

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

November 4, 2025 from 9:30am-2:40pm

FTC Representative Attendees

Tacoma: Melora Shelton

ECY: Andrew Luymes

WDFW: Bryce Glaser

TU: Jonathan Stumpf

YN: Bill Sharp

Additional Attendees

LC: Ann Weckback

LCPUD: Joe First, Laura Wolfe

LCFRB: Steve Manlow

Tacoma: Jenise Bauman, Sam Gibbons, Scott Gibson, Sean Luis, Matt Peter, Eric Shobлом, Chris Vaughn

WDFW: Brian Gale, Todd Hillson, Josua Holowatz, Peggy Miller, Larona Newhouse, John Serl, Sean Toomey

Facilitator: Jennifer Arnold, Reciprocity Consulting, LLC

Public Attendees: Jack Tipping (Coastal Conservation Association) and Larry Pryor (Northwest Fisheries Enhancement)

Remaining 2025 FTC Meeting Dates: Dec. 2 (in person)

Approval of Last Month's Meeting Summary

The revised version of the October FTC Meeting Summary was reviewed and approved with clarifying edits and will be posted on the public website.

Review of Agenda and Action Items

We reviewed the agenda and action items, then proceeded with the meeting.

Updates

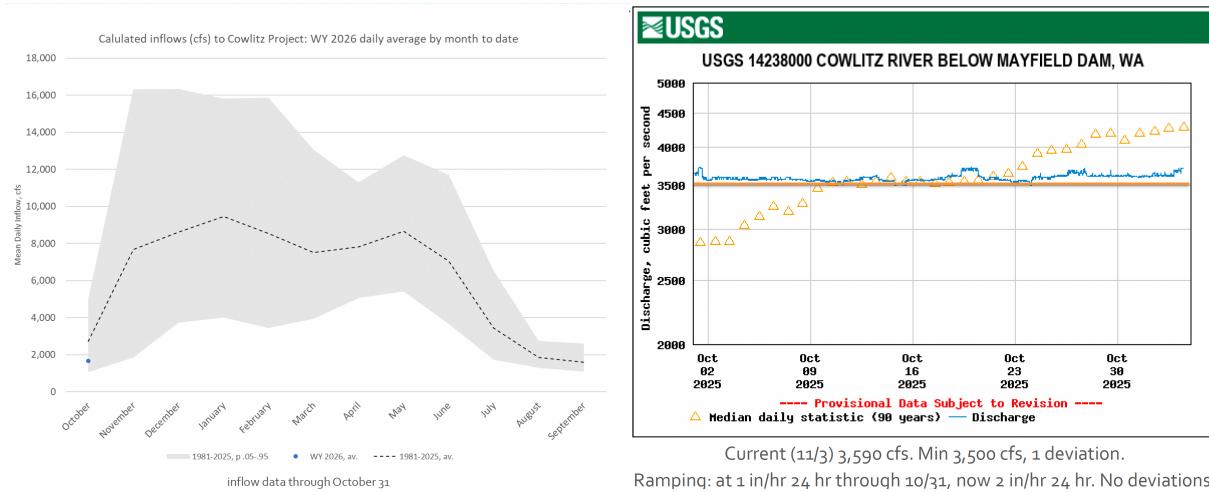
Announcements

- M. Shelton acknowledged that federal partners are not present due to the federal government shutdown.

Hydro Operations Update by Melora Shelton (Tacoma) (emailed 11/3)

- Low inflows through October
- Fall precipitation has arrived.
- Reservoir remains near record low, fill anticipated in the next week.

- Considerable November forecast uncertainty.
- Maintain discharge near minimum flow until we see outcomes from next rain event, evaluate potential increase next week.
- November flow changes will affect winter minimum flows.
- Climate outlook tilts above average for precipitation.



Water Quality and Related Projects Update by Matt Peter (Tacoma)

- M. Bleich is out until Nov 17. M. Peter is covering for him for half of that time.
- B. Caviness is out on paternity leave through early January. M. Peter will field any questions you might have for B. Caviness in the meantime.
- There have been no spill events and no water quality compliance issues.
- Temperature monitoring is ongoing at the same locations: Copper Canyon and Lake Scanewa Boat Launch.
- Tacoma is compiling co-variate water quality data as part of the Cowlitz Falls Downstream Passage Study and continuing water quality monitoring as part of the Mayfield Downstream Passage Study.

Related Projects

- North Taidnapam Boat Launch Improvements Project – The parking area, fishing trail and lower courtesy dock anchor are complete. The boat passenger ADA loading ramp for wheelchairs is expected to be complete February 2026.
- Kosmos oil clean up monitoring is on-going.
 - The Remedial Investigation (RI) report is in the final approval process with Ecology. Tacoma received a conditional approval.
 - Tacoma is already beginning work on a Feasibility Study (FS), which includes draft of alternatives and is due to Ecology 120 days after the RI report is accepted.

- The Feasibility Study will help inform the schedule for Riffe Lake Initiatives.
- After the Feasibility Study, Tacoma will create a draft Cleanup Action Plan (dCAP) followed by an Agreed Order Final Cleanup Action Plan.
- Tacoma has continued biweekly monitoring, which has turned up nothing new.
- The Onion Rock Bridge pier repair – Phase 2 (armoring to prevent future erosion) is in permitting. Tacoma is expecting US Army Corps of Engineers NWP coverage letter by next week. The project has ESA coverage under RRMP Programmatic BiOp. Tacoma is now only waiting on Mason County permits.
- Riffe Lake Fishing Area at Mossyrock Dam – There are concerns about rocks falling onto areas where people fish. Tacoma continues to assess mitigation options.

Fish Facilities Update by Eric Shoblom (Tacoma) (emailed 11/6)

Separator Returns:

Currently at the separator there are spring Chinook, fall Chinook, Coho, summer steelhead, cutthroat trout, and a few chum, sockeye, and pinks returning. The majority of the fish returning currently are coho, now near the fall peak or on the downhill side of the peak. Winter steelhead are expected any day, and the goal is to start collecting broodstock on December 1.

The coho hatchery is now a single, integrated program with an integration goal of 50% pNOB, which means Tacoma will transport integrated Coho to the Tilton and the upper Cowlitz basins. With the two hatchery programs in the past (Tilton segregated and upper Cowlitz River integrated), all of the integrated UCR fish went to the upper river and hatchery fish above hatchery need, went to the Tilton. Now, with the single Coho program, the integrated Coho will be transported to both the Upper Cowlitz and the Tilton. The transport goal is still to get up to 12,000 HORs to the Tilton. All NORs, other than brood needs, are shipped to their respective tributaries.

Cowlitz Release Sites:

All of our release sites are currently operational.

Update on the Mayfield Net Pens:

WDFW and Tacoma are on schedule with Phase II with plans to stock Coho in December.

Capital Projects: Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Remodel:

Tacoma is finalizing documents in the Water Supply Alternative Analysis. The consultant is working on some additionally requested reports as well as the report on the head tank and intake alternatives.

Working with their consultant, Tacoma hopes to have a decision on the water supply alternatives and which combination of approaches to move into design by Jan 15.

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

Mayfield Net Pen Assessment

C. Vaughn is taking the lead with the Phase II study design for assessment of the Coho net pens. S. Gibson is assisting, and both are organizing the marking and tagging of Coho in November so that they are ready to transfer juveniles into the net pens in December 2025.

Spring and fall Chinook DNA Collection

Staff are using best practices for collecting scale and DNA samples during broodstock collection. WDFW is currently reviewing a decision-tree to adaptively manage broodstock collection.

Transition Plan Updates

Tacoma is finishing up with the Coho transition plan presentation this month, and next month, WDFW will lead the first transition talk on steelhead.

Fall Chinook Limiting Factor Analysis

The M&E Committee is working on two initiatives, which will become FTC agenda items as their work develops:

- a framework for limiting factor analysis to understand influences on SARs. C. Vaughn is adapting a framework developed from NOAA data from a similar species in California.
- release strategies to minimize windows of high *C. shasta* infection rates, also led by C. Vaughn.

Life Cycle Model (LCM)

Tacoma has an open Request for Proposals (RFP) through November 18 for a third-party consultant to develop a LCM. Tacoma will work with WDFW to review proposals and select the consultant.

Tacoma and WDFW are making progress creating a centralized database. Tacoma is organizing what they have and asking what additional baseline data is needed. They will bring it to the M&E Committee for further development.

TWG Subcommittee Update by Jenise Bauman (Tacoma)

Downstream Adaptive Management Plan (DAMP)

S. Luis is leading the work to refresh the findings and actions in DAMP. This work will not change the decision-making framework. It was not ready yet to present this month, but expect to see this topic on the December FTC agenda.

Acoustic Tag (AT) study

They are organizing the data and discussing analysis methods.

Alternate Tagging

John Best is looking at incorporating alternate tagging strategies into his model.

Barrier Dam

TWG is discussing the electric fish fence on the barrier dam.

2026 Evaluations

This topic was originally on the agenda to discuss today, but it will be postponed to a future meeting so that TWG members have time to review and provide comments.

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

The Hatchery Associated Production (HAP) subcommittee has not gotten any requests for HAP proposal support, but they are available if needed. They received the near final 2026 calendar from LCFRB. Once it is final, they will distribute it. They are not planning to meet in December unless there is a request.

A Process Note about Subcommittees by Melora Shelton (Tacoma)

M. Shelton reminded people that each subcommittee creates their own meeting summaries using the same template for consistency and those are distributed to the FTC. The FTC can rely on those documents in order to keep the FTC meeting summaries high level. She will send these out and include reminders of upcoming meetings.

Action Item: M. Shelton will send subcommittee meetings summaries and upcoming meeting dates to the FTC. (done)

**Downstream Adaptive Management TWG – Cowlitz Falls Fish Facility (CFFF)
Summer Collection Summary by Sean Luis (Tacoma) (emailed 11/6)**

S. Luis presented collection data from this summer. They have data from across the year, but they are only presenting summer data since the spring collection data were presented previously.

This presentation includes results but not interpretations. Tacoma's consultant Four Peaks will prepare the final report, which will include an in-depth analysis and interpretation of results.

Coho Transition Plan: Determining Transition Triggers by Jenise Bauman and Scott Gibson (Tacoma)

J. Bauman and S. Gibson gave this presentation acknowledging that S. Luis and C. Vaughn worked with them to develop it and that many others were helpful in reviewing and improving it, including B. Glaser, T. Hillson, J. Serl and P. Rigdon.

Tacoma clarified that the Coho transition plan data and summary statements they presented last month were in draft form and the data is currently in review with WDFW. Next steps also include:

- working collaboratively to craft management actions and next steps
- reviewing suspected barriers and follow established barrier classification protocol
- developing a population Assessment Criteria.

L. Newhouse asked about the table that showed spring Chinook in Tilton. J. Bauman clarified that this table was cut and pasted from the Lower Columbia Recovery Plan and that just the starred rows are the ones that relate to transition planning. S. Gibson and B. Glaser clarified that the Lower Columbia Recovery Plan recognizes a spring Chinook population designation in the Tilton River however Tacoma is not transporting spring Chinook to the Tilton at this time.

B. Glaser recognized that he missed part of last month's coho transition plan presentation and appreciated the opportunity for WDFW to review the SARs and smolt production data, summary statements and next steps that was presented last month. He also said he was hopeful that as the Life Cycle Model is updated, they can establish biological reference points, like R_{max} , to see if it lines up with the recovery plan or newer objectives. It will be important to look at that before making recommendations and changes.

S. Manlow shared their recently completed region wide barrier inventory and prioritization project, which could help with assessment of open versus blocked habitat quantity and quality by species. <https://www.estuari/partnership.org/lower-columbia-barrier-assessment>

LCFRB also shared their decision support tool, designed to identify the most important individual barriers for correction. https://cdn.lcfrb.org/docs/library/LCEP_LCFRB_Lower-Columbia-Barrier-Inventory-Decision-Support-Tool...

J. Bauman thanked everyone who has been involved – staff at the separator, field staff and analysts – recognizing it has been a big lift over many years.

LCPUD updates

Presenter: Joe First

- Cowlitz Falls Units 1 and 2 are both back in service and operational.
- They are removing the baffle panels today in front of spill gates 2 and 3.
- There has been a slight increase in flows with the rains, but no debris at all in the trash racks. Usually the first fall rains bring debris or floating logs.
- The Packwood USGS gauge was not accurate by 4,000 cfs or more during the high flow event. LCPUD will contact USGS to check if it needs recalibration or what the problem might be.

Downstream Adaptive Management TWG – Discussion of draft charter by Jenise Bauman (Tacoma) (emailed 10/28)

J. Bauman walked through the draft DD 2025-08 for the TWG charter explaining that it follows the same structure as the M&E charter that the FTC recently approved. She had not received any comments or feedback since last month and will bring a final DD to FTC in December.

B. Glaser asked if the charter is a separate document or just embedded in the DD? M. Shelton confirmed that the charter is embedded in the DD, just like the M&E charter. She explained it is easiest to track if it is just in one place.

M. Shelton reminded everyone that this step of adopting charters is to formalize how the subcommittees work in alignment with FTC protocols. We will plan to revisit each charter annually. Updates to membership won't need a new DD, but we would want to initiate a new DD if there are big shifts.

Satellite Rearing Proposals (emailed 10/30)

Presenter: Sam Gibbons (Tacoma)

S. Gibbons walked through the draft DD 2025-07 and the satellite rearing program details document for CFFF extended collection period, raceways at the CFFF and the Mayfield net pens. He noted that there is an update with the start date for the first option. The CFFF extended collection period currently in the DD starts on March 15, 2026 and continues through December 23, 2026 as conditions allow. This is an extension of the current collection window of March 15th through September.

B. Glaser clarified that all future years the extended operations would be expected to start by March 8 and that they adjusted the timing for 2026 to start on March 15 for staffing reasons. He requested that the language in the DD and program detail be adjusted to state the regular start date as March 8 and then call-out any specific deviations, such as March 15 for 2026, and acknowledge that there may be other deviations in the future.

L. Newhouse asked about potential conflicts with the satellite rearing proposals and hatchery operations. E. Shobлом emphasized that they would aim to avoid or work through any potential conflicts with current hatchery operations. He said they still need to discuss the details with the M&E subcommittee and HOM group.

B. Sharp emphasized that the additional months of October, November and December are important for collecting various life stages.

B. Glaser emphasized the importance of the Program Details document for 2 reasons:

- It lays out the initial action for each of the 3 proposals, the why and the expected outcome for each.
- It describes adaptive management for each, specifically how the initial action could change over time based on data and conditions. For the CFFF extended operation, we want to tie it into the DAMP framework that TWG is developing.

S. Manlow responded to the first proposal that he likes the extended collection window because it provides a wider breadth of life history diversity and more outmigrants. However, he added it is unclear how FCE would be improved – how many fish released translate to how many are caught.

A. Luymes asked a clarification on the timing for proposal 2, raceways at Cowlitz Falls. S. Gibbons clarified that Tacoma would work to try to complete the FTC approval and permitting process so that they could start implementation on December 1. He emphasized that they hope this is possible, but they have no control over how long it might take to get approval from dam safety and FERC.

A. Luymes also asked whether proposal 3 is essentially continuing Phase 2 of the Mayfield Net Pen project into year 3 and beyond. S. Gibbons confirmed.

Discussion of proceeding with a decision given uncertainty with the federal shutdown

M. Shelton explained that she sent an email to Brad Thompson (USFWS) and Jennifer Quan (NOAA) on October 31, 2025 describing the situation that the Cowlitz FTC has been working toward a decision on satellite rearing. She provided materials and an invite to this meeting or any other follow-up meetings so that they are aware of the situation and our process to attempt to make a decision in December. She explained that they are willing to do an additional 7 days after the standard 7-day notice for a decision, but it is unclear how long the furlough will last or what their capacity is to manage pending issues. She will continue to keep them updated on this topic throughout the federal government furlough.

A. Luymes shared that he talked with Chad Brown, who offered his perspective. He felt that if the decision was less consequential then it could proceed, but if the decision was crucial to the functioning of the dam and the agreement, then it should be postponed as much as possible to allow for the federal services to participate in the decision. A. Luymes reflected that this is an important decision and asked what are the risks if we postpone it until the furlough is over and federal representatives can be informed on the issue?

S. Gibbons responded that it is difficult for Tacoma to invest in infrastructure and staffing to move these proposals forward without a clear decision. For the second

proposal, permitting and construction of the new water line would be delayed. CFFF extended operations and the Mayfield Net Pen probably have more flexibility, but it is good to plan even a year in advance for staffing and coordination with current operations. With less planning time, it might be harder to start implementation in 2026. Sam also described the importance of advanced notice to hatchery managers as these decisions significantly impact marking strategies, space planning and broodstock collection.

B. Glaser asked if the part of the Settlement Agreement on satellite rearing speaks specifically to the role of the federal services. P. Miller and others didn't think that the federal services were named specifically in the FERC agreement, or Settlement Agreement.

B. Glaser emphasized that the longer this decision and its implementation is delayed, the less benefit there will be for recovery. He also noted that the federal services have had limited capacity to engage even before the federal furlough and that they have selectively engaged in the topics that were of highest priority to them. He noted it is important to keep Brad Thompson and Jennifer Quan updated and continue to provide opportunities for them to weigh in on how we should proceed.

B. Glaser stated that the DD includes the language 'pending approval of FERC and the federal services.' He asked if Tacoma would be willing to move forward with the investments and implementation with the risk that the services would come back and ask for changes?

M. Shelton agreed that each FTC member organization wants to be able to speak for themselves and not assume what other FTC voting representatives would say.

M. Peter responded that we are keeping the services leadership apprised of the situation and FERC is the senior regulator in this situation. Tacoma has gotten internal and external legal advice that we can proceed with the additional 7-day extended voting period. It would be up to FERC to review this and be the stop if they are not comfortable moving forward.

M. Shelton thanked everyone for engaging in this discussion and being so thoughtful about how to proceed given the federal shutdown. She encouraged everyone that there are still some areas to continue digging into and to contact herself or S. Gibbons to join those meetings.

Action Items

- Tacoma and WDFW will continue to develop the program details for the 3 proposals. A. Luymes (Ecology) will join them. Other FTC members are welcome to join and should contact M. Shelton or S. Gibbons for meeting info.

- E. Shoblom will meet with anyone who has questions or would like more information on the proposals.
- S. Gibbons will incorporate feedback into DD 2025-07 and supporting documents to send to the FTC before the December meeting.
- M. Shelton will keep Brad Thompson (USFWS) and Jennifer Quan (NOAA) apprised of our progress with satellite rearing and opportunities to participate throughout the federal shutdown.

Public Comment Period #1 - Agenda related

L. Pryor shared a few comments:

- He shared his perception that the satellite rearing discussion seems rushed, which is complicated by the federal shutdown but still seems strange after 25 years of trying to figure it out. It feels like there is not enough time to digest the options.
- He appreciated J. Bauman's and S. Gibson's presentation and looks forward to seeing more of the data. He asked if they compare their SARs to others in the Columbia basin or coastal areas for coho.
- He went fishing a couple of weeks ago, launched from the boat launch below the barrier dam. There were only a dozen or so people fishing and no other boats. C. Vaughn reported 6-15% for Coho harvest at the September FTC meeting, but L. Pryor feels it is probably lower. Also, people fishing that he talked to noticed the percentage of jacks seemed high. He looked it up and, in the last few years with Coho, the jacks have been 40-77% of adults. In wild populations, it should be about 3-5% jacks. This needs to be figured out.

Jack Tipping shared a few comments:

- He expressed his agreement with 2 of the satellite rearing proposals – the Cowlitz Falls rearing and Mayfield net pens – but he felt the extended collection at CFFF was not commensurate with the agreement.
- He asked what happened to the proposal for a chum spawning channel. There was a meeting with WDFW 3 years ago, when they said an assessment was imminent.
- He shared that one CCA member is a guide for spring-run cutthroat, who said it was the worst year in recent memory. They are all hoping rearing conditions will improve.
- He stated that E. Shoblom said because of returning numbers of hatchery fall Chinook, the Cowlitz is closed again for fall Chinook retention. Then, why was there a gill net below the mouth of the river? He saw an agency letter that justified it because there were no CWTs recovered in the mainstem.

Responses

- T. Hillson responded that the chum project is in the scoping phase. It is moving and is under contract. There will be a public meeting later this month, and J. Tipping's name is on the invite list along with other interested members of the public.
- S. Gibson responded that they realize fall Chinook adult returns and SARs are significantly low. They are in the process of working with the M&E subcommittee to look at reasons why and different release strategies or sites of release to address it. They have to do the full assessment before they make changes to show that they are expected to produce benefits. They are well aware of the problem and working toward solutions. E. Shobлом added they put CWTs on fall Chinook annually.
- B. Glaser confirmed that is what the agency letter stated and that gillnet fishing was allowed in the mainstem because none of the Cowlitz CWT fish showed up there. It could be because they weren't caught, they weren't there, or the timing was off.
- M. Shelton responded on the timing for satellite rearing. She explained that Tacoma has been working diligently for over a year to come up with these 3 proposals for satellite rearing, including collaboration with WDFW and others. However, she acknowledged that the public wouldn't have known that because the topic was just included in the FTC agenda in October. She explained that they are following the 3-meeting protocol for making a decision and it is not their intention to rush it. They are hoping to make a decision within the 3 months so that they can start implementation in 2026 rather than waiting another year. That timing is complicated by the federal shutdown. She thanked L. Pryor for sharing his perception.

Topics for December 2, 2025 FTC Meeting on Teams

Steelhead Transition Plan; Final DDs for: Satellite Rearing & TWG charter; draft DD for TWG 2026 Evaluations and Usual Updates: Hydro Status, Water Quality, Fish Facilities, M&E, TWG, HAP, and LCPUD

Public Comment Period #2 – Any topic

L. Pryor shared several questions and comments:

- He asked about the FHMP. M. Bleich recently submitted an annual report to FERC, which L. Pryor reviewed. On page 12, M. Bleich noted that FERC had not approved the FHMP, which M. Bleich signed in 2020 and filed with FERC. What happened that it's been 5 years and hasn't been approved? When is the next one due? Is it every 6 years?
- He reviewed the CRR Presentation by M. Shelton to the TPU Board on 10/22/25. It was a great report. He was just curious about the funding awarded to date. The

Cowlitz Tribe received \$3.7 million of \$4.9 million awarded. Only two grants were awarded to Lewis County groups, none of which were local groups. Cascade Forest Conservancy, based in Vancouver, was one of them. Isn't it strange that so much funding went to the Cowlitz Tribe when they are suing Tacoma?

- He emphasized his concerns about too much focus on pounds of fish produced or fish released instead of harvestable returns. You could produce millions of pounds of fall Chinook, spring Chinook or steelhead and still not see an increase in harvestable returns. He would like to see more focus on SARs.
- He emphasized his concern about seal and sea lion predation in the months of March through June. Will there be any changes in release strategies to try to minimize predation?

Responses

- M. Shelton responded about the CRR funding that all applicants go through the same process established by LCFRB. The funded organizations are selected based on the likelihood of benefit to salmon. Cowlitz Tribe has been successful partnering with the US Forest Service on very large scale projects. Other sponsors work at much smaller scales. Recovery benefit comes with a diversity of project scales. All proposals go through the same vetting and approval processes. The HAP Subcommittee provides hatchery associated project development support for any eligible organization.
- M. Peter and E. Shoblom responded that Tacoma submitted their FHMP but do not have control over final approval from FERC. For the FHMP, they received a verbal approval. They did their due diligence and moved forward in 2020 with implementing the plan with transparency with FERC. S. Gibbons responded that he believes the FHMP needs to be updated every 10 years.
- S. Gibson responded that they are aware of the problem of seal and sea lion predation, but similar to his earlier response, they need to wait and evaluate all parts of their programs before making changes to their rearing and release strategies. Because of all the work that is needed for this step, they likely won't be able to make changes in 2026. They are looking into it and will work to address it.

Meeting Evaluation

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

- Helpful feedback for the facilitator on approving meeting summaries.
- Flexibility on the timing of topics to accommodate different schedules.
- Helpful feedback on presentations and draft DDs.
- Thoughtful conversation about decision making during the federal shutdown.

Josua's Inspirational Quote

“Patience is not simply the ability to wait – it’s how we behave while we’re waiting.” – Joyce Meyer

Closing Remarks

M. Shelton emphasized gratitude for all the thoughtful conversations today. It has been so helpful to talk through issues and put forth the best solutions. She expressed appreciation for everyone's time attending these meetings.