

Cowlitz Hydroelectric Project
FERC No. 2016
Cowlitz Fisheries Technical Committee
Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery
Final Conference Call/WebEx Meeting Summary
May 5, 2020 from 9:30 – 3:30

FTC Representative Attendees:

Travis Nelson	TPU
Bryce Glaser	WDFW
Carol Serdar	WA Dept. of Ecology
Paul Sparks	WA Council of TU, TU, American Rivers

Additional Attendees:

Rich Turner	NMFS
James Archibald	NMFS
Scott Anderson	NMFS
Jim Pacheco	Ecology
John Serl	WDFW
Peggy Miller	WDFW
Brian Gale	WDFW
Sam Gibbons	WDFW
Josua Holowatz	WDFW
Matt Bleich	TPU
Florian Leischner	TPU
Melora Shelton	TPU
Eric Shoblom	TPU
Phil Sandstrom	TPU
Tim Hoffnagle	TPU
Chris Foster	TPU
JD Jones	USDA FS
Diane Hopster	USDA FS
Ann Weckback	Lewis County
Steve West	LCFRB
Laura Wolfe	LCPUD
Lyn Wiltse	PDSA Consulting / Facilitator

Presenter:

Jessica Knickerbocker	TPU Engineering Manager
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Remaining 2020 FTC Meeting Dates: June 2 (conference call/GoToMeeting), July 7 (placeholder) Aug. 4, Sept. 1 (placeholder), Oct. 6, Nov. 3 (placeholder), Dec. 1 (public meeting?)

- **Action Item:** Travis: Update upcoming meeting invites to show that they are conference calls (to minimize the spread of COVID-19).

Announcements

- Travis announced that TPU plans to migrate over to Go-to-Meeting tool for future meetings.

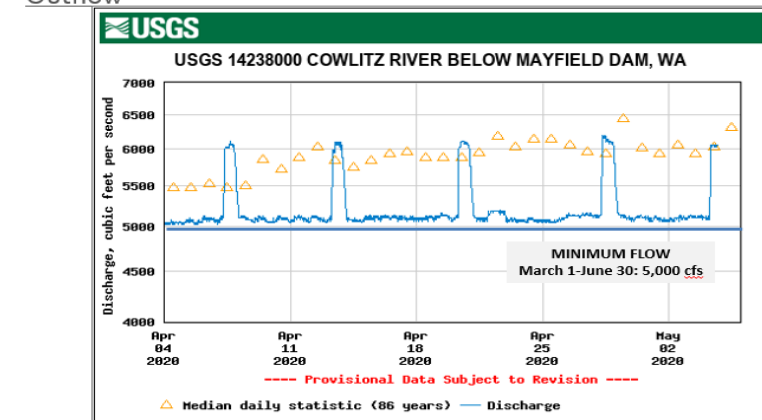
- As Ruth Tracy has retired, JD announced that Diane Hopster has assumed her position and will be helping out the next few months. Diane Hopster comes from the Columbia Gorge and we are happy to add her to the FTC distribution list. Welcome Diane!
- WDFW and WA State Parks and Rec Commission (Parks) reopened state-managed lands today (May 5), for local day-use only recreation. The reopening will apply to state-managed parks, wildlife areas, recreation land, and boat launches. WDFW is asking hunters and anglers to enjoy these outdoor activities only if they can do so locally, while also practicing physical distancing and to avoid crowding on banks, piers, or at boat ramps. All freshwater fisheries will open today, as will Puget Sound saltwater fisheries (Marine Areas 5-13). Exceptions are halibut, shrimp, and intertidal shellfish harvesting, which remain closed. If sites become overcrowded or other COVID-19 related public safety concerns develop, WDFW may reclose areas to further protect public health.
- TPU Boat launches opening on May 5 include Barrier Dam (*daylight hours only*), Blue Creek (*daylight hours only*), Lake Kokanee, Mayfield Lake Park, Mossyrock Park, and Taidnapam North.

Updates

Hydro Operations:

- Inflows: Florian reported that March and April were as dry as January and February were wet. The current elevation is 737' (15' from full reservoir). Inflows to Riffe Lake are averaging 10K cfs (1K cfs above the historical average). Snowpack in higher elevations is 120% of average. It is 82% of average at the lower station.
- Refill Projections for Riffe: While the refill probability is calculated at 67%, TPU is confident they will be able to refill by the end of May, as most snow melt will occur in next few weeks. They will increase outflow to accommodate that refill and create a buffer for additional runoff and rain.
- Outflow: Flows have been at/above the 5K cfs minimum flow for last month. Weekly fish pulses have been at 6K cfs and may increase further. The forecast indicates freezing levels will go up to 8K'. Riffe Lake levels are expected to increase about 1ft/day. TPU will increase outflows possibly as high as 9K cfs so as not to overflow Riffe Lake. They intend to keep boat launches operational all summer.

Outflow



Link to the USGS real-time Cowlitz River hydrograph:

https://waterdata.usgs.gov/wa/nwis/uv/?site_no=14238000&PARAMeter_cd=00060,00065

Water Quality: Carol requested that TPU provide a month-ahead preview of all project activities that may impact water quality. She appreciates as much notice as possible. This includes monitoring at the mouth of Mill Creek where a landslide occurred at the Barrier Dam boat launch, filling in much of the boat launch. While the normal work window to dredge at that location is in July, TPU applied for an HPA variance to remove the deposits in the first part of May. Sediment removal occurred on May 1st. However, the excavator was unable to reach more than 10 cubic yards. TPU is creating another plan to proceed. Eric will send the specifics on this to Carol. TPU has an approved WQPP for annual boat launch maintenance which includes dredging. Carol reminded TPU they should be disposing of the material removed as per the Plan (in a low spot nearby). She also suggested they use the landslide deposit to study gravel movement in the Cowlitz. When she asked for an update on the LWD Protection Plan, Travis responded he will have the appropriate person follow up with her on that. She requested that water quality updates at these meetings include reports on ground disturbing project activities (especially those with WQPPs).

Downstream Adaptive Management TWG:

CFFF: This facility has been operating since February of this year and fish are currently being PIT tagged weekly for FCE trials. Thus far, it appears that Steelhead and Coho collection efficiencies are on track to match those of the last two years. During Steelhead emigration, TPU will be conducting a direct study by modifying the floor geometry to try to improve CE. There will be more to report on this in June. Five directed evaluations were planned for 2020. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the study that involved acoustically tagged Chinook for a fourth season won't be performed.

Operations: Coho were observed coming in last week with increased abundance, there is an overall increase in smolt outmigration. Social distancing measures are in place. Staff are wearing masks at the sample table and working at designated workstations. There have been two release groups of Coho and Steelhead PIT-tagged fish. They are planning to do a third release group this week.

Fisheries Essential Operations: With current COVID-19 guidelines, Eric reported that they are still isolating crews at the hatcheries – maintaining smaller groups to reduce exposure risks to personnel. The current adult Spring Chinook returns indicate this year will be the lowest return on record for the Cowlitz.

CRR Fund: Florian reported having met twice with the LCFRB to discuss their future involvement with the CRR Fund. He will work with Steve West to schedule an additional meeting to conclude the discussions. In the meantime, TPU is working on drafting recommended changes for next year and will present these at the June meeting, along with a path forward.

Kosmos Flats Cleanup

Presenter: Jessica Knickerbocker

Jessica Knickerbocker, Engineering Manager and Project Manager for this project, provided an overview of the site history, communication efforts, independent emergency remedial action, and the Agreed Order. Throughout the presentation, she emphasized that public safety and compliance with environmental regulations is a top priority for TPU.

Communication: TPU temporarily closed the site to the public and notified the public and affected state and federal agencies, as well as tribes and local jurisdictions.

Independent Emergency Remedial Action: TPU contractor HartCrowser designed the cap. With Carol's help, TPU secured the necessary permits and ended up moving 8K cubic yards of material up to the top of the Kosmos Flats (elevation of 755'). It appears the BMPs were effective. The in-place clay-like subsurface material was challenging for the excavators and the weather made it difficult to keep the site dry. They were not able to remove all of the impacted soil below the creek bed, due to an impending storm that would cause water levels in the creek to rise considerably. They got the cap in place on December 30, just before the storm hit. Contaminated soil stockpiles at Kosmos Flats and the boat ramp were hauled to two landfills. Consultants are compiling a draft summary report that shows all sample locations (soil and water samples).

Agreed Order: In January, TPU received a letter from Ecology regarding the Agreed Order for investigating and cleanup. May 22 will be the start of a public comment period (that complies with COVID-19 restrictions). While the timeline to completely execute the Agreed Order is uncertain, it is likely to extend into 2024. Carol thanked Jessica for the very thorough presentation and noted that, while there is overlap with Water Quality, the Agreed Order comes from Ecology's Toxics Cleanup Program.

Cowlitz Project Low Flow Planning: Starting the Process

Presenter: Melora Shelton

Melora walked us through a presentation describing TPU's planning process for responding to low flow scenarios on the Cowlitz. This included an overview of their anticipated process, some existing climate science for context, and next steps. The planning process for Cowlitz will be more complex than the ongoing process at Nisqually. TPU will keep the FTC informed along the way to ensure a common set of expectations and understandings, for nimble decision making in low flow conditions. Plans also include hosting an FTC workshop to discuss communication planning.

Discussion:

Peggy expressed appreciation for this presentation and found the climate change graphs to be particularly helpful. Overlaying the various water years shows the variability and the associated challenges ahead. Frequent lower flows in June may be an issue in the future. It is important to keep the FTC appropriately informed as real-time decisions are made in response to various low-flow scenarios. When it comes to communications, more is better. No surprises. Carol noted that Ecology needs to be informed before decisions are made so that they can help to ensure WA State requirements are met. There was FTC broad support for this idea of a communications workshop. There were also specific questions about the time horizon and probability thresholds Power Management uses to make decisions about flow management, with appropriate coordination and/or regulatory agency approval. There was a request to invite a representative of Power Management to an FTC meeting to give a presentation on their planning process, including the role played by alternative energy sources, flow predictions, etc.

FHMP Update | Satellite Rearing

Presenter: Matt Bleich

FHMP Update: Matt began by announcing that FERC has accepted the proposed revised schedule TPU submitted back in October. There was great rejoicing! This approved schedule calls for a review of the complete draft FHMP document through the end of May.

The recent FHMP workshops allowed for working through unresolved topics. After each workshop, Matt emailed the entire FTC a detailed list of discussion topics, deliverables, and next steps. As the FTC comment period is wrapping up, the team is working to align topics from the various workshops and ensure consistency throughout the document. He thanked WDFW and LCRFB for their comments on Fall and Spring Chinook. These comments are available for review on the FTC website. He welcomes additional comments by May 30, after which technical editors will work thru June and into July to integrate comments and prepare the document for public review. The public comment period is from July through early September. Public comments will then also be incorporated, and the document will be finalized. TPU is also working to integrate an abbreviated APR process into the public comment period. This will involve sending out an information packet and holding virtual and/or small in-person gatherings (following social distancing rules).

Satellite Rearing Draft Report: R2 presented summary of design goals and criteria at the April FTC meeting. Matt sent this report out for comment on April 7 for a 30-day review which ends May 7. The next iteration of this report will be more detailed and include geographic locations as well as impact on fisheries program. All are encouraged to focus comments on design criteria, fish management, and geographic considerations. As the FERC Order approving the 2011 FHMP directed Tacoma to provide an update for the satellite rearing ponds, WDFW suggested a summary of the Satellite Rearing Report be included as part of FHMP.

FTC Protocols | FTC Meeting Frequency

Presenter: Travis Nelson

Protocols: Travis explained that he and Paul have yet to connect on the protocols, including the FTC discussions over the last few months. He recommended, with Paul's support, that this topic be deferred to the June meeting. This will also allow for Bryce's participation.

FTC Meeting Frequency: Travis announced that, due to COVID-19 and current budget shortfalls, TPU intends to alter the frequency of FTC meetings to every other month after the June meeting. Travis assured all the need for additional meetings will be made on a case-by-case basis. For the June FTC meeting, he will create an FTC work plan to ensure topics are addressed in a timely manner. We can also extend the length of FTC meetings to a full six hours as needed. Note: The license requires only an annual meeting of the FTC.

Discussion: Concern was expressed at shifting to a bi-monthly schedule, citing CRR and Gravel Augmentation progress will likely be delayed even more than it has been to date. Travis reminded all that meetings could be added as needed. Regarding finishing up the FHMP, Matt responded that this wouldn't preclude scheduling other workshops or subgroup meetings. Subsequent suggestions included reconvening the CRR Subcommittee and considering an alternate forum/methodology to ensure timely Water Quality updates. WDFW said that they understand Tacoma's fiscal issues given COVID-19 and looks forward to working with Tacoma on FTC tasks, however they cannot make a decision on altering the meeting schedules without Bryce Glaser present. Paul Sparks was also absent. Peggy asked if this decision will be made using the consensus decision-making process in our protocols. In addition, she suggested this be memorialized with a decision document so that members can add their position on the change.

Next steps: Further discussion, perhaps with a decision document at the June FTC meeting.

Action Items:

- Travis: Talk with Paul about how best to capture his concerns with FTC Technical Advisors as described in the SA.
 - Travis: Create a draft FTC Work Plan and possible decision document for June.
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M&E Subgroup**Presenter: Phil Sandstrom**

Tilton Release Site: Eric reported the site will be fish tested when the following three conditions are met:

- Covid-19 staff restrictions are lifted.
- Availability of HOR fish (likely Steelhead) above brood stock needs.
- Flows of less than 500cfs with good water visibility so it is easy to observe the fish.

M&E Subgroup: Phil reminded all this subgroup started solidifying the M&E Work Plan three months ago. He walked the FTC through the spreadsheet showing a rough schedule for their current workload. The subgroup is seeking FTC input on this schedule as well as additional topics they would like to see included. Phil's goal is to ensure there is a two-way conversation between the subgroup and the FTC.

Action Item: All - Send Phil your feedback/suggestions for work listed on the draft spreadsheet prior to the June meeting.

Gravel Augmentation**Presenter: Florian Leischner**

The 2020 Draft Gravel Augmentation Work Plan will be continually updated to ensure accountability for progress compared to the schedule. Acknowledging that some dates have slipped, Florian explained TPU is conducting an internal evaluation of sites to recommend for FTC review and discussion. A meeting with TPU engineers on May 7 will finalize these draft recommendations. He updated the Alternatives Analysis spreadsheet incorporating feedback from the April FTC meeting. He removed all the site data so that TPU recommendations could be added instead. Additions were made to the *Notes* category and a listing of permits at the bottom of the spreadsheet. No new sites have been added. A full work plan will be developed once a site is selected. Peggy suggested that Tacoma provide the FTC their top site recommendations so that members have a role in making the final site selection decision.

Corps Permitting: Corps permitting will be required and depending on the type of permit needed, the time it takes to acquire the permit will vary. The completed spreadsheet matrix will indicate the type of Corps permit that will be required. A programmatic permit with the USACE could cover the entire 11-mile stretch, with criteria for augmenting gravel within that stretch. It may be possible to do a similar programmatic permit for the WQPP. Matt Peter had cautioned that programmatic permits take longer than other types of permits, so TPU may need to take interim steps. Carol will follow up with Matt Peter on this.

Action Item: Florian – By May 15, send out filled in Alternatives Analysis spreadsheet for discussion at June meeting and create a draft decision document for the August FTC meeting.

Approval of Last Meeting Summary

The April FTC meeting summary was approved with edits and will be posted to the FTC public website.

Meeting Evaluation

- Great attendance!
 - Using the chat box to queue up to speak worked well.
 - It was nice to get most presentations before the meeting (rather than during).
 - Wish there were a toll-free line.
 - Stayed on agenda and finished on time.
 - Some discussions got hot.
 - Appreciate ending with Josua's inspirational quotes.
 - Appreciate everyone putting up with the frustration of technical difficulties related to meeting remotely.
 - Quotable Quote: "When **I** is replaced by **we**, even illness becomes wellness."
- Scharf
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Potential Topics for June 2 FTC Meeting

- Updates incl. Hydro Ops, Water Quality
 - FTC Protocols
 - FTC Work Plan
 - FTC Meeting Frequency
 - FHMP Update
 - M&E Subgroup
 - Gravel Augmentation Work Plan
 - Downstream Adaptive Management TWG
 - Cowlitz Restoration & Recovery Fund 2020
 - Satellite Rearing
 - Set topics for the next FTC Meeting
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Parking Lot

- Presentation by TPU Power Management
- Review Steelhead Recycling Program