

Implementation Team Meeting Notes

May 4, 2006

1. Greetings and Introductions.

Today's Implementation Team meeting was chaired by John Palensky and facilitated by Donna Silverberg. The following is a summary (not a verbatim transcript) of the topics discussed and decisions made at this meeting. Anyone with questions or comments on these notes should contact Kathy Ceballos at 503-230-5420.

2. Updates.

A. In-Season Management (TMT). Libby is at 2417.8 feet, 41 feet from full and gradually filling, with 4 Kcfs outflow, said Cathy Hlebechuk. Hungry Horse is at elevation 3516, 44 feet from full, releasing 10 Kcfs. Albeni Falls has filled above elevation 2056 and is in refill mode. Grand Coulee was at elevation 1232 yesterday, about 58 feet from full, and releasing 160 Kcfs. Grand Coulee is refilling as well. Dworshak is at elevation 1539, 61 feet from full, refilling but releasing 10 Kcfs, full load. Flows at Lower Granite are currently running about 135 Kcfs, well above the seasonal spring flow objective. McNary is releasing 340 Kcfs; Priest Rapids, 180 Kcfs, both of which are well above their seasonal spring flow objectives, Hlebechuk said. Obviously, there's plenty of water in the rivers right now.

Three SORs have been submitted since we last met, Hlebechuk said. One had to do with tow-boat safety; the tow-boat operators were having trouble exiting the lock at Lower Granite while the project is at MOP and spilling. They requested that we reduce or eliminate spill while they exited the lock. TMT discussed it and agreed to reduce spill to RSW plus training spill, about 20 Kcfs, down from the 60 Kcfs the project would normally be spilling. Dam operators had the option of going to zero spill if necessary. There have been nine times that spill has been reduced since the SOR was implemented; on only one of those occasions did the Corps go to zero spill. The average duration of these curtailments is 20 minutes, said Hlebechuk.

The salmon managers requested a staggered start to the 2006 fish transportation program, Hlebechuk said; we started transport on April 20 from Lower Granite, on April 24 from Little Goose and on April 28 from Lower Monumental. We documented this

decision very carefully, given the fact that it is a departure from the court-ordered operation, Hlebechuk said; we coordinated it carefully with the other parties to the litigation, with the various legal staffs and with the Department of Justice before a letter was written to Judge Redden, she said – apparently he didn't have a problem with this change in operation.

The third SOR was about The Dalles Dam spillway limitation, Hlebechuk said; it was submitted on April 11, while the wire ropes were still being replaced on the spillway. The SOR requested additional spill at John Day to compensate for the reduction in spill at The Dalles, but it turned out to be a moot point, because The Dalles was able to spill up to the gas cap using the specified bays. It is also the Corps' position not to provide make-up spill, she said. There was so much spill going on in the system that, again, it was a moot point. She also noted that the wire rope replacement in bays 1-9 at The Dalles spillway was completed ahead of schedule, by April 25.

The John Day T1 transformer bank is out, as you're aware, Hlebechuk said; it now appears that it may be possible to get two of those transformers back on-line by June, rather than September. As a result, another SOR had to do with going to 30%/30% spill at John Day Dam rather than 0%/60%, because of adult passage concerns, Hlebechuk said. It was discussed at FPOM, and it was agreed to continue to monitor for any adult passage problems under the current spill regime before making any change.

The TMT also discussed the issue of removing some of the SLEDS at the downstream entrances of the Bonneville Dam fish ladders; on April 18, WDFW expressed concern that the SLEDS might be interfering with the ability of the adult spring chinook to pass upstream. TMT concluded that this is primarily an FPOM issue; it was discussed at FPOM, which recommended that two of the Bonneville Dam Second Powerhouse north shore SLEDS be removed for a two-day test. They were removed on April 24 and re-installed on April 26. The prior weekend, adult counts had started to increase, Hlebechuk said. There is still a lot of concern at TMT about the sea lions' predation on adult salmon; there are still roughly 30 sea lions below Bonneville Dam. The states and tribes are continuing to pursue a permit to move some of the problem animals, but it is a very long, cumbersome process.

Bill Tweit thanked the Corps for their willingness to work with the State of Washington on the SLEDs removal test. Whatever is going on, it is clear that the 2006 run is the latest ever – something is going on, and we don't understand what it is, he said. We think it was very smart for the Corps to work with us on removing the SLEDS and looking at whether they were the problem; we really appreciate the support we received in moving forward with that two-day test.

At yesterday's TMT meeting, Oregon said the chum emergence has now officially ended, Hlebechuk said. TMT has been very concerned about the spill levels at The Dalles Dam because of high gas levels in the Bonneville forebay; The Dalles spill cap

went down to 80 Kcfs at one point. It's now back up to 120 Kcfs, she said. Another interesting thing is that the Cascade Island TDG gauge is now being used as the control point for TDG, rather than the Warrendale gauge, she said; we have seen very high gas levels – up to 124% – for short periods. That gauge is located upstream from the Bonneville Second Powerhouse corner collector, she said; the gas readings at Cascade Island are much higher than the readings at Warrendale. It appears that the Cascade Island gauge is being influenced by TDG from the adult fish ladder, Mark Schneider noted – we have seen TDG levels of 120% in that ladder, which exits above the Cascade Island gauge.

A PIT-tag detector array was installed in the B2 corner collector this winter, Hlebechuk continued; it was tested April 20-21. What's the detection rate? Jim Ruff asked. If the fish are in the middle, the test showed that it's detecting 100%, Hlebechuk replied; however, now that it's up and running, we don't know for sure. That new detector should really help the region obtain improved lower Columbia River reach survival estimates, Ruff observed.

Moving on to the most recent ESP/HYSSR runs, Hlebechuk noted that the full presentation is available via hot-link from the May 3 agenda on the TMT homepage. She noted that the RFC runs 44 different historical weather (temperature and precipitation) traces to develop 44 potential hydrographs for the current water year. Hlebechuk went briefly through this information, noting that there is an excellent chance that the McNary flow objectives will be met through July, but no chance the objective will be met in August. At Lower Granite, there is an excellent chance that the May and June flow objectives will be met, a 50% chance they will be met in July, and no chance the objective will be met in August.

B. Independent Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB). No report.

C. Water Quality Team (WQT). Mark Schneider said there will be a joint SCT/WQT field trip to Lower Granite, Little Goose, Ice Harbor and McNary dams later this month. We will be looking at spill and juvenile passage facilities, he said; anyone who would like to join us is welcome to do so.

Next, he said he had spent yesterday out on the lower Columbia River looking at water quality monitoring stations. The Corps has had a concern about TDG below Bonneville Dam, particularly in shallow-water habitat, Schneider said; LCREP has a series of monitoring stations in the lower river, and the Corps has agreed to install two additional sites. The Corps is coordinating placement of those sites with LCREP so that we have a complete picture of the dissolved gas situation in the lower river, he said. One station is located in an old channel of the Sandy River, while the other is about two miles downstream in the Columbia River on the Washington side of the 205 bridge.

D. System Configuration Team (SCT). No report.

E. FCRPS Litigation. Palensky said he had talked with Mark Eames; they concluded that the only item that should be mentioned is that the remand has been extended until February 1, 2007. Again, he said, Judge Redden was very comfortable with the process that was used to coordinate the staggered start of the transportation program. Yesterday Judge Redden heard arguments on the Upper Snake BiOp issue; he said he will render his opinion within about two weeks. If the outcome is that the two BiOps will have to be combined, said Palensky, that will have a major impact on the schedule.

Ruff said he had heard that it may take several weeks for Judge Redden to render his decision; major issues include the analytical framework and jeopardy analysis for the Upper Snake BiOp, because they are similar to those used in the 2004 FCRPS BiOp, so it is likely that it will also be remanded back to NMFS. No one knows what he will say about the segmentation issue, said Ruff – he may keep the two BiOps separate, or he may rule that they have to be combined.

3. Planning/Decision-Making Issues.

A. 2006 Water Management Plan – Spring/Summer Update. Hlebechuk described some of the differences between the 2006 spring/summer update and its predecessors. She noted that the 2006 update incorporates the provisions of the recent USFWS 2006 BiOp with its Libby sturgeon operations. The sturgeon pulse has the same volumes that have been used in the past. I know the State of Montana isn't pleased about the USFWS proposed sturgeon operation because of Libby spill and TDG concerns, Ruff observed.

The update also incorporates the new Dworshak flood control elevations, which are 12 feet higher (140 kaf) on March 31 due to the system flood control shift to Grand Coulee this year, Hlebechuk said. The spill priority list is also slightly different this year. Also, because of the completion of the dredging in the Lower Snake, we have been able to operate those projects at MOP to MOP+1. We have not yet finalized the 2006 Water Management Plan because we're waiting for Judge Redden's order, she said; we hope to finalize it at the next TMT meeting. The 2006 spring/summer update was finalized at yesterday's TMT meeting. There isn't really anything else different, Hlebechuk said.

What about the status of Upper Snake flow augmentation in 2006? Ruff asked. It looks like we will get the full 487 kaf, based on the forecast, Lori Postlethwait replied.

When is TMT expected to discuss the 2006 sturgeon operation? Ruff asked. We heard yesterday that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be submitting a sturgeon SOR prior to the next TMT meeting on May 17, Hlebechuk replied.

4. RM&E Issues.

A. Report on Mainstem/Systemwide Review Team's Review and Prioritization of Projects. Tom Iverson distributed a Council staff memo on this topic, which will be presented at the next Council meeting. We had 161 proposals reviewed by the team, Iverson said – fish and wildlife managers, Council staff, Corps staff and Bonneville staff. It was a preliminary, coarse-grained review; 28 projects totaling \$41 million were designated core projects, while 21 were ranked “do not fund.”

This is just the first step, Iverson said; there is still a lot more work to be done. The Council has allocated a total of \$46 million for this work, including funds for multi-province projects; there are \$61 million worth of core and high-priority projects. Iverson said the main project categories include fish and wildlife manager coordination and support, database management, fish passage monitoring (five proposals were submitted to replace the Fish Passage Center functions, three of which were deemed adequate by the salmon managers), ocean research, and groups of lamprey/bull trout/sturgeon projects. Funding for participation in regional processes for the states and tribes is a bit of a sticky area; we're discussing how best to provide that support, Iverson said.

The goal of this exercise was to prioritize the projects and highlight issues, Palensky said – how will those issues be dealt with from here on out? Palensky asked. Those are issues that remain to be resolved, and will be carried forward as rolling issues, Ruff replied – they will continue to be discussed by CBFWA and the Council.

With respect to the fish passage monitoring projects, when will the meeting occur? Ruff asked. The date hasn't been set yet, Iverson replied. What about the database management issue? Howard Schaller asked – who will be meeting to discuss that issue? We're still firming that up, Iverson said – my intention is to schedule a meeting later this month, on May 22. It will include the data management folks and the fish managers, to start talking through what data we need, what the framework should be and how we can make the data as accessible as possible. We really know what information we need, from the managers' perspective, Iverson said.

What about the other sections – lamprey/bull trout/sturgeon and ocean research? Schaller said. How will those be teed up? Does the Council intend to use the MSRT? Will the resident fish committee be asked to take a role in prioritizing those projects? Has the Council or CBFWA talked about that? The Council has, Ruff replied; we were looking for an initial review by CBFWA, and the MSRT was formed to provide that review from a management perspective. There are also lamprey and bull trout technical committees that could help provide that initial review, with the MSRT's participation. These projects were not reviewed in detail; they were basically tabled for the time being. They do need further review and should be reviewed in detail, Ruff said.

It sounds as though a hot potato is being thrown between the Council and CBFWA, Schaller said. We were able to review the salmon projects without ISRP input, so why do we need ISRP input only for certain projects? All of the Mainstem projects were ranked – they weren't just set aside, Iverson said. The bull trout, sturgeon and lamprey projects were all ranked. We then said let's take a step back and take a global look at those projects, Iverson said. And we're not necessarily waiting on the ISRP review, Ruff said – we are going to have an ISRP review on June 1st. Meetings will occur on database management and fish passage monitoring before June 1. It may not be possible to review the lamprey/bull trout/sturgeon projects before June 1, Ruff said. That's my point – those projects always get put off, Schaller said. Why not reconvene the MSRT to review those projects?

Iverson noted that the Council needs to take a more global look at the budgets for each project category before the MSRT is re-convened. The resident fish committee is looking at these projects, but needs some guidance as to how much of a budget will be available. I'm taking a bit of a patient approach until the budget question is resolved, Iverson said. My concern is that these projects deserve equal consideration, Schaller said. And in my view, they will receive it, Iverson said – I appreciate your frustration, because it is true that the process is a bit unclear at this point.

Weren't you planning to convene subgroups of the fish managers who choose to participate in the MSRT to discuss the lamprey, bull trout and sturgeon projects? Tony Nigro asked. That's correct, Iverson replied – those meetings will likely take place in June.

Ultimately, Schaller observed that his understanding was that the entire package was to be completed by June. This is just the start of a process that will culminate in a funding recommendation to the Council this fall, Ruff said – it will not be completed by June. There will likely be monthly meetings throughout the summer. These have definitely been highlighted as groups of projects needing further review; we're certainly not trying to ignore or hide the ball on those groups of projects.

Palensky noted that, within the mainstem and systemwide portions of the Council program are many of the research and monitoring projects that are of interest to the IT – that's why I included this topic on today's agenda, he said. It was noted that there is also a tie-in to the AFEP program, and some question as to whether the Corps should be asked to undertake further funding responsibilities. There are many questions about what should be a Corps responsibility, what should be a Bonneville funding responsibility and what should be a NOAA funding responsibility, another participant observed. We'll get further updates on this topic throughout the summer as the review process progresses, Palensky noted.

B. Update on Snake River Fall Chinook In-River Transport Study. Eric Braun said tagging of juvenile SR fall Chinook is proceeding for this year's study. The policy/planning and technical groups met last month; the general outcome was

agreement that the long-term plan for this study should be taken up within the remand process. The groups also discussed options for the development of that long-term plan; one possibility is that Paul Ocker will draft a strawman proposal; another is that the committees or a smaller work-group will take a crack at developing a long-term plan for what fall chinook studies should look like for the next several years, Braun said.

So far, the groups have discussed only the 2006 study design, Schaller noted – the marking levels needed to answer the questions that had been laid out. The group is also supposed to look at the longer-term plan – not just the marking, but how this data will be analyzed in the future. My understanding is that there are a couple of options for doing that, but some parties feel that should be a part of the remand process, and of a broader RM&E strategy, Schaller said.

I agree that this question needs to be included in the BiOp remand process, said Ruff; how those details will ultimately be worked out is a very important question for the region. My understanding is that the various parties will be getting back to Paul Ocker about their preferences, Braun said. Personally, I think this process was a real success story for the Columbia Basin, Schaller said – we actually got all of the policy people together in the same room to articulate the questions that needed to be answered. Having it so intimately integrated with the production planning process and US v. Oregon was extremely important as well, he said. What we learned was that we can design these studies in a cost-effective manner, and establish objectives to accommodate different analytical approaches and different points of view.

My understanding was that the planning group was going to get back together and summarize where we stand, currently, from various parties' perspective, on the long-term study question, Nigro said – essentially, that the planning group would function as a liaison between the policy and technical groups. I think that's a good characterization of where this stands, Paul Wagner said. Any idea when the planning group will be meeting next? Ruff asked. I'm not sure, Nigro replied.

C. Report on Comments Received and Next Steps Regarding the Corps' System Flood Control Study. Braun said 23 written comments were received on this proposed flood control study; the Corps is in the process of looking at all those comments and determining where to go from here. There were a couple of common questions or issues, and we need to think about those, he said – such as the appropriate funding source for the study, and whether or why the hydrosystem should pay for it; questions about the science, including the flow/survival relationship and whether this is the right vehicle with which to try to address that; questions about which issues to focus on first. Given the cost, the question of a phased approach, and what should be focused on first, are also important to the region, Braun said.

The Corps is trying to reach an internal position on where we should go from here, he continued; we will be coordinating with the region, again, on scope, sequencing of the study and other issues. How would that coordination take place – in what forum?

Ruff asked. I think that's part of what we need to decide, Braun replied.

An even more basic question is, has the Corps decided if it is going to proceed with a phased flood control study? Ruff asked. We have not yet made that decision, Braun replied; in June, we have a meeting planned to review where we are with our legal, policy and technical folks. Thus we probably won't have much more to say about this study until the July IT meeting, he added.

D. Results of Temporary Removal of Sea Lion Exclusion Devices at Bonneville Dam. Braun reported that there are about 300 radio-tagged adult chinook moving past Bonneville Dam. The bottom line is that we didn't see much difference in adult passage with the SLEDS in and the SLEDS out, he said. We'll revisit this topic, and the subject of the states' and tribes' progress toward obtaining a marine mammal removal permit, at our July meeting, Palensky said. It was noted that Sea World has expressed a willingness to accept C404, the most problematic sea lion, if he can be caught.

5. Regional Forum Process Issues.

A. Long-Term Strategic Planning Update. Palensky said upcoming IT topics include an update on the Snake River fall chinook transport study, a litigation update, a pinniped permit briefing, a Libby sturgeon operation update and the status of the SCT's FY2007 CRFM budget priorities.

6. Next IT Meeting Date.

The next Implementation Team meeting was set for Thursday, June 1. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.