DSMs that contain only those elements required to approximate system dynamics and address a decision-making problem. An SDM process may also result in an overly complex model initially; however, a sensitivity analysis can be used to identify the elements that are necessary to include. A simpler model can lead to improved stakeholder understanding of the model components and output, increased transparency, and broader acceptance of the model. A simpler model also allows for rapid processing times which can move the decision-making process forward without delay.

Kevin invited Rene Henry, Trout Unlimited, to share how these steps were used in the San Joaquin Valley SDM process. Rene emphasized that an important step for the SDM process was the development of a shared conceptual model for the project scope. This step allows groups to explore different perspectives on the scope and come to a shared agreement that honors a diverse range of views. A shared understanding of the scope prevents tension when making decisions. Rene explained that this step should occur before Step 3 - *Generate explicit management alternatives (candidate actions) that can be taken to meet the objectives.* Rene explained that once the sub-group has a shared conceptual model, its members can look at different actions and analyze trade-offs. The conceptual model can also help members to decide what DSM is most appropriate. The conceptual model used in the San Joaquin Valley SDM process included a set of values-based objectives.

Rene highlighted key risks to the SDM process for the sub-group to be aware of. The first risk is if there is a perspective from participants that the SDM process is a tool for a single interest. The second is using a decision support model that the participants do not trust. Rene emphasized the importance of Step 4 - *Cooperatively produce qualitative conceptual diagrams to help predict the consequences of potential management actions on objectives and to rule out implausible alternatives.* The salmon analyzer and other decision-making tools should be considered once the conceptual model has been developed and agreed to.

SDM sub-group members shared the following comments, questions, and considerations:

- A member shared that community planning efforts for Mid-Columbia Steelhead recovery have been ongoing, and that levels of funding and capacity have driven engagement. It is important to understand what conceptual models, planning processes, and engagement efforts have already been completed, and by whom, so that these groups can be engaged in this current process.
- Members supported the idea of collectively defining the problems and objectives that the sub-group should be focused on.
- Members shared an understanding that the development of an agreed-upon conceptual model would support greater transparency, help to define objectives, build upon work that has already been completed, and help to avoid conflict during future stages of the SDM process.

- Members asked Rene whether stakeholder involvement was needed during the development of the conceptual model. Rene shared that it is not necessary and can be done within the existing sub-group.
- Members reiterated that the charge of the SDM sub-group is to investigate the SDM process and determine if it should be recommended to the larger I/RG for use in other parts of the basin.

Scenarios and Actions

Liz transitioned the SDM sub-group discussion to focus on the scenarios and actions reviewed during prior sub-group meeting in November. During the November meeting, sub-group members reviewed the CBPTF Scenarios and the Mid-Columbia Steelhead Recovery Plans. Several members of the sub-group were tasked with reviewing the CBPTF Scenarios to look for overlaps with the Mid-Columbia Steelhead Recovery Plans, as well as gaps. A member shared that the CBPTF scenarios are presented at a high-level so it is challenging to compare them with the Mid-Columbia Recovery Plans strategies given that the CBPTF scenarios are more abstract. Kevin shared that Tom Iverson, Yakama Nation Fisheries, reviewed the CBPTF scenarios and extracted potential biological strategies from each scenario. The biological strategies were recorded in a table that the sub-group can review on the shared folder. Kevin introduced a Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) task force document from January 2020 which looks at potential basin-wide scenarios and the individual biological strategies within each scenario. The document outlines three different levels of effort for each biological strategy and proposes what each level of effort could entail. Members proposed aligning the MAFAC document with the Mid-Columbia recovery plan to ensure the actions match, and to make sure critical uncertainties are captured and addressed. Members highlighted smolt survival at the lower end of the tributaries and at early entry into the mainstem as a critical uncertainty.

Members shared the following comments, questions, and takeaways regarding the scenarios and actions:

- A member asked if the MAFAC document will be used as a tool for the SDM sub-group to determine which of the three levels of effort to apply.
- A member shared a preference for seeing the sub-group focusing on the singular objective of de-listing Mid-Columbia steelhead within 25 years or less. This aligns with the qualitative goals of the CBC. This focus would elicit specific actions to implement in order to achieve the goal of de-listing, and would call for CBC support of appropriations, actions, and land management regulations that move toward de-listing.
- A member added that it will be helpful to understand root causes that could prevent de-listing within 25 years and if there are pieces of existing recovery plans that need to be updated.
- A member highlighted that a limitation has been a lack of funding to implement strategies that are included in the recovery plans, and that more resources are needed.
- A member added that the MAFAC document is a good step toward establishing the conceptual model. The table includes a rationale for the different scenario themes, associated strategies

and their relationships to one another which provides a good starting point for the conceptual model development.

- The table includes a lot of implicit information about these relationships, and it will be important to make those assumptions explicit and ensure a shared understanding of the table among all group members.
- A member echoed the importance of building a shared understanding, stating that political successes for natural resource processes have been possible because diverse stakeholders were able to advocate to their representatives with a consistent message.
- A member highlighted that work currently being done at the tributary habitat level for the Mid-Columbia has been successful at addressing existing needs. Key uncertainties are at the lower portions of the tributaries and are also around impacts from predation.
- New programs and science are needed to understand ways to adequately address the impacts from predation. Assumptions that were made in 2019 about barriers to recovery may not be as applicable in 2025 and it will be important to involve various action agencies in planning next steps.
- A member asked the sub-group whether all five basins need to work together or is it enough to have great action in one basin that will then have an impact on the others.
- A member responded that great actions will need to be taken in all basins in order to achieve recovery goals.
- Members discussed the need to identify the individual bottlenecks preventing recovery for each major population group (MPG).
- A member proposed for sub-group members to focus on respective MPGs and put together a presentation on current conditions impacting those MPGs. The sub-group can then decide on one or more priority MPGs to focus on, identify actions to address impacts, and then move onto the remaining MPGs.
- Members agreed that predation was an outlier and that strategies to address predation should be developed separately from the other strategies for the MPGs. This was decided because all MPGs will encounter predation impacts in the Lower Columbia.
- A member asked how the proposed work to identify strategies for the MPGs is different than the recent status review completed by the Mid-Columbia Steering Committee.
- A member responded that the list developed by the Mid-Columbia Steering Committee would provide a good starting place.
- A member added that it would not be a heavy lift to map the viability requirements for each MPG and roll those up into viability requirements for each distinct population segment (DPS).
- Members discussed a next step of providing a detailed presentation, or presentations, on the scenarios in the Mid-Columbia recovery plans and developing a workshop to help build a common understanding of the predation impacts.
- The presentations would be MPG-specific and cover the individual needs of each MPG, the bottlenecks preventing recovery, and could help to build the overall conceptual model for the SDM.

- Rene proposed returning to the MAFAC table and drawing a conceptual model based on the rationale for the assumed relationships implicit in the table and then using that conceptual model as a basis to revise and build upon once the MPG and predation presentations are complete. Rene shared the conceptual model for the Central Valley SDM process to be used as a reference.
- Members recommended involving a representative from the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation and the Burns Paiute Tribe in this process going forward.
- A member from Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) stated that ODFW recovery staff can provide tributary-specific expertise.
- Members recommended using existing materials, including the Mid-Columbia 5-Year Status Review to pull together the presentations.
- A member cautioned that the Mid-Columbia 5-Year Status Review was completed using 2018 data and misses findings from 2019-2024. There are likely critical issues identified in the 5-Year Status Review that will need to be updated with recent data.
- Members discussed consolidating life cycle models and building a clearinghouse of data that could be used to update the science in the 5-Year Status Review. A member added that Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is currently working on integrating population models which could provide additional data to consult.

Liz thanked the sub-group members for the discussion and looked to next steps.

Confirm Next Steps and Action Items

Liz summarized that the sub-group will develop presentations on the specific sub-basins, the MPGs in those basins, and the bottlenecks preventing recovery. Members will meet to review the MAFAC document and consider how that information can be presented as a conceptual model. Finally, in the future the sub-group will plan to look at impacts from predation on Mid-Columbia Steelhead stocks. Liz thanked the sub-group members for their participation and reviewed the final action items.

Action Items

- **K&W and ODFW:** Reach out to Warm Springs and Burns Paiute about the work of the SDM Steelhead Pilot Project.
- **YN, CTWSRO, and ODFW:** Prepare a presentation on bottlenecks preventing the Cascades Eastern Slope Tributaries MPG from reaching viability.
- **CTWSRO, CTUIR, BPT, and ODFW:** Prepare a presentation on bottlenecks preventing John Day MPG from reaching viability.
- **Alex:** Prepare a presentation on bottlenecks preventing Yakima River MPGs from reaching viability.
- **Jeremiah/Steve:** Prepare a presentation on bottlenecks preventing Umatilla/Walla Walla River MPGs from reaching viability.
- **Steve, Kevin, and Rene:** Work on framing a conceptual model based on Columbia Basin Partnership work and the Mid-Columbia Recovery Plans.
- **Art, Rene, and Jeremiah:** Work on framing a conceptual model around predation impacts.

- **K&W:** Draft a summary of the CBC SDM Steelhead Pilot Project December 19 Meeting and share with the Sub-group by end of day 1/16.