

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

January 6, 2026 from 9:30am-2:00pm

FTC Representative Attendees

Tacoma: Melora Shelton

WDFW: Bryce Glaser

YN: Bill Sharp

USFWS: Jeff Garnett

Additional Attendees

BIA: Stephen Lewis

BPA: Michael Boyles

Ecology: Anne Baxter

LCPUD: Joe First, Laura Wolfe

LCFRB: Steve Manlow, Steve West

Tacoma: Jenise Bauman, Ben Caviness, Matt Bleich, Sam Gibbons, Scott Gibson, Sean Luis, Eric Shoblom, Chris Vaughn

WDFW: Brian Gale, Josua Holowatz, Peggy Miller, Larona Newhouse, Phil Sandstrom, John Serl, Matt Siskey, Sean Toomey, Kris Warner, Kevin Young

Facilitator: Jennifer Arnold, Reciprocity Consulting, LLC

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

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

Approval of Last Month's Meeting Summary

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

Review of Agenda and Action Items

We reviewed the agenda, then proceeded with the meeting.

Updates

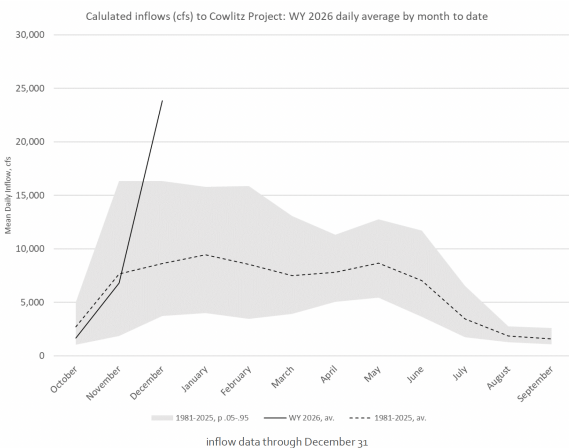
Announcements

- No announcements

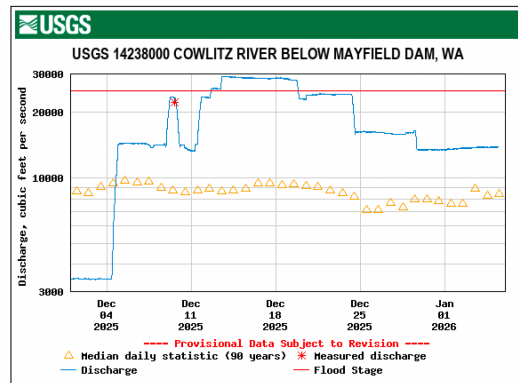
Hydro Operations Update by Melora Shelton (Tacoma) (emailed 12/2; corrections 1/9)

- December storms resulted in extremely high inflows and discharge, including 20 spill days.

- Reservoir was managed for flood control in coordination with USACE, max elevation ~762 ft.
- Outlook is for some precipitation and low snow and freezing levels, declining inflows anticipated.
- Plan to reduce discharge and resume typical winter operations once below the flood control curve later this week.
- Winter minimum flow is 2,989 cfs, typical operations anticipated well above that.
- Climate outlook tilts above average for precipitation and below average for temperature.



Outflow



Current (1/5) 13,900 cfs reported, max gen typically ~14,500 cfs.
Winter min reset to 2,989 cfs 12/4. No ramp or flow deviations.

Follow-up discussion:

- P. Miller asked, how long do they expect to draft Riffe Lake? M. Shelton responded that they are working to get it below the flood curve. There is not a single target elevation, but an end of month operating target that is dynamic depending on active weather and current load.
- P. Miller explained she is asking because she is thinking ahead about refilling the lake for summer. M. Shelton explained that during the winter their primary considerations are maintaining adequate space for flood control and baseload power generation considering demand during cold weather. They also try to manage conservatively thinking about spring refill and low snowpack.
- P. Miller asked if the high flow and spill resulted in gravel movement from the pile on the right bank, which is the old placement area? S. Gibson responded that the gravel on the right bank has been mobilized. P. Miller emphasized that this is good news. Tacoma can show some photos at the next meeting.
- P. Miller asked if the high flows triggered monitoring in the side channels? M. Shelton responded that it did not. The trigger is around 34,000 cfs.
- J. Holowatz asked if the Barrier Dam Boat Ramp will be operational as gravel comes down? S. Gibson responded that it is still too early to tell. When the flows recede, they can assess.

Water Quality Update by Ben Caviness (Tacoma) (emailed 1/7 with photos on 1/16)

- With the massive flows, Tacoma exceeded 7Q10's and TDG percent saturation limits below both dams with multiple spill events.
- B. Caviness shared some preliminary data with the caveat that these numbers may change as they get more precise barometric pressure data. Once the data are complete and analyzed, a report will be shared with the FTC.
- Tacoma is required to notify Ecology within 30 days of an exceedance. B. Caviness will work with A. Luymes on this step.
- At the Kosmos site, Tacoma has been monitoring the site twice a week since water levels went above 749 ft. For context, an emergency cleanup action removed contaminated material along the bank of Rainey Creek and capped the active oil seep at Kosmos, a former mill site, in late-2019 and early-2020. Tacoma has completed regular monitoring of the former Kosmos mill site and Rainey Creek, upstream, downstream and around the bank cap, since emergency actions concluded in January 2020. Tacoma is increasing their monitoring effort during this high water event to ensure no seeps or sheens appear. They have not found any seeps or sheens in the monitored area during this inundation event.

Fish Facilities Update by Eric Shoblom (Tacoma) (emailed 1/9)

Cowlitz Release Sites:

All release sites are currently operational after 1-2 weeks of access and sediment issues during the high water event. (See slides for more detail.)

With the exception of Franklin Bridge (Packwood), separator staff have orchestrated hauls so that Tacoma's percentages are close to where they should be at this point in the season.

Lewis County PUD had Lake Scanewa drawn down for the higher flows. Tacoma used the Copper Canyon Creek release site while LCPUD Day Use Park on Lake Scanewa was unusable. Even though the release site was still closed to the public, by 12/29, the lake elevation had increased and the Day Use Park was once again useable, after which Tacoma proceeded with releases. Since the Copper Canyon Creek site is considered a Scanewa release site, Tacoma's distribution proportions were not affected.

Update on the Mayfield Net Pens:

Fish are doing well, and the pens weathered the storms.

Capital Projects: Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Remodel:

Tacoma is reviewing the Water Supply Alternatives Analysis Report from the consultant.

Mayfield Juvenile Bypass System (JBS) Remodel:

Tacoma is working to secure a consultant for 100% design. The target date to start work is early 2026.

Satellite Rearing

Tacoma submitted the Decision Document and letters of support to FERC.

How did the hatcheries do with the high water? Presented by Brian Gale

- The facilities operated well.
- There was no power outage at the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery. There was sand and mud in the raceways, which staff are cleaning. There was no impact to gills identified, and fish have been feeding fine.
- There was an 11-hour power outage at the Cowlitz Trout Hatchery, but the generators worked well. No fish disease has been detected.
- The road into the Cowlitz Trout Hatchery was flooded, and staff couldn't get in for one day. Then, the water receded into the ditches, and access was restored.

Discussion:

- J. Serl expressed appreciation that Tacoma was able to use the site at Copper Canyon Creek to continue passage operations. He hopes this might allow Tacoma to be able to use that Lake Scanewa over a longer term for adult releases.

TWG Subcommittee Update by Jenise Bauman (Tacoma)

TWG is meeting monthly. 2026 Evaluations and a briefing on fish facilities are on the agenda for this meeting.

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Subcommittee by Jenise Bauman (Tacoma)

Life Cycle Model (LCM)

The subcommittee made a unanimous decision to select Mount Hood Environmental as their consultant. Tacoma is moving forward with contracting, which might take a few months.

They now have a shared database for the Upper Cowlitz winter steelhead, thanks to Tacoma and WDFW data teams. If it works well, they will use the same database to bring in data for other populations in the Big Table.

Limiting Factors Analysis

We now have a methods outline to conduct a limiting factors analysis looking at disease, hatchery rearing, water chemistry, juvenile rearing, etc. to try to improve hatchery and release strategies for fall Chinook.

Transition Plan Updates

The subcommittee continues to meet monthly to check-in on the transition plan talks.

Mayfield Net Pens Assessment – Phase II

This will remain a priority for 2026. C. Vaughn reported that the detection efficiency of fish going into the net pens was excellent. Kris Warner, B. Gale and staff are conducting weekly health checks and reporting weekly to the Cowlitz Hatchery Program subcommittee.

Cowlitz Annual Program Review and Science Conference

The date was set for April 22 and preparations are being made for the program.

Cowlitz Restoration and Recovery (CRR) Update by Melora Shelton (Tacoma)

Grant materials will be published to the website this month with the grant period opening January 12. The HAP subcommittee is available to support any inquiries or requests for workshops from prospective applicants. Otherwise, the subcommittee does not need to meet.

Fish Collection: Periodic updates by Chris Vaughn, Sean Luis and Eric Shoblom (Tacoma) (emailed 1/12)

This agenda topic focused on downstream updates at Mayfield. The Cowlitz Falls Fish Facility updates were presented at the November FTC meeting.

Clarifications and Discussion:

- What does 31% mortality refer to? What are the actual numbers? Just Chinook, 694 fall Chinook smolts.
- K. Warner asked, how many net pen Coho were intercepted at Mayfield? They heard less than a handful. (After the meeting, C. Vaughn reported back that there was 1 on 12/9 and 3 on 12/23.)
- B. Glaser asked, do the data in the tables represent raw counts not expanded for collection efficiency? S. Luis confirmed that the data are raw counts.
- P. Sandstrom asked, is the Coho 2+ age class based on size? S. Luis responded they are based on size and morphological characteristics. They are working to refine and standardize the age classification methods between Cowlitz and Mayfield this year. P. Sandstrom offered to talk and help with validation.
- B. Glaser asked, are there recaptures with rainbow trout? Are they marked? If there are recaptures, could they be released further back in the reservoir? S. Gibson clarified that rainbow trout are not currently marked when they are returned to the lake and that all trout are released at the Ike Kinswa Boat Ramp.

2025 Transition Plans: Debrief by Jenise Bauman (Tacoma) (emailed 1/9)

Jenise presented an overview of the transition plan talks from 2025 and opened up reflection on the value of these talks and discussion about what we want to do in 2026.

Discussion:

- People emphasized the value of these talks to get new staff up to speed and everyone on the same page in terms of goals.
- B. Glaser suggested that in 2026, we focus on what the data are telling us as data are available. It will be good timing to focus on fall Chinook in March to set us up for APR in April.
- M. Shelton reflected on the conversation that she and A. Luymes had at the December in-person meeting. They are both less technical and more removed from the day-to-day FTC work, so the talks have been a good opportunity for learning. They also brainstormed that it would be nice to have a high-level synthesis all in one place to orient where each species is in the road to recovery. If it were all in one slide deck, it would provide easy reference and high-level context for more specific discussion topics.
- J. Arnold added that she heard positive feedback about some of the visuals in the transition talks. During the breaks at the December meeting, she heard some people brainstorming what a visual could include that would tie a lot of these high-level concepts together.
- S. Luis extended kudos to S. Gibson for giving the first transition talk presentation and creating a template that the other presenters followed.
- S. Gibson credited J. Bauman for collaborating on that first presentation. He reflected that he got a lot of value out of going through all the plans as he created the presentation.
- B. Glaser liked the idea of creating a high-level synopsis. When they created the transition plans, they made the decision not to include a lot of background context and description of terms and concepts so that they could finish writing them more quickly and the documents wouldn't be overly long. At the time, they recognized this could potentially create difficulty in the future. He suggested it might be helpful to have a synopsis of key concepts and terms and was open to how to structure that.
- M. Shelton added that she can refresh the list of common acronyms and update the link on the public website.
- B. Sharp echoed that the transition talks have been super helpful. He has appreciated the holistic purpose of the transition plans.
- M. Bleich appreciated hearing everyone's perspectives. Discussing the transition plans in this way can help ground us in how we do business together.

Action items:

- M. Shelton will refresh the list of commonly used acronyms and relink to the website.
- The M&E Subcommittee will discuss next steps for the transition plan updates.

LCPUD Updates by Joe First (LCPUD)

J. First provided the following update

- A part failed on the gantry crane jib hoist last week. They use the jib hoist to place the log bronc in the reservoir. They use the log bronc to close the boat barrier. The boat barrier was opened for the high water event and must be closed before they re-open the Day Use Park. The jib hoist is expected to be repaired tomorrow. They plan to close the boat barrier and re-open the Day Use Park in the next few days.
- The December high flow events had minimal debris build up on the unit trash racks, except for slot four on unit 2, which has a vertical log leaning on the rack. Once the jib hoist is back in service, they will remove this log.
- Plant operations were smooth throughout the high flow events. They did lose three turbidity sensors. They like to keep the sensors in place during floods to get good data, but they can get damaged or lost.

Fish Facilities Update: Separator Returns by Eric Shoblom (Tacoma) (emailed 1/9)

Currently, at the separator there are mostly Coho with a few winter steelhead. (See slides for more detail.)

Detailed info on returns is sent out in weekly updates to FTC. The last weekly fish report sent out was in mid-December due to the holidays, but the rest of the updates will come out soon.

This presentation provided the opportunity to take a big-picture outlook and ask any questions.

- For summer steelhead, returns were consistent in 2025 without any big drop offs like there have been in past years. Although Tacoma made their broodstock goals, returns were lower than the 5-year and 10-year averages.
- For coho, this is the first year of returns from the new, single integrated program. Broodstock goals are being met, and coho NOR populations have been doing quite well compared to recent averages. Tacoma is hauling to both Tilton release sites and all three Upper Cowlitz release sites.
- Winter steelhead are just starting their return.
- For spring Chinook, the Kalama stock returns were recycled through June to provide anglers another opportunity to harvest. After June, these fish were surplused. Cowlitz River spring Chinook broodstock goals were met.
- Fall Chinook returns were about a third less than the 5-year average and half of the 10-year average. Broodstock collection fell short of the goal. All fall Chinook were either released into the Tilton or kept for broodstock.
- Cutthroat trout numbers have been significantly lower than the 5- and 10-year averages this year. Until the end of August, when cutthroats were kept for broodstock, all HOR cutthroat were recycled, and all NOR cutthroat were sent to the Tilton or UCR depending on the tag and mark.

Discussion:

- B. Glaser asked, with the new transition to the integrated coho program and transition plan goal for coho transport to reduce surplus fish, what is the number of surplus fish versus transported for coho? J. Serl responded that no coho were surplus. They were all used for brood or transported upstream.
- J. Holowatz reflected that with the first year of the integrated program for coho, the numbers beat the pre-season forecast of 14,000, which allows for great harvest, broodstock, and plenty of fish transported.

Downstream Technical Work Group: 2026 Evaluations by J. Bauman (Tacoma)
(emailed 1/9)

This is the second meeting to address TWG 2026 evaluations. Last month was the first discussion, this month the draft DD was introduced, and next meeting the final DD will be brought to the FTC for a decision. Evaluations include:

- Alternate Tagging Strategy
- Cowlitz Falls North Shore Collector Acoustic Telemetry Study
- Coho Parr Downstream Passage
- Downstream Adaptive Management Plan (DAMP) Refresh
- Juvenile coho aging validation at Mayfield Dam

When the topic was discussed at the December FTC meeting, WDFW requested to add study design for coho parr downstream passage. This was discussed at the TWG monthly meeting, and TWG decided to add it into the draft DD.

J. Bauman walked through draft DD 2026-01 with that addition.

Discussion:

- B. Glaser emphasized that TWG should take the first look at updates to DAMP but that WDFW wants FTC to use a DD to formally approve the DAMP with the updates because of the connection to satellite rearing. He will review this section of the draft DD to see if any additional clarity is needed on this point.

Action item: Everyone review draft DD 2026-01 2026 and send comments to J. Bauman by January 20, so that she has time to incorporate any comments into the final DD before the February meeting. (If there is additional discussion during February's meeting, further changes can be made before the DD is finalized.)

2026 FTC Work Plan and Protocols Review by Melora Shelton (Tacoma) (emailed 12/29)

Work Plan

Each year the FTC reviews their protocols and creates a work plan for the new year. The protocols were reviewed carefully in recent years so that they accurately reflect how FTC operates.

This meeting is the chance to discuss any changes with the goal to finalize the 2026 work plan and any changes to the protocols in March. This does not require a DD.

The biggest change to this year's work plan is the proposed return to July meetings in order to stay on track with decision-making since a DD is developed and finalized over three meetings. She emphasized that people are still welcome to go on vacations and delegate others to participate in their place. She also emphasized that FTC can change any meeting dates that don't work due to holidays or other scheduling conflicts affecting multiple FTC members.

The other changes to the work plan include collapsing all the regular meeting topics into a single table. Capital projects will be discussed according to their project schedules, not necessarily every month.

Discussion:

- P. Miller responded that adding a July meeting felt like a good change and that in the past, FTC used to meet in July.
- P. Miller asked, what does 'FTC organization and operations' refer to? M. Shelton responded this is the business of doing business, like setting up Teams links for virtual meetings.
- B. Glaser asked that satellite rearing site progress be captured somewhere on the work plan. He also asked that the hybrid meetings be indicated on the main table, perhaps with shading.
- P. Miller asked about FERC reporting and the list of topics for 30-day notices. Is implementation of satellite rearing part of FHMP? She suggested a separate meeting with Tacoma to discuss FERC reporting.
- Correction made to APR meeting for April 22.

Action item: P. Miller and M. Shelton will meet separately to talk through FERC reporting to make sure it is accurately captured in the 2026 FTC work plan.

Protocols

M. Shelton asked if anyone had anything to discuss about the protocols. She asked specifically about the meeting summaries and if we are getting to the right level of detail needed for the notes.

- P. Miller responded that she likes the level of detail now and would not necessarily want to go to a higher level. She said the meeting summaries are a useful reference if a question comes up to understand whether we discussed the issue before or even considered it. If the notes have less detail, we might lose important context. Sometimes, we might want more detail if it's a contentious topic.
- J. Arnold emphasized that sometimes FTC members do ask to include a particular detail in the notes during a meeting, which is helpful to her.

- M. Shelton said they can do a better job of getting the subcommittee notes out to people sooner, perhaps even post on the password-protected website in the future.
- With decision-making, the group discussed what to include when a member cannot participate, for example with the federal shutdown. M. Shelton suggested that they could include the process they used in the protocol, consisting of two parts: 1) waiting an additional 7-days if there is a chance the member(s) would be able to participate then and 2) additional communication up to higher levels within the member organization who are still able to respond to notify them of the decision and timeline.
- B. Glaser suggested that perhaps they should be less prescriptive and use language that allows the option for FTC members to adapt. For example, decisions will be made after 7 days, unless an alternate timeline is agreed to, such as 14 days. M. Shelton will update the protocols with that approach to allow more flexibility.
- P. Miller asked, is there a separate document for public protocols? M. Shelton responded that public protocols were established in DD 2022-08, and those could be updated if desired.

Action items:

- Everyone reach out to M. Shelton if you have additional thoughts or edits to the protocols.
- M. Shelton will send out an updated version of the protocols with the changes discussed to be finalized in March. We will not plan to discuss protocols again until March, unless something else comes up.

Public Comment Period #1 - Agenda related

R. LeDuc shared a few questions and comments:

- He is really happy about the work of the M&E Subcommittee but concerned about fall Chinook, especially mortality in the Tilton. What would it take to change the focus on fall Chinook to bring up the portion that's doing well, where they are naturally producing downstream, to replace the hatchery fish? Would that work? Would gravel augmentation help?
- There needs to be more focus on getting fish to the ocean and addressing predation.
- The fall Chinook from the hatchery that are put to spawn in Tilton are not doing well. If we recycled them, would they spawn downstream? Would habitat enhancement and woody debris downstream help?

C. Vaughn shared that doing a limiting factor analysis for fall Chinook is a priority for the M&E Subcommittee. They will list out limiting factors and prioritize the ones to work on. The report from that analysis will include the points R. LeDuc raised and be presented

to the FTC when it is ready. They are just starting that work now. If they reduce fall Chinook at the hatchery, there will be room for other populations.

L. Pryor shared a few questions and comments:

- What are the flood impacts to the Upper Cowlitz fisheries and habitat restoration?
- What was the Harvest for 2025? FTC needs to report on harvest impact and fishermen participation when reporting on returns. These are important to include in determining FTC's success.
- Release sizes for springers, winter and summer steelhead, as cited in recent DDs, are too large at 5 fish per pound. Release sizes drive spacing problems in the hatcheries.

M. Shelton responded that there were high flows above and below the dams. This was a high flow and long duration event – one of the top 10 events in the last 50 years. There was a lot of gravel and wood movement, which can benefit fish habitat in the long-term but also can be a challenge for organisms in the water at the time of the event. Habitat restoration projects build up the resistance of the system to withstand events like this. S. Manlow explained that they are reaching out to all their project sponsors to see how projects have held up, including organizing field visits.

Topics for February 3, 2026 FTC Meeting on Teams

The potential topics for February include: Final DD TWG 2026 Evaluation, Steelhead Transition Plan follow up topic(s), and Usual Updates: Hydro Status, Water Quality, Fish Facilities, M&E, TWG, CRR (HAP and habitat), and LCPUD.

Potentially, we will have an initial presentation on the Mayfield Net Pen progress with a more robust presentation planned for the April science conference.

Public Comment Period #2 – Any topic

L. Pryor asked, How much is Tacoma Power spending on Cowlitz fisheries and hatchery management per year? In 2025? How much is Tacoma Power spending on hatchery management contracts with WDFW? As a member of the public and de facto rate payer, he feels this is important information. As a fisherman, he would like to see results from this investment. He would like to hear the response at the next FTC meeting, or if Tacoma prefers, he could submit a FOIA or public records request.

Meeting Evaluation

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

- All presenters came well prepared, which can be challenging with the holiday.
- Discussion on the transition plans was really good.

- Liked the high level summary of results – how the year has gone.
 - With the holidays, J. Arnold was accidentally late sending out the agenda to members of the public. She thanked L. Pryor for the reminder.
 - Thanks to M. Shelton for paying close attention to the work plan and protocols – while not exciting work, it is important!
-

Josua's Inspirational Quote

“Life is like photographing a tree. To focus on one detail, you have to blur the rest.” – Sanober Khan

Closing Remarks

Everyone echoed happy new year and thanks for all the hard work and collaboration to set FTC up for a strong year in 2026!