

Cowlitz Hydroelectric Project
FERC No. 2016
Cowlitz Fisheries Technical Committee
Final Meeting Summary
May 6, 2025 from 9:30 – 3:30

FTC Representative Attendees:

Matt Peter	Tacoma
Bryce Glaser	WDFW
Andrew Luymes	ECY
Bill Sharp	YN
Jonathan Stumpf	TU

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
Larona Newhouse	WDFW
Matt Bleich	Tacoma
Eric Shoblom	Tacoma
Sean Luis	Tacoma
Jenise Bauman	Tacoma
Jamie Murphy	Tacoma
Ben Caviness	Tacoma
Chris Vaughn	Tacoma
Stephen Lewis	BIA
Ann Weckback	Lewis County
Joe First	LCPUD
Laura Wolfe	LCPUD
Steve West	LCFRB
Lyn Wiltse	PDSA Consulting / Facilitator

Public Attendees: Chris Vandenberg, Larry Pryor, and Randy LeDuc

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

Approval of April Meeting Summary

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

Updates

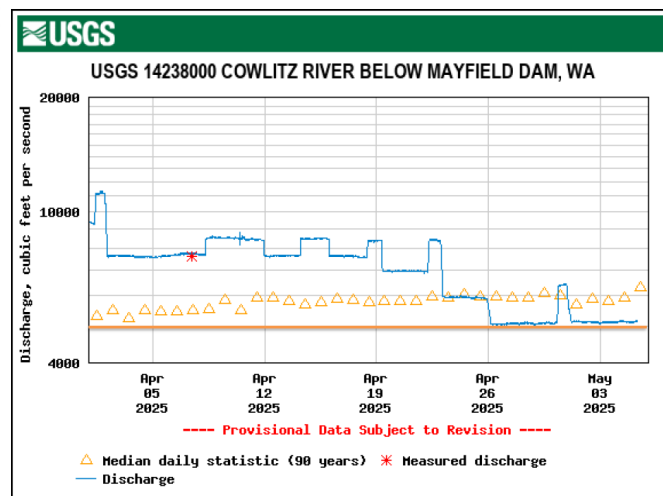
Announcements

- The CRR site visit is this Thursday. FTC voting members / their delegates who wish to attend are to respond to LCFRB asap.
- Matt Peter is stepping in for Melora who is on Jury Duty this week. Scott Gibson is also out due to Jury Duty this week. We thank them for their service!
- Sad news to report: Lorri Bodi passed away from cancer last month. Her career started in Washington DC as an attorney for EPA where she helped to craft and implement the EPA's early clean water regulations. After moving to Seattle, Lorri was hired as an attorney for NOAA. She soon became a key figure in advocacy for protection of salmon, an issue in which she would play a leadership role for several decades. She also co-founded the NW office of American Rivers, and was BPA's VP of Fish, Wildlife, and Environment.
- Eric was pleased to report Tacoma has hired Gus Garcia as the new Project Manager (PM) for the Trout Hatchery and Mayfield Remodels. We look forward to meeting him.

Hydro Operations (Presentation was emailed May 5, updated version was emailed on May 8)

- Inflows: After March inflows of 120% of the historical average, April inflows averaged 7,433 cfs – 95% of the historical average with only 39% of average precipitation and warmer temperatures on average. Precipitation in the Cowlitz Basin, WY 2025 to date is 89% of average.
- Storage: Riffe Lake elevation is 741.6 ft, right at the recent and 18 ft above the long-term averages. Boat ramps are open. Upper Cowlitz basin snow water equivalent is a bit below average. Tacoma is keeping the reservoir around 740 ft to manage for refill while maintaining outflows near minimums (plus fish transport flows) in anticipation of spring storms and additional snowmelt to prevent any spill actions. Current discharge is 5,160 cfs. There were no flow or ramp exceedances since the last meeting.
- 10-day Forecast: Below normal precipitation and normal to above normal temperatures. Inflows are below normal, ranging from 4.7K to 6.2K cfs. Outflows will continue to be near the minimum with the exception of fish transport flows.

Outflow



Current (5/5) discharge 5,160 cfs. 5,000 cfs min + weekly fish transport flow (if >8,000 cfs).
Down ramping limits <6,000 cfs 0 in/hr day, 2 in/hr night. No exceedances.

Water Quality

- Ben Caviness reported there were no spill events or water quality compliance monitoring for TDG, etc. since the last FTC meeting.
- Deployed water temperature arrays associated with the Cowlitz Falls North Shore Collector (CFNSC) on Mar. 13 – collecting temperature data at Cowlitz Falls Dam. Tacoma is developing a new automated way to display these data. They had to remove the temperature arrays from Mar. 27 to Apr. 3 due to high inflows into Scanewa, while LCPUD was replacing their debris barrier.
 - Debris Deflector North
 - Min Temp – 5.13 °C at 12 meters on Mar. 17 at 8:55 am
 - Max Temp – 10.20 °C at 0.5 meters on Apr. 27 at 12:25 AM
 - Debris Deflector South
 - Min Temp – 5.1 °C at 7.5 meters on Mar. 17 at 8:45 AM
 - Max Temp – 10.9 °C at 0.5 meters on Mar. 25 at 6:25 PM
 - Lewis Boat Barrier – Replaced on Apr. 1 and 2. Temp string replaced on Apr. 3.
 - Min Temp – 5.2 °C at 7.5 meters on Mar. 17 at 8:55 AM
 - Max Temp – 13.3 °C at 1.5 meters on Apr. 29 at 1:20 PM
- Currently temps are mainly impacted by inflows and amount of weekly precipitation and are fairly uniform throughout the water column. There are no data yet on Copper Canyon Creek or Lake Scanewa boat launch. Additional temperature arrays will be deployed, and weekly downloads will begin in June in coordination with the acoustic telemetry study. Debris barrier array maximum depth is ~3 meters. Depth of generators is ~23 meters. Temps are collected down to 18 meters on the north side and to 21 meters on south side.

Related Project Updates

- Trout Hatchery – Ground water study is complete. Results are expected soon.
- Kosmos Site – This is being monitored every other week with no sheens observed. In mid-June, they will conduct a metals background study to understand the native metals level in the area. After the feasibility study is reviewed and approved by ECY, Tacoma will develop a draft clean-up action plan later this year.
- Tacoma will do some dye testing at Mayfield spillway on May 13. The dye is environmentally safe and should dissipate quickly. This has been reported to the Statewide Environmental Reports Tracking System (ERTS). There will be signage on site. All are welcome to forward any questions to Ben. Ben will share a photo of the dye deployment to Andrew Luymes.
- North Taidnapam Boat Launch Improvement Project: Phase 1 has not been finished due to reservoir levels. Still waiting to finish the last portion which is pouring the cable anchor. Phase 2 (lower-level parking area, trail, ADA loading platform, etc.) permitting is complete and work is expected to begin this summer.
- Onion Rock Bridge Pier Repair – After permitting is secured, this will be done in two phases – inserting grout and then adding protection/ armoring against additional scour. Phase 1 of this work will likely be done in early June.

Fish Facilities (Presentation emailed May 8)

Separator Returns:

- Spring Chinook returns continue to increase and are nearly 4 times the 5-year average.
- The first load of summer steelhead and Kalama spring Chinook were recycled on May 2 to the I-5 Bridge launch.

- Winter steelhead returns are dropping off and are 75% of the 5-year average. Brood collection for the Lower Cowlitz and Tilton are complete. 20 more females are needed to complete the Upper Cowlitz program after fecundity levels dropped off toward the end of the season.
- Summer steelhead recently started to trickle into the separator. Brood collection starts June 16 (two weeks early to avoid the elevated pond losses at the end of the season).
- Cutthroat returns will pick up in August and are currently at the 5-year average.

Rainbow Trout Plants:

- Since March 44,200 trout have been planted at Mayfield Lake, as well as at Swofford and South Lewis County Park Ponds. 100K are expected to be planted by the end of August.

Cowlitz Release Sites: All sites are currently useable. Concerns continue regarding the water depth at the Cispus site. In discussions with the USFS, Tacoma has received approval of an extension of the access permit for temporary maintenance action.

Capital Projects: Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Remodel: The first draft of the ground water report to determine a reliable water source has been delayed until May 25 due to difficulties in comparing data from the 1960s and '70s. Eric hopes to present the results at the June FTC meeting. Eric looks forward to introducing the recently hired PM, Gus Garcia to this group.

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Subcommittee

Presenter: Jenise Bauman

Jenise reported this group is working through a short punch list that includes species-specific baseline tables and how to systematically prioritize the tables listed in the M&E plan. Some directed studies will launch this year. Two additional subcommittees have been formed for deeper dives: Life Cycle Modeling and a separate subcommittee focusing on concepts originally presented in Jack Tipping's study proposal.

At the June FTC meeting WDFW's John Serl and Sean Toomey will present an update and recommendations for the Spring Chinook Transition Plan. She thanked everyone for the great feedback along with presenters at the recent Science Conference and APR meeting.

Jenise walked through a completed draft of the M&E Subcommittee Charter. Today's discussion constitutes the first of three steps toward a DD over the next couple of months. She walked through the Subcommittee roles, scope of work, and monthly meeting schedule, reminding all their meetings open to all FTC reps and tech advisors. The Subcommittee has some autonomy to make in-season decisions to facilitate actions already approved by the FTC. Matt B recommended that when in-season decisions come up, these be communicated in updates to the FTC. The charter also includes milestones and measures. It will eventually be finalized as a DD for FTC approval. It will be posted to the FTC site and available for public review.

LCPUD Dam Operations

Presenter: Joe First

Tailrace survey: The firm AKS Engineering & Forestry will perform this survey this June or July.

Unit maintenance: They will be taking Unit 1 down in early July until the end of Sept. Unit 2 will be operating during that time.

Joe was pleased to report they have made good progress on the trash racks. There is currently zero differential on all four racks with only 6 ft of material per rack. They are also assisting with Tacoma's acoustic study.

Downstream Adaptive Mgt Technical Work Group (TWG) *(Presentation emailed May 8)*

Presenter: Sean Luis

Sean explained that Tacoma is working on a “comparative review of existing fish passage programs in the Cowlitz River basin: implications for baseline monitoring and directed investigations.” They are currently integrating comments from Tacoma and WDFW and then the document will be finalized. Components include facility configurations and fish processing/enumeration methods among the different facilities. TWG products have ramifications for M&E subgroup as well. Findings tie into existing baseline studies and will inform development of directed study concepts. This review has been conducted in the context of the Viable Salmon Population (VSP) parameters: Abundance, productivity, spatial structure, and genetic diversity – translated into monitoring metrics. This is the backbone of Tacoma's M&E Plan – guided development of baseline monitoring – and directed study concepts.

Key passage program components within the Cowlitz basin include the downstream juvenile trap and haul from the Upper Cowlitz River, downstream juvenile bypass at Mayfield, and upstream adult trap and haul program to multiple subbasins. He reviewed the passage group classifications and differences among facilities along with baseline monitoring implications. He tied the differences regarding directed study design implications to the various VSP parameters. He also reviewed key findings and next steps which include evaluating current methods and identifying opportunities to standardize protocols, continuing to better understand implications for M&E efforts, and understanding how best to align with regional practices.

Fall Chinook Transition Plan: Data Gaps *(Presentation emailed May 16)*

Models for Managing Fall Chinook Populations

Presenter: Jenise Bauman

Jenise began by thanking WDFW for their assistance and collaboration with the Fall Chinook Transition Plan and reminded all we will shift species to spring Chinook at the June FTC meeting. While fall Chinook is a prioritized population to include in the life cycle modeling, there are several data gaps to resolve including:

- Spring versus fall Chinook (results will refine calendar dates for brood stock collection of the two populations not understanding the abundance of the hybrid genotype).
 - M&E directed study design
- Lower Cowlitz vs. Tilton origin (potentially taking an otolith approach to determine river origin and migration behavior as we don't want a mixing of these two populations into brood stock).
 - M&E current study topic
- Mayfield guidance efficiency
 - Design will be based on Tacoma's previous studies associated with the secondary separator.2025 study.

Discussion: Anne Baxter asked if the modified summer flows impact the returns. John Serl asked whether having a 2,000 cfs flow that is cooler vs. ~700 cfs that is warmer might have allowed the spring and fall Chinook returns to overlap more than they would in the pre-dam system. Jenise

thanked both Anne and John and will take this into consideration. Anne also presented information on a new approach describing how stable isotope analysis of eye lenses can be used to determine a fish's life history. Jenise will follow up with Anne on this topic.

Cowlitz Restoration and Recovery (CRR) Program

Presenter: Steve West

Cowlitz Restoration and Recovery (CRR) Program: LCFRB is under contract with Tacoma to facilitate this CRR grant round. They provide overview of each submitted proposal. One CRR proposal was received this year – to enhance Kiona Creek. Steve West noted that draft applications for the Habitat round were due Mar. 31, and one project (Kiona Creek) was submitted by LCPUD. This proposal would implement design from CRR-1011-003. Cost is low and feasibility is high.

Project Goal: Restore natural processes of Lower Kiona Creek by adding complexity and developing a more robust riparian area to support the Upper Cowlitz/Cispus coho, winter steelhead, and spring Chinook populations.

Project Objectives:

- Addition of large wood structures are proposed throughout the project to increase habitat cover and complexity, increase pool scour and cover, help sort and retain gravels, and increase lateral channel dynamics such as split flow conditions.
- Increasing lateral channel dynamics will help to accelerate channel evolution processes, creating more inset floodplain surfaces and thus increasing floodplain connectivity. Wood additions that span the channel and collect bedload material will contribute to channel bed aggradation, further addressing floodplain disconnection.
- Restoration actions are focused on restoring native riparian vegetation communities to reestablish natural levels of stream stability, stream shading, nutrient exchange, and future large wood recruitment. Note: this restoration component is largely meant to complement existing and ongoing riparian management performed by LCPUD.

Total Project Cost: \$683,332; **Grant Request:** \$576,618 (84.4%); **Match:** \$106,714 (15.6%)

Steve closed by reminding everyone that the CRR proposal presentation and site visit will be May 8. He 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.

Mayfield Coho Net Pen Project, Phase 2

Presenter: Eric Shoblom

Eric walked through an initial draft DD 2025-04 recommending moving this project to Phase 2. The initial pilot is now complete as WDFW released the Mayfield Net pens on April 28. After the results come in on May 23, he will send out a draft DD (including the original plan) along with a summary of the evaluation comparing performance between the net pens and the hatchery. A vote to approve the DD will take place at the June FTC meeting as the timeline is short. If not approved, the hatchery program changes will be warranted. If approved, outside funding will need to be secured by Aug. 15 to support ongoing production of 250K BY2025 coho in the Mayfield net pens. In the event funding is not secured, the program will be concluded after Phase 2 (May 2026) and the BY2025 coho brood stock may be reduced accordingly. Tacoma is interested in taking control of this program as a Satellite Rearing (SR) facility.

Bryce asked if there were any net pen inventory discrepancies noted during the release on Apr. 28. Kris Warner replied that in his early investigations, there seem to be no red flags as inventories seemed to align with expectations.

Action Items:

- Eric: Update the DD and incorporate suggested edits and send out for review by May 27.
- All: Send any additional comments/suggested edits to Eric asap.

Annual Program Review (APR) (Updated DD emailed on May 8)

Presenter: Eric Shoblom

Eric noted today is the fourth meeting since March 4 to discuss the upcoming program goals for the hatcheries. The APR program was discussed at the annual meeting on Apr. 16 at the Veterans Memorial Museum in Chehalis.

Tacoma recently received a letter from Chris Vandenberg requesting the status of the Satellite Rearing (SR) program and expressing concern that, at the APR meeting, Tacoma stated they were discontinuing the program with no explanation.

Eric thanked Chris for the letter and noted that Tacoma has been struggling for many years to define and construct even one of the three Satellite Rearing Facilities. After many more years of deliberation and utilizing contractor help, they still were not able to come up with a solution that had high likelihood of success while also addressing their modern fisheries management concerns. The now completed Fisheries Hatchery Management Plan (FHMP) includes well defined goals along with a shared vision of recovery priorities. The FHMP includes some actionable and impactful options that can really move the needle toward recovery, which was the original intent of the license requirement. He emphasized that Tacoma is wholly committed to fulfilling its SR requirements. Since 2003 it has been working toward a viable solution that addresses modern fisheries management concerns. They are not abandoning SR and are continuing to work on this in concert with four other viable options. They hope to present a formal proposal at an upcoming FTC meeting. Progress has been slow but steady and updates have been provided at the October, February, and March meetings.

Review of initial draft DD 2025-03:

- Bryce reminded all that after the 2024 APR meeting Tacoma and WDFW agreed it was important to do a better job of capturing comments from the public. He was pleased to see the public feedback summary in the DD. Chris asked that the letter be included in the APR notes. Bryce suggested and Chris agreed to include his letter with these meeting notes instead.
- Eric reminded all of the change in the spring Chinook numbers, as well as an update on the net pens, noting that they were a success, and that funding will be provided to continue the program into 2026 which also would require that we take the fish now.

This DD was approved by FTC voting members present and will be sent out for electronic approval from FTC voting members not in attendance.

Action Item: Eric/Melora to send out DD for 7-day electronic approval.

Public Comment Period #1 - Agenda related

Larry: (The following is a summary of what he posted in the Chat.) As stated at the APR meeting, Larry is concerned that nothing is being done about the many seals and sea lions at the mouth and upriver on the Cowlitz River. He sees their arrival and departure as an easy correlation to when the large smolts are released between March and June. They leave when the smaller fall Chinook smolts are released. The number of predators is growing over the years from the same static release dates/timing. And this year's releases are going along as usual. What can be done to change release timings and sizes? Larry's emergency medical background and career we would have treated these events as Disaster Management. He has been discussing changing release times with NOAA representatives. To be continued!

Bryce: For the record, we are aware of the issue and are concerned and have been actively trying to pursue funding to address the pinniped issue. It is important to recognize the differences between correlation and causation. It's clear they come in to eat smelt and have an impact on adult fish and likely juvenile fish too. The proportional effect on the population is not clear.

Larry: Who is on the M&E Subcommittee? Can fishermen join? How can the public get a copy of their Charter? When is a schedule/agenda released? This M&E process can be an important tool in the turnaround of fisheries. Matt Bleich and Jenise need some credit here, to be determined. It seems the tribes are more effective in fisheries and hatchery management as they have active participation with and from their tribal fishermen, and many council members are fishermen.

Matt: FTC reps and their technical advisors are members of the M&E Subgroup. Depending on the topic, some consultants/those with particular technical expertise also attend. Members of the public are invited to attend the monthly FTC meetings.

Jenise: After FTC approval, the M&E Subcommittee Charter will be posted to the FTC website for public review

Chris: Hopes all read his letter. He was a Bio 1 for Cowlitz Falls fish evaluation under John Serl back in 1996. He thinks Tacoma is squandering its potential having accomplished little to nothing after 23 years of potential for restoring up-river populations. The adult transport program is not meeting the seeding goals. Tacoma needs to take initiative and start building facilities. Several years ago, Rep Jaime Herrera Beutler wrote a letter to FERC citing the same. Chris is a fisheries advocate. He proposes less talk and more action. He was told by Matt B in 2021 that there would be action on this in 2024. Tacoma is not willing to go above 650K lb cap unless someone pays for it.

Eric: Thanks for your comments. Tacoma knows it's been a long time. They have not been making as much progress as they would like to. The SR does not have to be part of the 650K lb cap.

Matt P: Tacoma has been actively/recently investigating - especially more recently in getting temperature data to identify places that would be viable options.

Matt B: Work on this issue is not just being done by Tacoma. There is an opportunity to be more communicative about the steps being taken and the progress that is being made. Everyone wants to see this project get to completion to get to the shared benefits.

Randy: Likes the concept of the M&E Subcommittee and would like to see a copy of its Charter in time to comment on it before it is finalized. It is important to include all relevant facts involved. Doing a better job getting help from other agencies might have a big effect in the long term.

Jenise: They are currently working with their regulators as well as with their WDFW partner. They are reaching out to experts in the field and will continue to share what they learn with the FTC.

Topics for June 3, 2025 FTC Meeting at Chehalis Veterans Memorial Museum & 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 Spring Chinook
 - Coho Net Pen BY 2026 DD 2025-04
 - FTC Work Plan / Protocols – public presentations
 - CRR Fund HAP Subcommittee
 - Send out M&E Charter as 30-day review – make changes and then it goes up for official vote (likely in August)
 - Preview August FTC Meeting Topics
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Public Comment Period #2 – Any topic: No comments.

Meeting Evaluation

- Great presentations/discussions
 - Appreciation for adjusting the agenda for DFW.
 - Some feedback/ background noise – be vigilant about use of the mute button
 - Start each meeting with a review of protocols
 - Very productive
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Josua's Inspirational Quote

As we heard during the tech check, it's gardening time!

"Successful gardening won't happen on its own. You have to get up and plant the seed and see if it grows, but you can't just wait around, you have to water it and take care of it." - Bootsy Collins

Closing Remarks

Matt Peter thanked everyone for all the collaboration that keeps this group moving during these meetings and between meetings – especially with the M&E group being back up and running. Lots of uncertainty these days at the fed and state level. Matt B added that he appreciates the partnership resulting in more collaborative progress.