

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

February 3, 2026 from 9:30am-1:45pm

**FTC Representative Attendees**

**Tacoma:** Melora Shelton

**WDFW:** Bryce Glaser

**Ecology:** Andrew Luymes

**TU:** Jonathan Stumpf

**Additional Attendees**

**BPA:** Michael Boyles

**LCPUD:** Joe First, David Plotz, Laura Wolfe

**LCFRB:** Amelia Johnson

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

**WDFW:** Brian Gale, 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) and Jack Tipping (Coastal Conservation Association)

---

**2026 FTC Meeting Dates**

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)

**Review of Agenda and Action Items**

We reviewed the agenda and action items. We postponed the agenda topic on TWG's 2026 Evaluations until next month since more discussion is still needed before finalizing DD 2026-01.

We are going to remove the ongoing action items from the back of the agenda each month and only include those from the most recent meeting. J. Arnold will also include the action items from the meeting in the body of the email when she sends out the presentations after each month's meeting. That way, everyone will see any near-term review timelines and action items for easy reference.

## Approval of Last Month's Meeting Summary

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

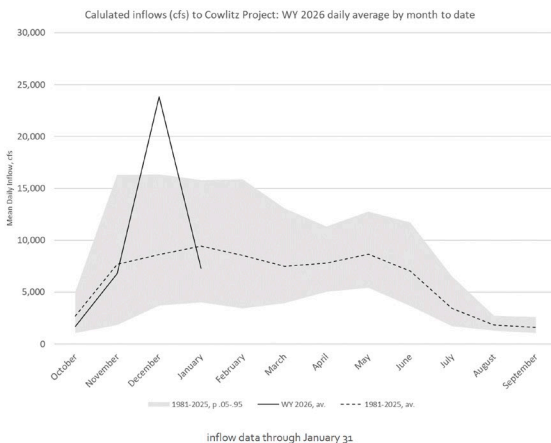
## Updates

### Announcements

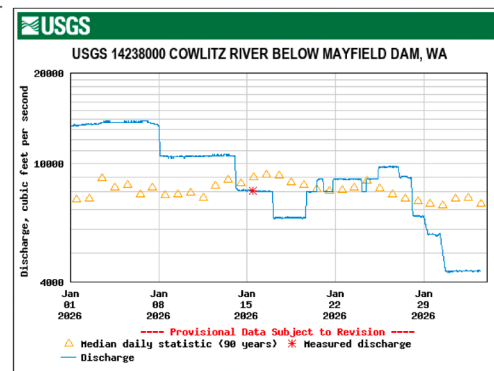
- No announcements

### Hydro Operations Update by Melora Shelton (Tacoma) (emailed 2/2)

- Except for December storms, inflows are below normal.
- Reservoir managed to above typical elevations (>736 ft)
- Snowpack extremely low
- Outflow currently 4,370 cfs, 2,989 cfs min
- Forecast for weekend rain, inflows may depend on snow levels.
- Climate outlook is neutral – no precipitation/temperature tilts.



### Outflow



Current (2/1) 4,370 cfs. Winter min reset to 2,989 cfs 12/4. No ramp or flow deviations.

### Winter-Spring Outlook

- Very low seasonal snowpack, unlikely to recover
- Uncertain spring runoff, may depend on spring precipitation
- Plan to keep reservoir higher than usual
- Variable outflows to manage reservoir
- Likely to consult on spring flow reduction

### Water Quality Update by Matt Peter (Tacoma)

- There have been no spill events since last month's update.
- Temperature monitoring is ongoing at the same locations in perpetuity: Copper Canyon and Lake Scanewa Boat Launch.
- Tacoma is expanding their water temperature monitoring complex in the upper watershed and each reservoir:
  - Re-establishing lost or damaged loggers

- Establishing vertical arrays in the Mossyrock (Riffe) and Mayfield forebays
- Finalizing a letter and report to Ecology on TDG, which will be sent out shortly. The report highlights periods when the 110% compliance criteria was exceeded, which occurred during periods above the 7Q10 for each location as well as the shoulders. Per Tacoma's TDG monitoring plan, a full TDG report will be provided to Ecology in October covering all required TDG monitoring events throughout the Water Year. The intent of monitoring plan is to collect data to inform development of a model that allows Tacoma to mitigate TDG concerns when spill occurs. This includes a suite of water quality parameters and spill pathways (gates, etc.) No GBT/GBD (Gas Bubble Trauma/Gas Bubble Disease) was observed in fish by staff. Prior to spilling events, the Denitro tower at the Salmon Hatchery was activated.

### *Related projects*

- Kosmos Cleanup: Tacoma received the draft feasibility study with alternatives for cleanup. They will discuss it with their senior leadership then submit it to Ecology. After that, Tacoma will develop a draft then final action plan.
- North Taidnapam Boat Launch Improvements Project: The boat passenger ADA loading ramp for wheelchairs is the last part of the project to be implemented. It is expected to be completed by the end of February. Once this is completed, Tacoma will update their recreation plan and send it to FERC.
- The Onion Rock Bridge pier repair: Phase 2 (armoring to prevent future erosion) is waiting on Mason County permits. Tacoma was concerned about scouring from the high flow event. They sent a diver down last week and found minimal scouring. They are hopeful they can complete the pier armoring within the work window.
- Large woody debris (LWD) management: Tacoma is developing updated LWD management plans to improve environmental outcomes and increase the availability of material for habitat restoration projects. This is an internal product, but Tacoma can share with the FTC once completed.

### *Feedback*

- M. Peter asked if these water quality updates are helpful, or if it would be a better use of time to provide updates to individuals partners who are involved or interested. For example, he provides regular updates to Ecology.
- J. Holowatz responded that he appreciates these updates as a one-stop shop.
- There were no other comments. Tacoma will continue with these updates and remain open to feedback about how they are done.

### Fish Facilities Update by Eric Shoblom (Tacoma) (emailed 2/4)

Most fish returning to the separator are winter-run steelhead with some Coho. This is typically the slowest time of the year with returns increasing in March.

M. Shelton shared that there has been a backlog in sending out the adult separator returns. She will aim to send them out this week.

Tacoma will be doing their normal Annual Ladder Shutdown for 1-2 days during the week of February 9th. This shutdown provides the opportunity to inspect the fence crowders, the holding pool, pumps, and the ladder. Ecology (Andrew) and NOAA (Amy) have been notified through email, and WDFW hatchery staff have been notified verbally.

#### *Cowlitz Release Sites:*

Currently, the Cispus release site is not available for use as the river has once again migrated to the opposite shore. Tacoma is releasing at Copper Canyon Creek site for now, which is located at the mouth of the Cispus at the head end of Lake Scanewa.

#### *Update on the Mayfield Net Pens:*

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

#### *Capital Projects: Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Remodel:*

Tacoma met with consultants for the Water Supply Analysis Workshop last week and created an initial evaluation of options. Next, individuals will provide the consultants more detailed data in order to drill down to a suite of preferred options, including which water sources are to be developed, to what extent, and when.

#### *Satellite Rearing*

Tacoma met with engineering staff and consultants to start design work on CFFF raceways including:

- Debris handling upgrades
- Gravity Intake blow off upgrade
- New Raceway supply pipeline
- New offline settling pond

The M&E and HOM group will discuss the Satellite Rearing Fish Program Review during the M&E meeting on February 17.

#### *Mayfield Juvenile Bypass System (JBS) Remodel:*

Tacoma is onboarding a new Project Manager to work with the new contractor to complete a 30%, 60%, and 90% design.

#### *Discussion:*

- J. Holowatz noted that some of the Chinook that arrived at the separator in January were adipose fin clipped and some were not. Did Tacoma collect genetic samples to make sure the fish are transported to the right place? S. Gibson responded, yes, they sampled 3 of the later Chinook.
- J. Serl asked if Tacoma has a timeline for the Mayfield rebuild to share. E. Shoblom responded that they don't yet have the contract in place with the consultant who will develop the timeline. They will keep everyone updated on progress.

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

### *Life Cycle Model (LCM)*

Tacoma is working through the contracting paperwork to get the consultant onboard. They now have a shared database for the Upper Cowlitz winter steelhead. Tacoma, WDFW, and the consultants will be able to access it and upload data. If it works well, they will use the same database to bring in data for other populations in the Big Table.

Tacoma is working to schedule a kick-off meeting with the consultant and the subcommittee working on LCM.

### *Ultrasound Technology*

Tacoma is looking into the feasibility of testing ultrasound technology to more reliably determine the sex of early spring Chinook to increase the accuracy of broodstock counts.

### *Transition Plan Updates*

The subcommittee is mapping out talks for future months. S. Gibson and J. Bauman are sorting data for the fall Chinook presentation at the March FTC in-person meeting.

### *Cowlitz Annual Program Review and Science Conference*

There will be an update on this topic later in this meeting.

### *Mayfield Net Pens Assessment – Phase II*

There will be an update on this topic later in this meeting.

### *Limiting Factors Analysis*

The subcommittee is working on understanding the limiting factors that impact rearing and river release of HOR fall Chinook.

## TWG Subcommittee Update by Jenise Bauman (Tacoma)

TWG is meeting monthly and has been focused on the 2026 Evaluations. They will take another month to reconcile comments on DD 2026-01, then bring it back to the FTC in March.

The CFFF conducted opercle punching on spring Chinook last year and will repeat it this year, potentially with differential punches to understand the rate at which fish are falling back from different upstream release locations.

They have seen more Western toads in the collector. Tacoma is reviewing their permit and protocols and looking into toad behaviors to confirm the best course of action.

The subcommittee is looking at alternative tagging, comparing HSI (Habitat Suitability Index) model to what FTC is doing.

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

The HAP subcommittee is available to support any inquiries or requests for workshops from prospective applicants. None have been received so far.

The HAP subcommittee will meet this month for their annual charter review.

A. Johnson (LCFRB) added that LCFRB staff have been talking to a couple of applicants about habitat focused projects in the basin. Applications are due in two months.

### Update on Right Bank Gravel Pile by S. Gibson

As a follow-up from questions at January FTC meeting, S. Gibson walked through a series of photos of the right bank gravel pile. He explained it is hard to quantify how much gravel was moved, but it appears to be significant as there is now an exposed root system of about 6-8' roots, which was formerly covered with gravel. It looks like most of the gravel on the island downstream was also moved. It will be hard to tell where the gravel landed until spring.

---

### **2026 Science Conference and Annual Program Review Meeting by Jenise Bauman (Tacoma)**

The meeting will be April 22 10am-5pm in-person at the Chehalis Veteran's Museum with a virtual option. J. Bauman scrolled through the draft agenda. She is still reaching out to potential speakers aiming to finalize the agenda in mid-February. When it is ready, it will be posted on the public website and distributed by email.

---

### **Winter Steelhead Transition Plan: Follow-up by John Serl (WDFW) (emailed 2/4)**

- J. Serl presented winter steelhead data in the context of goals for the population:
- Produce one lower Cowlitz segregated hatchery program and increase size of integrated upper basin Integrated programs
  - Promote abundance-building in the upper Cowlitz and Tilton basins and lower Cowlitz tributaries
  - Shift the run timing earlier for the segregated program.
  - Within a specific year, shortfalls for any program will be made up in another program to meet total production goals. The most likely shift will be from the integrated programs to the segregated program.

He emphasized that as population abundance increases in the upper watershed, we should approach pNOB program goals with a 10% mining rate; however, this will take some time. He also highlighted that NOR returns have been consistently higher than

HORs transported to the Upper Cowlitz Basin (i.e. Upper Cowlitz and Cispus populations). They are looking to increase early fishing opportunities as part of the effort to establish a protracted run timing for the segregated program. 2026 is the first year of returns from First Arrival Brood collection. Fishing has generally been better in January although the high flows in December kept people off the river at some times. The early return signal in 2026 is most likely a response to changes in hatchery practices, but it could have been influenced by the high December flows, or possibly a very large return. There are a lot of unknowns when it comes to ocean conditions and their impacts on winter steelhead.

Next steps include:

- Continue effective smolt passage
- Continue revised hatchery programs and assess results as fish return
- Continue monitoring program
- Develop Integrated Population Model, then utilize to assess potential pathways forward
- Develop and confirm assessment criteria for triggers

Discussion:

- B. Glaser clarified that the returns to the separator do not include harvest and that there's probably a higher harvest rate in the lower watershed with some harvest in the upper watershed. He emphasized that this still provides a useful snapshot of returns at the separator.
- J. Serl agreed. The recent harvest rate on hatchery winter steelhead in the lower Cowlitz River has been about 75%. Therefore, multiplying returns to the separator by 4 approximates the total return size to the Cowlitz. He also emphasized that achieving the 50% pNOB goal is the lowest priority in the near-term after meeting production goals, providing demographic replacement and not exceeding 10% mining rates.

---

### **Coho Net Pen Update by Chris Vaughn (Tacoma) (*emailed 2/4*)**

C. Vaughn presented on the success of moving juvenile Coho from the hatchery to the net pens highlighting a very low 0.1% tag shed rate and an average of 0.13% mortality, compared with 2.2% mortality total in the hatchery over 2 months. Results will be presented to the FTC this summer.

---

### **LCPUD Updates by Joe First (LCPUD)**

- Cowlitz Falls Units 1 and 2 are both available.
- There is debris behind the trash racks from the December 2025 high flow events and previous build up. LCPUD will hire a contractor March 2-27 to remove as much as they can.

- They lost some turbidity sensors and are working to replace them.
  - They were able to get some turbidity data during the high flow event until the sensors were lost. The control panel on the North bank was knocked over. They had a spare panel that they can install in its place. They hope to install it higher on the bank.
- 

## Public Comment Period #1 - Agenda related

L. Pryor shared some questions and comments:

- Are forecasts for 2026 springer returns out? Is the forecast for the springer run through May or October?
  - J. Holowatz responded that yes, the spring Chinook forecasts are out and available. Every year they produce a CKL (Cowlitz Kalama Lewis) fact sheet, this document includes hatchery releases, brood goals, and calculated harvest. It will be released to the Columbia River Recreational Fishing Advisory Board tomorrow, and then he can share with the FTC.
  - The 2026 pre-season forecast will be similar to the actual 2025 return for the entire spring return.
  - He referenced J. Bauman's previous comment about the importance of sex identification to meet broodstock goals. Run type identification is especially important when spring and fall Chinook intermix; this is especially important to make sure they are transported to the right places.
- When will the APR agenda be posted on the public website?
  - Tacoma is working on finalizing the agenda and aims to publish it on the website the third week of February.
- Who is the target audience for the APR meeting? Is the purpose to educate the public or just to this group? He has attended a lot of the APR meetings, and they are pretty cool.
  - J. Serl, E. Shoblom, and J. Bauman responded that the APR started in 1996 – 30 years ago! It was originally focused only on fish at Cowlitz Falls to share radiotelemetry data with all agencies and other interested parties. It's evolved over the years and now includes the lower Cowlitz also. The APR used to be its own meeting, but now it is held the same day as the science conference to educate people who might not be as familiar with these topics to inform any comments they might make on APR.
- Does satellite rearing affect hatchery production?
  - E. Shoblom responded that two of the satellite rearing programs are designed to grow Chinook larger so they are releasing at 5 fpp instead of 12 fpp, which should theoretically raise SARs in the upper watershed. The Mayfield Net Pens in particular are moving coho from the hatchery to the net pens to make more room in the hatchery for spring Chinook. The growth of the fish while within the satellite facilities is not counted against the 650,000 lb. cap.

- With respect to the earlier winter steelhead returns, the fisherman haven't caught on yet. 70% harvest is probably a high estimate. As B. Glaser pointed out, it's important that SARs incorporate harvest impact.
- The TPU Board met to reauthorize CRR and Hatchery Associated Production. Can you explain what they did? What does Hatchery Associated Production mean?
  - M. Shelton responded that in 2019, the TPU Board authorized funding for CRR and HAP. Now 6 years later, the Board reauthorized the allocation of this funding through the end of the license period with the FTC as the entity that makes decisions about this funding. There were no changes to this policy. It was just a renewal of the existing authorities. One of the ways that the funding can be spent is with Hatchery Associated Production.

R. LeDuc shared some comments:

- Referring to J. Serl's presentation on winter steelhead where he said there were a lot of unknowns with ocean conditions, R. LeDuc asked if he was referring to predation by birds and pinnipeds? Will there be a predation study? The predators are increasing in population and it is impacting the returns.
  - J. Serl responded that there have been predation studies in the past on the mainstem, not necessarily the lower Cowlitz, by the US Army Corps and others, especially in the 2000-2010s. He is not familiar with any more recent studies. He emphasized that all fish coming out of the river corridor are affected the same. When he spoke of ocean conditions, he was referring to the fact that once winter steelhead smolts leave the river, it is unknown where they go, besides knowing some make it all the way to Japan. The NOAA spotlight program has a little data on them at sea.
  - J. Holowatz responded that they put data from the NOAA spotlight chart for ocean conditions in the CKL document that is about to come out. He emphasized that different species respond differently to ocean conditions.
  - L. Pryor emphasized that you need to do comparative SARs to see how the Cowlitz is doing.
  - J. Holowatz responded that you can do comparatives, but it also gets complicated to interpret them. On some systems like the lower Columbia, there aren't dams or weirs to count how many fish get through. We have to do it in season with hatchery arrivals. There are different dams and survival rates when you start looking at systems above Bonneville. The co-variates start to make comparatives difficult to interpret pretty quickly.

---

### **Topics for March 3, 2026 FTC Meeting In-Person and on Teams**

The potential topics include: 2026 Annual Program Review: proposed programs (DD step 1), Downstream Technical Work Group – 2026 Evaluations (DD step 3); Fall

Chinook Transition Plan, FTC Work Plan / Protocols, Charter Development (CRR HAP), and Usual Updates.

P. Miller asked about the timing for comments on the FTC protocols. M. Shelton clarified the timing and that we do not need a DD for changes to the protocols.

M. Shelton clarified that there will be additional opportunities for public comment on the APR specifically over the next 3 FTC meetings in addition to our regular FTC agenda items where the public can share feedback to FTC or on any topic. E. Shoblom added that they will be careful to document public comments related to the APR process and make improvements from how they documented comments last year.

**Action Item:** Send any comments on FTC protocols to M. Shelton by February 17 so that she can incorporate comments into an updated draft that goes out with the March FTC meeting materials.

---

## **Public Comment Period #2 – Any topic**

J. Tipping asked, Who decides the activities of the M&E Subcommittee? In the past, he commented that TPU needed a strong research group. He is glad to see that they have hired people for hatchery research. He proposed a grading experiment that would take 3-5 days of people's time to increase returns. He can recruit volunteers and only needs a small amount of B. Gale's time to coordinate. He was told that it wasn't possible because the hatchery remodel was imminent. That was 9 years ago. He emphasized it would be helpful if Jonathan Stumpf would help weigh in on behalf of sports fisherman. He submitted it as a proposal to CRR and was told to take it to the M&E subcommittee. He feels like he was tricked since M&E haven't acted on it. Should he take it back to CRR?

- E. Shoblom responded that the M&E Subcommittee as a group decides what they will work on and prioritizes the biggest data gaps as per guidance from the FHMP and the M&E plan. Specifically, FTC directs M&E, then M&E develops a proposed work plan for FTC to approve. M&E has some flexibility to make decisions on smaller things, but big decisions are made by FTC.
- M. Shelton recognized his frustration and expressed apologies for it. She reflected back that he brought an out-of-the-box idea, and they suggested to bring it to the HAP Subcommittee team to see if made sense as a CRR proposal. After a lot of discussion with J. Tipping and the HAP Subcommittee, they found that there was so much complexity with how to set it up and how to fit it in with the rest of the hatchery operations that it would be most effective to look at it as part of the larger program rather than an external, independent project. These ideas now sit in M&E for Tacoma and WDFW to take up knowing they have a lot of other priorities that will need to come first. She emphasized Tacoma and WDFW have been intrigued by the ideas because of the potential for recovery benefit.

L. Pryor shared some comments:

- He emphasized that the APR process is part of Tacoma’s licensure and the comments either pro or con are a part of that, so it is more than just a science conference.
- He referenced the recent American Fisheries Society webinar, which was sent to the FTC, on angler engagement as a critical component of adaptive management. He emphasized the importance of angler engagement.
- He also referenced the Northwest Power Conservation Council meeting tomorrow in Yakima. NWPCC has goals of 2-6% SARs of adult returns. What does success look like for Cowlitz?
- He highlighted his work with independent hatcheries and substantial growth rates with optimal water quality. They are still prototyping, but he would like to share with S. Gibbons and S. Gibson.

R. LeDuc echoed support for J. Tipping’s proposal that would require 3-4 days of labor and would increase adult steelhead returns.

---

## **Meeting Evaluation**

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

- Nice job being flexible with agenda topics and the timing of updates.
  - The meeting was efficient and effective.
  - Good humor and laughter – The 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary APR meeting is cause for celebration with ‘extra cheese’ on our pizza.
  - Teams worked well.
  - The opening question, “What is your favorite part of the day?” was a fun one. Hearing the responses, you can feel this is a group of happy people.
- 

## **Josua’s Inspirational Quote**

“The charm of fishing is that it is the pursuit of what is elusive but attainable, a perpetual series of occasions for hope.” John Buchan

---

## **Closing Remarks**

Thanks to everyone for a smooth, collaborative meeting. Keep up the good work.