

Cowlitz Hydroelectric Project
FERC No. 2016
Cowlitz Fisheries Technical Committee
Final Meeting Summary
April 1, 2025 from 9:30 – 2:30

FTC Representative Attendees:

Melora Shelton	TPU
Bryce Glaser	WDFW
Andrew Luymes	ECY
Bill Sharp	YN

Additional Attendees:

Anne Baxter	ECY
Peggy Miller	WDFW
Josua Holowatz	WDFW
Brian Gale	WDFW
John Serl	WDFW
Kris Warner	WDFW
Kevin Young	WDFW
Todd Hillson	WDFW
Sean Toomey	WDFW
Eric Shoblom	TPU
Sean Luis	TPU
Matt Peter	TPU
Jenise Bauman	TPU
Scott Gibson	TPU
Chris Vaughn	TPU
Michael Boyles	BPA
Stephen Lewis	BIA
Ann Weckback	Lewis County
Joe First	LCPUD
Laura Wolfe	LCPUD
Steve West	LCFRB
Lyn Wiltse	PDSA Consulting / Facilitator

Public Attendees: Greg King, Randy LeDuc, and Jack Tipping

Remaining 2025 FTC Meeting Dates: May 6, June 3, Aug. 5, Sept. 2, Oct. 7, Nov. 4, Dec. 2

Approval of March Meeting Summary

The revised version of the March FTC Meeting Summary was reviewed and approved with clarifying edits and will be posted for public review.

Updates

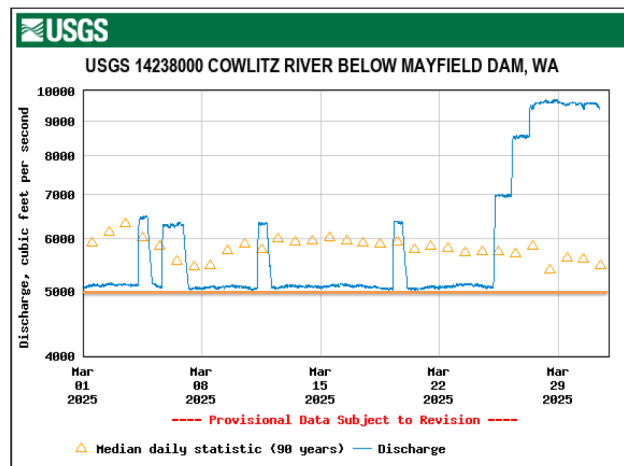
Announcements

- 30-day reviews: Comments on the Draft 2024 Cowlitz Restoration and Recovery (CRR) Fund report are due Apr. 25. Comments on the Draft 2024 Cowlitz Falls Northshore Collector (CFNSC) Downstream Fish Passage report are due Apr. 30.
- Tacoma will soon hire a Project Manager (PM) for the Trout Hatchery and Mayfield Remodels.

Hydro Operations (Presentation emailed Mar. 31.)

- Inflows: After lower inflows in January and February, warm and wet conditions in March led to inflows 120% of the historical average. Recent max daily inflows were over 20K cfs and are now declining.
- Storage: Riffe Lake elevation is 740 ft, above the recent and below the long-term averages. Boat ramps are open. Upper Cowlitz basin snow water equivalent is above average. Tacoma Resource Operations is managing the reservoir to balance between ensuring capacity to capture the spring runoff and meeting minimum flow requirements. Matt noted 749 ft level will be a hard cap during ongoing cultural/historical resource studies (will take a couple of years). This will also prevent any inundation at the Kosmos cleanup site.
- Outflow: Current discharge is 9,440 cfs. There were no exceedances since the last meeting.
- 10-day Forecast: Below normal precipitation and typical temperatures are anticipated. Inflows are decreasing from 11.5K cfs to near or below normal range. Outflows will reduce to 7.7K cfs later this week and then continue to move back to minimum flows. May-July climate outlook tilts warmer and drier.

Outflow



Current (3/31) discharge 9,440 cfs. 5,000 cfs min + weekly fish transport flow (if >8,000 cfs).
Down ramping limits <6,000 cfs o in/hr day, 2 in/hr night. No exceedances.

Water Quality

- Matt reported there were no spill events or water quality compliance monitoring for TDG, etc. since the last FTC meeting.
- Deployed water temp arrays associated with the CFNSC – north and south deflector sides of the debris barrier and the boat barrier were deployed on Mar. 14 and removed last week as boat barrier was being replaced by LCPUD – will be redeployed Apr. 3. Those data will be shared once the CFNSC is up and running.
- Tacoma will deploy additional arrays in the forebay associated with the acoustic telemetry studies.

- Tacoma is still working to collect additional water quality data as covariates to the upcoming CFNSC Passage Study.

Related Project Updates

- Kosmos: Tacoma is monitoring every other week and providing monthly reports to ECY. No sheens have been seen in years. Additional soil sampling later this month will determine if copper should be listed as a contaminant of concern. Ecology is expected to approve the work plan from Tacoma in the near future. Next steps will include the feasibility study and development of the draft clean-up action plan later this year.
- North Taidnapam Boat Launch Improvement Project: Phase 2 (lower-level parking area, trail, ADA loading platform, etc.) is out for permitting from the Corps and Section 106 for Cultural Resources. Construction (reservoir elevation dependent) is expected to begin this spring or fall.
- Mayfield Spillway Joint Testing: Next month Tacoma will be injecting Green Gobbler dye adjacent to Mayfield Dam in an effort to determine if leakage is infiltrating into the gallery. There is the potential for the pool below the dam to turn a little green. Tacoma is coordinating with WDFW and ECY about dates/notifications.
- Onion Rock Bridge Inspection: This is Tacoma's key access point to enter the powerhouse (typically open to the public from the west side). WSDOT notified Tacoma there is undermining on the center pier. In June Tacoma will insert some grout concrete there to get the pier back to functional condition. The second phase of the repair will include armoring to prevent future scour there. Tacoma has met with affected agencies and permitting is underway. Public access to the bridge will be restricted during this project.
- Debris Management Improvements to the Lake Scanewa haul out area are being assessed.

Fish Facilities (Presentation emailed Apr. 2)

Eric Shoblom began by noting these presentations will be shorter at future FTC meetings because Separator operations with graphs and tables will be included in the weekly reports sent to the entire FTC distribution list. Updates in these meetings will supplement the information in the reports. Eric welcomes feedback regarding any specific/additional updates folks would like him to include.

Separator Returns:

- Winter steelhead and some spring Chinook are starting to return.
- Spring Chinook: Peak of the run should be May and June. Broodstock collection started at the end of March and goes into the first week of August. All returning fish of Kalama stock origin (adipose+ventral clip) will be recycled through June to provide more angler opportunity.
- Cutthroat: The run picks up late summer.
- Winter run steelhead: The peak is expected in mid-April. Eric reminded everyone that for the last few years, collection has started Dec. 1 instead of Feb. 1 to help extend the return timing for the lower programs. Broodstock collection is complete and is in accordance with demographic replacement and mining protocols.

Rainbow Trout Plants:

- Trout plants began in early March. To date 18,400 trout have been planted in Swofford and South Lewis County Park Ponds. The first plant into Mayfield Lake will occur in early April.

Cowlitz Release Sites: Although the Cispus release site is not currently being used, due to the shallow depth of the water at the site and downstream channel, truck drivers and fish biologists

continue to monitor the site as it will be needed soon. The Tilton, Packwood, and Scanewa sites are all in good working condition.

Capital Projects: Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Remodel: All wells have been decommissioned. Contractor demobilized. The first draft of the report is expected May 2. This will determine next steps for water source. They also conducted hydraulic analysis of the existing facility. A new PM will be hired soon.

Cowlitz Restoration and Recovery (CRR) Program: Steve West noted that draft applications for the Habitat round were due Mar. 31, and one project (Kiona Creek) was submitted. More detail on this will be presented at the May FTC Meeting. Reminder that CRR proposal presentation and site visit will be May 8, Steve and Melora are working on the itinerary. FTC voting members or their delegates are welcome to RSVP to Steve if they would like to attend. Space will be limited.

Melora reported that draft applications for the Hatchery Associated Production (HAP) round will be due Apr. 7. The pre-application from the Friends of the Cowlitz (FOC) was received on Mar. 18. Uncertainty remains around the FOC program/developing co-op agreement with WDFW, and she anticipates an application with assumptions described. The HAP Subgroup discussed this and scheduled holds for presentations at their Mar. 19 meeting. The grant round schedule is posted at MyTPU.org/CRR.

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Subgroup: Jenise Bauman reported the draft Charter for this group was discussed at their Mar. 19 meeting and is undergoing internal review after which it will be finalized as a DD for FTC approval. They also discussed progress on transition plans, timelines, data needs, etc. They will present at the in-person FTC meeting in June with a speaker from WDFW. They are also focusing on the upcoming Annual Program Review (APR) meeting and working with Eric on an outline and timeline for continued evaluation of the Fall Chinook program in consideration of Jack Tipping's proposal (received at last fall's APR) to reduce fall Chinook in favor of spring Chinook. Jack Tipping has passed off the study to the M&E Subgroup. His HAP pre-proposal focused on steelhead program evaluation now including Chinook as well, will form the basis of a specialized sub-committee to outline methods and timelines.

Coho Net Pen Project, Phase 2

Presenter: Eric Shoblom

Mayfield Coho Net Pens: Phase 1: Everything is going well with the release planned for the end of April. There has been very low mortality (0.4%) compared with 2% typically in the hatchery. Bird netting and in-water predator netting have proven effective against predation. Mortality is expected to increase in the spring as the water temps rise. If overall mortality stays low this will give hatchery managers options in how they populate the pens for Phase 2.

Phase 2: In June the FTC will decide whether to approve moving the program to Phase 2.

Post Phase 2: If an outside funding source is not identified by mid-August programs will be adjusted accordingly.

Fall Chinook Transition Plan: *(Presentation emailed Apr. 2)*

Models for Managing Fall Chinook Populations

Presenter: Jenise Bauman

Jenise reminded all the M&E Subgroup has created a Transition Plan template that can also be used with all species, with an initial focus on Upper Cowlitz population of Fall Chinook in the Tilton River.

(She noted summer steelhead and cutthroat trout are production species and managed, but do not have transition plans.) The Subgroup has also been working on a life cycle model to calculate carrying capacity and better understand the cause of low (especially hatchery) returns. The model will help identify life stages, criteria to assess the need for supplementation, prioritize habitat restoration, and inform program changes. Fall Chinook is a priority species, however, identified data gaps (springs vs. hybrids vs. falls, Lower Cowlitz vs. Tilton origin) will delay the modeling for this population. Life cycle modeling will be used as an adaptive management tool as we work towards achieving recovery goals and will be evaluated during the APR.

Jenise then gave a detailed and riveting presentation on a two-stage state-specific life cycle model developed by Plumb and Perry in 2020. This model provides an example of the work done to date on life-cycle modeling and sets the stage for development of future Integrated Population Models. The model provides a statistical estimation framework for predicting populations among stochastic simulation framework allowing for the evaluation of alternative management actions while accounting for uncertainty in abundance estimates. It strikes an appropriate balance between model complexity, tractability, and applicability to guide future management decisions and program changes.

Next Steps include the M&E Subgroup forming a specialized work group with members from WDFW and Tacoma. This group will utilize an Integrated Population Model (IPM) framework developed by WDFW and USGS. They will hire a third-party consultant to advise on the theoretical side of the modeling and anticipate being able to apply the model to Cowlitz populations in the spring of 2026. Starting populations will include Upper Cowlitz winter steelhead, spring Chinook, and fall Chinook.

Anne Baxter asked if the new IPM life cycle modeling parameters will include ocean conditions and food availability, streams, etc. Jenise responded in the affirmative. Bryce reminded everyone that all FTC members and technical support staff are welcome to attend M&E Subgroup meetings and participate in the life-cycle modeling topic.

LCPUD Dam Operations

Presenter: Joe First

Joe reported that after flows as high as 15-16K cfs at the dam and 11K at Randle, flows have now returned to normal. The reservoir was not drawn down however there was spill. On March 25 they installed baffle panels on spillways 2 and 3 to help focus flow and fish to the surface spillway flume entrances for collection. He is just back from being out of the office for a week, he will confirm with ECY that the TDG monitors removed in September were installed again in late March as planned.

Boat Barrier Replacement – Will finish up this week.

Transmission Line Interruption – Scheduled Sept. 2 through the end of the month.

Downstream Adaptive Mgt Technical Work Group (TWG) (*Presentation emailed Apr. 2*)

Presenter: Chris Vaughn

Mayfield and CFNSC Methods Comparison

Chris reported that Sean Luis presented a document on this topic at the last TWG meeting. TWG is currently reviewing and will discuss it at the next meeting. Look for an update at the May FTC Meeting

CFNSC Acoustic Telemetry (AT) Study

Key dates:

- April 7 – project kickoff meeting (TPU & LCPUD & Four Peaks)
- April 23 – onsite pre-deployment site visit
- June 2-6 – equipment deployment
- June 9-12 – array test, mock download, troubleshooting

Opercle Punching Chinook Fallbacks

Details around this operation will be determined by the TWG this month.

Mayfield Counting House

Since Counting House is in bypass mode each year from Jan. 1 – Mar. 31, that makes today the Opening Day of monitoring fish passing Mayfield Dam! Chris noted the occasion with a photo of a ball game at Cheney Stadium. Yay!

Cowlitz Falls Northshore Collector

The collector reopened on Mar. 14 and spillway flumes opened on Mar. 31; collectively, Cowlitz Falls Fish Facility (CFFF). Crews are now working on debris management. All coho parr will be moved downstream to the stress relief ponds. There has been a surge of Chinook fry collected at the CFFF which coincides with the high discharge at Cowlitz Falls Dam (CFD). They are starting to tag fish (refer to slides for numbers).

FTC Operations: Fish Program Reports

Presenter: Melora Shelton

Melora noted that much of these FTC meetings is devoted to re-sharing information already provided in weekly fish reports. It is important to make room in these meetings for deeper dives into the fish collection information as needed as well as open time for other FTC business. For this reason, starting this Thursday, these reports will be sent via a single weekly email to the FTC distribution list. Included will be:

- Cowlitz Separator Adult Fish report
- Mayfield Adult facilities report
- Cowlitz Falls Fish Facility report

This transitions makes this information available to everyone by default vs by request only. It does not change direct coordination and data sharing that is already occurring. She also welcomes ideas from FTC members about topics for deeper dives such as a mid-season update for collection as well as one for end of season roundup. What kind of cadence would people like to see?

Bryce looks forward to hearing of any issues/challenges the FTC needs to be made aware of. A focus on where we are with collection efficiency targets is also appreciated.

Annual Program Review (APR) (Updated DD emailed on Apr. 2)

Presenters: Eric Shoblom and Jenise Bauman

Eric noted today is the second of three meetings discussing the upcoming program goals for the hatcheries. Today's meeting is the third APR meeting and includes a second Public Comment period reserved for public feedback on the APR. The APR program will be discussed at the APR meeting Apr. 16. Jenise is working with the presenters to collect PowerPoint talks. The meeting will be at the April 1, 2025 FTC Meeting Summary

Veterans Memorial Museum in Chehalis with lunch provided. Emails were sent to the FTC and to the public. All were asked to RSVP to attend to ensure there are sufficient refreshments.

Eric walked through the draft decision document 2025-03 with some edits in track changes that was sent out on March 25. There will be further changes based on public feedback. This will be finalized with a vote at the May FTC meeting. He called out the change to the spring Chinook numbers (1,657K instead of the former 1,678K) related to rearing more of these fish to a larger size. Other programs will remain at the same overall size as last year. Still to be discussed is how to capture the of allocation for other net pen projects with transparency.

Eric welcomed feedback and made additional edits to the DD. Now that we are doing the full pilot coho net pen program, we have more space at the hatchery. In addition to the coho for Mayfield net pens, WDFW brought up the need to clarify how allocations from these programs would be used for the net-pen project being revitalized by Friends of the Cowlitz (FOC). Several approaches were discussed and will be considered in finalizing the APR tables for the April 16th meeting to ensure transparency. WDFW also proposed that the species reared in the FOC net pens shift from spring Chinook and cutthroat as done in the past, to summer steelhead and cutthroat. Bryce suggested that summer steelhead would better align with management and project objectives of providing more fish for harvest in the lower river areas, staying within PHOS objectives and reducing the need to further divide up the spring Chinook production. There were no objections to this suggested change. He and Bryce will discuss possibly capturing these allocations as well as the fpp on the APR table. To the Coordination section, Eric will add more information regarding at what size (i.e., fpp) fish will be transferred.

Action Item: All to RSVP at Cowlitz@Cityoftacoma.org if they plan to attend the Apr. 16 for Science Conference and APR meeting. Jenise will add the link to the invite.

Public Comment Period #1 - Agenda related (excluding APR topics)

Greg: Wanted Bryce to be aware that there are some dangerously deep holes at the Olequa boat launch where it transitions from asphalt to gravel.

Bryce thanked him and said he would look into it.

Larry: Was unable to attend the meeting but emailed ahead of the meeting asking about the release dates for summer and winter steelhead, coho, spring and fall Chinook for 2025 smolt releases from the Cowlitz River hatcheries, as well as sizes expected at release. He also asked how the release dates are set and by whom and where he could find release strategies for each group.

Eric noted that the future brood document on WDFW's website contains most of this information and he will follow up with Larry. <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/management/hatcheries/future-brood>
The only information not included is who sets the release dates. Fish culture practices and hatchery space constraints have a part in setting those timing windows. They are also set in consultation with NOAA, based on fish biology like smolt timing and avoiding conflict with natural populations.

Topics for May 6, 2025 FTC Meeting via Teams

- Updates incl. Hydro Ops, Water Quality

- Fish Facilities, Satellite Rearing Ponds, Cispus Release Site, Mayfield Downstream Fish Passage Remodel, Coho Net Pen Project, Trout Hatchery Remodel
 - LCPUD Cowlitz Falls Dam Operations
 - Transition Plan Update for Fall Chinook
 - Coho Net Pen BY 2026 DD 2025-04
 - APR DD 2025-03
 - FTC Work Plan / Protocols – public presentations
 - CRR Fund HAP Subcommittee
 - Preview June FTC Meeting Topics
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Public Comment Period #2 – APR

Jack: What about reducing the coho program to 2 million and use the space we gain in the hatchery to increase spring Chinook production or rear more to a larger size?

Brian Gale: We're currently maximizing the space that we have and even with a 150K reduction of coho, we wouldn't have enough space to rear additional spring Chinook. If we want more fish, raising spring Chinook to 5 fpp helps to maximize that group because it results in better SARs, which is what we're doing already.

Greg: Back when we had a Cowlitz Restoration Advisory Group (CRAG), FOC asked for satellite rearing ponds to be set up in net pens. Cowlitz stock of fall Chinook are caught all over the Pacific Northwest. Spring Chinook cost a lot and are hard to raise. Anglers are more inclined to fish in better weather. He supports keeping the programs in the production table the same – no changes.

Eric thanked everyone for the discussion around forward thinking in the FHMP on what triggers would result in modifications. Jenise also thanked everyone and noted she looks forward to Apr. 16. In the meantime, she invited everyone to feel free to send any feedback directly to Eric.

Meeting Evaluation

- Wish that Steve West hadn't been so "anti-climactic!"
 - Good discussions
 - Had lots of lag time – Teams issues
 - Nice to have flexibility with the agenda – Thanks Joe and all!
 - Very productive
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Josua's Inspirational Quote

It's spring time. Flowers are out. There is baseball and lots of anticipation for the future.

"Baseball is about talent, hard work, and strategy. But at the deepest level, it's about love, integrity, and respect." - Cal Ripken Jr.

Closing Remarks

Melora thanked everyone for being at today's meeting, She specifically cited all the great teamwork during and between the meetings. She also appreciated getting to hear lots of different voices today in the discussions. This all is a good reminder that we are all in this together as we work on license implementation at the Cowlitz Project.