

System Configuration Team (SCT)
Reasonable & Prudent Measure #26
Meeting Notes
November 19, 1997

I. Greetings and Introductions.

The November 19 meeting of the System Configuration Team was held at the National Marine Fisheries Service's offices in Portland, Oregon. The meeting was chaired by Bill Hevlin of NMFS. The agenda and a list of attendees for the November 19 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.

II. John Day Drawdown -- Review of Scoping Document.

A quick question unrelated to this agenda item, said Ron Boyce -- where will the dollars for the Ice Harbor guide wall extension come from? The funding for the guide wall and whatever navigation fix is chosen will be fish dollars,, said Mike Mason of COE.

COE's Stuart Stanger then provided an overview of the Corps's John Day drawdown scoping document. A little background, he began -- in June 1997, we received a letter from the Appropriations Committee instructing the Corps to develop a scoping plan to study John Day drawdown, within 90 days, at a cost of no more than \$250,000. That's what came from the Senate side of the Committee, Stanger explained, but we never got anything out of the House side, so everything was on hold. When the budget came out this fall, they referred back to the June 6 letter, and we were finally able to get the scoping process underway.

The Corps now has until January 9 to complete the scoping report, Stanger continued. We are on track to have a final report -- not a final draft -- to division headquarters by December 19. So if the SCT membership has any comments for us, please get them to me as soon as possible, Stanger said.

Stanger went through the series of overheads, outlining the study plan as currently conceived. During Phase I of the plan, we will be developing a preliminary report, using a lot of existing information, which will define the Phase II scope and cost, he explained. During Phase II, we will develop a detailed feasibility study, NEPA documentation and a final configurational recommendation. In terms of schedule for Phase I, the start date we have chosen is Oct. 1, 1998, Stanger said. The schedule for Phase II will be laid out in the Phase I report.

Congress directed us to look at two alternatives at John Day, Stanger continued -- drawdown to spillway crest, and drawdown to natural river. Spillway crest at John Day is

elevation 210 feet. However, we can't operate John at elevation 210 feet without major physical changes to the project. Elevation 218 feet is the minimum we can operate the project without making those changes -- if we go to elevation 210, we will have to lower the spillway, he said.

Moving on to public involvement, Stanger said the current plan is to hold two series of meetings, beginning in January. In terms of operations analysis, there will be no flood control analysis, because the Corps is assuming that it will provide no flood control at John Day. The operations analysis will look only at how the project will be operated to accommodate hydropower and navigation.

In the facilities and structures arena, the study will look at adult and juvenile fish passage, the changes that will be needed to the powerhouse, lock and spillway, as well as the physical changes that will be necessary at McNary Dam. Question, said Steve Pettit of IDFG -- if the Lower Snake Feasibility Study has come to the conclusion that going to spillway crest has too many uncertainties and technical pitfalls, why even study it at John Day? I take your point, said COE's Witt Anderson, but there may be some navigational questions at John Day that are not present at the Lower Snake projects-- that's the only reason I can think of.

The study will also be looking at the impacts of John Day drawdown on other public and private facilities, such as irrigation, municipal water supply, groundwater wells, utilities and recreation, Stanger continued. It will provide an assessment of changes to water quality, sediment quality, impacts to hazardous, toxic and radioactive waste, as well as natural and cultural resources -- wildlife habitat, resident fish habitat and fisheries.

With respect to the fisheries evaluation, said the Corps's John Ferguson, about 18 months ago, we sat down with agencies and tribes and had a brainstorming session to try to determine what biological studies will be needed in support of John Day drawdown. That was the starting-point for our development of the Phase I and Phase II studies, he explained.

One of the first things identified was a need for baseline information on travel time and survival at John Day, Ferguson continued. We now have a smolt monitoring facility at that project, and we would like to get a PIT-tag study going to gather that baseline information, he said. Why are you waiting until Phase II to begin the biological studies identified by the work group? asked Boyce. The simple answer is feasibility vs. recon, Ferguson replied. We did some biological field work in 1996; the rest of the biological studies were originally included in Phase I, but there was a lot of time, money and effort involved. At that point, we had to ask ourselves whether we really needed all the information to answer the question we had been asked to answer, Ferguson said. The fact is, we're not out to answer the John Day drawdown question in Phase I -- we were asked to develop a description of what we think of the costs and benefits associated with John Day drawdown might be, to give Congress a sense of whether they want to find this program further.

There are three main things we're trying to accomplish in Phase I, Ferguson continued -- first, to establish baseline travel time and survival data for John Day, using the new smolt monitoring facility. We need to know whether or not we even have a survival issue at John Day; if the answer to that question is yes, then we need an idea of the level of benefit/drawdown of that project could be expected to provide. If John Day drawdown gives us 100% survival, what is survival today? The second thing we're trying to accomplish is to finalize the 1996 resident fish,

limnological and radio telemetry fish behavior studies, he continued. The third thing we want to do is look at any adult passage issues that may exist, and what level of habitat and spawning improvement might result from drawdown of John Day. That will be a paper study, using existing data, Ferguson explained.

So the logic was to gather information on the those three areas, Ferguson said; to answer Ron's question, we had all of the other studies in Phase I, but when we took a hard look at it, we didn't think they were needed for the recon level. They will be needed for the feasibility level, certainly, and that's one of the things are here to talk about today.

Our idea that this point to ask PATH to do the actual analysis, using the updated John Day numbers, Ferguson continued. I would suggest that you also ask PATH to be involved as you design the studies, to ensure that the information those studies will provide will fully support their analysis, said Boyce. I think that's an excellent idea, said Anderson.

Hevlin observed that tagged fish will be coming down through the system in 1998, and suggested that they may provide an opportunity to gather data on the McNary-to-John Day reach. Our intent certainly is not to ignore potential data sources, said Ferguson; those data will be collected through the PIT-tag system, and then we'll have to pay someone to analyze that data and pull out information relevant to John Day. However, I am unwilling to say at this point that the data that will be collected next year would be enough to replace a comprehensive John Day PIT-tag survival study.

On the economic side, we will look at various mitigation concepts, and attempt to quantify the various tradeoffs involved in implementing a drawdown alternative, Stanger said. Again, if anyone has additional substantive comments on this scope of work, please provide them to me as soon as possible.

The group spent a few minutes discussing which informational components need to be developed during Phase I of the John Day study process, and which should be developed in Phase II. I am concerned about the amount of time that is going to be involved in completing both the recon-level and feasibility-level components of the John Day drawdown analysis, said Boyce -- according to the time-frame you've laid out, it could take as much as seven years just to complete the study. We've said all along that John Day drawdown is a long ways out there, Anderson said -- that should be no surprise. After some minutes of further discussion, it was agreed to schedule an SCT conference call to provide any further SCT comments on the draft scoping plan, and to discuss the Phase I biological studies, to ensure that no critical informational components are missing; it was further agreed to coordinate PATH participation in that conference call, which was scheduled for Tuesday, November 25.

I think the other question SCT needs to consider, apart from the study of John drawdown itself, is what to do with John Day in the interim, Ferguson said. If we're talking about completing the study in 2005, approximately, followed by the decision, design and construction processes, actual drawdown of John Day is a long ways out. What do we do in the interim, beyond extended screens and flow deflectors? Do we want to do surface collection at that project? Do we want to do skeleton bays? Those are questions the SCT may want to consider, he said.

III. FY'99 CRFM Program – Comments Review.

We discussed this item that our last meeting, and agreed to come to today's meeting prepared to provide agency comments on the FY'99 program, Hevlin said. Boyce said his agency has begun internal discussions on the FY'99 program, but has not yet concluded those discussions. Anderson reiterated his belief that it is extremely important to the future of the fish and wildlife funding in the Northwest to develop an FY'99 CRFM program that enjoys a broad spectrum of regional support, including support from the Governors of Oregon, Washington and Idaho, and, to the greatest extent possible, from the members of the Northwest Congressional delegation.

Given the extremely short time line for additional comments on this budget, Anderson said, I've taken a good apart look at the comments the NMFS biologists have provided on the FY'99 spreadsheet, and have made adjustments to the spreadsheet accordingly. As the result of those comments, the bottom line on the spreadsheet is now \$117 million for FY '99. The specific comments NMFS provided include:

1. Lower Granite Surface Bypass Collector -- increase amount to \$5 million (\$2.5 million increase) as a placeholder for biological studies in case of desire for a potential re-test of the prototype. A re-test would only occur if the yet-to-be -decided 1998 performance standard is attained/exceeded.
2. McNary Cylindrical Screen Pilot Study -- Walla Walla will be completing a letter report which will better guesstimate costs. We estimated adding \$150,000 for FY '99, and \$600,000 for an FY'00 prototype test in the McNary ice/trash sluiceway. This work is related to the ongoing debris control study.
3. The Dalles Emergency AWSS -- FY'00 comment; add \$5 million placeholder for combined AWSS improvement and relocation of ice/trash sluiceway outfall.
4. Bonneville PH II FGE -- FY'00 comment; add \$3 million placeholder for further studies/partial implementation.
5. System: Lower Columbia Adult Passage -- increased FY '99 allocation to \$5 million (\$3 million increase) as a placeholder for partial implementation identified improvements.
6. System: Lower Snake Auxiliary Water Supply -- increase to \$700,000 (\$650,000 increase). This would cover troubleshooting at Ice Harbor and Lower Granite, and design work at Lower Monumental in FY'99.
7. System: Disbursed Release (short-haul barging) -- deferred in FY 99. New outfalls are planned for PH I and PH II. Short-haul may only have implication for low-flow scenario.

The group spent a few minutes reviewing NMFS's comments, to see whether or not they reflect the SCT's feelings as well. This exercise resulted in the following additional comments:

1. Lower Granite SBC. The SCT endorsed NMFS's comment, with the understanding that the caveat -- "... a re-test would only occur if the yet-to-be-decided 1998 performance standard is attained/exceeded" -- be strongly emphasized.

2. McNary Cylindrical Screen Pilot Study. No SCT objections were raised to NMFS's comment at this time.

3. The Dalles Emergency AWSS. The SCT agreed to raise the FY '99 budget amount for this item from \$500,000 to \$1 million, to complete FDM work and to start plans and specs.

4. Bonneville PH II FGE. No SCT objections were raised to NMFS's comment on this item.

5. Lower Columbia Adult Passage. No SCT objections were raised to NMFS's comments on this item.

6. Lower Snake AWSS. No SCT objections were raised to NMFS's comments on this item.

7. Dispersed Release (Short-Haul Barging). The SCT agreed with the NMFS recommendation.

Apparently that is all the comments we have received on the FY'99 program so far, said Hevlin -- if anyone has further comments, please submit them to Witt as soon as possible.

IV. John Day Extended-Length Screens – Continued Discussion.

This segment of the agenda began with a discussion of the need for biological evaluation of extended-length screens at John Day in 1998. What we proposed to AFEP in February 1997 was that we would screen two units at John Day, and evaluate fish passage efficiency and OPE daily as a post-construction verification to ensure that everything was working the way we thought it should, said Ferguson. The idea was to do a conventional FPE study design on the target species -- spring/summer chinook, steelhead and fall chinook.

It now appears likely to that all we will have to work with, at least during the beginning to the 1998 fish passage season, is the prototype screens on one unit, Ferguson said. Given that reality, it probably makes more sense to use them for operational, mechanical and engineering testing, to get the screen design figured out prior to letting a contract to construct additional screens. Basically, Ferguson said, the Corps is saying we can't do what we had originally proposed, because we won't have the screens to do it with.

The group spent a few minutes discussing the details of the John Day screen design; ultimately, the Corps proposed a schedule by which screens would be installed on eight units at John Day (21 screens in addition to the three prototype screens now available) by April 1999. The contract for the new screens will be issued in August 1998.

After some minutes of discussion, no clear SCT consensus emerged on the Corps' proposed screen construction schedule. Returning to the subject of extended-length screen testing at John Day 1998, Ferguson reiterated that the Corps's original test plans will now have to be modified. Basically, he said, we are open -- what do you want us to do?

Boyce reiterated ODFW's previously-stated position that the Corps should install as many screens as possible at John Day in 1998. The group then discussed various biological testing

options for 1998, including lamprey assessments, juvenile sockeye evaluations and fall chinook fry evaluations (see Enclosure C). Various participants expressed concern about the potential impacts of these assessments on listed species. Ferguson said the Corps is waiting for tribal input on 1998 John Day E-screen testing alternatives; I was hoping to get that today, he said, and now I'm not sure whether we should contact them, or wait until they come to us.

Perhaps this is really a Studies Review Work Group issue, rather than an SCT issue, suggested Hevlin. Other SCT participants agreed. However, the SCT needs to establish what the goals are, said Ferguson -- do you want us to study lamprey passage at dams, ESBS impacts to lamprey, or something else related to John Day screens?

After some minutes of further discussion, no SCT objections were raised to the idea of kicking the specifics of 1998 extended-length screen biological testing back to the SRWG. NMFS is supportive of all of the screen tests that the Corps is proposing to develop a better design, said Hevlin. We still want to see as many screens installed as soon as possible, but we also want to be sure that the design is sound. To that end, we are not opposed to the August 1998 contract award date the Corps has proposed. It could be that there is a better place to study the impacts of extended-length bar screens on lamprey than John Day, he said -- it may be that more lamprey are present at one of the Lower Snake projects.

V. Grand Coulee Gas Abatement Study.

With respect to the Grand Coulee gas abatement study, Hevlin asked what years the \$800,000 budgeted for this proposal would be spent in. Monte McClendon of USBR said that \$315,000 is budgeted for FY'98; the study is scheduled to run for three years, during which the remaining \$485,000 will be expended. No further expenditures have been identified outside that period. Those three years are a feasibility study or an alternatives review, a precursor to implementing something in 2001? asked Hevlin. Yes -- whenever we can get funding, McClendon replied.

McClendon distributed Enclosure D, a document outlining a study approach for evaluating structural gas abatement alternatives at Grand Coulee. Is it realistic to expect any sort of structural gas abatement modification at Grand Coulee by somewhere in the 2002-2007 time frame? Hevlin asked. I really can't answer that at the moment, McClendon replied. In response to another question from Boyce, McClendon said that the Bureau is working closely with the Corps in developing the Grand Coulee study -- they're way ahead of us on this type of work, McClendon said, and we don't want to reinvent the wheel. We will discuss this issue further at our February meeting, Hevlin said -- that will give everyone a chance to look at your study proposal in more detail, and give you a chance to further coordinate with the Corps.

VI. FY'98 CRFM Program Issues for Discussion.

A. Update on John Day Flow Deflectors. On the subject of John Day flow deflectors, Stanger said that, last year, the contractor installed two flow deflectors and completed

the pier nose extensions on Bays 4 and 5. He is now working on the last two pier nose extensions and has completed nine additional flow deflectors. The good news is that we will have the flow deflectors installed a year earlier than anticipated, Stanger said; the bad news is that we now have to pay the contractor for completing the work early -- about \$2.1 million we hadn't been anticipating in FY'98. .

The group discussed various possible sources for these funds, given the constraints on the FY'98 budget. I would suggest that we revisit this question at our next meeting, Anderson said -- there are some other things that are unsettled, and it would appear that money may be available within the John Day project. It was so agreed.

B. Squawfish Telemetry Study at Bonneville. As you'll recall, said Boyce, we discussed this study at the last SCT meeting; and we are still waiting for this committee to prioritize the squawfish telemetry study within the Bonneville I surface collection program. As I mentioned last time, we have modified the study proposal in response to comments received from the studies review workgroup; the total cost is now \$329,000. What does FFDRWG have to say about this study? asked Hevlin. It was discussed at our September meeting, Ferguson replied; in general, people felt that it should be a priority, particularly with respect to the ongoing surface collection effort. We asked Oregon to make some changes to the study proposal; they have now done so, and if the money is available, we don't have any problem with the study going forward.

I guess my question is, even if we do find out that squawfish are modifying the behavior of juveniles in the forebay, what can we do about it? Hevlin asked. That was our concern as well, Ferguson said -- it was discussed at FFDRWG, and the general feeling was that we should take it to some kind of cause-and-effect test. Beyond that, there really wasn't a consensus about what the next step should be.

After some minutes to discussion, the SCT agreed that this study is important, and should go forward if the necessary funding can be found. My guess is that we can find the money, said Anderson -- it's just going to be a matter of adjusting our budget allocations. He said the Corps would go over the FY'98 budget to try to find the necessary funds, and would also develop a list of other prioritized but unfunded FY'98 research projects. It was agreed to make a decision on this item at the SCT's December 17 meeting.

C. Bonneville Guidance Curtain. Funding for this item was deferred until at least FY'99.

VII. Review of Past SCT Criteria for Prioritizing CRFM Program Items.

At our last meeting, said Hevlin, we talked about the need to apply the SCT criteria for prioritizing CRFM program items, which we developed in February 1996, during our FY'99 prioritization process. I wanted to spend a few minutes going through this list of criteria (attached as Enclosure E), to see whether anyone has changes or additions, he said.

Why? Thor asked. Mainly because the Council is going to be reviewing our FY '99 prioritizations, Hevlin replied -- we are going to be asked to justify why we placed one project above another, and it would be helpful if we could show the Council a concrete rationale for

those decisions. The problem with that is that it is not a quantitative process, said Thor -- we discuss individual program items in the context of the program as a whole, and there is a lot of give and take on the road to consensus. However, I think it is important to show the Council the guidelines the SCT uses to prioritize projects, Hevlin said.

The discussion turned to annual and multi-year work plans for each of the projects in the system, and the need to update them to reflect recent changes in funding priority. I think this is an important task for SCT over the next few months, Hevlin said -- to develop plans at least for each of the Lower Columbia River projects. It will be relatively easy to do that for John Day and The Dalles, said Ferguson, but Bonneville will be tougher. Anderson said the Corps will develop revised annual work plans for the Lower Columbia projects prior to the next SCT meeting; we can then have some discussions about where we are going in both the short and long terms, he said.

Revisiting an item raised earlier in the meeting, Mason said that performance objectives for the Lower Granite surface collector will be included in a monitoring and evaluation package, which will be ready for review in mid- to late December. The package will incorporate comments received at the last FFDRWG meeting; interested parties will have 30 days to comment on the plan.

Hevlin asked that any comments on the SCT prioritization criteria be provided to him prior to the December meeting.

VIII. FFDRWG and AFEP Updates.

Ferguson provided a brief overview of recent FFDRWG activities, beginning with an update on recent John Day extended-length screen engineering data. At Bonneville II, there was agreement that, based on the modeling work that has been done so far, it would be useful to remove the ties to see how the sluice chute will perform, he said. We would want to try to do this evaluation in the summer of 1998; prior to that, we will need to develop a more detailed study design for FFDRWG review.

Moving on to John Day smolt monitoring, Ferguson said that the Corps is currently in the water-up phase. There are a number of structural and design deficiencies which we are in the process of fixing, he said. At Bonneville, we are constructing the B I prototype surface collector; Unit 3 is in, but we have been struggling to get the floor elevation and the panels set. Despite some construction problems, the 1998 streamlined trash racks for the ESBS test are still on schedule, he said. We needed to decide how far upstream the streamlined trash racks for the 1999 test will extend by November 1; we have now missed that date. However, it now looks as though we will move out on a six-foot extension for 1999.

Letter reports are due out in the next week on the Bonneville II guidance device and corner collector, Ferguson continued. On the subject of Bonneville rehab, Ferguson said Unit 6 was supposed to be back on line by May 15; however, once they started to tear the unit down, they discovered that the problems are worse than anticipated. The bottom line is that there will now be a three to four-month delay in getting Unit 6 back on line. That affects when we can do the minimum-gap runner test, he said, and it now looks as though that test will be pushed into 1999.

We now have an estimate of what it will cost to dewater The Dallas AWS, Ferguson continued; it looks like it will be more than \$1 million. Until that work is completed, we can't get in there to do maintenance on the system.

IX. Other.

The group spent a few minutes discussing the training wall extension at Ice Harbor Dam, which is being constructed to protect barge traffic from the altered flow patterns caused by the new flow deflectors at that project. Boyce asked why this project is being funded with fish dollars, since its purpose is to protect navigation. Simply because we have caused the problem through the addition of flow deflectors, Mason replied -- the new flow deflectors have caused changes to surface velocities, and those surface velocities affect navigation safety. The Corps has discussed this question internally, Anderson added, and this is how it has shaken out. If you would prefer that funding for this project came from another source, he said, write a letter to General Griffin. BPA's Phil Thor observed that it really doesn't matter what source these funds come from -- we're not bumping up against the fish capital ceiling, he said, and BPA will be paying 78% of the cost, whether it's a fish cost or a non-fish cost.

IX. Next SCT Meeting Date and Agenda Items.

The next meeting of the System Configuration Team was set for Wednesday, December 17 at 9 a.m. at the NMFS offices in Portland, Oregon. The January meeting date was set for Wednesday, January 21; the February SCT meeting was set for February 18. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.