

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

FTC Representative Attendees:

Melora Shelton	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
Matt Peter	Tacoma
Eric Shoblom	Tacoma
Scott Gibson	Tacoma
Sam Gibbons	Tacoma
Sean Luis	Tacoma
Jenise Bauman	Tacoma
Jamie Murphy	Tacoma
Ben Caviness	Tacoma
Chris Vaughn	Tacoma
Jason Stewart	Tacoma
Audrey Lamb	Tacoma
Stephen Lewis	BIA
Ann Weckback	Lewis County
Laura Wolfe	LCPUD
Steve Manlow	LCFRB
Lyn Wiltse	PDSA Consulting / Facilitator

Public Attendees: Fred Ming, Jack Tipping, Chris Vandenberg, Larry Pryor, Carol Serdar Tepper, Randy LeDuc, and Greg King

Remaining 2025 FTC Meeting Dates: Aug. 5, Sept. 2 (in person), Oct. 7, Nov. 4, Dec. 2 (in person)

Approval of May Meeting Summary

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

Updates

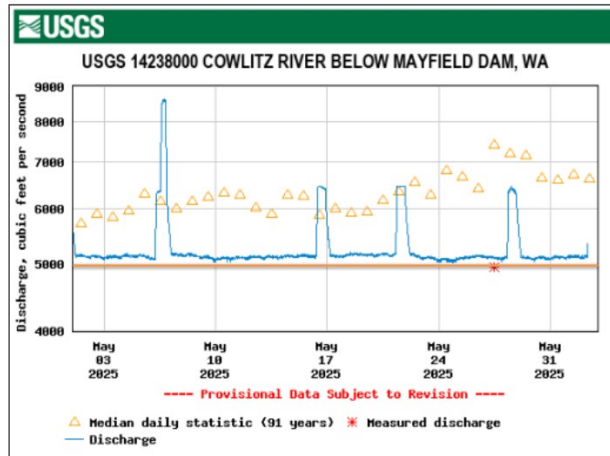
Announcement

- This was Lyn Wiltse's last meeting as the facilitator of the FTC. The FTC appreciates all of Lyn's efforts over her ~20-year tenure with the group. Her nimble efforts to facilitate a committee made up of diverse perspectives and agendas resulted in the completion of major milestones and major strides in satisfying the requirements of the Settlement Agreement and FERC license. The entire committee is grateful for Lyn's service, professionalism and commitment to fairness.
- Jennifer Arnold from Reciprocity Consulting will assume the role of facilitator/notetaker for this group starting with the August meeting. Jennifer comes highly recommended and looks forward to working with this group. Lyn has appreciated very much her time with the FTC.
- Joe First is double booked today and will email his update to be included in the meeting summary if he is unable to join the call.

Hydro Operations (*Presentation was emailed June 2*)

- Inflows: After 95% of the historical average in April, May inflows averaged 5,369 cfs (62% of the historical average, 4th percentile) with only 48% of average precipitation and typical temperatures. Precipitation in the Cowlitz Basin, WY 2025 to date is 87% of average.
- Storage: Upper Cowlitz basin Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) started off relatively normal this year. It didn't build much in April and has been rapidly declining since and is now below average. White Pass and June Lake have now substantially melted out without much increase in the reservoir. Riffe Lake elevation has been between 739 and 741 ft through May; currently at the recent average, and 18 ft below the long-term average. Boat ramps are all currently open. Operating at minimum flows in the lower Cowlitz with the exception of fish transport flows. Current discharge is 5,400 cfs. There were no flow or ramp exceedances since the last meeting.
- 10-day Forecast: No precipitation and normal to above normal temperatures. Inflows to be below normal, ranging from 5K to 6.3K cfs. Outflows will continue to be near the minimum with the exception of fish transport flows. They will continue to capture as much of remaining snow melt as possible.

Outflow



Current (6/2) 5,400 cfs (Unit maintenance). 5,000 cfs min + weekly FTF (if >8,000 cfs).
Down ramping limits <6,000 cfs o in/hr day, 2 in/hr night. No exceedances.

Additional Notes:

- On June 16, ramping rates will change to 1 inch/hr 24 hours a day.
- Fish transport flows before the ramping rate change, it may require two nights to return to minimum flow (may pause during daylight and finish the next day).
- Reservoir drafting is anticipated through June unless there is substantial precipitation.
- On July 1, Tacoma will ramp down directly to summer low flow, as was done last year.
- This has been a challenging year. Tacoma Power Management has been diligently monitoring the situation (e.g., 4th percentile May inflows). Long-term modeling indicates drafting and elevation substantially below 749 ft on July 1. There may be a need to reach out to this group consulting on a spring flow reduction during June in order to mitigate the extent of the draft.

Water Quality

- Matt P reported there were no spill events or water quality compliance monitoring for TDG, etc. since the last FTC meeting.
- He will send out a snapshot of temperature monitoring results. They are currently setting up for the acoustic telemetry study and associated WQ monitoring.
 - **Action Item:** Matt will send out temperature monitoring results.

Related Project Updates

- Trout Hatchery – Ground water study is complete and under internal review at Tacoma.
- Kosmos Site – Bi-weekly surveys continue at the site with monthly reporting to ECY. No sheens have been observed in the last few years in the Project area, including the banks of Rainy Creek. Additional soil sampling is underway to understand copper levels in the soil. When the Remedial Investigation study is complete, Tacoma will start the feasibility study and the draft clean-up action plan (early 2026).
- The dye testing at Mayfield spillway took place on May 13. Dam safety engineers are evaluating how to interpret that the green dye didn't show up anywhere.
- North Taidnapam Boat Launch Improvement Project – All permitting is complete. They have begun to rough-in the lower parking area and access point to that area as well as the trail

there. The upper parking lot ADA access will soon be underway, and the entire project should be complete by late summer-fall of this year.

Fish Facilities (Presentation emailed June 4)

Separator Returns:

- Spring Chinook typically peak the last week in May and will continue into October. To date, they have trapped 3,562, which is more than 2.5 times the 5-year average. Brood collection is well ahead of schedule.
- So far, 127 summer steelhead and 107 Kalama (AD+vent clip) spring Chinook have been recycled to the I-5 Bridge launch (ongoing.)
- Winter steelhead returns fell off in mid-April, with only 3 returning last week. Returns are 80% of the 5-year average. They completed broodstock collection on May 13.
- Summer steelhead are beginning to come in at around the 5-year average (131 to date) and recently started to trickle into the separator. Brood collection starts June 16.
- Cutthroat returns are currently just above the 5-year average and will pick up in August.

Rainbow Trout Plants:

- Since March 62,480 trout have been planted in Southwest Washington lakes. 100K are expected to be planted by the end of August.

Cowlitz Release Sites: Eric was pleased to report that all sites are currently available and in good working condition. Tacoma received an extension for access to maintain or dredge the Cispus site from the Forest Service and LCPUD is in the process of applying for maintenance HPAs.

Capital Projects: Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Remodel: Tacoma received the Draft Groundwater Report at the end of May. Estimates show a range from 1.5cfs to 5cfs of groundwater available if a Ranney-style well is installed. The geomorphology of the area is highly unpredictable. Additional imagery would be required prior to any construction efforts to understand the best paths for the laterals. These wells use a large, 12' diameter concrete cylinder or caisson as a collection point with horizontal well screens that jack out radially. Without a full analysis with cost estimates, it's too early to determine whether or not this is an appropriate path forward for providing additional, clean water to the hatchery. While 5cfs of pathogen-free (or pathogen-light) groundwater would definitely help the facility, other water sources may make more sense. Next steps include Water Source Alternative Analyses to determine a recommended path forward. Stay tuned.

Public Presentation Protocols: Tacoma has been working with WDFW on a draft protocol for a member of the public to make a presentation to the FTC. This will include roles of various voting members regarding decisions.

- **Action Item:** Melora to distribute draft public protocol to FTC signatories and delegates by June 30 targeting discussion ahead of the August FTC Meeting.

CRR Program: Steve M. reported the May 8 field visit with Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) went well and included a much-appreciated tour of the Cowlitz Falls North Shore Collector. The LCFRB will provide feedback on the CRR proposal to enhance Kiona Creek to the LCPUD. The TAC will review final applications at the end of June; scoring and ranking will show how this CRR proposal stacks up against the SRFB projects. Once final application materials are available, they will be sent to the FTC for review. At the August FTC meeting one of the Steves will give a

presentation on the project details and TAC ranking, followed by LCFR Board recommendation in September. We will finalize the associated DD for approval at the October FTC Meeting.

Melora reported the HAP subcommittee didn't meet in May and will meet on June 18. She will send out materials to subcommittee members. More details will be shared at the August FTC Meeting.

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Subcommittee

Presenter: Scott Gibson

Scott walked through the draft of the M&E Subcommittee Charter, expressing appreciation for WDFW's comments which will be integrated. The Charter formalizes the FTC directive, defines role and scope of work, and the process for making recommendations to the FTC. Today's discussion is the second of three steps toward DD 2025-05 to be finalized at the August FTC meeting.

Next steps: All comments will be reviewed at the next M&E meeting in mid-June, including inclusion of the Annual Operating Plan, and changing "minimum viability" targets to "full recovery" targets.

Action Items:

- Scott to send out a clean draft noting where edits were made and ask for additional feedback prior to the August FTC meeting.
- Melora and Jenise to check with James Archibald to see if he is the correct NOAA rep to include in this subcommittee, per the roles described in the Charter.

Spring Chinook Transition Plan: Data Gaps (*Presentation emailed June 4*)

Presenter: Sean Toomey

Sean Toomey walked through a very dynamic presentation introducing the Transition Plan for Spring Chinook. He emphasized that the focus is full recovery of the Upper Cowlitz and Cispus populations.

- Program Type: Segregated (ongoing while life-cycle modeling is completed and the plan for integration is developed)
- Recovery phase: Recolonization
- Goal of program: Conservation/Harvest

Juvenile releases: 16 fpp were planted in November. 12 fpp are now planted in December. With a set release date, holding fish back to be released at 8 fpp is difficult compared to letting them grow to 5 fpp.

He also described potentially moving from a segregated to integrated program driven by NOR returns, infrastructure, and program goals.

Next steps:

- Complete life cycle modeling - Integrated Population Model (IPM)
- Continue SAR analysis and compare with neighboring basins
- Continue to improve juvenile collection and survival at the CFFF
- Evaluate current segregated program including residualism of sub-yearling releases and the effect of the rearing strategy on adult age composition

Discussion:

Melora and Matt B expressed appreciation for this presentation as well as the state of the transition plans. Building out the spring Chinook program will form a helpful base of information from which to make recommendations for the future as we observe trends. Bryce noted that the program itself is straight-forward as it is a segregated program to provide spawners in the upper basin and support fisheries. At first, making brood was a real struggle. We are now starting to see a good number of fish return to the upper basin. The segregated hatchery program and current abundant returns has allowed us to shift the return timing, working to increase brood collections at the front end of the returns. Earlier collection targets are working well due to the early returns. We are currently ahead of the collection curve by about two weeks.

We are collecting samples from returning Chinook adults to assess timing and mixing of single-nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) within *GREB1L gene region* that show a strong association between early-(spring Chinook) and late- (fall Chinook) migrating phenotypes.. We currently have cut-off dates to help us with broodstock collection.

Subcommittee Update:

At the last M&E meeting WDFW's Lance Campbell gave a presentation on otolith work to differentiate between upper Cowlitz and Tilton Stock. They also discussed the Fall Chinook Transition Plan and the potential for different rearing strategy options for fall Chinook at the Cowlitz Hatchery, including future approaches for this. The subcommittee is also working on developing a life cycle IPM and have consulted with outside firms and with WDFW regarding models already developed/in use and how best to incorporate them in the Cowlitz basin. The subcommittee is also discussing how to make timely in-season decisions (e.g., disease management).

LCPUD Dam Operations

Presenter: Joe First (*Provided after the meeting via email*)

- Unit 1 maintenance will begin in late June or early July as the river flow decreases.
- The boat barrier replacement is complete.
- Transmission line outage is scheduled for September 3 – October 2.
- Forebay debris removal is scheduled for October.

Mayfield Coho Net Pen Project, Phase 2

Presenter: Eric Shoblom

Eric walked through the updated DD: Net Pen Coho Project - Phase 2 DD 2025-04 which recommends moving this project to Phase 2 based on the success of Phase 1 (survival in the net pens was equal to or greater than the five-year average of in-hatchery survival.) Due to feedback from the last meeting, he attached the evaluation of Net Pen Phase One Evaluation, showing that this was a year where there was a disparity, the loss is mathematically significant, but not biologically or pragmatically per Kris Warner.

Discussion:

Bryce noted that WDFW thinks this type of evaluation works for this DD. He had been anticipating that a more detailed summary of the pre-pilot results, including infrastructure, densities, etc. would also be included in the DD. For example, there is no clear recommendation on which density

performed the best and should be used next year. He would like to see a commitment to completing better documentation of how things went and the associated recommendations moving forward described in this DD, along with a commitment to follow through with recommendations around improved monitoring. The development of an improved monitoring approach (i.e., Mark/Recapture approach) was not completed as scheduled during Phase 1 due to time constraints. This work needs to happen before moving to the full pilot in Phase 2. More also should be added to the Coordination Need section of the document to reflect these commitments.

There has been concern about how coho will perform in the net pens. The original DD was completed pre-season with the improved monitoring information included (the evaluation step between Phase 1 and 2). Ideally this would be in place now, but that piece was not completed. This DD should include what was not completed in the initial phase before moving to Phase 2. There was a question about the appropriate level of detail to include in the DD. There were logistical and mechanical challenges in doing the secondary evaluation to the degree it deserves. This can't be revisited with existing data. The how matters less than the commitment to do the additional evaluation.

Could the M&E team review an approach and make recommendations accordingly? Is there a need to do a mark/recapture? Phil suggested there would be a mark/recapture approach that may not require much investment and would provide a lot more certainty about the population in a pen at release. Especially if we are considering this as a satellite rearing option, we want to make sure the approach is sound. WDFW committed to working on a draft framework for the improved monitoring of abundance/survival in the net pens for discussion with the M&E subgroup and FTC.

Next Steps:

The FTC is giving this assignment to the Hatchery Operations Management (HOM) and M&E groups to meet to develop a summary document to formalize results and recommendations by the Oct. 7 FTC meeting.

A funding source needs to be identified by August 15. Matt B is working on a satellite rearing DD that includes this option and plans to review this with the FTC at the August or September meeting. That would satisfy the commitment to at least take the brood, so there may be a pathway by then. The limiting factor is the time to collect brood.

With edits made at this meeting, 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 Items:

- Melora: Send out DD for 7-day electronic approval. (*Done.*)
- Matt B: Follow up on funding for Phase 2 (required by August 15).

Public Comment Period #1 - Agenda related

Larry: I have been waiting nearly two years for how the public can make a presentation to the FTC. In the meantime, I am making public comment directly to FERC. Who creates the agenda for the FTC meetings?

Melora: Topics are queued up with FTC input at the end of each meeting. Then the facilitator and I put together the initial draft which is routed internally for edits. We also start each meeting by reviewing the agenda and asking for any edits, so it is a very participative process.

Larry: In all the discussion about the Spring Chinook Transition Plan, there is discussion about releases – the production side of things, but no evaluation of hatchery success. Why would a member of the public want to support that? When is the next FHMP?

Melora: 2030

Greg: Would like to see marking Summer steelhead for their program if possible. CFFF Collection efficiency - 60% is the top of the range for Chinook for one year. If the goal is 95% of FPS or 75% with best available technology for all species, what happens if that is not accomplished by 2037?

Jack: Keeping sea run cutthroats for broodstock? They might just be residuals.

Eric: No. We are not collecting them.

Jack: Since Phase 2 of coho program is to make room for spring Chinook, what is the strategy?

Eric: Some of the 8 fpp production will be raised to the 5 fpp.

Topics for August 5, 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 for Spring Chinook
- Coho Net Pen Phase 2 – Funding source
- FTC Work Plan / Protocols – public presentations
- CRR Fund Update
- Preview September FTC Meeting Topics

Public Comment Period #2 – Any topic:

Jonathan asked about the Cowlitz Indian Tribe's Notice of Intent over failure to protect threatened steelhead.

Melora: Tacoma Power received notice from the Cowlitz Indian Tribe and The Conservation Angler Monday, May 19th stating their belief that Tacoma Power is not in compliance with the Endangered Species Act. Tacoma Power has been operating in compliance with our FERC license requirements and responsibly stewarding the land and fisheries operations on the Cowlitz River for many years. We are in the process of analyzing these new concerns and will have further information once we fully understand the scope of their claim.

Bryce: The FTC has relied on a password-protected internet site in the past for posting documents and other information. It is now out of date, though it does include good background information.

Melora: Yes, and until it is updated, I will send out the password to allow access to it.

Carol: Keep in mind that with the change in fish flows, there will be a need to monitor for dead and dying fish. She is grateful that Matt P has demonstrated that there is good water quality. As a former regulator and current member of the public, it is important to remember that the best time to plan for droughts is when not in a drought.

Larry: How is springer fishing in the Cowlitz?

Josua: Good. Getting reports on spring Chinook as well as summer steelhead. Creel reports show spring Chinook being caught including 5-year-olds from Kalama stock.

Larry: Upper Cowlitz revolves around fisheries success. It is not as productive as everyone had hoped. There is a need to do the numbers and shift from a production to a harvest mentality. (Larry did this exercise on coho last year.

Meeting Evaluation

- Meeting link
 - Productive conversations – resulting in arriving at a place of common understanding
 - Record breaking attendance at 41!
 - Great presentations/discussions
 - Start each meeting with a review of protocols
-

Josua's Inspirational Quote

"Don't be dismayed at good-byes. A farewell is necessary before you can meet again. And meeting again, after moments or lifetimes, is certain for those who are friends." Richard Bach

Closing Remarks

Melora thanked everyone for such a collaborative meeting with challenging but productive discussions to ensure a common understanding and path forward. She also thanked Lyn for her many years of service and closed by reading what she called a "Lynerick" in her honor.