

WATER QUALITY TEAM MEETING NOTES

September 12, 2000

National Marine Fisheries Service Offices

Portland, Oregon

Introductions and Review of the Agenda.

Mark Schneider of NMFS and Mary Lou Soscia of EPA, WQT co-chairs, welcomed everyone to the meeting, held September 12 at the National Marine Fisheries Service offices in Portland, Oregon. The meeting was facilitated by Donna Silverberg, who led a round of introductions and a review of the agenda. The group spent a few minutes reviewing the minutes from the last WQT meeting, making a few minor revisions.

I. Review of 2000 Spill Program.

Schneider said this agenda item was suggested by Margaret Filardo at the last WQT meeting; essentially, what is being proposed is that the WQT participate in the review of the annual report on the Corps' spill program. Ruth Abney noted that the Corps is planning to hold a meeting in October, at which various presentations would be made about the spill program report; Jerry McCann of the Fish Passage Center said his understanding of Filardo's request is that the Corps would be asked to make those presentations to the WQT itself.

Schneider noted that the Corps' report will be available soon; he suggested that a joint WQT/Corps meeting might be an appropriate place at which to discuss the plan. Abney said she will explore the feasibility of such a joint meeting with the Corps' Dick Cassidy.

Schneider added that the Corps is organizing a field trip and site visit to the Lower Snake River fixed monitoring stations for October 17-19; he said all interested WQT participants are invited to attend.

The group then devoted a few minutes' discussion to the specific items they would like to see the Corps include in its 2000 spill program report, including Schneider's suggestion that the Corps specifically address the unusually high TDG levels seen at various places in the system prior to the start of the 2000 spill season; Abney said she will pass this information along to Cassidy and others at the Corps.

II. Bonneville Power Administration Temperature Model.

BPA's John Piccininni said that, in response to language in the 2000 FCRPS Biological Opinion, BPA is considering funding the development of a water quality monitoring program and a new water temperature model. Essentially, he said, what is being proposed is that BPA will fund the development of a data collection infrastructure, water temperature model and real-time assessment protocols for Columbia River and Snake River mainstem reaches, two large river tributaries (the Willamette and the Yakima) and at least three smaller priority tributaries.

The primary purpose of this program would be to develop an accurate, state-of-the-art method and model of the rates of heat gain and loss in the streams and rivers of the Columbia Basin, Piccininni explained. This will allow real-time descriptions of water temperature and flow in these systems, provide the data needed to assess the factors influencing water temperature, and provide a method of monitoring the effects of habitat improvement actions on streamflows and water temperatures. Essentially, Piccininni said, BPA is looking for the Water Quality Team's suggestions and input on this proposal.

Piccininni noted that there are numerous water quality models currently in use in the Columbia Basin; what BPA hopes to avoid, through the creation of this tool, is the "dueling models" scenario. We need to agree, as a region, on something, he said. Piccininni noted that BPA is planning to evaluate some of the off-the-shelf models developed by the U.S. Geological Survey, to see whether or not they may suit BPA's modeling needs.

Piccininni said October 1, 2001 is the proposed start-date for this project; in other words, he said, BPA anticipates that it will take about a year to scope the project, find the right contractor, select the model, then begin the work. BPA is envisioning a series of meetings during the first quarter of 2001, at which the model and contractor will be selected. The specifics of sampling, tool development and approach will be addressed during the Oct. 1-December 31, 2000 period, he said. The existing data will be summarized during the first quarter of 2001; hardware acquisition and software testing will take place during the period of April-September, 2001.

BPA assumes that, once the vendor is selected, agencies with an interest in temperature modeling will offer their modelers to participate in a technical advisory committee to work with the USGS on the development and implementation of the new model, Piccininni said; the same applies to your sampling experts. He noted that the sampling will be based on locations that make use of long-term Class A weather stations and USGS gauging stations, facilities with long periods of record. We also hope the WQT will give us their opinion as to where those stations should be located, Piccininni said.

Piccininni noted that, while BPA is prepared to provide the majority of funding for this effort, Bonneville will be looking to other stakeholders in the region to participate financially as well. He added that the data collected during the sampling phase will be available to EPA and the states working on TMDLs for temperature.

Soscia suggested that any resources Bonneville devotes to this effort be partnered in with the EPA/state TMDL development process. It would make sense for Bonneville to provide some resources to the TMDL development process as well, she said, to ensure that we're all headed in the same direction. EPA does not want to see a situation where EPA and the states develop, through intensive effort, a plan that is under court order, and must be implemented to avoid lawsuits from environmental groups, while BPA is off on a separate track. Piccininni replied that he can envision a number of areas where the BPA effort could be useful to the TMDL developers.

Schneider said he is still unclear about which Bonneville Fish and Wildlife Program needs this proposed monitoring/modeling effort will address. Piccininni replied that BPA wants to know where the heat exchange is taking place – where it is coming into the system, where it is leaving the system and where temperature problems exist for anadromous and resident fish. The model will also have extensive application to the habitat restoration effort, said Piccininni.

Piccininni said BPA will soon be producing a written summary of the agency's proposed monitoring and temperature modeling project; what would be ideal, he said, would be if the WQT could review the document, then schedule some time on the agenda of its next meeting, when Tom Morse, the leader of this project, will be available to answer detailed questions. After a few minutes of discussion, Silverberg suggested that the WQT review the written summary with an eye toward how the BPA effort can best be integrated with the EPA/state TMDL development process. There was general agreement that a presentation by, and a discussion with, Tom Morse would be extremely helpful.

Silverberg summarized the next steps on this issue as follows: the WQT will review Tom Morse's project description, and will help BPA with scoping this proposed project. BPA will make Morse's written description available in advance of the WQT's October meeting. At the meeting itself, she said, it sounds as though BPA will need to address a number of key questions:

1. Is there the potential for the information generated by the model to assist in mainstem TMDL development?
2. Will this effort help to fill gaps in the existing knowledge base?
3. Might the proposed model and monitoring network be a useful management tool in the future?
4. How can the BPA effort best be meshed with the mainstem TMDL development process?
5. What improvement in data accuracy is necessary for the BPA model to succeed?

III. SYSTDG Model and Assignment from IT.

Schneider reminded the WQT of their assignment from the IT to answer several questions regarding Mike Schneider's SYSTDG model, including the following:

- What work remains to be done in order for this model to have management application and
- What is the time-frame in which this might be expected to occur?

At this point, said Schneider, we have some additional information on the contracting portion of this project. Jim Irish, the BPA contract administrator for the SYSTDG project, said that the model is complete to this point and has been released to the Corps, NMFS and the Corps' Reservoir Control Center for review and comment. Once that process is completed, said Irish, BPA will conduct a series of two-day workshops (to which the WQT will be invited) to explain how to use the model. Attendance at one of these workshops will be mandatory before an agency will be provided a copy of the model, Irish said.

Irish noted that close of comment for NMFS and the Corps is Friday, September 15; the workshops will likely be held in mid-October. Schneider agreed to talk to the WQT members and other interested parties to get an idea of the estimated number of participants in these workshops. Because of the computer requirements to demonstrate the model, it was noted that these workshops will likely be held in the BPA computer training room, which has all of the equipment needed to run the model. Irish added that, once the model training is complete, copies of the model distributed for comment to all interested parties and their comments are assimilated, BPA intends for the SYSTDG model to be fully operational in time for use during the 2001 in-season management period.

IV. Water Quality Plan.

Silverberg said the purpose of this agenda item is to discuss the process changes outlined in the 2000 FCRPS Biological Opinion, and their implications for the Water Quality Team. Schneider distributed Enclosure C, the relevant section of the BiOp (Section 9.5). I mainly wanted to alert you to the fact that, under the new BiOp, the WQT has some increased responsibilities, Schneider said, related to the development of the one- and five-year water quality improvement plans.

Jim Ruff noted that if the WQT has any comments about how a water quality team should coordinate or integrate into the one- and five-year planning processes, it would be appropriate to provide those comments to NMFS by the end of September. We wanted to have some discussion at today's meeting about what is meant by the one- and five-year planning process in all four Hs, said Ruff; with respect to Hydro, NMFS expects that the development of the one- and five-year plans will be coordinated through the existing Regional Forum processes. The SCT is expected to handle capital improvement actions; the other aspects of Hydro which need to be addressed are an operations or water management plan, to be coordinated through the Technical Management Team, and a water quality improvement plan, currently attached, in somewhat skeletal form, as Appendix D of the draft

BiOp.

Ruff noted that, according to the language in the draft BiOp, the one- and five-year planning processes are the responsibility of the action agencies, with the assistance of NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I would look to the Corps, BPA and Reclamation to say how they intend that these processes be conducted, he said.

It's a matter of being able to agree on the track to implementation measures, Piccininni replied – some of the action agencies' reluctance has to do with committing to things that have yet to be identified as feasible. Our plan is to include some flow charts in the water quality plan to show logical implementation schedules for construction and operational changes, with off-ramps for items that are determined not to be feasible.

Schneider suggested that various SCT members, including Chairman Hevlin, be invited to attend the October WQT meeting to discuss the water quality-related measures in the CRFM program for the next few years. It was so agreed, Ruff added that, at the next IT meeting, the action agencies will be presenting their preliminary concepts for how to proceed with their one- and five-year plans. He noted that the first five-year plan is due to NMFS by January 31, 2001; that doesn't leave a lot of time, he said.

What are you looking for, in terms of this group's input today? Silverberg asked. I mainly wanted to give you a heads-up that the new BiOp outlines a role for a water quality team, whether it's this group or a reformatted WQT with a broader scope, in coordinating the implementation of the water quality improvement plan, Ruff replied.

The group spent a few minutes discussing the implications of the language in the new BiOp for the Water Quality Team, as well as the potential for the creation of a new Water Quality Improvement Team to address Clean Water Act compliance issues; the team discussed the potential disconnect between Clean Water Act issues and Endangered Species Act issues. Ultimately, there was general agreement that there may be some advantage to creating a regional federal/state/tribal partnership to solve potential conflicts between state water quality and fishery agencies within a given state.

V. Next WQT Meeting Date.

The next meeting of the Water Quality Team was set for Tuesday, October 10 (later changed to October 24). Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.