Cowlitz Fish Technical Committee **2026-02**
Decision Documentation

Project Name	2026 Annual Program Review – Hatchery Production
Date Proposal Submitted	4/7/2026
Date of Requested Decision	May 5th, 2026
Requested By	Eric Shoblom
Date of Decision[1]	May 5th, 2026

[1] Decision will become final if committee members who were not present at this meeting do not oppose this proposed decision within 7 days

FTC Decision and Justification

The FTC supports the following decision based on the 2026 APR process. Tacoma Power will produce the following programs in the Cowlitz Hatchery Complex for brood year 2026 of Coho, fall Chinook Salmon, Summer Steelhead and Cutthroat Trout. Winter steelhead and spring Chinook Salmon goals will take effect in the 2027 brood year as is typical of the 2020 Fisheries and Hatchery Management Update (FHMP) Annual Project Review (APR) process.

- Fall Chinook: 3,500,000
- Spring Chinook: 1,657,000
- Coho: 2,178,000
- Winter Steelhead: 644,500
- Summer Steelhead: 650,000
- Cutthroat Trout: 100,599

Members Present: FTC members present represented Bryce Glaser (WDFW), Andrew Luymes (Ecology), Jonathan Stumpf (Trout Unlimited) and Melora Shelton (Tacoma Power).

Proposed Decision or Consideration

The 2026 Cowlitz Complex hatchery programs are proposed below (Table 1). The programs are in alignment with FHMP transition plans that have been approved by the FTC (DD# 2022 02).

Overall program release numbers and sizes at release remain largely unchanged. However, there are a few notable changes. The Mayfield Coho net pen pilot project will transition to a full program in 2027 as a Tacoma Satellite Rearing Facility. Additionally, the Cowlitz Falls Fish Facility will receive spring Chinook from the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery and rear and release them as an additional Satellite Rearing Facility. See the Satellite Rearing Facility Decision Document (DD# 2025-07) and the 2025 APR Decision Document (DD# 2025-03) for background on these recent program changes. Recently the Friends of the Cowlitz acquired net pens in order to accommodate a Summer Steelhead and Cutthroat Trout program. This is the first year in several years that this program has been reinstated. See Table 2 for the associated program details. Finally, in order to maintain

overall Complex release poundage under the 650k lb cap, the 2026 BY Cutthroat Trout release size may be reduced by as much as .4 fpp. See Background for additional information.

Table 1 represents the proposed program goals for the 2026 brood year of Coho, fall Chinook Salmon, Summer Steelhead, spring Chinook and Cutthroat Trout. Winter steelhead goals will take effect in the 2027 brood year as is typical of the APR process.

Table 1: APR Decision Years for Hatchery Production

Species	2021 APR Goal	2022 APR Goal	2023 APR Goal	2024 APR Goal	2025 APR Goal	2026 APR Proposal
Fall Chinook	3,500,000	3,500,000	3,500,000	3,500,000	3,500,000	3,500,000
Spring Chinook	1,738,529	1,738,529	1,678,000	1,678,000	1,657,000	1,657,000
Coho	2,178,000	2,178,000	2,178,000	2,178,000	2,178,000	2,178,000
Winter Steelhead	647,000	647,000	644,500	644,500	644,500	644,500
Summer Steelhead	650,000	650,000	650,000	650,000	650,000	650,000
Cutthroat	100,599	100,599	100,599	100,599	100,599	100,599

Table 2 depicts a detailed breakdown of the proposed programs and their poundage.

Table 2: 2026 APR Details

Hatchery	Species	Seg/Int	Program	Total	FPP	Pounds
Trout Hatchery	Summer Run Steelhead	SEG	625,000	650,000	5.5	113,636
	Summer Run Steelhead (FOC)*	SEG	25,000		5.5	4,545
	Cutthroat Trout (FOC)*[1]	SEG	10,599	100,599	4.4	2,409
	Cutthroat Trout[1]	SEG	90,000		4.4	20,455
	Lower Winter Steelhead	SEG	308,500	644,500	7	44,071
	Tilton Winter Steelhead	INT	100,000		7	14,286
	Upper Cow Winter Steelhead	INT	236,000		7	33,714
Salmon Hatchery	Spring Chinook	SEG	700,000	1,657,000	5	140,000
	Spring Chinook	SEG	420,000		8	52,500
	Spring Chinook	SEG	487,000		12	40,583
	Spring Chinook to Cowlitz Falls	SEG	50,000		12	4,167
	Fall Chinook	INT	3,500,000	3,500,000	80	43,750
	Coho	INT	1,928,000	2,178,000	15	128,533
	Coho to Net Pens	INT	250,000		35	7,143
					Total	649,793

Satellite Rearing[2]	Species	Seg/Int	Program	Total	FPP	Pounds
Mayfield Net Pens	Coho	INT	250,000	Included above	15	9,524
Cowlitz Falls Rearing	Spring Chinook	SEG	50,000	Included above	5	5,833
					Total	15,357

[1] Denotes that: Cutthroat trout will be adjusted, in season, to a release size of up to 4fpp if program shortages within the complex are projected to be below the 650K cap.

[2] Denotes that: Satellite rearing growth is above and beyond the 650k lb cap.

Background

See Table 2 for program specific information.

This year's proposal includes a reduction of release size to the Cutthroat Trout program from 4fpp to 4.4fpp. This reduction ensures that the overall poundage within the Cowlitz Complex will remain under the 650k lb. cap. However, should any of the hatchery programs project a shortage of pounds at release, said shortage pounds may be transferred to the cutthroat to increase their release size, up to 4.0 fpp commensurately.

This 2026 APR was based on data inputs from the FTC and public feedback as required in the FHMP. All FTC meetings are open to the public. Public involvement included:

- March 3rd FTC meeting (public in attendance), APR goals presented.
- April 7th FTC meeting (public in attendance), APR Draft Decision Document introduced.
- April 22nd APR meeting (public in attendance), feedback requested and discussed
- May 5th FTC meeting (public in attendance), APR Proposed Final Decision Document presented and discussed for approval

This document represents the results of the FTC discussion and final decision at the May 5th FTC meeting (public in attendance).

Coordination Need

Tacoma, WDFW, and the FTC will coordinate around any changing program needs and limitations due to actual adult returns and other factors. Shortfalls or over production of juvenile hatchery salmonids will be reported to the FTC, as well as the anticipated impacts for adult returns in subsequent years.

Satellite rearing facility and Friends of the Cowlitz net pen performance will be regularly shared with the FTC to ensure program success and collaboration.

Public Feedback log: See attached.

Other public comments were heard during feedback sessions but no other direct request to modify the APR goals proposed in this document.

Summary of Potential Impacts
The hatchery programs have remained static for the past several years, with very few changes to release numbers or size at release. Satellite Rearing programs may result in impacts yet unknown and will be monitored regularly, per the established protocols developed jointly by Tacoma and WDFW. FOC net pens may result in impacts yet unknown and will be monitored regularly, per an agreement and established protocols developed with WDFW.

Cowlitz Hydroelectric Project
FERC No. 2016
Cowlitz Fisheries Technical Committee

Annual Program Review
Summary of Public Comments
Received as of April 30, 2026
Prepared by Jennifer Arnold, FTC Facilitator

Comments in black with *responses in blue italics*	Commenter	Date first received
Process Comments		
What are we supposed to comment on? *The APR process sets Tacoma's hatchery production goals for the year. Tacoma starts with a proposal for the number and size of fish they will produce but also welcomes comments. Other more detailed aspects of hatchery operations will not be decided in this process although comments about timing of releases may be relevant if they affect release size and total poundage.*	J. Tipping	3/3/26 FTC meeting
Are there any consequences if Tacoma comes up short of the 650,000 lbs. target for hatchery production? Who holds Tacoma accountable? *Tacoma has a requirement to produce up to 650,000 lbs. and does their best to reach that target, but sometimes they fall short due to conditions outside of their control, such as adult return numbers, weather, ocean conditions, disease, etc. Tacoma works with FTC to provide transparency and invite feedback. Some FTC members have regulatory authority, which provides another layer of accountability.*	L. Pryor	3/3/26 FTC meeting
Why does FERC require production goals and not SAR goals? *This reflects how the license was set up. FERC requires production goals, not SAR goals as there are many factors outside of Tacoma's control that influence SARs. Tacoma is working to improve SARs, even though they are not held to SARs goals, including developing life cycle models, identifying limiting factors, and taking actions to address those limiting factors.*	L. Pryor	3/3/26 FTC meeting
Where are we with the Fish Hatchery Management Plan (FHMP)? *Tacoma submitted their (FHMP) to FERC in 2020. At that time, Tacoma requested that it be a 10-year plan. It has now been almost 6 years. FERC has not yet responded or shared any feedback.*	G. King	3/3/26 FTC meeting
Is the Disease Management Plan (DMP) a part of the APR? *Tacoma submits a DMP every 5 years. They submitted one in 2023, and the next one is due 2028. It is not a part of the APR, but Tacoma welcomes comments on the DMP separately.*	L. Pryor	3/3/26 FTC meeting
Questions about Production Goals		
What is the success of the 5 fish per pound (fpp), 8 fpp, and 12 ffp size classes for spring Chinook? *As part of the transition plans, WDFW did an in-depth release study and found that all size classes have a benefit: 5 fpp were the highest performers, but on some years 8 fpp were high performers as well. With all 3 sizes, there is a measure of resiliency so that if one size doesn't do as well one year, there are the other sizes to make up for it.*	G. King	3/3/26 FTC meeting
Will net pens be beneficial to spring Chinook? *Yes, because Tacoma is moving some coho production from the hatchery into the net pens, Tacoma has space in the hatchery to grow more spring Chinook to the*	G. King	3/3/26 FTC meeting

larger size of 5 fpp. Production in the net pens are not included in Tacoma's 650,000 lbs. production cap.		
What size fish will be installed in the raceways at Cowlitz Falls? *The initial program calls for transferring spring Chinook from the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery to the Cowlitz Falls Fish Collection Facility at 12 fpp.*	R. LeDuc	3/3/26 FTC meeting
What hatchery production goals will benefit adult return goals? *All hatchery program targets are based on the FHMP and Transition plans. Each target was tailored to a specific program to maximize adult returns while simultaneously protecting natural stocks.*	L. Pryor	3/3/26 FTC meeting
Adaptive management is a core requirement of the Settlement Agreement, Fish Hatchery Management Plan (FHMP), and Fish Technical Committee (FTC) processes. However, it remains unclear how adaptive management is being implemented as a structured, decision-driven framework—particularly in relation to hatchery production goals and release strategies (size and timing) intended to increase adult returns of both hatchery and recovery salmonids. Tacoma Power should clarify how adaptive management is operationalized to ensure that monitoring results directly inform—and, where necessary, compel—changes in management actions. Specifically: **Linkage to Production Goals:** How are hatchery production targets evaluated against biological performance metrics such as smolt-to-adult return rates (SARs), productivity, and fishery contribution? What explicit thresholds or performance benchmarks trigger adjustments to production levels under the adaptive management framework described in the Settlement Agreement and FHMP? **Release Size and Timing Decisions:** How are release size and timing decisions quantitatively informed by monitoring data and environmental variables (e.g., flow, temperature, and ocean entry timing)? Are there predefined decision rules or predictive models guiding these actions, or are adjustments made on an ad hoc basis? **Implementation Through FTC:** What formal process within the FTC ensures that adaptive management provisions result in actual management changes? How are performance data reviewed, how are decisions documented, and what mechanisms ensure that identified changes are implemented in subsequent brood years? **Demonstrated Adaptive Changes:** Please provide specific examples from recent brood years where monitoring results led to measurable changes in release size, timing, or production levels, and indicate whether those changes resulted in improved adult returns. If such examples are limited or absent, explain how current practices satisfy the adaptive management intent of the Settlement Agreement and FHMP. **Accountability and Transparency:** What documentation (e.g., APR materials, annual reports, or decision logs) clearly tracks the relationship between monitoring results, management decisions, and subsequent outcomes? Without this transparency, it is not possible to evaluate whether adaptive management is functioning as intended. As noted in prior comments, the APR hatchery production plan appears largely unchanged over multiple years. During this same period, the public has experienced fishery closures, significant declines in returns, and reduced harvest opportunities. This raises a fundamental question as to whether adaptive management is being applied in a meaningful, responsive manner. Given its central role in the Settlement Agreement, FHMP, and FTC guidance, Tacoma Power should demonstrate that adaptive management is functioning as a data-driven process with clear decision triggers, documented management responses, and measurable outcomes tied to improved adult returns. Without this,	L. Pryor	4/28/26 by email

adaptive management risks being treated as a procedural requirement rather than an enforceable mechanism for improving program performance.

A significant number of program changes were implemented from the most recent FHMP and Transition Plans, which demonstrate how FTC is implementing adaptive management. For example the FTC recognized that recovery and harvest opportunity would be significantly improved by reducing the Lower Cowlitz winter steelhead program and applying the reduction to effectively double both the Tilton and Upper Cowlitz winter steelhead programs. By evaluating recovery status, harvest, and a host of other metrics, the data supported the change in hatchery production. This significant change doubled the spawning adults and therefore adults available for harvest in the Upper Basins. After such significant changes, the M&E subcommittee has recommended that the FTC wait before making any other changes to production goals so that they can monitor and evaluate the performance of changes already made.

Tacoma and the FTC have institutionalized their approach to adaptive management through the M&E subcommittee and M&E work plan. The questions posed about adaptive management are the focus of ongoing M&E subcommittee discussions and too much to elaborate on specifically here. The Transition Plan talks that are regularly scheduled throughout the year at FTC meetings detail progress with monitoring and evaluation efforts along with adaptive management changes and strategies. The questions posed indicate that the linkages between these presentations and the larger adaptive management approach and actions taken could be made clearer.

Currently, the M&E subcommittee is undertaking the limiting factors analysis and life cycle modeling, which is a framework that considers release size and timing among other things to determine management changes with the potential to benefit fish populations. This is a comprehensive and ambitious approach to monitoring and evaluation that will take time to implement before FTC can report on results and recommend changes. The actual timeline varies for each species depending on data gaps. That is why the M&E subcommittee recommends no changes to production goals at this time.

Suggestions for Production Goals		
Proposal to reduce fall Chinook down to 1 million fish utilizing wild broodstock and to shift production poundage to spring Chinook as much as possible.	J. Tipping	3/3/26 FTC meeting
Support for reduced fall Chinook on the Lower Cowlitz.	R. LeDuc	3/3/26 FTC meeting
Disagree with reduced fall Chinook noting that the health and success of fish coming out of the Tilton are poor. Reducing fall Chinook releases would be detrimental to the fishery from SE Alaska all the way down the coast to the Columbia.	G. King	3/3/26 FTC meeting
Hatchery production should replicate natural outmigration in size and timing citing Settlement Agreement Section 6.1.5. This is especially important for fall and spring Chinook. Tacoma's hatchery releases are much later with much larger fish than natural releases.	L. Pryor	3/3/26 FTC meeting
Concerns		
Concern that fall Chinook returns from hatchery releases are very low (1,200 returns from 3.5 million released).	L. Pryor	3/3/26 FTC meeting
Concern that Tacoma is rearing a combination of different size classes of fish to get to the 650,000 lb. production target rather than producing the sizes that will be most successful for adult returns. *Tacoma is proposing different size classes based on studies of what would increase the likelihood for success considering smolt timing, competition with wild*	L. Pryor	3/3/26 FTC meeting

fish, etc. Tacoma is balancing the needs of six different populations within the 650,000 lb. cap. They consider the individual needs of each population to maximize adult returns.