

Implementation Team Conference Call Notes

February 14, 2005

1. Greetings and Introductions.

Today's emergency IT conference call was chaired by Jim Ruff 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 about these notes should contact Kathy Ceballos at 503-230-5420.

2. Little Goose RSW Timing Decision – Issue Elevated from the System Configuration Team.

Silverberg said the purpose of today's conference call was to discuss the Little Goose RSW issue and the salmon managers' technical staff letter that has been submitted on that issue. All of the meeting participants agreed that they had been fully briefed on the issue. Ruff said NOAA Fisheries staff did not sign the staff letter because they were in the process of briefing their management; he said, however, that NMFS agrees with the other salmon managers that construction of the Little Goose RSW should proceed on a 2008 implementation schedule. We have good information about the performance of the Lower Granite RSW, and believe that the Little Goose RSW should perform similarly, Ruff said; another consideration is that if it is built by 2008, the Little Goose RSW would be one of the only major capital expenditures on the FY'07 CRFM budget. We also believe that, if the 2006 studies produce anomalous or unexpected passage or survival results, then we can have a built-in off-ramp that will allow us to delay construction until 2009, Ruff said. Bill Hevlin said that, when he spoke last to Ron Boyce, Boyce said Oregon also supports the salmon managers' letter.

It sounds, then, as though there is salmon managers' consensus on this issue, said Silverberg – they support it. What are the action agencies' thoughts?

Our thought was that we wanted to add structure to our configurational decision-making, Rock Peters replied. We kind of got wrapped around the axle on our surface passage decision document, but it did identify some worthwhile concepts. We also felt it was worthwhile to develop some quantifiable performance targets, Peters said. In the COPS documents, we laid out a step-by-step path to ensure that we were making good, well-supported decisions. We also wanted to be sure we had agreement on the kind of testing needed to support costly configurational actions such as RSWs, Peters said.

There is a need for good biological information to support our decision-making, Peters said. The question is, how much risk is the region willing to accept, with respect to Little Goose RSW construction? I realize that we have a stopgap measure, which would have us wait until we have the 2006 biological testing data before issuing a construction contract. We are also talking about spending up to about \$1 million on the design of the Little Goose RSW in FY'06, Peters said; that money won't necessarily be lost even if we don't move forward with FY'08 RSW construction at Little Goose.

The other issue is capability – whether Walla Walla District has the manpower and resources to accomplish everything that would need to be done in FY'06. Another thing to consider is that, if we shift resources to Little Goose RSW design, something else is likely going to fall off the table. We will be working with Seattle and Portland Districts to see what additional manpower and resources may be available, Peters said.

It really comes down to the risk associated with installation in 2008 vs. 2009, Peters said. We have put 24-hour spill on the table at Little Goose in 2006, both spring and summer. that's never been done before. My management wants to know – what is the biological risk of waiting until 2009 to install the Little Goose RSW, if we're spilling 24 hours a day in the intervening years? We're going to need some kind of a biological risk assessment to take to our management, he said.

Ruff said he had asked Hevlin to take a look at the question of the biological risks associated with waiting until 2009 to install the Little Goose RSW, and how the RSW will be expected to improve passage and survival at that project. The RSW is expected to increase dam passage survival in at least three ways, Hevlin said – first and most obvious, if spill stays at 30 percent, you will get more fish through the RSW than you would through the other routes of passage; survival at that project is highest through the spillway. Peters said that, in his opinion, it isn't clear that the Ice Harbor data supports that assumption.

Second, said Hevlin, as the Lower Granite research shows, having an RSW in place reduces forebay delay and will improve survival to some extent, because of reduced predation. Finally, said Hevlin, we would be recommending the simultaneous construction of a state-of-the-art flow deflector along with the construction of the RSW at Little Goose in bay 1, where previous studies have already shown 100 percent spillway survival. Plug all of that into a passage model, and you will get a dam passage survival improvement ranging from 0.5 percent to 4 percent, he added.

The group devoted a few minutes of discussion to this information, with Peters noting that he has yet to see any evidence that forebay delay is even a problem at Little Goose. You're right that we don't have definitive evidence, Gary Fredricks replied, but the bottom line is that the preponderance of evidence shows that a Little Goose RSW will yield biological benefits, and there is a risk, in the form of higher mortality for one additional year, if construction of the Little Goose RSW is delayed until 2009. Peters requested that NOAA Fisheries put its analysis of this issue in writing, in particular, the

assumptions underlying that analysis. In response to another point, Peters and John Kranda said that, in their view, funding for the Little Goose RSW is unlikely to be an issue in either FY'07 or FY'08 SCT CRFM budgets. If it's a priority, it will get funded, Kranda said.

Sharon Kiefer said it remains Idaho's position that RSWs need to be installed at all four Lower Snake projects as soon as possible, according to the schedule laid out in the joint state/tribal salmon manager letter. Peters replied that, as a Corps veteran, he remains concerned about the potential risk of making a design error with the Little Goose RSW. This is a \$15 million-\$20 million investment, Peters said – we can't afford to make a mistake of that magnitude. That is certainly true, Kiefer replied; however, as we heard at the beginning of today's meeting, there is an off-ramp, prior to the actual issuance of the construction contract for the Little Goose RSW, if we don't like what the 2006 biological testing is telling us.

Peters said another concern, on the action agencies' part, is that all four Lower Snake projects are unique – no one design will work for all four, he said. The point is, we want to be sure to do it right, Peters said.

Silverberg asked whether the action agencies have any objections to proceeding with the design phase of the Little Goose RSW project, with the understanding that there is an off-ramp if the 2006 biological testing provides some unexpected results. Howard Schaller said the Fish and Wildlife Service agrees with NOAA Fisheries' position on this issue, and with the technical letter from the other salmon managers. Bob Heinith said CRITFC, too, supports 2008 RSW installation at Little Goose – I can't think of another project that would yield greater or more immediate biological benefits, Heinith said. There is also some economic impetus to do the project as soon as possible, he said, because we have an opportunity to get it built within the FY'07 CRFM budget. Sharon Kiefer said Idaho's position on this issue is clear; there is always some level of uncertainty associated with large construction projects. It was noted that Washington's position on this issue was put forward in the technical letter.

After a few minutes of further discussion, Peters said that, while he cannot provide a decision at today's meeting, he will go back to Corps management, weigh the issues, look at the capability situation and what other projects may have to fall off the table if the Corps pursues 2008 RSW implementation at Little Goose, and will report back to the IT and SCT within a week or so. Suzanne Cooper said it is difficult for Bonneville to weigh in on this issue until they have a better sense of what other mainstem passage projects may fall off the table. I would add, however, that if survival is high at Little Goose with 24-hour spill, I would want a better understanding of the biological risks associated with a year's delay, she said.

It sounds, then, as though the Corps needs to have some further discussion of the Little Goose RSW schedule within the districts, and will report back to the IT and SCT within a week or so, said Silverberg. Ruff noted that there is an IT meeting

scheduled for March 2 if more policy-level discussion is needed. Fredricks said he is a bit concerned about the impacts of delaying this decision, even by a week, on potentially missing the window of opportunity to get the Little Goose RSW constructed by 2008. Peters replied that Corps management is all in Washington D.C. this week, so it would be impossible to convene them on such short notice. We'll move as quickly as we can, he said; again, a written description of the expected biological benefits of 2008 vs. 2009 Little Goose RSW construction would be helpful, if NOAA and the other salmon managers can provide that. Any information you can provide on the expected increase in adult returns would be particularly helpful, added Rebecca Kalamasz. We'll work to get that to you, Ruff replied.

It was agreed to convene another emergency IT conference call if one is needed between now and March 2. With that, today's conference call was adjourned.