

System Configuration Team (SCT)

Reasonable & Prudent Measure #26 Meeting Notes January 18, 2001

Greetings and Introductions.

The January 18 meeting of the System Configuration Team was held at NMFS' Portland offices. The meeting was chaired by Bill Hevlin of NMFS and facilitated by Trish McCarty. The agenda and a list of attendees for the January 18 meeting 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 may be too lengthy to routinely include with the meeting notes; copies of all enclosures referred to in the minutes are available upon request from Kathy Ceballos of NMFS at 503/230-5420.

1. Discussion of Grand Coulee Gas Abatement Program.

Hevlin said the Bureau of Reclamation has asked the SCT to appoint a subcommittee to develop an estimate of the future load shift from Chief Joseph and other basin projects to Grand Coulee once flow deflectors are installed at that project. Dave Zimmer explained that this load shift estimate is needed so that Reclamation can assess future spill operations at Grand Coulee and determine the number of outlet tubes that will need to be modified at that project.

After a few minutes of discussion, it was agreed that the subcommittee will include Zimmer, Bolyvong Tanovan, Marian Valentine, Mark Schneider, Bill Maslen and Monte McClendon. The subcommittee will develop the future load shift estimate, as well as an assessment of the effects of this transfer on transmission system reliability. Zimmer and McClendon agreed to take the lead in coordinating the first meeting of this group.

2. Review of Battelle Findings re the Framework For the Action Agencies' One- and Five-Year Implementation Plans.

Maslen said that, as the SCT is aware, the 2000 FCRPS Biological Opinion tasks the federal action agencies with the development of one- and five-year implementation plans, explaining how the action agencies intend to plan, organize and structure the various activities necessary to meet the action agencies' ESA obligations. In preparation for that effort, said Maslen, the action agencies contracted with Battelle Northwest Laboratories to review implementation plans from around the country, to give the action agencies the benefit of other agencies' experience in this process.

Given the time-frame we have to work with, Maslen said, we gave Battelle a fairly short list of implementation plans to work with – Cal Fed in California's central valley, the Trinity River anadromous fish restoration program, Glen Canyon, Everglades, Great Lakes, and whooping crane restoration. The review of these plans showed that some of them were very poorly developed; in short, said Maslen, many of these plans were not overly-useful as templates for the development of the FCRPS BiOp implementation plans.

Maslen said the action agencies sat down with Battelle and talked about what they felt were some of the necessary elements of the BiOp implementation plans; they then used that to develop criteria for Battelle's review of the plans themselves. Battelle developed critiques of each of the plans and how well they addressed the key elements each contained. In terms of the results of Battelle's review, said Maslen, they determined that, first and foremost, there needs to be a clearly-stated purpose right at the beginning of the plan, followed by a concise statement of objectives and strategies. Inter-agency coordination is important, as is public involvement – one of the main purposes of these plans is as a communications tool.

The goal is to explain what we're going to do, how our decisions will be coordinated, how actions will be implemented, how processes – regional, political, funding – are aligned to support the end result, Maslen said. We could develop the greatest implementation plan anyone has ever seen, he continued, but if we can't communicate that to, for example, the Congressional delegation, there isn't much chance of obtaining the necessary appropriations from Congress.

Maslen distributed copies of the Battelle report, "Developing an Implementation Plan – Review and Critique of Implementation Plans;" additional copies of this document are available via the BPA website, or by calling Maslen directly at 503/230-5548.

3. Report on NWPPC Review of the Capital Portion of the Reimbursement Program.

Bruce Suzumoto of the Council staff reminded the group that, in 1999, Congress instructed the Council and the ISRP to conduct an annual review of the Corps' reimbursable projects. This has not yet been done, said Suzumoto; the purpose of the review is to determine whether or not these projects meet the 4H10 (d) criteria – are they based on sound scientific principals, will they benefit fish and wildlife, do they have clearly-defined objectives and outcomes, and do they include adequate monitoring and evaluation? The review will also be looking for consistency with the Council program, Suzumoto added.

The review report is due in May 2001, said Suzumoto; after discussions with the Corps and the ISRP, however, it became clear that it simply isn't practical to attempt to review all of the projects that are currently underway. What we're thinking, instead, is that we will focus on reimbursable projects at Bonneville Dam, Suzumoto said – in particular, the question of whether or not a surface bypass system or extended-length screens with outfalls would be best, from a juvenile fish passage standpoint. At their meeting yesterday, the Council approved this approach.

The other element we will be requesting will be for the Corps to lay out their overall goal and strategy, and a description of how all of the projects in the reimbursable category fit into that structure, Suzumoto said. He noted that the ISRP has set aside a block of time to conduct this review from mid-February through mid-March; if the action agencies' draft BiOp Implementation Plan is released in early March, it could be extremely useful to the Council/ISRP review. We're actually referring to that document as an "interim" plan, rather than a "draft" plan, Maslen said – it will be available by the end of March.

The group spent a few minutes discussing the likely outcome of the ISRP review; ultimately, Hevlin observed that the B1 decision subcommittee is developing the best information on the structural and operational alternatives at Bonneville Dam; their product may not be completely ready by mid-February, he said, but it would probably be very useful for the ISRP to look it over once it's ready.

Maslen observed that, when the ISRP reviewed the capital program that included the Bonneville outfall and John Day extended-length screens, their recommendation on the extended screens at John Day was none too favorable, despite the fact that NMFS strongly supported that project. Sometimes your view of a given project has more to do than your perspective than anything else, Maslen said; my concern is that what is most helpful to progress in this region is a unified front when the time comes to ask Congress for the appropriations we need to implement the BiOp program. We need to work this through carefully, he said, so that we don't send a mixed message to Congress. I agree, said Suzumoto, adding that he will continue to discuss the ISRP review with the Corps and NMFS. It was agreed to have some further discussion on this item at the February SCT meeting.

4. Preliminary Review of the Biological Opinion Performance Standards, Evaluations and Time Frames.

At the last SCT meeting, said Hevlin, there were a number of questions about how the new BiOp and the action agencies' one-year and five-year implementation planning processes might alter the SCT prioritization process. To that end, said Hevlin, I agreed to review Chapter 9 of the 2000 FCRPS BiOp, which covers performance standards and the implementation planning and evaluation processes.

Hevlin distributed Enclosure D, a flow chart titled "Timeline for Midpoint Evaluations." He went briefly through this document, touching on performance standards, the planning process, the evaluation process, risk reduction and critical uncertainties.

With respect to the questions about the impact of the BiOp on the future role of the SCT, said Hevlin, the capital construction plan will be coordinated through the SCT, as it has been in the past. Essentially, he said, SCT will operate the same way it has in the past; the Corps has always had ultimate responsibility for implementing the CRFM program. If there was a difference of opinion at the SCT level, he said, it was up to the Corps to make a final decision. In the future, rather than the Corps making the final call, it will be the federal action agencies – the Corps, BPA and Reclamation. If they choose a course of action that runs contrary to the SCT’s recommendation, however, the action agencies will be required to explain why. Basically, said Hevlin, I don’t think the new BiOp makes any significant changes to the way the SCT has done business in the past.

The action agencies’ initial five-year implementation plan is due to be completed by March 31, 2001, said Hevlin; the first one-year plan, which will spell out project-specific detail, is due for completion by September 1, 2001. Hevlin added that NMFS and the Fish and Wildlife Service will be reviewing the action agencies’ implementation plans and their progress reports, to make a judgement as to adequacy and, ultimately, success. Hevlin asked that anyone with questions about the one- and five-year implementation plans, or the future role of the SCT, contact him directly at 503/231-5415.

5. Updates.

A. FY’01 CRFM Budget. John Kranda reported that the Corps has requested an additional \$7 million to \$12 million in FY’01 funding; my understanding is that the \$3.5 million January increment of that additional funding has been approved and is on its way, Kranda said. Kranda added that, as better estimates have come in, it appears likely that more money will be needed for the FY’01 program. We will provide further information as it becomes available, Kranda said. Hevlin noted that the SCT is very supportive of the Corps beginning work on the Ice Harbor AWS this year.

B. Lower Granite RSW Delayed Schedule. Kevin Crum said the Corps’ modeling work on the Lower Granite removable spillway weir (RSW) is now complete; the construction contract has been awarded, and the contractor has been working 20 hours a day, six days a week in order to complete the prototype on time. Despite this fact, said Crum, the contractor is still behind schedule, and now estimates completion of the RSW on May 7. That is seven weeks late, said Crum; the bottom line is that the contractor is going to be unable to complete the RSW in time to install and test it this spring. Crum distributed a memo outlining the construction schedule issues associated with the Lower Granite RSW project (attached as Enclosure C); please refer to this document for details of Crum’s presentation.

So where does that leave us? Crum said. At next week’s FFDRWG meeting in Walla Walla, there will be an in-depth discussion of what needs to happen at Lower Granite this year, and how we can best position ourselves to conduct the RSW test next year. At this point, our intent is to complete all of the RSW support structures, he said; that way, once the RSW itself is complete, it will be a relatively quick and simple installation.

Crum said the Corps apologizes for this delay, but noted that the schedule for the RSW effort has always been an extremely aggressive one. He added that the Corps has worked frequently with this general contractor in the past, and has always been extremely satisfied with both the quality and timeliness of their work. It was agreed that the Corps will provide further updates on this issue as more information becomes available.

C. B1 Decision Document and Five-Year Plan. Doug Clarke said that, to date, there have been several meetings of the Bonneville decision subgroup; most of the agencies represented at the table today have been participating in those meetings. Another Bonneville subgroup meeting is scheduled for this afternoon, said Clarke; the purpose of that meeting is to try to reach agreement on the input parameters for the SYMPAS modeling of all of the various structural and operational alternatives under consideration at Bonneville.

Following this afternoon's meeting, said Clarke, we will re-run SYMPAS with whatever changes have been agreed to; we will then send out the results for the entire group to review. We hope to have a meeting to discuss those results in late January or early February, with the goal of producing a draft of the B1 decision document for review by mid-February. Ultimately, we hope to reach agreement on a decision for how to move ahead at Bonneville by early March, said Clarke – that is the drop-dead date for advertising the B1 JBS improvements if we are to take advantage of the next in-water work window and complete those improvements by 2003.

The group revisited the question of whether or not the Bonneville decision document should be subject to ISRP and Council review; ultimately, Suzumoto suggested that some additional dialogue on this issue needs to take place between the Council, the Corps and NMFS.

D. FY'01 AFEP Studies. Rock Peters distributed Enclosure E, a complete list of the Portland District's 2001 AFEP studies and their current funding and work status. He asked that the SCT review this list studies and provide any comments they may have to him at the SCT's February meeting. Peters noted that the adult PIT-tag evaluation at Bonneville is funded for this year, but is not shown on the list; funds are also pending for the Bonneville 3-D sonic tracking project.

E. Turbine Survival Program. Peters said the Turbine Survival Program was discussed at the February 4 FFDRWG meeting; at that meeting, it was agreed that there is about \$1 million in funding available for the Turbine Survival Program this year. Peters said the Bonneville turbine model is being developed to gain a more exact understanding of the dynamics of fish movement through the MGR units; the Corps is also planning to produce its 90% report on this phase of the Turbine Survival Program by September. He added that the TSP team still believes a second year of testing is necessary at McNary to answer the questions the Corps feels are relevant to the rehabbing of the McNary turbine units. The Corps is exploring the availability of funding through BPA and/or the Department of Energy for the McNary second-year test. The test would be conducted next winter; this phase of the Turbine Survival Program would then be completed in September 2002, Peters said.

F. Other FFDRWG Items. This issue will be discussed at the February SCT meeting.

6. Next SCT Meeting Date.

The next meeting of the System Configuration Team was set for Thursday, February 22, from 9 a.m. to noon at NMFS' Portland offices. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.