

## Cowlitz Annual Program Review Virtual Public Meeting Q&A

Wednesday, June 23, 2021 | 2 to 4 PM

**Q. Chris Vandenberg** – Did you not receive advice for doing things with spring Chinook in the upper basin, such as the satellite program?

**A. Matt Bleich** – These recommendations came from a suite of recommendations that we worked up as part of the development of the FHMP before we submitted it. We worked with the public to develop that suite of recommendations. We asked ourselves what changes are realistic during 2021, while Transition Plans were in development. The satellite rearing strategies are also in a planning phase. We are working with the Fisheries Technical Committee (FTC) and the public on that plan. We knew that process would go beyond 2021, so that’s why it doesn’t show up on this chart.

**John Serl** – We should change the label of the “APR Thoughts Today – From 2020 FHMP” slide to reflect that these are the things we’re doing in 2021.

**Matt Bleich** – I agree. I will do that before we publish this presentation online.

---

**Q. Larry Pryor** – I have a comment about the settlement agreement – your responsibility lies with 650k lbs. But the release numbers are relative to size; it’s not just poundage. You didn’t put numbers in this about release sizes.

**A. Matt Bleich** – We spend a tremendous amount of time and energy thinking about our facilities, release sizes, release numbers, and which species mix will achieve the best overall survival rate. We think about this constantly, as well as when we enter into each APR process. We will take another more in-depth look at that again through the Transition Planning and invite the public to participate in that process as well.

---

**Q. Larry Pryor** – How much have your NORs been influenced by the hatchery fish? Do you know the generational information? Some people think hatchery fish are evil.

**A. John Serl** – It depends on which stock of fish you’re talking about. The lower Cowlitz fall Chinook have a 20% hatchery influence average. Mass marking for fall Chinook went into effect in 2011. For the upper Cowlitz stocks, that reintroduction started in 1996. The collection efficiency wasn’t high enough for them to be self-sustaining. However, as that improves, we’ll end up genetically diverging away from the hatchery populations. We haven’t done a specific genetic study to see what kind of diversion we’ve got. Hatchery fish aren’t evil. They are good at being hatchery fish, but don’t do as well as NORs in the natural environment. They are just adapted to different environments.

---

**Q. Chris Vandenberg** – On the seeding capacity estimates, what models and data are you using and who's going to be doing that?

**A. John Serl** – The heavy lifting has been done by Thomas Buehrens at WDFW and Phil Sandstrom at Tacoma Power. We are tracking the juvenile Chinook out-migrating at the Mayfield counting house and comparing those numbers to the number of adult fall Chinook that return the next year. We have fit Beaverton-Holt, Ricker, and Hockey Stick functions to the data and these look about the same.

**Q. Chris Vandenberg** – What's your timeline?

**A. John Serl** – I don't recall at the moment. We'll take what we've got back to the larger group to see if they have comments and if we need to refine the data.

**Matt Bleich** – There is a two phased-approach for the seeding capacity estimate – we used fall Chinook as a template, but we have a need to do this across other populations. The strategy John described is a great first step for us. That exercise needs to be extended to other populations. The second cut is we'd like to introduce that perspective into a lifecycle model approach. We used USGS as a consultant for coho in the upper basin. We have talked about using or modifying that model. We gave ourselves a year to work through that longer exercise after the transition plans are done.

---

**Q. Larry Pryor** – I haven't seen harvest impact numbers recently, but they should be surprisingly lower than you think. Need to do some numbers for harvest impact for NORs.

**A. John Serl** – We get numbers from harvest cards every year. We're not quite there with the actual impact. We're getting a handle on adult abundance, which would help us determine if a fishery could be potentially opened there.

**Matt Bleich** – NOAA is part of this conversation around these two critical data points: marking strategies and adult abundance data points. We're committed to working together to move things forward with this.

---

**Q. Larry Pryor** – The early winter-run steelhead are missed by the community. Do you support any outside reintroduction from an independent group for the early winter-run steelhead? There is new technology available and it might be doable to bring back an early winter run.

**A. John Serl** – The general consensus from the group is that's probably not where we want to go. We can't bring the Chambers Creek stock back, and the Kalama stock isn't ready yet. However, it looks like we could potentially get there by doing a segregated group and aggressively pushing run timing.

**Matt Bleich** – Regarding external collaborators – that is something our FTC group has potential opportunities for. We have a couple avenues worth keeping an eye out for: the Cowlitz Restoration and Recovery (CRR) Fund grant strategy for hatchery-associated projects has the potential for opening up opportunities. Come 2022 there should be opportunities for strategies around this idea. We need to think about how these fit with the transition plans and overarching strategy. Another opportunity is thinking about the overall strategy around the satellite rearing facilities. We are developing the next

phase of our work planning with the FTC and how we'll incorporate public feedback. We don't yet know what avenue that will take, but we're open and the FTC is open to.

**Eric Shoblom** – It is exciting that these grant opportunities will be ready to go when the transition plans are complete.

---

**Q. Chris Vandenberg** – Thank you for being responsive to the sportsmen regarding the early winter-run steelhead. It broke my heart to see the Blue Creek parking lot empty in December. If you can do anything to bring that program back so it has some resemblance to what it looked like before, that would be great. I appreciate you making the effort to improve it so there is a fishery again between November and January.

**A. Matt Bleich** – Thank you very much, Chris.

---

**Comment from Larry Pryor** – Great to see SAR analysis complete, but you're missing adult return goals and how we get there. The fish you're releasing fish at 80 and 90 grams are whales compared to what other hatcheries are doing, so you need to take another look at that. Don't pat yourselves on the back just yet.

---

**Q. Chris Vandenberg** – Have you, or are you going to, take scale samples of the fish?

**A. Phil Sandstrom** – Yes, we take scale samples.

**Q. Chris Vandenberg** – Have you analyzed them yet?

**A. John Serl** – We haven't done the complete analysis yet, but we did previously check some spring Chinook scales. Some were zeros and some came out as ones. They are growing about as fast as hatchery fish are right now and that can confuse analysis of the scale patterns.

**Chris Vandenberg** – That's excellent news! I would love to see the scale sample data in a chart sometime.

---

**Q. Larry Pryor** – Are you doing SARs on your NORs? That's the measure to use according to the HSRG.

**A. John Serl** – You can calculate SARs on coho pretty easily since the adults are the same age. I should have that data for coho for most years. We have done direct tagging of steelhead from the upper watershed; it was at 5% for a while. It's trickier with other species since they are from different years. I think some of that data is available or could be estimated. It's an apples-to-oranges comparison between hatchery and natural numbers. For hatchery fish, a large part of the mortality occurs after they are released as smolts, but natural fish experience more of their mortality before they become smolts.

---

**Q. Chris Vandenberg** – Will the public be invited to the next FTC meeting? There are some comments we need to make to the FTC before the next part of this process.

**A. Matt Bleich** – I'm not sure, but you can provide your comments to me or Travis Nelson, and we will make sure that the FTC receives them.

**John Serl** – FYI – there is not a July FTC meeting; the next one will be in August.

**Chris Vandenberg** – No problem; that gives us more time to collect our feedback.

---