

Cowlitz Hydroelectric Project
FERC No. 2016
Cowlitz Fisheries Technical Committee
Meeting Summary

April 7, 2026 from 9:30 am-2:50 pm

FTC Representative Attendees

Ecology: Andrew Luymes
Tacoma: Melora Shelton
TU: Jonathan Stumpf
WDFW: Bryce Glaser
Yakama Nation: Bill Sharp

Additional Attendees

BIA: Stephen Lewis
BPA: Michael Boyles
LCPUD: Joe First, Laura Wolfe
LCFRB: Steve West
Tacoma: Matt Bleich, Ben Caviness, Sam Gibbons, Scott Gibson, Matt Peter, Eric Shoblom
WDFW: Todd Hillson, Josua Holowatz, Peggy Miller, Larona Newhouse, John Serl, Sean Toomey, Kevin Young

Facilitator: Jennifer Arnold, Reciprocity Consulting, LLC

Public Attendees: Randy LeDuc (Coastal Conservation Association), Larry Pryor (Northwest Fisheries Enhancement)

2026 FTC Meeting Dates: May 5, June 2 (in person), July 7, Aug 4, Sep 1 (in person), Oct 6, Nov 3, Dec 1 (in person)

Review of Agenda and Action Items

We reviewed the agenda and action items using the new agenda format.

Approval of Last Month's Meeting Summary

FTC members reviewed and edited the March FTC Meeting Summary for clarity. It will be posted on the public website.

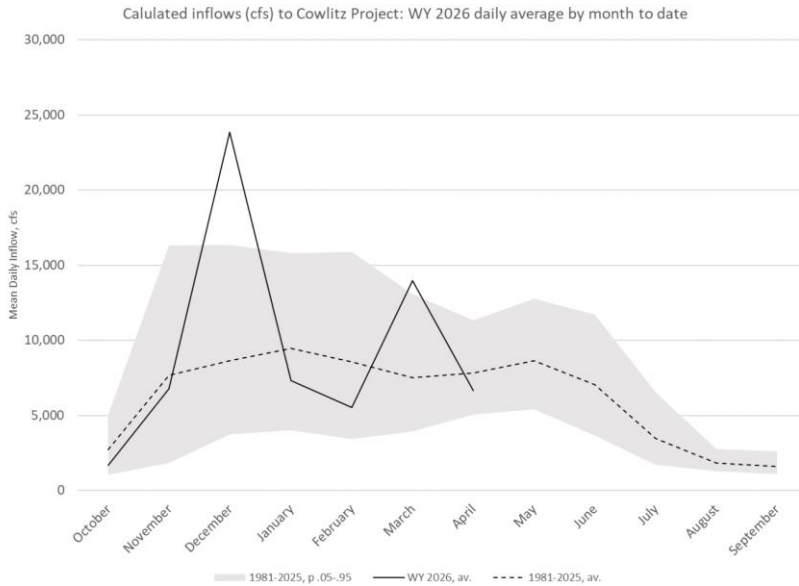
Updates

Announcements

- **John Serl's retirement:** John announced that he will be retiring at the end of April after 30 years with WDFW. WDFW plans to refill the position, but there is a hiring freeze due to budget cuts probably through June. They will backfill in the meantime.
- **CFFF Fish Biologist:** Sam Williams is moving on to another job. Tacoma will backfill, while they announce the job search. Please spread the word if you know of anyone who might be a good fit.
- **Federal workforce:** The US Department of Interior is offering a third round of voluntary early retirement, which could affect staffing at FERC.

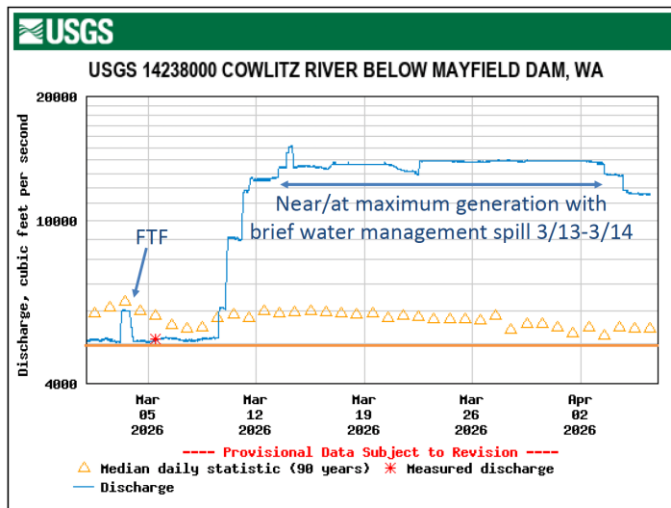
Hydro Operations Update by Melora Shelton (Tacoma) (emailed 4/6)

- The March atmospheric river required water management.
- Improved reservoir condition. Tacoma continues to manage above average elevations.
- Snowpack is extremely low.
- Tacoma will transition to standard minimum flow as soon as elevation and inflows allow.
- 10-day forecast is warmer temperatures and low precipitation.
- Climate outlook tilts warm and dry through June.



inflow data through April 5

Outflow



Current (4/6) 11,600 cfs.

Spring minimum 5,000 cfs + fish transport flow (12 hrs at 120% if <8,000 cfs)
No ramp or flow deviations.

Spring Outlook

- Anticipate a spring flow reduction consistent with Settlement Agreement Article 13(a)

Question

- Once the reservoir gets above 749', is there a time period to get down below the seismic limit? There is no specified time period. Tacoma's Resource Operations and Dam Safety teams work to do it as soon as possible.

Water Quality Update by Ben Caviness (Tacoma)

Mayfield Spill Event

- A spill event was initiated on 3/13/2026 with spilling for about 10 hours.
- The spill maxed out at just under 1,500 cfs. Tacoma was at maximum generation capacity for the entirety of the spill.
- There was no spill at Mossyrock during this period. Tacoma was able to use the storage capacity of Riffe Lake to mitigate downstream impacts of the atmospheric river event.
- The spill was largely driven by side flows from the Tilton River.

Mossyrock Spill event

- A spill was initiated on 3/28/2026 with spilling for 21 hours.
- This event was not planned or forecasted and happened over the weekend.
- Tacoma was monitoring TDG throughout the spill event, and it did exceed state water quality criteria for TDG % Saturation (110%).
- Tacoma notified Ecology of the exceedance within the required time period and will provide them with any necessary information or reports related to this spill event.

Project Updates

- A legal notice will be going out for a short-term water right associated with the Cowlitz Gravel Augmentation. This water right will be used to mitigate dust and turbidity concerns with the gravel placement. This action is on track to be completed this summer and TPU has contractors lined up already.

Fish Facilities Update by Eric Shoblom (Tacoma)

Separator Returns

Currently at the separator, there are mostly winter steelhead with a few spring Chinook and cutthroats. Winter steelhead returns are significantly above 5-year and 10-year averages. Tacoma is currently on schedule for broodstock collection on all three winter steelhead programs (Lower Cowlitz, Tilton, and Upper Cowlitz).

See the Cowlitz Weekly Fish Facilities Reports from April 1, 2026 for more detailed information.

Capital Projects: Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Remodel

Currently, Tacoma's consultant is working on a series of technical memos. Tacoma is currently reviewing a draft of the Incubation memo, while the consultant prepares memos on the hatchery building alternative and outdoor rearing.

Cowlitz Release Sites

Currently, all release sites are useable with the exception of the Cispus River. Tacoma is sending some fish to the Copper Canyon Creek site, which places fish closer to the Cispus release site.

We returned to the question from last meeting about the permits needed for dredging to make the Cispus release site available for use. L. Wolfe from LCPUD explained that she is filling out an expedited Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA) to remove sediment and that they will not need a USACE permit.

Cowlitz Falls Fish Facility Update

- The CFFF began 2026 operations on Sunday, March 15 when reservoir elevations from the previous day's drawdown were back to operating levels. The following Friday (March 21), the facility shut down in preparation for another drawdown of Lake Scanewa. Operations resumed Sunday, March 23 and have been continuous since then with the spillway flumes coming online on April 3.
- Thus far, about 1,200 smolts have been collected (mostly steelhead and Coho) along with about 7,000 fry (mostly Coho). The crew has been working hard with 2 weeks of heavy debris removal.

Mayfield Juvenile Bypass System (JBS) Remodel

Tacoma is finalizing the contract with Kleinschmidt as the design consultant.

Satellite Rearing

- Tacoma is finalizing the contract with FSP for engineering and design work at CFFF to accommodate the debris handling upgrades, a dedicated water supply line, and offline effluent settling.
- Staff are continuing to work on a list of projects to prepare for operations this fall.
- HOM coordinated on CWT logistics for the Spring Chinook program at the CFFF.
- The M&E and HOM developed final fish program recommendations, which matches DD 2025-07.

Update on the Mayfield Net Pens

- The Coho in the pens are doing well, for the most part.
- Mortality increased due to BKD last week. They had a little over 300 mortalities with the majority from two of the pens. Staff also noticed an otter last week on the pen walkways.
- Tacoma provided an update on their conversation with Sean Roon, the WDFW pathologist. S. Roon said that he was going to take a look at both the net pen

and hatchery populations as each are showing signs of BKD. He stated that at this point it doesn't make sense to try to treat the net pens since the treatment and withdrawal period would exceed the target plant date of May 1st.

- At this time, the plan is to pump out the fish and release them on the week of April 27 at the Barrier Dam.

Releases

- Spring Chinook were released at 8 fpp on March 27, and all are healthy.
- Spring Chinook at 5 fpp will be released on April 13.

TWG Subcommittee Update by Scott Gibson (Tacoma)

TWG meets monthly. S. Gibson briefly reviewed the topics they are working on:

- operations at CFFF and Cowlitz Falls Dam
- review of alternate tagging for evaluation,
- historic fish passage,
- Downstream Adaptive Management Plan, and
- timing of 2026 evaluations.

More detailed information is covered in the subcommittee meeting summaries distributed monthly to the FTC.

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Subcommittee by Scott Gibson (Tacoma)

M&E meets monthly. S. Gibson briefly summarized what M&E is working on:

- Limiting factors analysis to meet objectives for fall Chinook recovery
- Preparing for the Cowlitz Science Conference
- Mayfield Net Pens Assessment – Phase II – There will be a presentation at the Science Conference.
- Creel survey update
- The Life Cycle Model for steelhead - Mount Hood Environmental is now under contract.
- J. Tipping's proposal (Winter Steelhead and Spring Chinook size grading)– M&E met with hatchery staff to discuss logistics, which would be difficult given current tagging strategies.

More detailed information is covered in the subcommittee meeting summaries distributed monthly to the FTC.

Hatchery Associated Production (HAP) Update by Melora Shelton (Tacoma)

The HAP subcommittee has not had a need to meet. They have received no letters of intent to submit a proposal and no requests for workshops.

Cowlitz Restoration and Recovery (CRR) Update by Steve West (LCFRB)

S. West provided an update on four proposed projects for CRR funding:

- Yellowjacket Phase 5a project, located downstream from the bridge with Cowlitz Tribe as the applicant,
- Kiona Creek Phase II with LCPUD as the applicant – a continuation of a design project funded by CRR in 2022,
- Lower Woods Creek with Cascade Forest Conservancy as the applicant, and
- Dark Divide on North Cispus Restoration Phase I, where the USFS is the applicant on USFS land; they will provide trees for match.

The total costs including match come to just over \$6.7M with CRR grant requests totaling more than \$4.1M.

M. Shelton noted that this total is above the \$3M, which was the previous limit for a biennium. Tacoma updated their policy and the TPU Board no longer has this limit. Previously, requests over \$3M had to go to the TPU Board, but the Board has now delegated the authority to make CRR funding decisions to TPU, LCFRB, and FTC. The grant round materials still mention the \$3M limit, so Tacoma and LCFRB are proposing that FTC clarifies this change in a DD that the biennial limit is removed for the current funding round. They are suggesting this just pertains to the current funding round and FTC can address any potential funding limit in the future if desired. They are proposing this because they would like the ability to respond to the full amount of requests and not end up rejecting good projects due to the current limit.

P. Miller agreed with this approach since there is plenty of money in the account. The license will end in 10 years, and FTC wants to spend the funding on good projects.

Action item: Tacoma and LCPUD will prepare a draft DD to remove the funding limit on CRR grant awards for this funding round.

J. Serl shared that a constituent contacted him requesting that a gravel augmentation project be implemented on the Tilton River due to the lack of observed spawning gravel. He explained that an applicant would need to bring that forward as a project to apply for CRR funding. If anyone has any interest in that project, there would be some public support.

Website Update by Hanna McCauley (Tacoma)

Tacoma is in the process of updating their website to make it easier to use and also comply with new federal ADA standards for accessibility.

- As of April 24, all new documents added to the site need to meet the requirements. Tacoma will let us know when they have more guidance.
- Documents maintained by external organizations are outside of Tacoma Power's jurisdiction. As a best practice, Tacoma will link to those materials rather than host them directly. The originating entity is responsible for accessibility compliance.
- They will be reorganizing the site to make it easier to find things. They will be reducing duplicates and archiving some content.
- The password-protected site will disappear by the end of the year.
- Tacoma will host some type of alternate file sharing platform.
- All the existing documents will still exist. If FTC members can't find something, reach out to M. Shelton.

B. Glaser responded that WDFW is undertaking similar changes. WDFW and Tacoma can be in contact about what the standards are and how they can share information to meet the requirements.

2026 Spring Flow Reduction by Melora Shelton (Tacoma) *(draft DD emailed 4/3, FTC Spring Flow Reduction April outlook 04072026.pdf emailed 4/8)*

M. Shelton explained Tacoma's approach with planning for spring flow reductions referencing License Article 13(a) that addresses the time period March 1 to June 30.

Tacoma has been keeping the reservoir full because of extremely low snowpack and forecasted dry conditions this spring. They have limited storage capacity for any forecasted storm events because the reservoir is so full and must manage the elevation accordingly. They are keeping the reservoir full and want to implement reduced spring flow in May to target reservoir traces where June 30 elevations will be supportive of summer and fall operations and flow management to avoid what happened in 2023 and 2025 when they started low and had to draft deeply summer through fall. (See presentation *FTC Spring Flow Reduction April outlook 04072026.pdf* and draft DD *DD2026-03 Spring Flow Reduction_MRP.docx* for more detail.)

Once Tacoma reduces spring flow, this will establish a new "basement" minimum (will not operate below), which they will hold through June 30. Tacoma can still operate above this new minimum, but they will continue to have that flexibility and can use it as needed.

Tacoma understands that FTC has liked the incremental flow reductions and will take that into consideration as they make decisions.

The DD includes a section on impacts, specifically: 1) the potential for fry stranding and 2) impacts to habitat. For fry stranding, Tacoma will conduct surveys and will include the results in their annual reports to FERC. For impacts to habitat, Tacoma referenced previous studies on river width and side channels and aerial imagery. M. Shelton encouraged FTC members to provide feedback on this section and whether it is useful.

Tacoma's draft DD is different this year because they are proposing to use the DD to document the consultation process with FTC and not get into the specifics of reduced flow operations. They are proceeding with this direction because their Hydro Resource Operations group needs to be more nimble to respond to quickly changing conditions and Tacoma has the authority to do so under License Article 13(a). However, they emphasized that they value the FTC's consultation, which is why they are proposing to set up the DD in this way. They will keep FTC updated at meetings and in between meetings to stay coordinated.

M. Shelton encouraged FTC members to comment on the draft DD to make suggestions for how they would like the consultation process to go.

Tacoma offered that staff from their Hydro Resource Operations group can speak to FTC members to explain more about the models they use to make their decisions.

- A. Luymes confirmed that he would like to meet with staff from the Hydro Resource Operations group to understand the theory and operational limitations they work through. He emphasized that he wants to understand their process and doesn't necessarily need to review the most updated info with them at the May FTC meeting although others may want that.
- B. Sharp and J. Stumpf said that they would like to understand the process first in a smaller separate meeting with FTC voting reps, and then they can decide if there is value in asking Tacoma to come back to speak to the full group at the May FTC meeting, where they could speak to the most recent data and conditions.
- B. Glaser agreed that sounded like a good strategy and suggested blocking off enough time for discussion at the May FTC meeting to work through the revised DD.
- M. Peter asked that FTC members share their questions for Power Management with him ahead of time so that Power Management can come prepared to respond without getting too much into the sausage making.

Action Item: M. Shelton will work with FTC voting representatives and Tacoma's Hydro Resource Operations group to schedule a meeting in the next two weeks to talk about Tacoma's models and how they make decisions.

Comments from WDFW:

- They liked having options last year for what the minimum flow should be and how flows would step down. They realize that Tacoma wants more flexibility, but it is challenging to understand what they are being asked to support without options.

- If the DD specified reduced flows that step down incrementally instead of abruptly, it would be easier for them to show support for the DD.
- The stranding information is good in the DD, but they don't want to lose sight of juvenile survival in the M&E plan. Especially now with the limiting factors analysis, it will be important to have more information to understand how changes in flow will affect the analysis.
- What does Tacoma mean when they say they want FTC's consultation? Is Tacoma asking for input? Or support for a Tacoma decision?
- WDFW could be in an uncomfortable place if the FTC approves a DD focused on the consultation process, and then WDFW ends up not agreeing with Tacoma's flow reduction decisions.

M. Shelton explained that Tacoma is moving forward with the decision for reduced spring flow. They are asking for FTC's support and providing information so FTC can see what's driving Tacoma's approach and decision-making. In the past, Tacoma has tried to actively collaborate with FTC on setting the reduced spring flows by providing 3 options, but that has been too constraining for Tacoma's Hydro Resource Operations and Power Management teams. Under the Settlement Agreement, it is within Tacoma's authority to exercise their decision for reduced spring flow, but Tacoma is consulting with FTC and providing opportunities for questions. They are asking how FTC would like Tacoma to communicate about this.

P. Miller asked for clarification, If FTC members don't agree with Tacoma's decision, will they still implement it? M. Shelton confirmed yes.

L. Newhouse asked if they will be notified when fish transport flows will occur so they can plan fish releases around the changes in flow. M. Shelton responded that yes, if there is a minimum flow reduction and baseflows are below 5,000 cfs, the fish transport flows will happen on Tuesdays. Tacoma realizes they have to give up some flexibility with the fish releases.

Comments from Ecology:

- The information presented is appreciated.
- A. Luymes is looking for more specifics about flow reduction strategies, but it makes sense that it is not included in the DD yet.
- The Cowlitz basin is not currently included in Ecology's drought declaration although they will probably update their declaration soon so that could change.
- It would be nice to have options for what the minimum flow should be so that FTC can work together to discuss and pick one. It sounds like Tacoma is not doing that this year.
- The section on impacts is appreciated. There is a big difference between 5,000 and 2,140 cfs, and it is good to see how those differences impact habitat.
- If reduced flows begin May 13, that would be 7 weeks of flow reduction. Is that more or less than in the past?
- A. Luymes will email more specific comments on the DD to M. Peter.

M. Shelton responded that the length of the spring flow reductions in the past have been variable. They've had a March to June reduction before. In 2023, they made a reduction in April and May, then went back to regular flow, but they ended up having to draft the reservoir a lot and lost the benefit of reduced flow. The lesson learned from that experience was to keep the minimum low flow. She emphasized that Tacoma can still operate above the minimum and will as weather conditions allow.

She recognized that FTC members would like Tacoma to commit to making flow reductions gradual and to reset the minimum flow as soon as possible while maintaining the target elevation; however, this approach doesn't give Power Management enough room to make decisions. Tacoma needs to retain their responsibility to manage their authority. Tacoma's Natural Resources group will work with Hydro Resource Operations and Power Management groups to keep the FTC interests up front in their considerations. It is better that Tacoma's Natural Resource group brings guidance from FTC, and let the Hydro Operations group make the decision.

M. Bleich echoed that Tacoma does work collaboratively with FTC to implement the license that they have. Often, Tacoma can't make decisions without the FTC. Sometimes, Tacoma has to make their own business decisions.

S. Lewis asked if there is flexibility to change the locations of the stranding surveys and if they also assess benthic macroinvertebrates or structure.

- S. Gibson explained that the location of stranding surveys have been established from years of mapping observations where stranding occurs. They look for new low gradient gravel bars and side channels with pooling and pocketing of water. They focus on key areas and identify life stages. They do 100' belt transect surveys with a grid to count stranded live or dead to come up with a total number. Usually, they find the fish are alive and 98% are returned to the river.
- Assessing other things is outside of their scope, which is focused on fry stranding immediately following transport flows. However, they do note if they observe other species like lamprey or macroinvertebrates.
- M. Shelton added that they have identified different stranding locations relative to different baseline flow elevations during recent flow reduction.

LCPUD Updates by Joe First (LCPUD)

- All units are running and stable.
- Baffle panels were installed on April 1 in front of spillways 2 and 3 to direct smolts to the surface and help with collection.
- The forebay debris removal has occurred for 18 days with 3600 yd³ of debris removed at about 20 truckloads removed each day. The work is being extended

to April 17 because of some work days lost due to high flows and the crane being out-of-service.

Annual Program Review by Eric Shoblom (Tacoma) *(2026 Annual Program Review Hatchery Production initial draft DD.docx emailed 3/7, Cowlitz_APR_CommentSummary_3_3_2026 emailed 3/31)*

E. Shoblom reviewed the proposed production goals for 2026 in Tables 1 and 2 in the draft DD.

L. Newhouse noted that they raise more fish than what's in the table and asked if the numbers of fish account for mortality. E. Shoblom responded that she is correct and the numbers do not account for mortality. They represent the target production. The detail related to mortalities is not needed.

No one else had comments.

E. Shoblom highlighted that this is the second FTC meeting discussing APR. There will also be discussion at the 4/22 APR meeting and again at the May FTC meeting where the DD will be finalized. There will be opportunities for public comment today and at the 4/22 meeting.

J. Arnold summarized public comments received to date highlighting which ones were within the scope of the APR decision and which ones were outside the scope. She opened up the public comment period specific to APR topics.

APR Public Comment Period

L. Pryor asked a clarifying question, Will the draft DD become finalized after the APR meeting and discussion on 4/22? E. Shoblom responded that this is correct. If any members of the public make comments about changes to the release size or distribution of production across the populations on 4/22, then the FTC will have a chance to discuss that at the May FTC meeting before they finalize the DD.

J. Tipping asked a clarifying question about the 15,357 lbs. of production at the bottom right of the table related to satellite rearing, How does that affect the total relative to the cap of 650,000 lbs. of production? E. Shoblom responded that the satellite rearing production is not counted in the total – only the pounds they gained while in the hatchery count toward the 650,000 lb. cap.

J. Tipping noted that shifting cutthroat from 4.4 fpp to 4 fpp is only a difference of 2,300 lbs., which is not much relative to the overall production target of 650,000 lbs.

J. Tipping responded that he likes that the satellite rearing poundage doesn't count, but why is that? S. Gibbons and B. Glaser responded that it was part of the conversation about satellite rearing and was written into the DD. B. Glaser added that it was FTC's

interpretation of the license and how satellite rearing contributes to recovery beyond the 650,000 lbs.

L. Pryor repeated some comments previously captured in the APR Summary of Public Comments, for example related to what hatchery production goals will benefit adult returns and topics outside of the scope of the APR, such as timing of releases relative to C. shasta.

L. Pryor referenced the Settlement Agreement Section 6.1.5 that hatchery production should replicate natural outmigration in size and timing. He noted that this production plan will release fish much larger than natural outmigration. He also expressed concern that the variable size of cutthroat to meet the total production goal is not managing based on what's best for adult returns.

E. Shoblom responded to the questions about cutthroat. Based on the literature, 4 fpp is best practice, but this hasn't been recently evaluated. The M&E Subcommittee wants to reevaluate release sizes, especially for fall Chinook. In the meantime, 4 fpp is ideal, but there is a spectrum where we can release, which might end up being 4.5 fpp one year and 3.9 fpp another year. What this plan says is that we would like to retain the full 90,000 fish and can go down to 4.4 fpp to get closer to our total poundage target rather than reduce the number of fish.

S. Gibson responded to L. Pryor that they are looking at improvements to the hatchery and actively working on them. He emphasized that is the value of taking a close look at each population to figure out SARs and overall growth trajectories linked to recovery goals. Then, having more hatchery fish upstream will make the fisherman happier. He recognized that progress can seem slow, but they are working on it.

L. Pryor responded that S. Gibson and the team are doing great work.

Public Comment Period #1 - Agenda related

L. Pryor emphasized that he was glad to hear in the discussion of spring flow reduction that Tacoma is taking responsibility to exercise their authority under the license recognizing that FTC can make a recommendation but that Tacoma holds decision making power.

- M. Peter responded that Tacoma is exercising their authority specifically with respect to Settlement Article 13(a). Tacoma is a licensee, and FTC are partners. There is some nuance.
- B. Glaser confirmed that this is how he sees the relationship and how it has always operated where FTC provides recommendations to Tacoma documented in the DDs to inform how they implement their license. If Tacoma doesn't agree, they are not obligated to follow the recommendations.
- M. Shelton added a nuance that sometimes FTC does make decisions like with CRR funding.

R. LeDuc reflected that what he heard in the spring flow reduction discussion is that if it comes down to fish or power, Tacoma is going to go with what's best for power.

- E. Shoblom responded that yes, Tacoma is in the business of making power, but it is the role of the FTC to help Tacoma make decisions with the least impact and the best results for fish.

Topics for May 5, 2026 FTC Meeting on Teams

Potential topics include:

- 2026 Annual Program Review: finalize DD
- Fall Chinook Transition Plan follow-up
- Follow-up on Spring Flow Reduction and/or finalize DD
- CRR grant round updates
- Usual Updates

Public Comment Period #2 – Any topic

L. Pryor closed by sharing that he has been out in his boat with some of the higher flows. Springer fishing is a little easier, but in general the high flows make it a little harder. He is looking forward to it coming down. The spring weather has been beautiful.

Meeting Evaluation

What went well? What can we change or improve in the future?

- Appreciation for the FTC for sharing their expertise and informing decisions.
- We need to schedule ample time for topics like spring flow reduction that we know will need discussion.
- M. Shelton did a nice job presenting the hydro status update and information on the spring flow reduction.
- Joint efforts are going well.
- It was nice to hear L. Pryor end on a positive note with fishing conditions and spring weather.

Josua's Inspirational Quote

How glorious a greeting the sun gives the mountains!" John Muir

Closing Remarks

Everyone thanked J. Serl for his 30 years of service and wished him well in retirement. People got a chance to share their favorite memories of him and what they appreciate most. L. Wiltse collaborated with others to create a limerick to send him off.

Ode to John Serl

This guy's retiring. His name is John Serl.
So much to say... Well, let's give it a whirl!
Oh, where should we start?
He's got a big heart.
And now he can let his wings unfurl.

With Fish and Wildlife for 30 plus years,
Now he'll have time to really switch gears.
More time to ref games,
And discover new aims.
To start the next chapter without any fears.

Fish passage and research and all the rest,
When it comes down to it, John is the best.
It's just who he is.
A regular whiz,
One of the best fish heads in the Northwest.

You've been part of the FTC for so long.
It's hard to believe this is your Swan Song.
You've given so much.
Hope you stay in touch.
Do know that we'll miss you, and thank you, dear John.