

Final Notes March 2, 1998

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM MEETING NOTES

February 5, 1998, 9:00 a.m.-4 p.m.

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE OFFICES
PORTLAND, OREGON

I. Greetings and Introductions.

The February meeting of the Implementation Team, held at the National Marine Fisheries Service's offices in Portland, Oregon, was chaired by Brian Brown of NMFS. The agenda for the February 5 meeting and a list of attendees are attached as Enclosures A and B. The following is a distillation (not a verbatim transcript) of items discussed at the meeting, together with actions taken on those items. Please note that some enclosures referenced in the body of the text may be too lengthy to attach; all enclosures referenced are available upon request from NMFS's Kathy Ceballos at 503/230-5420 or via E-mail at kathy.ceballos@noaa.gov.

II. Updates.

A. In-Season Management. Cindy Henriksen, chairwoman of the TMT, said that group had met January 15 to discuss the 1998 Water Management Plan. One of the issues discussed at that meeting was seasonal vs. weekly flow objectives; at the meeting, it was agreed to allow individual TMT members to post their positions on seasonal vs. weekly flow objectives on the TMT's Internet homepage. Henriksen distributed a document summarizing all of the comments posted on this issue to date; this document is listed as Enclosure C. She added that the TMT will be discussing this issue further at its February 11 meeting, in an effort to clarify the definition of seasonal vs. weekly.

At the January 15 TMT meeting, it was also agreed that the salmon managers will develop a proposal for Upper Snake River operations in 1998, for presentation at the February 11 TMT meeting, Henriksen continued. The bottom line is that the 1998 Water Management Plan is still very much a draft at this point, she said; we hope to have a more complete draft available following the February 11 meeting. It sounds as though the 1998 Water Management Plan is not yet ready for IT discussion, said Brown, but that further work will take place on this document at the TMT level next week.

ODFW's Ron Boyce said the salmon managers have sent a letter to Henriksen requesting that the 1997 Water Management Plan be used as the basis for developing the 1998 plan. At the last TMT meeting, Henriksen said, we did agree to incorporate portions of the 1997 Water Management Plan into the 1998 plan; the 1998 outline is in a somewhat different order than the 1997 plan. However, there were some fairly substantial changes to the draft issued by the Corps at the last TMT meeting, said Boyce -- that's why the salmon managers have requested that we return to the 1997 plan as the starting point for the 1998 plan, and that we simply incorporate the

1998 data. Are you now telling me that the Corps does not agree to do that?

Your concern is not so much that the framework of the 1997 plan is better than the 1998 plan -- your concern is that there are substantive issues from 1997 that have been dropped from the 1998 framework? Brown asked. That's correct, Boyce replied. Is the format for the plan important, as long as those substantive issues are addressed? Brown asked. I guess I would need to look at the format, Boyce replied -- if we're talking about the document that was provided at the last TMT meeting, however, that is not adequate. Are you willing to continue to work on those issues at the TMT level? Brown asked. Yes, Boyce replied. As long as the TMT is willing to continue to work on the 1998 plan, that would be my preference, Brown said.

Moving on, Henriksen said the February final water supply forecast is not yet available. The mid-month and early bird forecasts have increased slightly from the January final forecast presented at the last IT meeting, she said; however, it should be pointed out that the National Weather Service doesn't have a lot of confidence in the mid-month or early bird forecasts, because they are based on a small subset of data. Based on the January final forecast, the seasonal flow objectives were at the lower end of the scale at both Lower Granite and McNary dams; at Lower Granite, the spring flow objective is 85 Kcfs, while the summer objective is about 50 Kcfs.

When we ran a 60-year study, based on the January final forecast, the projection was that the spring average flow at Lower Granite would be slightly less than 85 Kcfs, Henriksen continued; the summer average was about 45 Kcfs. At McNary, the current spring seasonal flow objective is about 220 Kcfs; the current summer flow objective is 200 Kcfs. The 60-year study at McNary projects a spring average flow of about 243 Kcfs and about 139 Kcfs for the summer period. The bottom line is, based on the January final forecast, the outlook is not too positive, Henriksen said. She added that these numbers will be updated once the February final water supply forecast is received.

B. Plan for Analyzing and Testing Hypotheses (PATH). The PATH group was not able to get the information they will be presenting to the Executive Committee ready in time to brief us at today's meeting, Brown said. As you'll recall, we had set aside February 12 for a second IT meeting if we needed some additional time to prepare for the Executive Committee meeting; it now appears that we will need that time for the PATH presentation, said Brown, so everyone who is interested in what PATH will be concluding should plan to be in attendance on February 12.

C. Integrated Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB). Mike Schiewe said the ISAB is now fully engaged in the review of the Corps capital construction program; the group heard a presentation on surface collectors and extended screens at John Day during its January meeting. The ISAB's February meeting will focus on improvements at Bonneville Dam, he said. The other major item on the ISAB's plate is the hatchery review, Schiewe added; that work is also in progress.

D. Dissolved Gas Team (DGT). DGT co-chair Mark Schneider said that group has begun its review of Bonneville-funded and Corps-funded dissolved gas research projects, and has embarked on discussions about what research is needed in the future. The main challenge facing us, he said, is how to integrate the varying input from the fish managers, the researchers and the

Corps into a single, unified dissolved gas research plan. The actual drafting of the plan is now well underway; once it is complete, the next step will be for the DGT to review the draft in an effort to reach consensus on the substance and details of the plan.

One concern I wanted to bring to the IT's attention is the fact that it appears that there are now two parallel dissolved gas planning efforts underway, both of which are ultimately intended for presentation to the Power Planning Council, Schneider said. The DGT, of course, is working on a plan in response to an assignment from the IT; in addition, there is an FPAC/Fish Passage Center process underway which will be presented directly to the Council. One difference between the two efforts is the fact that the FPAC/Fish Passage Center process seems to be focused mainly on immediate FY'98 projects, while the DGT is taking more of a long-term view, Schneider said. However, there are some concerns about how the two processes overlap, and about the potential for duplication of effort.

My understanding is that the Council has identified 11 projects that they would like us to review before they approve funding for FY'98, said Tom Cooney of WDFW -- that's the focus of the FPAC effort. My feeling is that if the FPAC/Fish Passage Center plan goes first to CBFWA, then is tied back in with the DGT planning effort before it goes to the Council, I think that's fine, Schneider said.

It sounds to me as though the distinction is that the DGT effort is intended to prepare questions for the ISAB on the long-term research strategy, while the FPAC/Fish Passage Center planning effort is intended to answer the Council's questions to allow funding for FY'98 research to go forward, Brown said. I think that's correct, Cooney said.

In response to a question, Schneider said the DGT hopes to complete its dissolved gas research plan by the end of February. Fred Olney raised the concern that this may be too late to include the DGT research plan in the Council's FY'98 review process. The researchers will be unable to get anything done in 1998 if the Council can't reach a decision, he said. It sounds to me as if it's important that these two efforts be closely coordinated, Brown said. My suggestion is that, at whatever point FPAC thinks is appropriate, that the FPAC plan comes to DGT so that we can incorporate it into our more comprehensive research plan, Schneider said. I don't think it would be as productive to have two parallel processes underway without coordination, he said.

After some minutes of further discussion, Brown said that, as long as the FPAC research plan answers the Power Planning Council's funding-related questions, and there is an opportunity to incorporate FPAC's findings into the comprehensive long-term research plan being developed by the DGT, that should satisfy the needs of all the parties involved. There may need to be some further discussion of how the DGT and FPAC processes fit together, he said, but as long as they do fit together, then we can move on. It was so agreed.

E. System Configuration Team (SCT). SCT co-chairs Bill Hevlin and Jim Ruff provided a series of short updates on recent SCT activities, beginning with the Council/ISAB review of the Corps's capital construction program. Ruff said the Council had unanimously approved the suggested scope of work for this review; a copy of the scope of work is Enclosure D. The deadline for the review is June 30; as Mike Schiewe mentioned, the next meeting of the review group will be held Feb. 17, and the main topic of discussion will be Bonneville dam juvenile fish passage improvements -- the planned bypass improvements and outfall work. Adult fish passage and the

dissolved gas program will be covered at a later date, Ruff said.

Simultaneous with the ISAB/Council review of the technical side of the Corps's capital construction program, the Council will also be addressing some of the policy issues, he continued. One of those issues is the criteria the SCT uses to prioritize projects within the Corps's CRFM budget; another is a review of the planning, engineering, scheduling and cost estimation processes the Corps goes through in its programs.

I've heard rumors that the ISAB is feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the volume of work involved in this review, said Doug Arndt of the Corps -- is it true that the ISAB may not be able to complete its review by June 30? They are definitely feeling overwhelmed, Schiewe replied, and are looking at possible ways to slow the track down somewhat while still satisfying the Congressional mandate. The majority of those discussions have focused on the possibility of narrowing the scope and making a "down payment," completing the review of surface collectors, extended length screens and the Bonneville program by May. The gas abatement program review would be completed later, under this scenario. I think we can expect to get something in writing from the ISAB to the effect that there is only so much they can accomplish by mid-May, Ruff said. However, I haven't seen anything yet, so that comment may be premature. What may end up happening, however, is that the review will be done in two stages.

Arndt raised the concern that the window of opportunity for completing this review in time for consideration by the Conference Committee is quite narrow. We have told the ISAB that there are certain issues which are very time-sensitive in terms of FY'99 spending, Ruff said -- one of those issues is Bonneville, and the other is extended-length screen installation at John Day. We have urged the ISAB to consider those two items before anything else.

As Jim mentioned, the council has asked the SCT for the criteria it uses to prioritize projects within the CRFM budget when funding is limited, Hevlin said. There are 13 criteria on that list; I have asked the individual SCT members to take that list of criteria and weight them, he explained. I will then create the profile of the weights the SCT has assigned to each criteria, for submission to the Council, Hevlin said.

In cooperation with the DGT, the SCT has also been working on a dissolved gas abatement plan for submission to the Washington Department of Ecology as part of the process to allow the 1998 BiOp spill program to go forward, Hevlin continued. That effort is now well underway. Mary Lou Soscia of EPA observed that she would like to see a greater degree of coordination between the SCT/DGT gas abatement plan and the long-term system configuration analysis underway in Fred Olney's Three Sovereigns workgroup. In addition, she said, there are a number of things we could be doing in the short term which require little additional analysis but which could have a profound influence on dissolved gas conditions in the system.

In response to a question from Jim Yost, Ruff said the SCT/DGT gas abatement plan does not currently include gas abatement work at Dworshak dam. While I understand that this plan needs to satisfy WDOE's information needs, I am a little surprised that we would develop a gas abatement plan that looks only at one state, said Brown. In response to the comments we've heard today, he continued, I think it would be appropriate for the plan to not only address WDOE's needs, but to look within the alternative scenarios that are being developed to identify items common to all of those scenarios which could be implemented with minimal additional

analysis or debate. It would also be appropriate to broaden the scope of the gas abatement plan to include the entire Columbia River basin, not just the State of Washington. I agree, as long as we don't lose sight of the fact that our first priority is to respond to the request from WDOE, said Ruff.

Moving on, Olney said that the Three Sovereigns Future Fish and Wildlife Costs workgroup has been working to develop estimates of the capital construction costs that would be a part of Bonneville's repayment obligations for the period FY'01 through at least FY'06. The workgroup has developed a list of potential construction activities at all of the mainstem dams, as well as some of the dams in the Willamette and the upper part of the basin, Olney said. The Multi-Year Implementation Plan has been used heavily as a source document in our work, he explained; we now have an updated list of potential construction activities and how long it will take to implement them, as well as a range of cost estimates for each project.

That work has subsequently been used in our effort to identify all of the potential system configuration alternatives, Olney continued. Those alternatives include the nine options that PATH is reviewing through the Lower Snake feasibility study -- the in-river alternative, the two transportation alternatives, Drawdown of four Lower Snake projects, Drawdown of two Lower Snake projects, Drawdown of four Lower Snake projects plus John Day Drawdown, John Day Drawdown alone, John Day to spillway crest and Drawdown of the four Lower Snake projects plus Drawdown of John Day to spillway crest.

We went through each of those alternatives and identified which construction activities make sense under each, said Olney. We were unable to reach complete consensus, so we developed a "bookend" approach -- a "low" option which captures the views of a majority of the participants, and a "high" option, which includes many of the additional items on which we were unable to reach consensus. For example, the "high" option includes things like additional fish ladders at Lower Granite and Little Goose dams, which were not supported by the entire group.

So far, Olney said, we have completed the first cut at the "low" option set of actions; at the February 2 Three Sovereigns meeting, we presented preliminary cost estimates based on the "low" option set of alternatives. That presentation included the annual appropriations amount through 2009 for each of the nine system configuration alternatives; the annual plant in service amounts for each option, including a calculation of the power share to determine the extent of Bonneville's obligation. We still have some more work to do in order to finish our analysis of the "high" option, Olney said; another workgroup meeting is scheduled for February 13 to finish that work. Once that it is done, we will be putting out a package for public review under the Three Sovereigns process, probably some time in late February. Olney distributed a series of handouts (enclosures E, F and G) covering the cost estimates and other work products produced by the Future Fish and Wildlife Costs workgroup to date.

Would it be fair to say that the schedule and costs laid out here are the best available information from the action agencies, put together into a table showing what can be done without regard for what kinds of decisions need to be made in order to make these things happen? Brown asked. That's correct, Olney replied, and without regard to any limits on annual appropriations.

F. Decision Process Coordinating Group (DPCG). Ed Sheets provided a briefing on the Decision

Process Coordinating Group's recommendations for a process for Columbia River basin fish and wildlife restoration decisions. He went through a series of overheads, touching on the schedule for the Lower Snake River Feasibility Report, the background for the DPCG's decision process development effort, its goal and scope, recommended biological criteria and performance measures, other considerations, including treaty obligations, economic considerations, financial feasibility and other environmental criteria, the PATH process, the alternative scenarios, information needs, biological issues, the 1999 decision schedule and next steps in the decision process recommendation effort. These overheads are reproduced in Enclosure H; please see this enclosure for details of Sheets' presentation and the DPCG's recommendations. Sheets also distributed Enclosure I, a paper, dated February 3, 1998, which spells out the DPCG's recommendations in more detail.

One important point, Sheets said -- the schedule for the Lower Snake Feasibility Study is currently focused on the four Lower Snake dams only, and much of the analysis is focused only on Snake River stocks. One important change in our recommendations is the fact that there is a great deal of interest within the Decision Process Coordinating Group to broaden the scope to look at least at all listed stocks in the Snake and Columbia rivers, and to look at actions in the Columbia as well as in the Snake. He added that, with the addition of further information from the biological analysis, this is essentially the same presentation he intends to make at the upcoming Executive Committee meeting.

One of the things that jumped out from this presentation, for me, is the importance of developing a process to facilitate a regional agreement, Brown said. At this point, what the DPCG and PATH are doing is essentially a technical analysis, and what seems to be lacking is a policy table on which that analysis will ultimately come to rest. I think that's a fair assessment, said Sheets -- we have held a couple of meetings with the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission in an effort to keep them informed. The hope would be that continuing those discussions, as well as discussions at the Executive Committee level, will lead to some guidance about how we can begin some policy-level regional discussions on what this process should look like. We need more feedback about whether or not we have identified the right goals and scope, as well as the information needed to support the 1999 decision. If there are key informational components that are not currently in the pipeline, Sheets said, we need to know about that. My hope is that, at the Executive Committee meeting, we can get some feedback about how to take the next step toward building regional consensus for a decision process.

III. Transportation.

A. Findings of ISAB Review. As most of you will recall, said Schiewe, the ISAB was asked to review the available data on transportation and to provide their opinion on whether barging or in-river migration would likely result in more adult returns from the 1998 migration season. We knew when we started this process that the timeline was very tight; the bottom line is that the ISAB's transportation report should be available by February 16.

B. 1998 Operations. Until the ISAB review is completed, said Brown, there is nothing to discuss in the 1998 transport operations arena.

C. Research Plans for Spring/Summer Chinook and Steelhead Research Needs. As most of you are aware, said Brown, we are proceeding with the third year of the spring/summer chinook

evaluation from Lower Granite; we have also been contemplating potential steelhead transport research at both Lower Granite and McNary. After internal discussion at NMFS, our conclusion is that it is probably too late to undertake steelhead transport research at either Lower Granite or McNary in 1998, Brown said. At this point, it probably makes more sense for us to direct our efforts toward developing a 1999 study plan everyone is comfortable with.

In discussing this internally within NMFS, Schiewe said, we see considerable value in doing a PIT-tag steelhead study from Lower Granite in much the same way the spring/summer chinook study was done -- it's really the only realistic way for us to gather information on wild fish. The only reason we're not pursuing it for 1998 is the fact that the logistical and permitting problems appear insurmountable at this point, he said. At McNary, we could intercept and mark fish, but until we get a PIT-tag detector at that project, evaluating adult returns back to that location is virtually impossible.

The group spent a few minutes discussing possible steelhead survival study designs, as well as the question of whether or not an extraordinary effort should be made to do some sort of steelhead evaluation in 1998. Ultimately, no concrete proposals for overcoming the logistical challenges in time to perform a steelhead evaluation in 1998 were proposed, although Dan Daley said BPA would like to give some further thought to this issue before the door closes completely on steelhead research in 1998. Tom Cooney suggested that a 10- to 15-year PIT-tag detection plan is needed; that technology is vital to assessing the success of the DGAS program, he said, because we really need a baseline survival study for both the Snake and Mid-Columbia Rivers.

IV. Save Our Wild Salmon Presentation on Operations.

Tim Stearns of Save Our Wild Salmon said that the recent listing of Columbia River steelhead, and the development of a new Biological Opinion to take into account the needs of that species, provide an opportunity to review past salmon recovery operations and to look to the future. He distributed a packet of information, summarizing those past operations; in general, he said, our assessment is that we have not fully met flow, spill or passage objectives, and that we have relied more heavily on transportation than we believe the data warrants. We have also made little progress toward restoring the normative river described by the ISRP, he said.

This is not to say that there have been no improvements since 1990, Stearns continued -- we have put more water down the river, and we have spilled at all of the projects. However, when you look at the big picture, we haven't made any real progress toward stabilization of the stocks, or toward recovery.

In looking at interim recovery strategies, we came to a fairly brutal conclusion, Stearns said: we see virtually no interim strategies that are going to get us anywhere near stabilization or recovery, based on PATH's assessment that a 2% smolt-to-adult return is needed for stabilization, and a 6% smolt-to-adult return is needed for recovery. The past smolt-to-adult return numbers our interim strategies have been able to generate fall far short of either of those targets, Stearns said.

The question we have been asking ourselves, fish management agencies and utilities is, what

can we do, in the interim, to improve our current conditions, Stearns continued. We came to a series of conclusions, which I would like to share with you today, he said.

First, said Stearns, we still think there is merit in operating John Day and McNary at minimum operating pool -- while this operation alone isn't going to get us where we need to go, it will improve flow conditions. Second, we need to optimize spill, and to operate as close as possible to the dissolved gas supersaturation limits. Third, since it appears that we will be barging fish, at least during the interim period, we believe that we need to adhere to the 50-50 spread the risk policy. Fourth, PIT-tag data shows that, the more fish are handled and dewatered, the worse their SARs -- with that in mind, we would urge you to move toward a kinder, gentler fish handling system, and toward bypass systems that avoid dewatering to the greatest extent possible, despite the disruption this may cause to research.

We also believe that the BiOp seasonal flow targets should be met on a weekly, rather than on a seasonal basis, Stearns continued. At the same time, we acknowledge that, in a dry year such as 1998 is shaping up to be, it probably will not be possible to meet those flow targets every week of the migration season. We need to take steps toward controlling temperature in the system, said Stearns, and we need to stick to the 1999 decision schedule.

Finally, he said, if we are to craft a system in which fish and power production can coexist, we need to figure out how to make decisions in a timely-enough fashion to provide utility system planning certainty, as well as certainty to irrigators, navigators, fishermen and other system users. And that is our proposal, Stearns said.

V. FCRPS Steelhead Consultation.

As most of you are aware, said Brown, in August 1997, Snake River steelhead and Upper Columbia River steelhead were both listed under the Endangered Species Act; NMFS is currently in consultation with the action agencies -- BPA, the Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation -- with regard to those species. Lower Columbia River steelhead were also proposed for listing about 18 months ago; a final determination on what to do about that proposed listing is scheduled for next week, he said.

In terms of schedule, Brown continued, the Biological Assessment was received from the action agencies on January 21; most of you should have that by now. The remainder of the schedule is driven by the need to conclude this process prior to the start of the 1998 migration season; NMFS is working to complete the draft Biological Opinion by the end of February, so that it can be reviewed by this group by mid-March. The intent is to have a final Biological Opinion in place by April 1. NMFS is considering scheduling public hearings in mid-March to address a range of issues associated with this consultation, and, more specifically, to address our issuance of Section 10 permits for both the juvenile fish transportation program and the smolt monitoring program.

There seems to be some confusion about which forum NMFS intends to use to engage these issues, Brown said. I want to state clearly that the IT is that forum, with the recognition that, because we don't have full regional participation in the Regional Forum process, NMFS will continue its outreach efforts to the tribes and to other parties who have chosen not to participate.

We have had some tribal involvement through our ongoing discussions with the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority, Brown continued; under the recently-adopted secretarial order, NMFS also has an obligation to specifically consult with the tribes on areas where tribal resources may be affected. To that end, NMFS will continue to encourage the tribes to participate in this process, and will keep them informed as to other forums in which we will be discussing this process; NMFS and the federal action agencies will also offer to meet with tribal representatives separately on issues that are of particular concern to the tribes.

Brown distributed Enclosure J, a series of overheads summarizing the scope of the consultation; the proposed action ("The action agencies propose to continue the operation of the FCRPS as described in the 1995 BiOp and Records of Decision. In addition, they also recommend the consideration of certain alternative operations described herein in the consultation with NMFS or through the Adaptive Management process created by the 1995 BiOp"); a list of the process and substance issues identified in the course of the FCRPS steelhead consultations (Duration; the Jeopardy Standard; Mid-Columbia flows; Spill at Snake River collector dams; Spring transport from McNary and Spill levels). The final slide details potential long-term actions (John Day Drawdown, McNary Drawdown, surface collection, gas abatement and other). Please see Enclosure J for details of Brown's presentation.

One of the major issues raised in the consultation process has to do with the jeopardy standard, and the fact that we simply don't have as much information about steelhead, and the effects of the FCRPS on steelhead, as we do on other species, Brown said. We need to pull together what is known about steelhead into an analysis, and we don't have very long to accomplish that if we are to meet the April 1 deadline for the Biological Opinion. NMFS's preference would be for that analysis to be done by the PATH group, although we are hesitant to place any additional analytical burdens on that group at this time, he said. Do other IT members agree that PATH would be the most appropriate entity to conduct this analysis?

My initial reaction is that I hesitate to hand PATH anything that is going to distract it from completing its alternatives analysis in support of the 1999 decision, Daley said. If PATH is unable to complete a thorough alternatives analysis in the time available, then we will have to delay the 1999 decision. Do we know for a fact that asking PATH to review the steelhead jeopardy standard will compromise their ability to complete the 1999 decision alternatives analysis on schedule? Arndt asked. That isn't clear to me, Brown replied -- what we need for the purposes of this consultation it is quite different from the extensive evaluation of steelhead PATH had already planned to undertake over the next 18 months.

Are you saying that, in your opinion, PATH can take on this new assignment, continue to make progress on its alternative analyses, and still meet the 1999 decision schedule? asked BPA's Phil Thor. It's possible, Brown replied -- we just don't know at this point.

What is your specific question for IT today? Arndt asked. Simply that, having been told by Judge Marsh that the way to accomplish Step 4 under "Jeopardy Standard" ("Determine whether the species can be expected to survive with an adequate potential for recovery under the effects of the proposed or continuing action, the environmental baseline and any cumulative effects, and considering measures for survival and recovery specific to other life stages") is in close coordination with the other salmon managers, given that we only have until the end of this month to accomplish that, how do you want to proceed? Brown asked.

After some minutes of discussion, no IT objections (with the exception of Daley's comment) were raised to Brown's suggestion that PATH be asked to undertake the Biological Opinion steelhead analysis.

Brown continued on through Enclosure J; touching on the issue of seasonal vs. weekly flow objectives raised earlier in today's meeting, he said that his hope is that the steelhead consultation will bring some clarity to this issue. The in-season management process was initially established to manage the available water to provide maximum biological benefit, Brown explained; NMFS knew, when the amount of water available for the operational measures was established, that there was not going to be enough water to meet the BiOp flow targets throughout the entire season. Setting a flow target that begins April 10 doesn't mean that, on April 10, you start meeting that flow target, and that you continue to meet it until all the available water is gone, he said. It means that, beginning April 10, you start to manage the available water to provide the maximum possible biological benefit to the greatest possible number of fish. We have been doing that on a weekly basis for 10 years now, Brown said, and frankly, I'm not sure why we continue to have this argument about weekly vs. seasonal flow objectives.

Brown continued on through Enclosure J, touching on possible changes in Grand Coulee storage operations, the importance of the Mid-Columbia flows piece to the consultation process, spill at the Snake River collector dams, spring transport at McNary and spill levels. In connection with the latter issue, Brown observed that the spill levels in the 1995 BiOp were chosen because, at the time, they were the levels that were felt to be necessary to meet 80% fish passage efficiency. With the installation of extended-length screens at Lower Granite in 1996, we changed fish passage efficiency at that project, and changed the amount of spill necessary to meet 80% FPE at that project, Brown said. However, in both 1996 and 1997, we continued to spill as though those modifications had not been made. One of the modifications we have been requested to consider in this Biological Assessment is whether we want to change that policy, and curtail spill at projects that are meeting the 80% FPE goal with lower spill levels.

There are a couple of issues embedded in that concept, said Brown. The first is the lack of linkage between 80% FPE and long-term survival and recovery. The second is the fact that, while we have increased our estimates of guidance at Lower Granite, Little Goose and McNary, we have also decreased them at other projects by taking a closer look at what kind of guidance efficiencies we're actually getting, he continued. Also, at all projects, we are sometimes limited by dissolved gas levels, and are unable to meet the objective regardless of what fish guidance efficiency we assume. With that as a background, the question, for this Biological Opinion, is going to be, do we want to revisit this management objective, and look alternatively at simply spilling to the gas limits? Based on recent data we have received on survival through spillway passage, that is probably the best thing we can do to provide the best possible fish survival conditions for in-river migrants, he said. We will be collecting input from the salmon managers and other entities on this issue, in an attempt to resolve it in the Biological Opinion, Brown said.

Over the next few weeks, we will be working closely with both the salmon managers and the federal action agencies in an effort to bring this consultation to a successful and timely conclusion, Brown said. I think it would be a good idea to ensure that, when NMFS sits down with the action agencies, there are also representatives from the salmon managers present at those discussions, and vice versa, to ensure that everyone is fully aware of what's going on, and that

everyone has an opportunity to provide their input.

One final item, in terms of the goal for the steelhead consultation process, Brown said –this list of issues includes most of the operational issues we have been spending time on in the last couple of years. Wouldn't it be nice if we could tie them all up into a neat package for 1998 and 1999, while we turn our attention to the long-term decision? Just a thought, Brown said.

Again, he continued, I want to reiterate that the Implementation Team is the forum in which NMFS wants to deal with these steelhead issues. We're trying to get people to engage in this process; we're also working to ensure that no one is left out of the process if they choose not to so engage. But the bottom line is, this is the place where we intend these issues to be addressed, said Brown.

VI. Regional Forum Facilitation.

Daley said there isn't much to report on this issue; a list of potential facilitators has now been developed, and the next step is to begin soliciting proposals. Do you have a timeline? Brown asked. Not at this point, Daley replied – however, I know Alan Ruger is working to get this done as quickly as possible. Do you still think it will be possible to conclude the solicitation and selection processes in time to get a facilitator on board prior to the 1998 migration season? Boyce asked. It's going to be tight, but we're going to do our best, Daley replied.

VII. February 19 Executive Committee Agenda.

Given the expected February 16 delivery date for the ISAB's 1998 transportation report and the timing of the 1998 Water Management Plan, and the need for a thorough IT discussion of these documents and any connected issues prior to their presentation to the Executive Committee, Brown proposed that the February 19 EC meeting be postponed until March. The 1998 Biological Opinion discussions will also be farther along at that point, Boyce observed. After some minutes of discussion, no IT objections were raised to Brown's proposal that the EC meeting be rescheduled. It was further agreed that the March EC meeting may need to be expanded to a second day in order to get through all of the issues on the agenda. Brown said NMFS will work with the Executive Committee membership to find a mutually-acceptable meeting date in March.

VIII. Approval of Minutes from January 8 IT Meeting.

Brown asked that any comments on the January 8 meeting notes be submitted to Kathy Ceballos of NMFS.

IX. Next IT Meeting Date and Agenda Items.

The next meeting of the Implementation Team was set for Thursday, February 12 (this meeting was subsequently changed to February 19). Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.