

**Cowlitz Hydroelectric Project
FERC No. 2016
Cowlitz Fisheries Technical Committee
Meeting Summary**

August 5, 2025 from 9:30am-2:30pm

FTC Representative Attendees:

Melora Shelton	Tacoma
Peggy Miller (for Bryce Glaser)	WDFW
Andrew Luymes	ECY
Bill Sharp (for Phil Rigdon)	YN

Additional Attendees:

Anne Baxter	ECY
Josua Holowatz	WDFW
John Serl	WDFW
Kevin Young	WDFW
Todd Hillson	WDFW
Sean Toomey	WDFW
Larona Newhouse	WDFW
Matt Bleich	Tacoma
Eric Shoblom	Tacoma
Scott Gibson	Tacoma
Sam Gibbons	Tacoma
Jenise Bauman	Tacoma
Ben Caviness	Tacoma
Chris Vaughn	Tacoma
Joe First	LCPUD
Laura Wolfe	LCPUD
Steve Manlow	LCFRB
Michael Boyles	BPA
Jennifer Arnold	Reciprocity Consulting, LLC / Facilitator

Public Attendees: Jack Tipping and Larry Pryor

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

Approval of June Meeting Summary

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

Updates

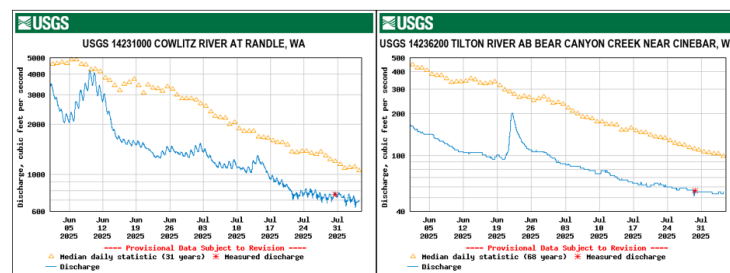
Announcements

- Jennifer Arnold from Reciprocity Consulting, LLC is the new facilitator/notetaker for this group. Lyn and Melora have supported her onboarding. Jennifer has known Lyn and worked with her for years. Her intent is to match Lyn's style and practices and invite feedback along the way to adjust and continue improving as we go. Her intention is to support each person and a strong group process. She is always open to feedback.

Hydro Operations Update by Melora Shelton (Tacoma) (Presentation emailed August 4)

- This update includes two months of data: June and July.
- Inflows were typical in April, but quite low since then (see below).
- The elevation of Riffe Lake has been about 10' below the recent average (2017-2024) and drafting. It is currently at 728 ft. Refill was not achieved.
- Outflow has been near minimum flows. It is currently at the typical summer low (2,300 cfs, above the 2,000 cfs summer minimum).
- There were no minimum flows or ramping deviations.
- All boat ramps are open. Courtesy docks will be removed and ramps closed as the reservoir drafts. WDFW will be updated, including before Labor Day weekend.
- John Serl reflected that the low flows this spring probably contributed to the high juvenile fish collection efficiency.

Inflows (6/1-8/4)



Snow melt done by mid June, minimal late precipitation June.

Overall well below average streamflow throughout June and July.

TACOMA POWER
TACOMA PUBLIC UTILITIES

Water Quality Update by Ben Caviness (Tacoma) (Presentation emailed July 23)

- Ben reviewed water temperature profiles emailed on July 23 and their monitoring locations.

Related Projects

- August maintenance dredging includes boat ramps (Blue Creek 8/4, Barrier Dam 8/5) and at Blue Creek for stormwater management at the Trout Hatchery (8/6).
- North Taidnapam Boat Launch Improvements Project – The parking area and the fishing trail are nearing completion, additional work will require lower reservoir elevations. They hope to complete everything by this fall.
- The Onion Rock Bridge pier repair – Phase 1 repairs to the bridge pier were completed in July. Phase 2 (armoring to prevent future erosion) is in permitting.
- Josua asked about lamprey salvage. Fish salvage efforts were completed prior to and during Blue Creek boat ramp creek dredging, including lamprey rescue.
- Josua asked about upland sediment disposal and the desire to return them to the river. Tacoma is having conversation with Ecology to incorporate this into future permits.

Fish Facilities Update by Eric Shoblom (Tacoma) (Presentation emailed August 5)

Separator Returns:

Currently at the separator, there are spring Chinook, fall Chinook, summer steelhead, cutthroat trout, and a few chum and sockeye returning. The majority of fish returning currently are summer steelhead. First time returning summer steelhead are getting recycled along with HOR cutthroat, chum, and sockeye.

Staff were able to collect 100% of broodstock required for our Winter Steelhead and Spring Chinook programs. Summer Steelhead broodstock collection is currently underway. Cutthroat Trout and Fall Chinook are just beginning to arrive and the Fall Chinook are being transported to the Tilton River until their broodstock collection begins on August 18th.

Cowlitz Release Sites:

Currently, all release sites are available and in working condition. Tacoma is working with LCPUD to identify and develop an alternate release site on the Cispus River.

Rainbow Trout Plants:

Annual rainbow trout plants began the first week of March, and 92,712 have been planted so far across Southwest Washington lakes, like Mayfield, Swofford, and South Lewis County park ponds.

Update on the Mayfield Net Pens:

WDFW has been working on evaluation methods for Phase II, which is on schedule. Tacoma and WDFW met on logistics, and Tacoma is in the process of purchasing additional nets and supplies for the program. WDFW is working on preparing the net pens and growing the fish. The Coho have already been tagged and set aside for the program. Matt Bleich had an FTC action item to secure funding for the Phase II net pen program, which was completed in June.

Capital Projects: Cowlitz Trout Hatchery Remodel:

Tacoma commented on the Draft Groundwater Report and received the final draft. Tacoma would like to bring slant well technology forward into the Alternatives Assessment as it appears that 3 to 5 wells could produce around 5 cfs. Tacoma will also continue to look at other water supply alternatives. They are testing the now defunct North Well. If testing is promising, they will recommend a full rehab and analysis and add it to the Alternatives Analysis.

Fisheries Update by Josua Holowatz (WDFW)

For fall management, WDFW has moved the fishing boundary to the standard 400'. Fishing rules will be no Fall Chinook retention until further notice as posted on WDFW's pamphlet, website, and app. As WDFW continues to monitor, they have some capacity to liberalize those rules but are not looking to do so right now.

Public Presentation Protocols Update by Melora Shelton (Tacoma)

Melora distributed the draft protocols to FTC signatories and delegates and is scheduling a meeting with delegates to discuss it in August or September. NMFS cannot participate until October so there will be follow up.

Gravel and Large Woody Debris (LWD) Placement Implementation Presenter: Ben Caviness (Tacoma)

Annual large woody debris place is happening today (8/5). There was additional discussion around wood management, including the fate of any wood removed from Lake Scanewa instead of spilled into Riffe Lake. David Cogswell is Tacoma's lead for the programmatic approach to wood management, which includes transitioning away from burning excess wood and proving it to other entities. People can follow up with David directly or through Matt Peter.

Annual gravel placement is planned for next week, 900-1,000 cubic yards. This is consistent with the 2023 Gravel Plan addendum filed with FERC. Ben will report on completed work in September

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Subcommittee Presenter: Jenise Bauman (Tacoma)

Finalizing the M&E Charter. DD 2025-05

Jenise incorporated all of the comments from Tacoma and WDFW into a clean version of the charter. Comments from FTC and the Subcommittee helped strengthen the document. Jenise confirmed that James Archibald is still the subcommittee rep from NOAA.

Melora shared the proposed final Decision Document (DD 2025-05) on screen. She reminded the group that we can update the primary points of contact, as needed, without

updating or amending the DD. No additional edits were proposed and the DD including the M&E Subcommittee Charter was approved by FTC voting members present. It will be sent out for electronic approval from FTC voting members not in attendance.

Jenise thanked all the reviewers for contributing.

Action Items:

- Melora: Send out DD for 7-day electronic approval.

Update on Life Cycle Modeling

Jenise explained that the approval of the M&E plan generated lots of ideas for actionable studies. They all hang under the umbrella of **life cycle modeling**, which will be the cornerstone for synthesizing data for all of our populations of interest.

To initiate the life cycle modeling work, Tacoma and WDFW will bring in a consultant to design and implement studies to address data gaps and curiosities starting with Winter Steelhead. The next step will be to organize all the data and pull it into a shared database. WDFW's and Tacoma's data specialists are working with them to figure out the best way to do this. The model will first be built with Winter Steelhead, then they will fill data gaps with Spring and Fall Chinook. One data gap is confirming the broodstock collection dates between spring and fall. They will use molecular and phenotypic traits to try to figure this out. They will also collect otoliths to ascertain where they originate to ensure proper dispositioning and broodstock. They will also look at study designs to compare release strategies for Fall Chinook. Each initiative will produce data to incorporate into life cycle modeling to understand the best methods to improve SARs into the future.

Larona asked what happens if unmarked Fall Chinook adults are sampled? Or Spring Chinook with Coded Wire Tags? Are you sure you're sending them to the right place? John answered that they presume the separator staff will be able to id the Fall Chinook. Uncertainties will be confirmed using the laboratory techniques mentioned above, which will reconcile uncertainties and confirm calendar dates used for collection and dispositioning.

Update on M&E Implementation Planning

On August 20, there will be a 4-hour in-person meeting to discuss implementation planning and how that fits into the APR process. Everyone from FTC is welcome and can reach out to Jenise for meeting details if you are interested. At the meeting, the group will be whiteboarding their priorities and then sharing them with the M&E Subcommittee and FTC.

Mayfield Net Pen Pilot Project, Phase 2
Presenter: Eric Shoblom (Tacoma)

- Eric explained that Tacoma and WDFW wanted to add some details under Coordination Need in the DD 2024-04 specifying decision points and deadlines for the record. The only change was to add “Coordination Need updated August 5, 2025” to the decision date.
- Peggy asked a procedural question about any need for FTC concurrence or recognition of the change? Melora responded that because the additions are follow ups in the Coordination Need section and do not change the decision, she proposes to just post it with the update clearly noted as shown.
- Todd and Eric discussed the proposed updates and made minor clarifying edits.

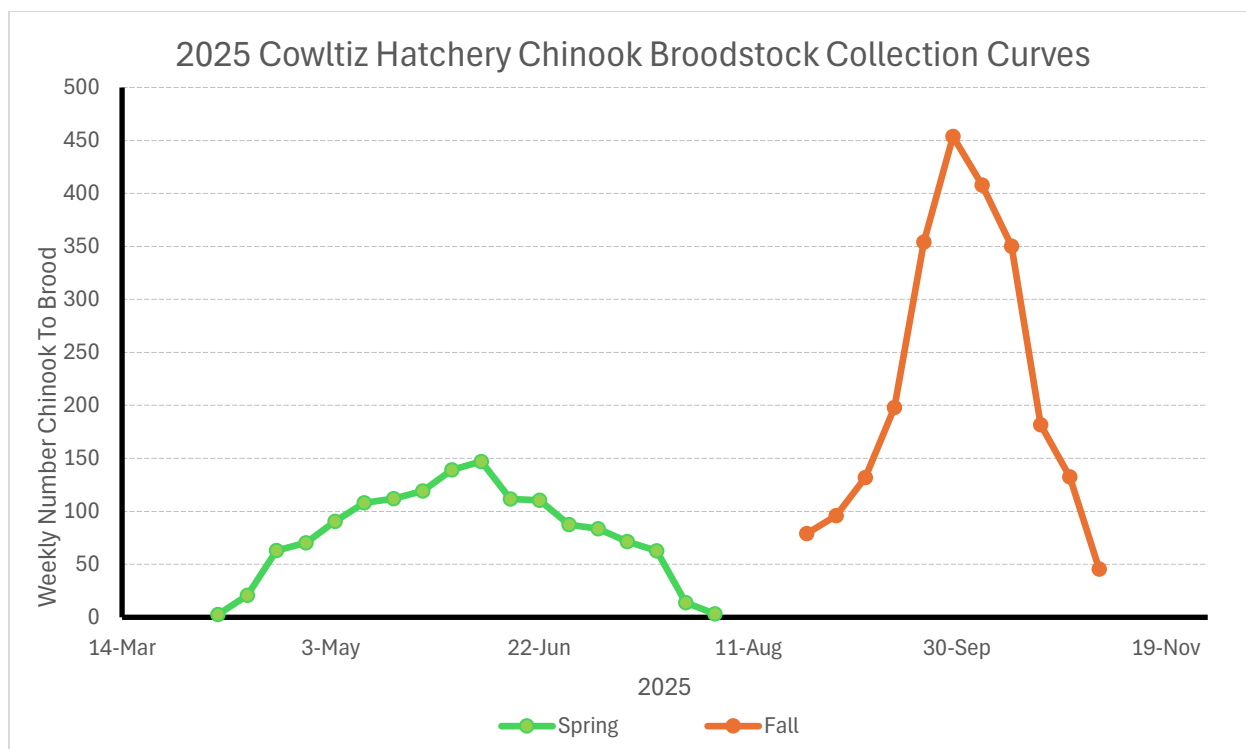
Action Items:

- Melora: Post DD 2024-04 with agreed on updates to the FTC website.

Spring Chinook Transition Plan – Follow-up Topic: Collection Update
Presenter: Todd Hillson (WDFW)

Kris Warner was scheduled for a presentation on Spring Chinook collection but was unable to attend the meeting. Todd and others from WDFW provided high level updates.

Hatchery staff have modified the broodstock collection curves for 2026. They noticed a bell-shaped, bimodal curve with a right-handed tail to the distribution in August 2025 (see below). Because of uncertainties around Spring to Fall timing and identification, WDFW moved the collection curve earlier with a hard date at the end of July for Spring Chinook broodstock collection. Even with the new hard cutoff date, spring Chinook broodstock goals were met without any issues



WDFW led additional discussion around returning timing and how program numbers influence collection timing, the potential benefits of targeted coded wire tagged fish for broodstock, and the trade-offs around targeting specific return timing in the long term and potentially not making brood stock collection goals (e.g., Fall Chinook). The focus on timing for Spring versus Fall Chinook is a really good example of collaboration between hatcheries, science, and management – and all the people involved.

Josua also explained that, based on the pre-season forecast for Fall Chinook and broodstock needs there will be no Fall Chinook retention. There was additional discussion about addressing data gaps around unmarked Fall Chinook juveniles passing the turbines at Mayfield.

Melora thanked Todd and Josua for presenting on this topic and responding to questions on the fly. Kris Warner potentially has more to present on this topic. Jenise will check-in with Kris when he is back to ask if he would like more time to present in September or at a later meeting, knowing that the FTC is scheduled to start with the Coho transition plan at our in-person September meeting

Action Item

- Jenise will check-in with Kris and follow-up with Jennifer and Melora if needed for a presentation on this topic at an upcoming FTC meeting.

Downstream Adaptive Management Technical Work Group (TWG)

Presenter: Chris Vaughn (Tacoma) *(Presentation emailed August 8)*

Acoustic telemetry project

Chris provided a brief update on the acoustic telemetry project. Sean was not able to attend this meeting, but he is preparing a deeper dive next month.

The Cowlitz Falls North Shore Collector telemetry study runs 2025-2026. They are looking at entrance configurations and what methods they can use to increase the collection efficiencies for Chinook using three different treatments: 1) a control treatment with 500 cfs inflow, 2) an occlusion plate blocking off half of the entrance face, also with 500 cfs inflow, and 3) tailrace discharge adding 250 cfs for a total inflow of 750 cfs.

They have one more tag and release event on August 12th, which will be 580 fish total. They've added an additional block at the end (with no tag/release) to allow more time for observing downstream migration and behavioral responses in the forebay.

Chris presented some promising detection efficiency data, which indicates equipment functionality, fish behavior, and data quality.

Josua asked what is the tag life of the acoustic tags? Is this showing some fish are delayed through their migration in the reservoir, so they are collected again after the acoustic tag is expired? Conservatively, the batteries are published to last 45-50 days although the consultant estimates longer.

Todd asked if the acoustic tags are surgical implants with an antenna. Are they scanned? Do you have numbers on fish that came through with a PIT tag but not a radio tag due to delayed migration? Chris responded there is no antenna. The dual tags are associated with their companion PIT tag so they would know if there was an acoustic tag that is no longer functioning at time of capture. Todd asked if it was looked at. Chris responded that they haven't seen it, but he wasn't sure if they had looked at that issue specifically. It is unlikely we would have seen this at this point considering tag life.

Coho parr

Mayfield and Cowlitz Falls facilities have historically had different dispositions for parr life stages. There is extensive literature on life history plasticity, especially this nomadic stage with Coho.

They brought this to FTC in January 2025 with the recommendation to begin passing Coho parr downstream. DD 2025-02 was approved in March, and as soon as the Cowlitz Falls Fish Facility was open, Coho parr were sent downstream. TWG was tasked with looking at performance monitoring associated with that decision.

They felt it was best to first take a passive approach to performance monitoring looking at SAR comparing it to juvenile-to-adult return (JAR), specifically Coho from the Upper

Cowlitz. Past SAR performance will be compared to 2027+ JAR. Ocean conditions, among other things, can drastically influence SAR, so they also plan to compare same year JAR to the SAR of same year FCE trial Coho smolts. If they see return rates below the lower bound of the confidence interval (6.5%, 2019-2023) for 3 consecutive years, they have the option of moving to Phase 2 looking at rate of downstream dispersal where they would tag parr and compare the downstream rate of observation to that of tagged smolts from the FCE trials. Depending on the results of a statistical comparison, they could move to an optional phase 3, which would focus on upstream overwinter survival and behavior. Phase 3 would come back to TWG for study design.

LCPUD updates

Presenter: Joe First

- They are in the middle of Unit 1 outage. Unit 2 is operating.
- The transmission line outage between Cowlitz Falls and the Glenoma substation is scheduled for September 3 – October 2. Unit 2 will still have 1-2 MW flowing.
- The sluice gate project is in the design phase and has been sent to NOAA. They wrote a letter to FERC disagreeing with their methods for seismic hazard analysis, and FERC responded that they agreed with us. There is a lot of permitting to work through, but optimistically they hope to start construction in 2029.
- Sediment removal in front of the sluice gates is scheduled for October.
- Alternate release sites in the Cispus look promising.

Peggy asked about flows in October during the outage. Joe described prescribed spill through October and noted they might be able to spill it over the North Shore collector during the outage. Peggy emphasized the benefit of this approach to avoid spilling smolts into Riffe Lake. Joe noted that the low flow conditions make the outage easier to manage. Tacoma and LCPUD have worked well together and will coordinate on this.

CRR Program Updates

Grant Round Funding

Presenter: Steve West (LCFRB) *(Presentation will be emailed when it is received)*

Steve went over the ranking for all 21 proposals received by the Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board. LCFRB staff ranked all of the proposals, which were then reviewed by the 10-member Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). Kiona Creek was the only project submitted for Cowlitz Restoration and Recovery (CRR) Funding. Steve emphasized that Laura Wolfe did a great job with the Kiona Creek site visit and the overall application. Steve stated that all of the submitted projects were good projects and that the scores and rationales reflect this. However, projects are scored on their own merits and ranked relative to each other. Kiona Creek was ranked 20 out of 21 with several concerns identified: lack of benefits to fish relative to cost, lack of overall considerations of

watershed processes, ambiguities in the proposals, and surrounding property constraints to limit project success. With the ambiguity, it was unclear what was required by LCPUD under their license and what was being proposed. The TAC felt it was a good project, but they needed more information and greater clarification of project metrics. Although the project score was high enough to fund, the TAC-recommended and board-approved decision is do not fund Kiona Creek in 2025 due to the concerns. The overall TAC opinion is that this is a good project. Steve and Laura discussed the project and some ideas to make the proposal more robust. All parties have agreed to work together to make the project more robust, and LCPUD will resubmit in 2026 or 2027.

Steve and Melora reminded everyone that the LCFRB recommends projects but the FTC makes decisions on CRR expenditures following FTC decision protocols.

Melora reflected on the value of FTC's partnership with LCFRB to make these funding decisions. She expressed appreciation for the technical expertise of TAC and LCFRB staff and use of their robust ranking process. Steve shared that the LCFRB Board expressed gratitude for the TAC members and their role in ensuring the value for Tacoma Power's ratepayers.

Action Item

- Steve and Melora will work together to prepare a DD for the FTC's decision not to fund the Kiona Creek Project in 2025, which will be presented at the September FTC meeting.

HAP Subcommittee

Presenter: Melora Shelton (Tacoma)

There were no June workshop requests. The next opportunity is in October. They reviewed the application materials for 2026 and are only changing dates to match the SRF Board calendar which will be finalized in a few months. They will share the draft calendar and work plan after this meeting and will hold meeting time for technical assistance as needed.

2023 Funding Clarification Memo

Presenter: Steve Manlow (LCFRB)

Steve explained the purpose of this memo and agenda topic is to provide clarification for the record. The Crystal and Woods Creek Project was funded in 2023. There was a discrepancy between the preliminary project cost \$157,648 and the final cost \$168,098. They realized recently that the DD references the preliminary cost and was never updated to reflect the final cost that matches the contracted amount. All of the materials that the FTC used to make their decision, including linked PowerPoint presentations, applications, and the project summary correctly use the final cost, but the DD still had the original cost. The goal of this memo is provide an explanation for this discrepancy.

Melora proposed attaching this memo to the DD posted online and also attaching it to the FERC annual report for the record. Peggy asked that the DD include a note at the top that there is a memo appended. Melora will do so.

There was discussion about any need for further process. Members present (WDFW, Ecology, and Tacoma) agreed with this approach, but recognized that they would like to check-in with the other signatories, especially since it relates to funding. We will pause when we go through the August notes in September to ask if any other voting members want to weigh in.

Action Item

Melora: Add the memo as an appendix to DD 2024-04 with a note at the top that a memo was appended in August 2025.

Public Comment Period #1 - Agenda related

Jack: The closure of Fall Chinook on the Cowlitz shows the dire need to change management. Lewis County is missing out on millions of dollars worth of recreational value. The last FTC meeting showed that the Cowlitz Falls Hatchery Fall Chinook only have 20% of the survival of the Kalama hatchery. It's time for a change. He keeps commenting on this every year and yet sees changes delayed.

Larry: Larry echoed Jack's comment. He also asked Jenise what she meant by "proper broodstock".

Jenise: Tacoma has established cutoff dates for Spring and Fall Chinook. They are proposing to use molecular techniques to identify species and adjust cutoff dates if needed. If they are expecting a low return year for Fall Chinook and they need to collect more broodstock, this will help them understand if they can adjust the dates to collect earlier in the season. For the life cycle model, this will confirm numbers of outmigrating juveniles by strengthening our understanding between Spring and Fall Chinook populations.

Larry: Are SARs being tracked at the Cowlitz Falls Collection Facility?

Jenise: Yes, SARs are being tracked.

Larry: There is a good amount of Coho. The Springer SARs have exceeded the hatchery SARs and the sizes are coming out smaller than the hatchery release sizes, which is why SARs are important as they relate to hatchery management.

Topics for September 2, 2025 FTC Meeting in Chehalis with a Hybrid Teams Option

Coho Transition Plan

Option - Spring Chinook Transition Plan: Follow-up on Collection

AM TWG update – Sean Luis – presenting preliminary data
CRR funding draft DD and Fund update
Fish Collection: Mid-season Update
Satellite Rearing
Follow-up on Gravel and LWD placement
Usual Updates: Hydro Status, WQ, Fish Facilities, M&E, TWG
Preview October FTC Meeting Topics

Public Comment Period #2 – Any topic:

Larry: The release timing should be changed because of the thousands of seals at the mouth of the Cowlitz River. Who is responsible for release timing? Is it NOAA? Hatchery managers have said they have had earlier release times to try to avoid problems, but it's important to talk about it now instead of May and June when it is too late.

Wild Coho retention. Last year there were 14,000 wild Coho collected at the separator, yet we have not been able to retain wild Coho. He would like to know the progress.

How has fisherman participation and harvest been for late winter steelhead, springers, and summer steelhead? His sense was that planners generally don't know what fishing participation is like on the River. From his perspective, that needs to change, and planners need to take into account the economic impact.

Josua described how WDFW does creel survey in the Cowlitz and provided some preliminary numbers. He noted that while it does not provide a census, it does confirm that fish are being caught every week. Management numbers won't come out for another year. The 2024-2025 season just ended in April, and those numbers probably won't be available for a year. Numbers after April 2025 won't be reported until 2026.

Scott: Tacoma is working on various release strategies for each species based on the studies described earlier, particularly for different sizes for Fall Chinook.

Meeting Evaluation

What went well? What can we change or improve in the future?

- Kudos to Jennifer for providing a nice transition.
 - We demonstrated flexibility today and pivoted when we needed to.
 - Thank you to WDFW staff for filling in.
 - Glad to see “relax and refresh” stayed on the agenda.
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Josua's Inspirational Quote

“The strength of a team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.” Phil Jackson

Closing Remarks

Melora thanked Jennifer and everyone for their contributions and commitment.