System Configuration Team (SCT)

Reasonable & Prudent Measure #26
Meeting Notes
February 17, 1999

DRAFT

Greetings and Introductions.

The February 17 meeting of the System Configuration Team was held at the National Marine Fisheries Service offices in Portland, Oregon. The meeting was co-chaired by Bill Hevlin of NMFS and Jim Ruff of the Northwest Power Planning Council staff, and was facilitated by Donna Silverberg and Cathryn Collis. The agenda and a list of attendees for the February 17 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.

I. FFDRWG Updates. Rock Peters said there have been no Portland District FFDRWG meetings since the last SCT meeting; the next meeting of this group is scheduled for March 1 at Portland District HQ. In response to a request from Ron Boyce from the last SCT meeting, Peters distributed a memo (Enclosure C) detailing the cost estimates associated with each of the funded and unfunded FY'99 AFEP studies for the Walla Walla and Portland Districts. Peters noted that, in most cases, these are just the study costs; there are also several studies for which costs have not been identified. Peters explained that the Corps is Currently negotiating with the contractors for those studies, and cannot release government estimates until the contract award date.

Peters said he also wanted to discuss a potential change for the SRWG group, having to do with the adequacy of the dialogue between the Corps and the state and tribal agencies in the

annual SRWG process, particularly in the development of the one-pagers and the review of the proposals. In the past few years, Peters said, we have held a one-week meeting to develop the one-pagers and another one-week meeting for proposal review; it just doesn't seem we're getting enough feedback from the region in the course of those rather grueling week-long meetings.

With that in mind, said Peters, the Corps would like to do things a little differently in this year's process. We have broken out the seven major elements of the AFEP program (surface bypass, transportation, bypass systems, feasibility/drawdown, gas abatement, adult fish and turbine), and propose to hold individual one-day meetings on each of these elements. At those meetings, we would like to develop not just the research requirements, but programming needs for the following year. That will need to happen within the next six weeks, Peters said; we're in the process of setting up these various meetings and getting the word out to all of the various agencies that have been participating in the SRWG process.

During these meetings, he continued, we will develop the one-pagers, and will then solicit proposals. Once those proposals are received, the Corps would like to re-convene the seven SRWG subgroups to review the proposals during another one-day session.

Again, Peters said, this is just a suggested change at this point, and the Corps welcomes any thoughts the SCT may have on this alternative approach. The purpose of this change is to provide greater focus and input on each of the major AFEP program elements, rather than trying to rush through 80 proposals in a week-long session.

Ron Boyce expressed the concern that this multiple-meeting strategy may actually result in less agency input to the SRWG process, because of the additional time demands imposed by seven one-day meetings. He also suggested that there is a need for a process akin to the old Research Needs and Priorities Subcommittee to prioritize AFEP research needs before studies are solicited.

John Kranda replied that most of the AFEP research priorities are now being set by the SCT. Rod Woodin agreed that the basic outline of research priorities is and should be set by SCT; he also agreed with Boyce's comment that the possibility of having to commit time and resources to seven different SRWG forums is a recipe for disaster, from his agency's standpoint. At the same time, observed other commentors, if the SRWG study review process is compressed into a single week-long meeting, by the end of the week, few participants have the energy left to provide input at all.

Peters said that, because maximum agency participation and input is the goal of these changes to the SRWG process, the Corps is willing to work within whatever structure the states and tribes feel would provide that. Ruff urged the other SCT participants to give this matter their best consideration, because these research and study projects comprise more than 50% of the annual CRFM budget. We need to find a way to look at this entire package from a programmatic perspective, Ruff said, and do some strategic thinking about where we're going with research, and which areas need more attention. For example, the just-released ISAB overview report suggests that we need to focus more attention on adult passage, he said, and I would like to see

some group -- perhaps SCT, or SCT plus some outside representation -- take that programmatic look at the research component of the CRFM budget, to see where we need to focus our efforts.

In response to Boyce's point about the need for a Research Needs and Priorities-type process, Witt Anderson said the Corps agrees that this need exists. In fact, it is addressed in the first activity identified in the most recent draft of the AFEP coordination schedule for FY'00 studies (attached as Enclosure D), Anderson said: meetings of the seven SRWG subgroups to develop study needs, objectives and priorities for the one-page research summaries and the multi-year plans. While it is true that broader programmatic priorities are set by the SCT, when you get down to the individual project level, and how specifically to achieve those broader priorities, that would be an appropriate topic of discussion for these SRWG subgroups, Anderson said.

So you're saying the SRWG would meet between February 22 and March 19 to develop the needs, objectives and priorities for the FY'00 studies package, and before the one-page research summaries are produced, would reach agreement on that first step? Boyce asked. That's correct, Peters replied – it will then be up to the researchers to determine how they will meet those objectives. I think that's fair, said Boyce.

The group spent a few minutes discussing the differences between "research" and "studies," as well as the overlap between "studies" and "implementation items." Kranda said that, for example, for FY'00, there is $13 million in the CRFM budget for Bonneville surface bypass; $2 million of that $13 million will go for research, to test how well the surface bypass prototype is working. Once we decide to implement a given measure – to construct it and operate it over the long term – that becomes an implementation item, Anderson said. Anything that is not an implementation item is a study item, by the Corps' definition; research is a component of both study items and implementation items.

What I hear Jim saying, Anderson continued, is that we need to look broadly at the overall program direction, including adult measures, and we also need to look at where we're spending our available research dollars to find out what fish are doing under various interim and long-term hardware and operational measures. That's correct, said Ruff.

In response to a request from Marv Yoshinaka, Anderson provided the following Corps definitions:

> **IMPLEMENTATION ITEMS**: configuration measures that have been decided to construct (e.g. B2 DSM/Outfall).
> **STUDIES**: Measures that involve evaluation or research and development of potential configuration changes not yet decided to implement. This includes the design and construction of prototypes, hydraulic models etc. used for evaluation. Also known as "mitigation analysis."
> **AFEP RESEARCH**: Biological field investigations (and reporting) to determine fish responses to R&D or implemented measures.

Boyce suggested that, prior to the next SCT meeting, the Corps develop a fact sheet showing how the various study and research funds are being spent; at its March 17 meeting, the SCT can engage in the sort of broad programmatic prioritization discussion suggested by Jim Ruff. Given the fact that it is unlikely that the SCT can come to closure on those priorities at a single meeting, said Boyce, I would further suggest that, over the next month, the SRWG subgroups get their detailed needs and priorities discussions underway, with the goal of completing that process before beginning the development of the one-page research summaries.

After some minutes of further discussion, it was agreed to schedule the joint Walla Walla District/Portland District SRWG needs and priorities meeting for Tuesday, March 9, beginning at 9 a.m. at the Corps' Walla Walla District headquarters It was further agreed that, if time allows, the FY'00 transportation program and adult measures will also be discussed at that meeting.

Moving on, COE's Tim Wick reported on the January 28 Walla Walla FFDRWG meeting; items discussed included Lower Monumental Dam stilling basin repair, auxiliary water supply at Ice Harbor and Lower Monumental Dams, concerns about the juvenile fish facility at McNary Dam, and the FY'99 and FY'00 surface bypass collection tests at Lower Granite.

At the FFDRWG meeting, the group also discussed some of the unfunded studies for FY'99, including detailed flow measurements at Lower Granite in a test of a new 3-D tracking system, and a proposal to study directed flow attraction at the Cowlitz Falls project. These items have both received tentative support from NMFS, Wick said; they were also slated for discussion at yesterday's FPAC meeting. Pending the outcome of those discussions, he said, we will be asking for funds to do those studies this year. Yoshinaka said that, at yesterday's FPAC meeting, there was no objection to going forward with either study in 1999. In response to a question from Boyce, Anderson said there are adequate unspent funds to cover the $300,000-$400,000 needed for these studies. After a few minutes of further discussion, no SCT objections were raised to funding these studies in FY'99.

Another item discussed at the January 28 FFDRWG meeting was McNary adult fish ladder exit modifications, said Wick. It appears that the main problem is the operation of the electrical control system, he explained; the Corps will make a decision about what direction they want to pursue to correct the problem in the near future. The group also discussed the evaluation separator at Ice Harbor Dam. The next FFDRWG meeting is scheduled for March 10.

One other item, said Wick: the perforated plates on the extended-length screens at Lower Granite, Little Goose and McNary are experiencing severe vibration problems, to the extent that some of the bolts holding these systems in place are breaking. The Corps has initiated modeling efforts and hydraulic testing to develop a solution, which, at this point, looks as though it will involve beveling the upstream edge of the holes. Testing so far has shown that the beveling pretty much eliminates the vibration problem, Wick said, so the Corps plans to implement that solution following some additional FGE and fish condition testing at Little Goose.

Rebecca Kalamasz touched on two other unfunded FY'99 proposals that have received some support: temperature monitoring and field methodology for descaling. Before I ask the

researchers to finalize their proposals, she said, I wanted to ask whether the SCT is still interested in them. Steve Pettit said IDFG is willing to support the temperature monitoring work, but is not in support of the descaling proposal. Yoshinaka said he is unfamiliar with the descaling proposal, but is supportive of the temperature monitoring work. Rod Woodin said WDFW supports both studies. Tom Lorz said CRITFC strongly supports the temperature study, but is lukewarm about the descaling study; Ruff said the Council agrees with CRITFC's position on these studies. Boyce said ODFW supports the temperature monitoring work and has no position on the descaling proposal. The Corps and NMFS said they have no position on either study.

After some minutes of further discussion, the SCT raised no show-stopping objections to the descaling study; the temperature monitoring proposal generally received strong support.

II. BPA Presentation on Potential Impacts of Proposed Lower Columbia Spill Programs on Operations, Intertie capacity, Revenue and Power Marketing.

BPA's Phil Thor explained that there would be three main elements to this presentation: the impacts of the spill program on generation and transmission, standards of conduct with respect to BPA's Power Business Line and Transmission Business Line, and an overview of how BPA calculates the impacts of the spill program to the transmission system.

Thor distributed a document, titled "Economic Impact of Spill Regimes," attached as Enclosure E. He spent a few minutes going through this document; some of the highlights of his presentation include:

1. John Day Spill Test Options (for the test period, May 1-August 15)
25% for 24 hours: ~ $2.7 million lost revenue to BPA
45% for 24 hours: ~ $21 million lost revenue to BPA
60% for 24 hours: ~$38 million lost revenue to BPA
45% for 24 hours tested against 25% daytime/60% nighttime: ~ $19 million lost revenue to BPA

2. Reduction of The Dalles Spill from 64% to 30%

TOTAL: $20 million increase in revenue to BPA

3. Increase Bonneville Daytime Spill to 120 Kcfs

TOTAL: $5 million in lost revenue to BPA

Thor said the second page of this handout includes additional details about the impacts of each of these potential actions. In response to a question, he said these are average costs, based on the 1998 operating requirements and the 50-year historic water record. Given the above-average runoff predictions in 1999 water year, these costs will be higher this year, Thor added.

BPA's Keshmira McVey then spent a few minutes talking about recent changes to energy regulation rules, which have necessitated the separation of BPA's transmission and generation divisions. She distributed Enclosure F, a "cheat sheet" explaining how BPA has changed its organizational structure to comply with FERC order 889, which regulates the relationship between a utility's transmission and wholesale merchant functions. The intent of this rule change is to prevent utilities from using their control over access to the transmission system as an unfair competitive advantage, explained BPA's Marv Landauer.

To ensure fair and open access to the transmission system, BPA (and other utilities) are now required to post a number of pieces of information to a central site on the Internet, including the available transmission capacity (ATC) of the total transmission capacity (TTC) for 13 months in advance, transmission service schedules no later than seven days from the start of transmission service, and notice of transmission curtailments or interruptions, and the reason for those curtailments or interruptions, McVey said; this list of informational requirements is growing every year. The basic idea is to ensure that everyone gets this information at the same time, so that they can use it to make real-time power marketing decisions, she explained.

Landauer said the Lower River spill program directly impacts the available transmission capacity of the system, which must be posted 13 months in advance. As the spill program changes, transmission capacity changes, and we need to get that information out so people can look at it, he said.

We are struggling, on the transmission side, to keep up with what the actual transmission capacity is, so that we can keep our colleagues in the market accurately informed, Laundauer continued. That really hit home in the summer of 1996, when some very serious transmission reliability disturbances occurred, he said – we really didn't know what was going on in the river, and we were continuing to operate the system as if we had historical generation patterns.

The current Intertie capacity is rated at 7,200 aMW, Landauer continued. If the 60% spill test occurs at John Day this summer, Intertie capacity will be derated to 6,300 aMW. BPA has to ensure that they are operating the transmission system in a reliable manner, he said; another disturbance like those that occurred in the summer of 1996 simply would not be acceptable. For that reason, BPA is trying to ensure that it has the most reliable and up-to-date information possible about the river.

Laundauer then provided an extensive briefing on how the transmission system works, and what types of situations can cause system reliability concerns. Landauer worked from a series of overheads, attached as Enclosure G; please refer to this document for details of Landauer's presentation. Among his key points:

The geographic and Intertie proximity of John Day and The Dalles dams means that high levels of spill, occurring simultaneously at both projects, are likely to cause transmission system reliability concerns.
There are an number of sophisticated technical factors, including current, voltage and dynamic stability (frequency) that must be kept tightly in balance at a multitude of facilities to ensure transmission system reliability; changes to the spill program can significantly alter this balance.
Thermal overload issues in the northern part of the system are already causing BPA to think more transmission lines may be needed in the northern part of the system, perhaps between Grand Coulee and John Day Dams.
If John Day is spilling the equivalent of 800 aMW, but The Dalles can pick up 800 aMW in generation, the system is essentially the same. From an operational standpoint, John Day and The Dalles have to be considered together.

Thor observed that summer flow augmentation for fish actually provides an economic benefit as well as a biological benefit, because it increases river flows at a time when natural flows are low, but demand for power is at its peak.

One issue related to this presentation is the minimum generation requirement on the Lower Columbia, said Boyce. Last summer, for the first time, that requirement had a major impact on the spill program – do you see that continuing in the future, under current flow conditions? Yes, Landauer replied. Each project is different – at Bonneville and The Dalles, for example, there are a number of issues, primarily having to do with local support; there is a disconnect between the main grid and the lower-voltage system, which means you can't get a free exchange of power in that part of the system. There is also the issue that you have to be able to get the megawatts from Grand Coulee and other projects in the outlying areas to the load areas in the Northwest. In other words, there is a minimum generation requirement for the main grid, and there is also a minimum generation requirement for the local areas. The bottom line is, I don't see those minimum generation requirements changing significantly, Landauer said; if anything, as local-area loads grow in places like The Dalles, the situation will get a little worse.

Landauer also distributed a handout (Enclosure H) showing the expected impacts (in megawatts) to the transmission and generation capacity of the system due to the proposed changes in spill at John Day and The Dalles in 1999. The bottom line: if John Day spill is increased to 60% while The Dalles is spilling at 64% for 24 hours a day, the net impact to the system is -1,100 MW in capacity during the spring period and -900 MW capacity during the summer period.

III. The Dalles 1999 Juvenile Passage Research and Spill Plan – Review of February 11 Technical Meeting and Resolution/Framing of Remaining Issues.

Hevlin summarized last Thursday's meeting by saying that he had asked the participants to focus on two questions: what do the study results from the last two years at The Dalles tell us, and what do suggest about what needs to be studied at The Dalles in 1999? With regard to the

first question, Hevlin said, what I heard was, from the NMFS perspective, the two years of study results raise some red flags about the 64% spill level at that project. Another answer I heard loud and clear, he said, is that we usually don't make management decisions based on only one or two years of study. Another comment was that the variability within the results from the two years of study is too high to draw any solid conclusions. Another comment was that the study design did not address the underlying cause of the survival problem, and that the spill level may not necessarily be the mechanism that is causing that problem – it may be tailrace conditions, predation or some other factor. Another comment was that people want to make these types of management decisions based on adult returns, rather than juvenile survival to the next project downstream, Hevlin said.

With regard to the second question, Hevlin continued, NMFS felt that the best approach to the 1999 study at The Dalles would be to focus on the 30% spill level; others felt it would be more appropriate to focus the 1999 study on the 64% spill level. Another comment was that, rather than alternating the spill level between 30% and 64% within-season, some people would prefer to see a steady state study, concentrating on a single spill level for the entire season. Another comment was that no study should go forward in 1999 unless it is designed to answer the question of what is the underlying cause of the survival problem, Hevlin said. CRITFC commented that they are still interested in having the ISAB review the study plan, and that they would like to see all routes of passage evaluated at The Dalles in the next study plan.

After all of that discussion, Hevlin continued, there was a sense that a smaller group, consisting of a single representative from each of the interested entities, should be convened, with the goal of reaching consensus on what will be studied this year at The Dalles. We were also asked whether, if this smaller group was unable to reach consensus on a study plan, NMFS would still like to see a study go forward at The Dalles in 1999, Hevlin said; I checked that out with our managers, and NMFS is committed to doing a study at The Dalles in 1999, and probably in 2000 as well. We feel it is extremely important to continue to investigate what is the best mode of operation for The Dalles, he said. The small group is scheduled to meet on February 23, Collis added.

Boyce said it is his expectation that the first order of business at the February 23 meeting will be to clarify the goals and objectives of the 1999 study at The Dalles; once we have agreement on that, he said, we can move on to the details of the study design. He added that FPAC has now had an opportunity to discuss The Dalles spill test issue, but was not able to make much progress in recommending what the goals, objectives and design of the study should be for 1999. One important thing that did come out of that meeting was a recommendation that the study's experimental design should be improved to reduce the variability in the results, Boyce said. Second, the salmon managers felt it was important to look at the scope of the study, and whether this type of project-specific study should be used to look at an incremental approach to improving survival at the Columbia River projects. The general feeling is that this is an issue that requires further policy-level discussion, Boyce said, because not everyone is convinced that this is the type of study we should be buying into if we're looking at potential operational refinements. Obviously, that is something this SCT subgroup won't be able to address, Hevlin observed.

Hevlin went on to observe that, with the exception of CRITFC, everyone at SCT has been very supportive of doing the spill study at The Dalles. Now, all of a sudden, it seems everyone is questioning the need for this study, and I'd like to know, where did we go wrong? Hevlin said. Did we go wrong in proposing that we study only the 30% spill level in 1999? Did that polarize opinion against the study among the salmon managers? In NMFS' view, we need these kinds of project-specific studies, he said; otherwise, we're running blind. If NMFS made a mistake in suggesting that we study 30% spill in 1999, we're willing to take responsibility for that error, he said; however, I don't want to see the salmon managers turn against these types of studies simply because that isn't the particular study focus you'd like to see for 1999.

In my mind, getting better information about how to manage spill at The Dalles is still a high priority, Woodin replied. However, that doesn't mean the salmon managers are willing to provide carte blanche support for whatever study plan is plopped onto the table. We need to look at that study plan to see whether or not we're going to get useful information out of it. And that's fine, Hevlin said -- again, my sense is that the other salmon managers viewed the suggestion that we study 30% spill as a slap in the face, and NMFS certainly didn't mean it that way. There are just as many reasons to study 64% spill for another years as there are to study 30% spill. I think in general, what you're sensing is concern about the methodology employed and the reliability of the results from the previous two years' testing, Woodin said.

The discussion returned to the overall goal of this study. Is it an assessment of project survival? Of spillway survival? Boyce asked. To me, it is very unclear exactly what this study is supposed to be designed to tell us, and how that information will be used to modify operations at The Dalles. Clearly, by the time all is said and done, we will want to look at survival through all routes of passage at The Dalles, Anderson said. Remember, years ago we made the decision not to install a juvenile bypass system at The Dalles, and to pass fish primarily through spill at that project. There is now some evidence that there may be problems with survival under some spill conditions. I agree that it makes sense to look at total project survival at The Dalles, Anderson said, but I really don't see how that becomes a policy discussion that automatically needs to be elevated to the IT.

Bob Willis of the Corps observed that there is information that suggests that daytime spill is beneficial to juvenile migrants at John Day Dam; there is also evidence, however controversial, suggesting that 30% spill provides greater benefit to juvenile migrants at The Dalles than does 64%. It seems to me, he said, that if the John Day 24-hour spill test goes forward in 1999, limiting the amount of spill at The Dalles, passage through that reach will actually be enhanced by the planned tests.

Again, we need to try to reach agreement on the specific goals and objectives of the study at The Dalles before we can develop the 1999 study plan, Boyce said. Hevlin replied that, in his view, the goal of the study is to optimize survival at The Dalles; he added that NMFS has not specified a percent survival goal that would be acceptable for that project, but simply wants to get the best survival possible. The other thing I would say, he continued, is that, if there is some thorny policy issue that has to be resolved before the subgroup can come to grips with the study

goals and experimental design issues, we need to talk about that today.

Boyce said his main policy concern, as the discussion of the 1999 spill study and program at The Dalles has unfolded, is that NMFS appeared to be ready to make a change to the Biological Opinion spill program at The Dalles, based on the results of this study to date. I can understand that perception, said Hevlin; however, that was not our intent at all. It probably would have been better for NMFS to get together with the other salmon managers prior to floating a proposal for the 1999 study design, he said; I guess we were just trying to push the process along, to figure out what's best for the fish. I can certainly understand your concern that, if we did a 30% study in 1999, and the results tended to confirm what we've seen in previous years, that NMFS might say, that's it, we don't need to study this anymore, Hevlin said. It may well be that we need another year of study at 64% first, to verify what we think we've seen at that spill level at The Dalles.

In response to a question from Collis, Boyce said ODFW will continue to work cooperatively with NMFS and others in the region on this issue, and will attend the February 23 meeting with the goal of developing the best possible study design to get at the relevant information.

In response to a question, Hevlin said that, no matter what the end result of the February 23 meeting may be, it is NMFS' intention that there will be a study at The Dalles in 1999. NMFS is willing to support what that group comes up with, he said. What if the consensus is that it is not appropriate to do a study in 1999? Woodin asked. We're not going to buy into that, Hevlin said, which should provide some incentive for everyone to come to Tuesday's meeting prepared to roll up their sleeves and really get to work.

IV. John Day 24-Hour Spill Evaluation – Discussion of COE Proposal.

We discussed this test at our meeting on February 11, Hevlin said; one of the issues associated with this test was whether the lower daytime spill level for this test should be 25% or 30%. There was also the issue of the design to look at passage, plus the issue of developing methodology to test assumptions and parameters associated with evaluating both passage and survival, said BPA's Bill Maslen. That's correct, Hevlin said – in their proposal, the Corps would like to look at fish passage efficiency using radio-tagged juveniles, and they would also like to do some pilot-level study of whether or not radio-tagged juveniles can be used to study survival at an individual project.

Personally, said Maslen, I think all of the issues and concerns we've been talking about relative to the study at The Dalles also come into play on the study at John Day. The driver here is the same – the Biological Opinion – and that driver raises the exact same issues at John Day as it does at The Dalles: the objectives and purpose of the test, the applicability of its results, the experimental design.

The purpose of the spill tests at John Day in 1999 and 2000 is to evaluate fish passage efficiency through the spillway, and forebay residence time, said Gary Fredricks – not survival. Survival is to be addressed in the next iteration of this test. Fundamentally, however, if you're raising the question of how this fits in a broader context at the project, and broader yet in terms of the reach, it is the same question, Maslen said. To pursue that at one project, but not the other, is inconsistent, in terms of putting that into the broader context, he said. Admittedly, that is beyond the letter of the BiOp, but still, the inconsistency remains.

In response to a question from Boyce, Fredricks said the survival evaluation component of the study at John Day is simply an effort to gather concurrent information that may be useful in the future, at the same time the researchers are doing the FPE and forebay residence evaluations, which are the primary focus of this year's study. My understanding is that we would be taking advantage of an opportunity to study the feasibility of a different technology for future application, Woodin said.

Maslen observed that there is also a policy question regarding the economic impacts of the proposed spill test at John Day. The Biological Opinion specifies that the test should maximize the biological information gained while minimizing the economic impact. The technical issue is, in light of the objective of evaluating spill effectiveness through efficiency and forebay retention time, it is possible to develop any number of different operational scenarios to test those factors, Maslen said. However, not knowing what my objective is, any one of those might be viable. We've been around and around on this, he said; if the objective is to maximize spill, then evaluate spill effectiveness, then we may not agree.

Is there a limit to the economic impact, a level beyond which BPA's tolerance would be exceeded? Boyce asked. That's an important question, said Hevlin, because the subgroup needs a sense of where the sideboards are for what they're planning at The Dalles and John Day. He explained that this was a section of the Biological Opinion that resulted from some extremely strenuous negotiation between NMFS and BPA; we were trying to get a 24-hour spill test at John Day, while, at the same time, ensuring that the 64% spill program continued at The Dalles. The resulting BiOp language isn't very precise, Hevlin said, but the bottom line is that BPA has agreed that a 24-hour spill test can go forward at John Day so that we can get the necessary information, within some economic restrictions. The reality of the situation is that, while BPA is willing to let those tests proceed, they are unwilling to incur unacceptable economic impacts in the process of obtaining that information.

If the economic impact of the test has to be near zero, that takes nearly all of the test options off the table, observed IDFG's Steve Pettit. If you're spilling 64% at The Dalles, you could still spill 25% during the day at John Day, Maslen said. Perhaps it would be appropriate to ask BPA to come to the meeting on February 23 prepared to say what level of economic impact would be acceptable, Anderson suggested – does the test have to be revenue-neutral, or is there some room to negotiate? If the Tuesday meeting isn't going to produce something that is dead on arrival, he said, I think that needs to be laid out fairly clearly. We can go back to the office and ask, Thor replied.

Tom Lorz said that, from CRITFC's standpoint, it is going to be hard enough to reach consensus on the technical aspects of the study design at Tuesday's meeting; that task will be next to impossible if the group has to factor in economic considerations as well. The reality is, that isn't realistic, said Anderson – the economic factor is referenced specifically in the BiOp, and the economic impact of this test is going to be a discussion item between NMFS and BPA. The tribes and the states are going to have to deal reasonably with that issue, just as BPA has to be willing to talk reasonably about how much of a revenue impact is acceptable. Woodin suggested that the technical subgroup concentrate on designing the minimum evaluation required to generate useful information. If that's too expensive for Bonneville, he said, then we have a real problem.

After some minutes of discussion, there was general agreement that, at Tuesday's meeting, the technical group will make their best effort to reach consensus on the study goals, objectives and design; once consensus is reached, the economic information will then be factored in, with BPA's help. There was also agreement that, in the event consensus cannot be reached at the February 23 meeting, the SCT will meet via conference call to discuss any issues that arise prior to their being elevated for IT resolution.

V. John Day Drawdown Phase I Scope of Study.

Stuart Stanger, manager of the John Day Drawdown Study, explained that the question Phase I of this study is attempting to answer is, should the Corps move forward with the Phase II feasibility-level study of John Day Drawdown. He said the Corps has sent out a request for any relevant studies that have already been done by others in the region, and has also begun to open the study up to the public, with the goal of answering any questions they can about the impacts of drawdown and about the study process itself.

Stanger said the first public meeting on the study was held in Alaska, at the request of Senator Stevens, and was attended by representatives of the Governor's office and the Alaska Department of Fisheries, as well as a number of local trawl fishermen. The second meeting was held in Helena, Montana; it was attended by only one person. The third meeting was held in Lewiston, and was somewhat better-attended; it is worth noting that no one at that meeting expressed a favorable opinion of drawdown. Stanger added that the Drawdown study managers are making a special effort to meet with the editorial boards in the local areas they visit, in an attempt to put to rest some of the misinformation that is currently circulating about John Day drawdown, and about drawdown in general. He said another public meeting will be held tonight in Portland, and invited any interested SCT members to attend.

Stanger said the Phase I study is looking at only four John Day drawdown options: drawdown to spillway crest with and without flood control, and drawdown to natural river with and without flood control. If the study proceeds to the feasibility level, he said, it is very likely that other alternatives will be considered.

In response to a question from Boyce, Stanger said the current schedule calls for

completion of the draft Phase I report by September, followed by a 30-day public comment period. The final John Day Drawdown Phase I report will then be submitted to Congress in December. If Congress decides that the Phase II study should proceed, said John Kranda, there should be adequate funds to begin that work in FY'00, but whether or not we can actually get that work underway next year will depend on when Congress makes its decision.

In response to another question from Boyce, Stanger said it will likely be at least 15 years before John Day drawdown could be implemented.

VI. Review of FY'00 CRFM Program, Discussion of Process and Timeline for Prioritization of Activities.

The main point of this agenda item was to discuss how the process worked last year, to provide an opportunity for the SCT to put forward any suggestions about ways the prioritization process could be improved this year, and to have some preliminary discussion of the timeline for the FY'00 prioritization process, Collis said. Can we spend a few minutes talking about how last year's process worked, she asked, and how the process for FY'00 might be improved?

One question for Jim, said Anderson – it seems as though the Council/ISRP review process may be relevant to what Congress may direct us to do or not do in FY'00. Does the SCT need to think about developing any priorities that need to be in the ISRP's hands before their review is concluded? I think the SCT's efforts to rank projects and establish priorities are very valuable to the ISRP, Ruff replied. However, this year's ISRP review will be a broad-brush look at the program, and will probably rely heavily on the work the ISAB has already done in its series of review reports. Next year, the ISRP will probably be taking a more thorough, project-by-project look at the program, Ruff said, but this year, they will not. In other words, the ISRP and the Council are behind, so in terms of the FY'00 program, there isn't a need, in your view, for the SCT to provide any additional information beyond the FY'00 spreadsheet and workplans? Anderson asked. That's correct this year, Ruff replied. Next year, however, we will need to have a ranked 2001 CRFM program by January or February.

Ruff added that, next week, the Independent Scientific Analysis Board will be submitting its final overview report on the Corps' Capital Construction program to the Council. Whether that sheds any light on what the ISRP is going to say remains to be seen, he said. In response to a question from Anderson, Ruff said there will be an opportunity for the SCT to provide comments on the ISRP report once it is submitted to the Council; Hevlin suggested that it may make sense for the SCT to draft a letter, expressing the SCT's views on the progress that has been made in improving fish passage in the system, and explaining some of the specific priorities that have been set, to be submitted along with the ISRP report to Congress. I think that's right on, Anderson said – if we can send that message, as a multi-agency group, I think that would be very helpful.

VII. Criteria Development for FY'00 CRFM Prioritization.

Ruff said he and Hevlin have been assigned the task of developing the criteria for FY'00 CRFM prioritization; we are well aware of that assignment, he said, but have not had time to complete it yet. Also, Bob Heinith has asked that we postpone that discussion until he is able to attend the meeting, and he was unable to be here today, Ruff said. In addition, Ruff said he has a strong suspicion that, in their report, the ISRP will be suggesting some criteria which the SCT has not considered in the past.

I would strongly suggest that, at the March SCT meeting, we ask the ISAB to come in and give us the same presentation on their overview report that they will be giving the Council, Ruff said; we can then have a discussion of what they've said in their report. No disagreements were raised to this suggestion.

Ruff added that he sees these last two agenda items (VI and VII) as the SCT's most important tasks over the next few months; given the fact that we have run out of time to discuss them today, he said, I would suggest that we move them to the top of the agenda for the March SCT meeting. It was so agreed. Hevlin added that, prior to the next meeting, he and Ruff will develop the draft FY'00 prioritization criteria.

IX. Next SCT Meeting Date and Agenda Items.

The next meeting of the System Configuration Team was set for Wednesday, March 17, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at NMFS' Portland offices. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.