

COLUMBIA RIVER TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM

Friday, July 14, 2023

Facilitator's Summary

Facilitation Team: Emily Stranz & Colby Mills, DS Consulting

The following Facilitator's Summary is intended to capture basic discussion, decisions, and actions, as well as point out future actions or issues that may need further discussion at upcoming meetings; it is not intended to be the "record" of the meeting. Official minutes can be found on the TMT website: <http://pweb.crohms.org/tmt/agendas/2023/>. Suggested edits for the summary are welcome and can be sent to Colby at colby@dsconsult.co.

System Operational Request (SOR) for Hungry Horse Releases – Michael Freeman, Energy and Natural Resources Policy Advisor for the State of Montana Governor's Office, reviewed an SOR on behalf of Montana Governor Greg Gianforte, requesting that the TMT use all available data and criteria to consider releases from Hungry Horse Dam (HH) into Flathead Lake in an amount practical and compliant with state and federal law and regulations. He acknowledged that SORs presented to the TMT typically have more technical analysis and specifics, but given the time constraints and that some of their requested technical information is still forthcoming, the Governor's Office wanted to submit a formal request on record to ensure a discussion on the technical aspects of these operations and explore any feasible and permissible options for HH releases.

Joel Fenolio, Reclamation, noted that Reclamation provided information to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) and the Montana Governor's Office on July 7 in response to their request, including complete information on releases from HH to improve elevations in Flathead Lake and proposed timing. In response to the SOR request, Reclamation has been coordinating with MFWP to develop a possible operation to adaptively manage within drought conditions and BiOp limitations. He oriented meeting participants to the Flathead River drainage, noting that HH controls about 1/3 of the basin's flow.

Joel presented the coordinated 2023 HH operations (posted to the TMT website). On June 28, TMT coordinated to keep HH releases at 2,000 cfs, rather than reducing to target 12-feet from full pool (3,560 feet) on September 30. The operation minimizes flow fluctuations (benefitting the Southfork). Given the dry conditions this year, it is likely that the dam will soon be operating to the Columbia Falls minimum of 3,500 cfs, which is anticipated to take the HH pool 1-2 feet lower than the September 30 target.

To model potential reservoir operation scenarios, Reclamation used 2015 hydrology. They considered the 10-day river forecasts as a good representation of the current dry conditions, and the Climate Prediction Center's July through September outlook, which shows above average temperatures and dry conditions. Given that the current water supply forecast is 88% of average, extremely dry conditions are predicted for the rest of summer and fall, the risks to refill, and the requirements to maintain compliance with the BiOps and Record of Decision (ROD), options for releasing more water out of HH are very limited.

In response to the SOR, Reclamation offered an alternative operation to increase HH releases to target being within 1.5 feet of full pool (2,893 feet) at Flathead Lake on July 31. This operation would include potential releases of up to 4,000 cfs until the end of July, then decrease back to the previously coordinated 2,000 cfs or operate to Columbia Falls minimums. However, if the lake reached 1.5 feet from full or forecasts showed that HH would draft below 20-feet from full, releases would need to decrease prior to July 31. To achieve this operation and stay within the 20-foot draft target, Columbia Falls minimums would need to decrease from 3,500 cfs to 3,200 cfs (August 1 to December 31). The operation would also result in a higher flat flow from Seliš Ksanka Qlispè Dam (SKQ) through the rest of the summer. Joel emphasized that this proposed operation is the most that could be done considering the BiOps and ROD.

Questions and Comments from TMT Members

- Dave Swank, USFWS, noted that the proposed operation seems to be within the bounds of the BiOp, but had concerns with the potential impacts to bull trout. There are a lot of unknowns and the water supply forecast could change.
- Brian Marotz, MFWP and Montana TMT Representative, noted that Columbia Falls minimum flow was established in the Flathead River based on an instream flow incremental methodology study. Minimum flow in the Southfork below HH was based on the wetted perimeter method. The sliding scale (3,500-3,200 cfs) in the minimum flow is to be consistent with minimum flows downstream of the lake. Dropping the minimum flow would have a biological impact to the amount of available habitat in the river for bull trout.
- Matt Boyer, MFWP and Montana TMT Alternate, emphasized that this is most extreme support that HH could provide to Flathead Lake elevations, and that eventually the water must go downstream for flow augmentation. Coordination with Energy Keepers (SKQ operators), and confirmation of September flows seems necessary to ensure the operational goals are met.
- Kelsey Swieca, NOAA, asked how flow augmentation accounting would occur under the proposed operation?
 - This would probably depend on September operations at SKQ. Travis Togo, Energy Keepers/SKQ, noted that the intent and BiOp obligation is to pass flow augmentation water downstream through SKQ; augmentation flows are complete by the end of September.
 - There was recognition that releases from HH would pass through the system and likely not provide a significant increase in Flathead Lake elevations due to SKQ BiOp requirements.
- There is serious risk associated with drafting HH an additional 8 feet: potentially impacting 2024 flow augmentation and refill.

Responses from State of Montana Representatives Regarding the Proposed Operation

- Michael Freeman noted that the Governor's Office is seeking assurances that the water would actually address the water elevation concerns in Flathead Lake.
- Randy Brodehl, Flathead County Commissioner, noted that management decisions made in May and June are being addressed now. From his perspective, there was little or no notice provided to irrigators and businesses regarding the significant drop in lake levels. Impacts to the local economy and agricultural community in the breadbasket of Montana must be considered. Nobody understood what the impact of the spring conditions would be, and next year's conditions are unknown. There is a need today to address and react. Commissioner Brodehl added that a minimum of 14 inches is needed (12 inches ideal) to get businesses back open and agricultural producers producing. Targeting 1.5 feet from full pool (the potential operation) does not address the concerns or meet the needs expressed by representatives from the State of Montana.
- Gale Decker, Lake County Commissioner, noted that the potential operation of 1.5 feet below full pool does not really help. People are used to dealing with a maximum of 14 inches below full pool, and current conditions at 2 feet below full are nothing like what has happened before. Local businesses and recreation are at a standstill, and locals are voicing frustration with the damage to the economy. A solution is needed to reach mid-September and then deal with the ramifications later.

Through continued deliberation among TMT Members, questions arose regarding the actual feasibility of the operation (if releases could be held or would need to pass through) and if it would result in negative impacts while not providing the necessary relief to the Flathead Lake communities. SKQ must operate within the bounds of their FERC license; they have an obligation to move flow augmentation water through by the end of September, and the project would be operated to meet ecological and economic

needs. The proposed operation would result in a higher flat flow on the river in order to avoid creating unnatural peaks in flow and negatively impacting the biological systems. Brian noted that HH operations have historically avoided fluctuations in the river (avoiding double peaks), and that the proposed operation would do just that; there is a huge impact that has not been fully vetted. Additionally, MFWP has not yet been included in the conversation with representatives from Montana regarding their request for release increases.

As the submitted SOR was limited in specificity and details, the TMT concluded that they had fulfilled its request to “use all available data and criteria to consider releases” from HH into Flathead Lake. TMT Members were polled on Reclamation’s potential alternative operation as written in response to the SOR. Some provided additional rationale for their responses:

TMT Member	Polling Response	Rationale <i>(optional)</i>
NOAA	Abstain	NOAA considers flow augmentation, as described in the CRS Proposed Action and NOAA BiOp, to be one of the most critical resource management tools for the protection and enhancement of trust species. Flow augmentation water contributes to the measurable improvements in fish travel time, which data show improves increased survival and increased returns. Procuring flow augmentation water typically involves protecting the probability of storage refill. The proposed operation is technically within the bounds of the BiOp but does increase risk of the probability of refill heading into 2024 into an El Niño year, and NOAA is unsure that the proposal will achieve the desired outcome for Montana. NOAA is sympathetic towards the State of Montana’s recreational and economic concerns at Flathead Lake and looks forward to working with the state to find an equitable solution to help preserve recreational resources while ensuring the protection of ESA listed salmon and steelhead.
Oregon	Object	Oregon appreciates the efforts from Reclamation and others to bring forward an alternative operation. Montana did not include considerations that TMT had previously asked for in an SOR, which veers from TMT process. Even the representatives from MFWP were not provided adequate opportunity to inform the conversation. OR acknowledges the history of managing this system over past decades, noting that not all decisions have always been supported, and this proposed operation does not provide an assurance of benefit for the request and is likely to have ramifications long after this water year.
Washington	Object	Washington fully agreed with NOAA’s statement, and although WA is not engaged in conversations with the State of Montana, they remain sympathetic to their concerns.
Kootenai Tribe of Idaho	Object	Kootenai Tribe objected due to too many uncertainties with the proposed operation, too much potential for biological harm, and the suggested operation may not meet the needs identified in the SOR and resulting discussion.
Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation	Object	It’s unclear if this operation would actually meet the expressed needs. From the Tribe’s perspective, they can’t support an operation that doesn’t meet the needs requested while resulting in a negative biological impact.

Reclamation	No Objection	Reclamation recognized the impacts and sympathizes with the recreation and agricultural communities at Flathead Lake. This has been a hard year for forecasting and May/June operations. They did not object because there is a potential operation that can be implemented within the BiOp, but Reclamation does have concerns on the biological impacts to the South Fork of the Flathead, the lower Flathead River, and down through the Columbia River system. Additionally, the potential for refill next year remains a concern given that it is an El Niño year; heading into a long hot dry summer there are serious risk and concerns with an operation to potentially draft HH lower. Reclamation appreciated everyone’s participation, time, and consideration of the proposal.
Corps	No Objection	The Corps deferred to Reclamation as the lead Action Agency for this request. The Corps was concerned that there may be biological impacts, a lack of regional support, and the proposal does not seem to provide the benefits requested.
USFWS	Abstain	USFWS had serious concerns about the alternative proposal, and although they were initially prepared to not object, they have since understood through the prior discussion that the proposed releases will likely pass through Flathead Lake and will not achieve the desired effect of raising the lake elevation as requested.
Idaho	Object	Idaho noted that having an action that doesn’t achieve the desired goals, and results in potential negative biological impacts, is not something they can support. Idaho hoped lessons can be learned from this experience and that the State of Montana crafts an implementable “dry year” plan for when outflows exceed inflows. There are many legal issues and restrictions when seeking to alter storage project operations on the Columbia River Basin.
Montana	Object	Montana was concerned that the proposed operation does not have solid guarantees that it will provide the requested relief for Flathead Lake; there is not enough water to release within the BiOp constraints. They appreciated Reclamation’s efforts to come up with an alternative action.
Nez Perce Tribe	Object	The Nez Perce Tribe appreciated the efforts that went into establishing criteria that support resident fish and downstream migration conditions (base operation). The coordination effort over the last several decades is robust. The requested action does not achieve the intended outcomes and has potential impact to both downstream anadromous and resident fish.
BPA	No Objection	BPA was concerned with the potential impacts of the proposed alternative operation, and that it wouldn’t necessarily resolve the issues that the State of Montana brought forward regarding the elevation at Flathead Lake.
<i>The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Spokane Tribe of Indians, and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs were not present to register a polling response.</i>		

Action Agency Decision

Joel reiterated Reclamation’s sympathies with the hardships of those in the State of Montana. Given what was heard about the potential biological impacts and the risk to refill next year, Reclamation will not implement the potential operation discussed. Operations at HH will continue to hold outflows at 2,000 cfs until Columbia Falls minimums take over in August, and will continue through September.

TMT – July 14, 2023

Emily invited representatives from the State of Montana to join the TMT's Year End Review (YER) in December as an opportunity to participate in retrospective conversation. Details will be posted on the TMT calendar closer to the date.

Questions and Comments from Members of the Public – Commissioner Brodehl appreciated the robust discussion and engagement, noting that the State of Montana's request was short on time, and they will do their best to be more prepared if the situation ever requires again. He thanked the TMT for working with the representatives from the State.

The next scheduled TMT meeting is on July 19, 2023, at 9:00 AM.

**Columbia River Regional Forum
Technical Management Team
OFFICIAL MINUTES
Friday, July 14, 2023
Minutes: Andrea Ausmus, BPA (contractor, CorSource Technology Group)**

An unscheduled TMT Meeting was held on Friday, July 14 @ 10 am to coordinate System Operational Request (SOR) for Hungry Horse Releases from Governor Gianforte dated July 13, 2023. Today's TMT meeting was held via conference call and webinar, chaired by Doug Baus, Corps, and facilitated by Emily Stranz, DS Consulting. A list of today's attendees is available at the end of these minutes.

1. System Operational Request (SOR) for Hungry Horse Releases - Matt Boyer, MT, and Joel Fenolio, Reclamation

Stranz began by introducing the SOR process. She acknowledged that the SOR that TMT came together to discuss is different than a typical SOR. It does not have the same level of technical detail that TMT asks for and expects. She requested that TMT to commit to engage in a conversation.

- The SOR received from the Governor of Montana asked specifically for TMT to consider releases from Hungry Horse Dam (HGH) into Flathead Lake that are practical and within compliance of the State and Federal laws.
 - Stranz said that she has heard that Reclamation and Montana have been in communication on what those operations could look like, what is feasible and within compliance.
 - Stranz said that there will be a presentation from Reclamation and Montana on what operations could look like, and TMT would discuss those operations as an SOR and poll on them.
- a. SOR from MT Governor Gianforte – Michael Freeman, Governor's Office
- Freeman said that he thinks the SOR speaks for itself. He said that they understand the complexity and are aware that SORs in the past have had more technical analysis done.
 - Freeman said that given the time constraints and given that they have not received a lot of information, Montana wanted to make sure that if this discussion required a formal ask that they made the formal ask.
 - He referred to their request to see what is feasible and permissible in this area.

Montana requested a discussion of:

- What is within the realm of possible.
- What their options are.

b. Hungry Horse Dam for Operations for TMT – Joel Fenolio, Reclamation

Fenolio said that he had been working closely with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks on this request getting data over to the State of Montana. Reclamation did provide information to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Montana Governor's Office on July 7, 2023, in response to their request. This included complete information about releases from HGH to improve elevations in Flathead Lake and proposed timing. In response to the SOR request from the Governor, Reclamation has been again coordinating with MT FWP to develop a possible operation to adaptively manage within these drought conditions and within Reclamation's BiOp limitations.

- Flathead River Drainage
 - Flathead Drainage covers most of western Montana and much of northern Idaho.
 - Generally, the area of topic for Hungry Horse Dam operations is Columbia Falls, and Flathead Lake and includes about 4500 square miles above Columbia Falls.
 - Three rivers connect upstream of Columbia Falls
 - Flathead River (measure minimum flow requirements and flood stage for HGH operations)
 - North Fork Flathead
 - Middle Fork Flathead
 - South Fork Flathead
 - HGH only controls about one-third of the basin annually.
- Coordinated TMT Operation – June 28, 2023
 - Keep HGH releases at 2 kcfs out.
 - Original plan was to target 12 feet from full based on the May Water Supply Forecast.
 - End of June it looked like they would have to reduce releases to 1500 – 1000 cfs out of HGH.
 - Dry years – North and Middle Fork contributions to the Columbia Falls discharge gradually declines through the summer. It is not uncommon for HGH to have to increase releases later in summer to support minimum flow at Columbia Falls.
 - Worked with MT FWP to maintain 2 kcfs instead of dropping releases.
 - Reservoir impacts:
 - Beneficial to the South Fork to not drop releases and then bring them back up as dramatically.

- There is potential to draft another 1 – 2 feet over the summer, they are already looking to draft to support Columbia Falls below the 12’ target.
- It did not exacerbate the Flathead Lake elevations at that time, it was drafting but it was not making it worse.
- Current Hydrology
 - The current hydrology is tracking below 2015 hydrology.
 - The scenarios all used 2015 hydrology added with the 10-day deterministic from the river forecasts.
- Climate Prediction Center Outlook July - September
 - Issued June 15, 2023
 - Looking at equal chances of another hot, dry summer but this might change once they issue another outlook in the next couple of days.
 - Looking at above average temperatures for the summer.
 - 2015 is a good representation for future outlook and understanding how proposed operations may or may not impact HGH
- Coordinated Operation
 - Potential reservoir operations for the rest of the summer with 2015 forecasted data.

Fenolio caveated that he acknowledges that we are tracking drier than 2015. The elevations in these projections could be drier than what is shown, or we could get precipitation events later in the summer.
 - HGH Operations
 - Release 2000 cfs
 - Increase releases mid-August to maintain Columbia Falls at ~3600 cfs.
 - Expected end of September elevation: 3542.5 ft
 - Below 12’ of full
 - Coordinated on June 28, 2023.
 - SKQ Operations
 - Focus through August 31
 - July – August releases down to 4300 cfs
 - Flathead Lake elevation
 - July 31 – 2891’ (2 feet from full)

- Still around 1 – 2 feet from full on August 31.
- Fills a little in August and then falls back down as stream flows diminish throughout the summer.
- Flathead Lake: to fill to 1 foot from full
 - HGH Operations
 - Come off 2000 cfs tomorrow.
 - Increase to 6200 cfs through July.
 - Has impact on HGH forebay elevations.
 - Drafts to **~5 feet below 3540'** or **20 feet from full** end of September operation
 - SKQ Operations
 - Flathead Lake at a foot of full.
 - Stays up through August 31.
 - Has HGH drafting below their 20-foot draft target and is outside what was consulted on in terms of the record of decision in the Biological Opinion.

Stranz asked for clarification. This last Wednesday the Commissioners asked for a foot from full through September 1, 2023. If Reclamation were to do that it would be outside of what is permissible with the BiOp.

Fenolio confirmed.

- Draft Targets
 - End of September Draft Target is set by the May Water Supply Forecast.
 - Part of the NOAA Biological Opinion that was an outcome of the CRSO Record of Opinion.
 - Forecast based off Hungry Horse's May – September inflow volume.
 - 2023 May Water Supply Forecast: ~1550 KAF
 - Within the interpolation range, and that is where Reclamation got the 12-foot from full target.
- Columbia Falls Minimum Flows
 - January and February minimum flows are set by the respective forecasts for that month.
 - The March Water Supply Forecast sets the minimum flows for the entirety of the rest of the calendar year, March 1 – December 31.

- Forecast was above 1790 for April to August on March 1, the minimum flows were set to 3500 cfs Columbia Falls and 900 cfs downstream of HGH.
- There may be releases above the two numbers throughout the summer. That is to give a buffer so that they do not drop below the minimum flows.
- 2023 Water Supply Forecasts
 - Snowpack at Noisy Basin – same snowpack this year.
 - Last year it attenuated through June, and we were hit by an atmospheric river and became a wraparound that caused flooding in the Flathead Valley.
 - This year there was a very hot May that depleted the snowpack about 3 weeks earlier than average.
 - There were above average inflows into HGH for May but there was not a lot of precipitation for June. Inflows were below average for June.
 - RFC is expecting the same below average inflows for July, August and September at HGH.
 - Flathead River System for the remainder of the year (first of the month through July)
 - Residual Inflows for May: 88%
 - Residual Inflows for June: 51%
 - Dire conditions in terms of inflows throughout the Flathead River System.
- Proposed Operation (in response to Governor’s Request) – Fenolio and Matt Boyer, MT FWP
 - Increase releases to target being within 1.5 ft of full (2893 feet) at Flathead Lake on July 31.
 - Decrease releases to 2000 cfs or operate to Columbia Falls minimums.
 - May need to decrease releases prior to July 31 if Flathead Lake reaches 1.5 feet from full or forecasts show that Hungry Horse is going to draft below 20 feet from full.
 - Relax Columbia Falls Minimums from August 1 to December 31 from 3500 cfs to 3200 cfs.
 - Target being above 20 feet from full at Hungry Horse Dam with the operation.
 - HGH Operations
 - Release at ~4000 cfs at through July
 - Ramp down releases to ~3540 cfs by the end of September.
 - SKQ Operations
 - Flathead Lake within 18 inches of full.

- Energy Keepers current projection of ramping down to 4300 cfs.
- Dropping to meet inflows for the rest of the year.
- Fenolio said that this proposed operation is the most HGH could do within what is considered within the Biological Opinion and Record of Decision.

Dave Swank, USFWS, said that this has been captured well. This is an operation that would keep us with in the bounds of what was analyzed for the Biological Opinion. He said that the USFWS would be okay with that. He said that they still have some concerns about the affects to the Bull Trout, but this seems to be a reasonable compromise. There are a lot of unknowns given the Water Supply Forecast could change, but it seems to be a reasonable operation to them.

Boyer said that he would like to recognize Fenolio for all the work he had done on this modeling effort, showing what could be done within the BiOp constraints. He said thank you, this is the most extreme offering that HGH could provide to keep Flathead up with what has been contemplated under the BiOp. He said eventually this water has got to get downstream for summer flow augmentation so that limits the amount of time it provides relief for Flathead. Boyer again thanked Fenolio for all his work.

Swank said that there was one question that came up during FPAC discussion. Reclamation controls releases from HGH, but does not operate SKQ dam on Flathead Lake. Swank asked how confident Fenolio is that those SKQ outflows are going to track inflows as his models are suggesting.

Fenolio said that for September in the model, he just put that in there to show an operation, but the September flows are not something that he has coordinated with Energy Keepers. The 4300 cfs is the flow rate that we have heard from them previously about what they are going to be releasing from SKQ.

Swank said that he thinks that it is important to circle back with them and confirm that is a reasonable assumption because it would be frustrating to release the extra water from HGH and just have it passed downstream out of Flathead.

Stranz pointed out that there was a chat from the Commissioners that 18-inches from full does not address the issues that we heard about regarding their concerns both to irrigation and recreation on Lake Flathead.

from Randy Brodehl, Flathead County Commissioner to everyone: 10:34 AM

No, we will need a min of 14 9/1, to get water into intakes and reopen marinas. If possible, I can speak to that. need 2 minutes...Thanks Emily. r

from Randy Brodehl, Flathead County Commissioner to everyone: 10:34 AM

through 9/1

from Gale Decker to everyone: 10:35 AM

I agree with Randy, 1.5 feet below full doesn't begin to solve the problem. Is there somewhere else to get 0.5 feet?

from Tom Iverson to everyone: 10:37 AM

Are there irrigators upstream that could forego their withdrawals?

from Randy Brodehl, Flathead County Commissioner to everyone: 10:39 AM

Likely too late for the ask as our irrigators were not aware they would face a need to reduce.

c. TMT Deliberation – Questions, Comments, Thoughts

Ebel asked for clarification from Fenolio about the basis and/or rationale behind the Columbia Falls Minimum. He asked if it is irrigation or biological.

Fenolio said at this point it is a compromise to keep HGH from drafting too far down. If they do not have Columbia Falls Minimums relaxed to 3200 cfs they are drafting below 20 feet from full. That was the rationale for that ask in terms of minimum flows. Fenolio said that he would turn to MT FWP for the terms of biological impact of what it means to the fisheries.

Ebel said he would ask a different way. He asked if the State of Montana holds a water right. In Idaho, minimum stream flows are held by the Water Resource Board, Ebel asked if that is the situation in Montana. Ebel asked where the 3200 cfs number comes from.

Fenolio said that he does not know of a specific water right for that flow discharge. He said that was probably something that came out of the IRI-M studies and he is just talking from his history on the Kootenai and Flathead basin. They are both established off of biological studies done in the late 1990s or early 2000s. He said that he would again have to defer to MT FWP or USFWS to further explain those discharge rates.

Marotz said that the minimum flow was established in the Flathead River based on the Instream Flow Incremental Flow Methodology Study and then the minimum flow in the South Fork below HGH was based on the Wetted Perimeter method. They have a sliding scale in the minimum flow to be consistent with the minimum flows downstream of Flathead Lake.

Ebel said that is great information. He asked what MT FWP prediction on the biological impact of reducing the minimum flow in a biologically relevant way. He asked if it will be a serious negative later in the year from a bull trout or westslope cutthroat perspective.

Boyer said there would be some impact to bull trout with a drop from 35 kcfs to 32 kcfs in their available habitat in the river. He said the compromise being made is that you are not drafting the reservoir as much so there are some potential gains to be made there.

Kelsey Swieca, NOAA, said that NOAA has a couple of concerns and a couple of clarifying questions. She asked if moving forward with this operation how flow augmentation would be accounted for this year. She asked how the accounting would occur for flow augmentation if it is potentially going to be released from HGH but then captured and held in SKQ.

Fenolio said he did not contemplate on how the water would come out. He said that it would probably depend on how the September operation went with SKQ dam. If it looks like they are in a “pass inflow” scenario there may be a little bit of the water that is held

up there, but Fenolio had not worked out that detail on how the water would be accounted for. Fenolio asked Energy Keepers how they usually account for how the flow augmentation gets released from the dam.

Travis Togo, Energy Keepers, said that they do not account locally for the flow augmentation provided by HGH. The intent is to pass it downstream, and it should not get stranded at the SKQ project and Flathead Lake.

Swieca asked for confirmation that would be plan for this year as well.

Togo said that he does not think that they even have the right to store the flow augmentation water. He said he thinks the flow augmentation needs to pass downstream.

Fenolio asked if Togo had a sense given the proposed operation how that would work.

Togo said that the lake would pass the water as it comes in if those are the rules.

Stranz asked Togo if there was a timeframe on when the flow augmentation needs to pass through.

from Gale Decker to everyone: 10:40 AM

The Columbia Basin River Management Plan includes consideration of impacts of management to recreational activities. I'm not hearing any consideration of that.

from Emily Stranz to everyone: 10:42 AM

Thanks for your comment, Gale, we are just getting going... We've got another hour +, still a lot to talk about!

Togo said that typically HGH achieves its flow augmentation objective by the end of September, under every year.

Stranz asked for more information as many people on the call do not know the system and the operations well. She asked if that means that by the end of September all the flow augmentation needs to be passed through or continuously pass through.

Togo said that he is not an expert on HGH flow augmentation operations and the absolute requirements of the BiOp, but he believes so.

Ebel said that he does not think that question got answered and he said it is very important. Ebel said HGH releases a volume of water every year under the proposed action, or the BiOp, and typically Flathead Lake is full. It is acting as a run of the river project and the water passes through, and the same is true of Lake Pend Oreille. In this scenario, where part of the draft now is going to fill Flathead Lake from HGH there needs to be some type of value against which the flow out Flathead Lake is measured so that the volume that is described in the proposed action and BiOp is moving through for anadromous fish. He asked if there is a value for a measurement point in this scenario. For example, when Idaho does this in the Snake River the value for accounting at Brownlee is a water right at Johnson Bar.

Fenolio said that one operational widget would be returning Flathead Lake elevation in September back to where they are today. That would essentially have the mass balance be even, but that water would come out in September.

Togo said that one way or another the water needs to move through Flathead Lake. If the operation on the South Fork, as a result of HGH, has a biological basis for it and if this is good for the fishery, it needs to move through Flathead Lake.

Fenolio said what we are hearing is that the proposal is to draft down to potentially 20 feet from full and that would be water that would need to be passed downstream below Flathead Lake. He that he thinks that we are asking the question of could that happen.

Ebel said that he is trying to piece this together. He brought up last week and it is like they have two buckets of water. One bucket, under the Water Management Plan and Fenolio's interpretation, the top 12 feet of draft that HGH should be moving through Flathead Lake and down into the Columbia and a second bucket, under this proposal that is close to eight feet that will go to minimum flows or to fill Flathead Lake. Ebel said that is how he is interpreting it, he asked if he is way off.

Fenolio said that initially it would be to fill Flathead Lake but after that he is not sure how it would be routed through.

Jay Hesse, Nez Perce, asked Fenolio what the risk associated with drafting HGH an additional 8 feet. He said that he assumes that is applied to the probability of refill for next year's flow augmentation. He asked if that 20 feet are allowed under the BiOp within a certain refill risk rating.

Fenolio said yes there is a risk here. If there are El Niño conditions and another dry sequence, and we have another draft to target 3540 feet. He said given that with the TMT-coordinated operation on July 28, 2023, HGH is already looking at releasing 2000 cfs or operating to the Columbia Falls minimums they are probably going to be drafting below the 12-foot target. With the proposed action we are looking at potentially drafting HGH another ~2.3 feet and it could exacerbate conditions next year if we are in dry conditions and put refill more in jeopardy if we were to stay with the coordinated operation. Fenolio said that there are also El Niño conditions where it is a wet sequence and they do refill the dam. That could be a flip side too, they could improve refill. But if they do draft the extra 2.5 feet out of HGH then they are potentially impacting flow augmentation for the summer of 2024 and refill as well.

from Charles Morrill to everyone: 10:50 AM

drafting HH 20 feet - what are risks to refill and operations for 2024

from Charles Morrill to everyone: 10:52 AM

question answered

Swank asked for clarification from Energy Keepers about SKQ outflow. He said that he thought he heard from Togo that they are obligated to release flow augmentation water. He said that he is concerned that if TMT releases this extra bucket of water from HGH if that means that SKQ outflow would also increase because that would seem to negate the benefits that Montana is asking for.

Togo said that they would have to examine the intent of the BiOp very carefully and other supporting information. He said that he believes that any flow augmentation released from HGH should be passed downstream for the benefit of the fisheries. That is something to be researched in the coming days.

Fenolio said that the simplest approach would be to return Flathead Lake to the elevation that we would be at the end of today by September 30, that would even the water out. He does not see another way to cleanly do that release in terms of accounting for it and have it reach the lower system otherwise.

Hesse asked if under that scenario if that would result in a flow pulse peak in the Flathead River downstream of Flathead Lake in September. He said there would be an unnatural pulse that is impacting resident fish upstream from Flathead Lake in July and similar pulse in September downstream of the lake likely to be negative impacting resident fish.

Togo said it would create an unnatural pulse of water in both reaches of the Flathead River, downstream of HGH dam in South Fork during the month of July and then at some point in the near future downstream of SKQ dam. Two artificial peaks.

Ebel said that the operation proposed by Reclamation to target 18 inches from full there were a couple things in the chat from the County Commissioners saying that the proposed operation is not going to get them what they are looking for. Ebel asked, because Montana was the one that requested this analysis, discussion, and potential action, what is Montana's view of the proposed operation and does it meet the need for Montana given the questions about how water will be moving through and even how SKQ will be operated in this scenario to try to keep within the BiOp.

Matt Boyer said that he has a concern that he has not heard a guarantee that a release from HGH would raise Flathead Lake, it may just pass through the system and not provide pool elevation relief.

Freeman said that as clear in Montana's SOR that they are looking to address these levels in Flathead Lake, there are agricultural concerns that the County Commissioners noted that are very important to them. He said that the County Commissioners are on the ground they have been talking to the people there, he would encourage TMT to listen to them to see if this proposal would address those agricultural concerns. He said that he thinks they would want assurances that the water would actually address the level of concerns in Flathead Lake.

Stranz said that there was a request from the Commissioners for a moment to speak. She asked Randy Brodehl, Flathead Lake Commissioner, if he still would like to have two minutes to share his perspective.

Brodehl said thank you for everyone for taking time out of their Friday to put this together and their understandings of the concerns that Flathead and Lake Counties have. He said that he would like to go back to May/June decisions that were being made back then are what we are addressing now. It is not because the farmers planted, it is not because people were planning on recreating on Flathead Lake, now we are trying to adjust to those decisions. Brodehl said that no or little to no notice was given to either agriculturalists and recreational businesses that we were going to see this significant drop

in lake levels. Now they are addressing that today by coming back to looking at what it will do to fisheries. The reality is that they have to consider what it is doing to the economy and to their agricultural community, the breadbasket of Montana. Brodehl said that draft targets are just that. He said remembers back in 2001/2 when HGH was significantly low and the pool in Flathead Lake was sufficient and they were able to irrigate, they were able to recreate. Their businesses were not closing on Flathead Lake. He said that they have that need today and they can continue to address it. No one understood that we were going to miss the mark on weather with what happened this Spring. He said that we cannot anticipate that we are going to get the same Spring next year because like last year we had more water than we knew what to do with. Brodehl said that we need to address these issues today, we need address these issues for the next month and a half and that is what they are asking for. He said looking at the numbers, he gets all that, but the reality is that they are responding to some decisions that were made in May and June and we are having to be react to the choices the Agencies made. He said that Flathead needs TMT's help, and we need to get to a minimum of 14 inches, 12 inches from full would be ideal, and get their businesses back open and their producers producing. He said that would be the ask from Flathead County.

Gale Decker, Lake County, again thanked everyone for meeting today. He said that the proposal of 1.5 feet below pool does not help. At 1 foot below full pool, or even 14 inches, Decker said he does not want to say that it is a negligible difference, but it is a difference that people are used to dealing with. He said with the two feet that they have now it is very different than anything else they have ever experienced during July. The lake is quiet, there are very few people out there recreating. People have their boats out of the water. There are people that already saying they are going to protest the property taxes as far as their docks because they cannot use them. There a couple groups that are compiling damage claims and they are not sure where they are going to go with that. He said that he thinks that we need to come up with a possible solution to get us to the middle of September and then deal with the ramifications of that later. The need is great, there is a lot of damage money-wise for the tourism industry – businesses, restaurants, marinas, etc. He said that it is a situation they have not been in before, and they need to really try to come up with a solution to get them to the middle of September.

Stranz asked if Fenolio had a chance to look at what 14 inches from full would mean.

Fenolio said no because anything out of 18 inches from full pulls HGH below the 20-foot draft target. He said that anything that looks likely to get them below that elevation is something they cannot support given they are looking at El Niño conditions and potentially exasperating that Flathead operation as well.

Stranz said that she wanted to clarify, Fenolio said that anything beyond 18 inches from full would compromise the 20-foot draft target. She said that Brodehl just commented that a draft target is a draft target. She said that she thinks that she heard from Fenolio earlier that the 20-foot draft is a boundary or the sideboard for the HGH BiOp. She asked if that was correct.

Fenolio said that is what was consulted on and what was considered in the BiOp. He said there is potential that even with the proposed operation that HGH could draft below 20 feet from full operating on minimum flows but that was also considered within the BiOp

that setting up these draft targets does not mean that HGH will always meet them and that was the spirit of the operation back on June 28. They were looking to be below the 12-foot draft target, just operating the Columbia Falls minimum sometime out in August.

Stranz said that were a in a funky spot right now. We have requests for operations that are not feasible under the current BiOp. She said that we also have the Proposed Operation that is feasible within the current BiOps and Regulations, but it does not seem to meet the needs of the County Commissioners that we have heard. There is also a question mark of if water comes out of HGH will it be held in Flathead Lake or will SKQ have to pass it through. Stranz said at this point she was wondering where TMT would like to go. She said that she could do a polling on the Proposed Operation, given the uncertainties.

Swank said that this is very important for USFWS because it has the potential to be bad for bull trout. He said it is a tough one because he thinks his vote, and potentially other members, it seems like it could be conditional on whether Fenolio's proposed alternative operation is actually feasible. Until TMT gets the answer to that question Swank said that it is hard to even vote on it.

Stranz asked Swank by feasible he means whether that water will stay in the lake.

Swank said yes, because he does not want to see a big release from HGH occur with the intent of giving some relief to the Flathead Lake Community and then have it just all be passed downstream by raising the outflow from SKQ. That would be frustrating and would not benefit anyone. He said that he does not know how we can even vote on it at this point without answering that question.

Ebel said that TMT needs to hear what Reclamation is going to do. He asked if they are going to implement their proposed operation. It sounds like Reclamation can release the water as proposed but it is not going to provide the relief to people around Flathead Lake that they need and on top of that it is going to have a negative biological impact in the Flathead and above Flathead Lake. He said TMT polls on the SOR and then Reclamation tells us what they are going to do. Ebel said that if we are going to follow protocol he thinks that is what we do.

Fenolio asked whether TMT members should poll or caucus.

Norris asked what exactly TMT would be polling on.

Stranz said that she has some process perspective on what TMT would be polling on. Her suggestion would be that TMT does not poll specifically on the SOR as written because it does not contain the level of detail as written that is needed to make a decision. She said that instead she suggests that TMT skips Box number 3 in the SOR flow chart and go straight to number 4B and poll on the proposed operation that Fenolio has outlined.

from Gale Decker to everyone: 11:10 AM

What did the governor's SOR request as far as elevation?

from tom lorz to everyone: 11:11 AM

12 inches from full on the first letter I believe

from Emily Stranz to everyone: 11:11 AM

Hi Gale, the SOR did not request a specific elevation.

Julie Ammann, Corps, asked if TMT would get clarification on the SKQ portion. She said she thinks that is a question that she had heard from several members, and she has not heard clarification. She asked if people would feel comfortable polling if we do not have the answer to that question.

Stranz said that she does not think that we got complete clarity. From what she heard from Togo was that from his perspective his understanding of the BiOp that the augmentation water needs to go through and cannot be held in the lake.

Brian Lipscomb, CEO of Energy Keepers said that their license requires them to be in coordination with the parties to the BiOp in ensuring that flow augmentation water moves through the lake. He said that the proposal does not say hold it. The proposal says move it down. He said that what TMT needs to understand is that they need know what TMT is saying. He posed the question of whether they could hold the water and the obligations of moving the water. He said that their obligations are attached to the requirements of the body of water released. He said that the action of releasing less than 6 inches will not provide much relief. He said that the timing is the question for them, they are obligated to move it. It would fall back to the Federal Operators to say what is in compliance with the Biological Opinion.

Fenolio said from his perspective it would be good to hear it again from the governor's office on if this is even worth the operation given the biological impacts we are currently seeing and that it sounds like there is potentially a minimum relief on the elevations.

Freeman said that the Commissioners said that the additional flows would not help the agricultural needs much less the people on Flathead Lake. He said that they still do not have assurances that it sounds that if we let the water through it would stay in Flathead Lake for a certain amount, and do not know how long that is.

Fenolio said that part of the SOR was to operate within legal bounds. The proposed operation gets to that, but he is not hearing that certainty on how that water would come out later. He said that he thinks that has been a consistent thing that he has heard throughout his career. Reading the 2001 notes when this came up then, and then looking at the 2010 Libby operation, decade and a half ago, there was always some sort of operation to get that water out. He asked from the Governor's office, is this proposal even worth moving forward with or do we just back out of the SOR. He asked Stranz if the proponent of the SOR may not be fully on board if there is something to poll on and instead continue with what the coordinated operation of June 28.

Stranz said that from a process perspective the SOR specifically asked to use all available data and criteria to consider releases from HGH into Flathead Lake in an amount practical and compliant with State and Federal law and regulations. She said that the SOR was largely process-based. She said that Freeman is welcome to jump in and tell her she is wrong and ask TMT to deliberate more on it. She said that it seems like TMT has had analysis that they have looked at, they have had conversation about what is within the legal boundaries right now. She said that we are hearing that it does not fit the needs of

Flathead Lake from the Commissioners. Stranz said it seems to her like TMT has checked the box of deliberating the SOR. She said that it does not meet the needs moving forward so Montana will need to decide if they want to poll on the proposed action or if it is a moot point because it does not meet the needs.

Freeman said that he thinks given the fact that they submitted the request it would be good to have a resolution. He said that he knows that TMT has had the discussion and he thinks that they wanted that to find out what is not only permissible, but also what is practical and reasonable as laid out in the SOR. He said that he thinks that getting some resolution and a decision on this. He said he thinks we should follow through on that.

Stranz asked Freeman for some added perspective. She asked because the SOR written is largely process-based, if it would make sense from his perspective if TMT polled on what the operation could look like as Fenolio has laid out instead of the specific SOR.

Freeman said he thinks that is reasonable if the operations were contingent with the understanding that we are assuming that SKQ would keep the water in Flathead Lake. He said that their end goal is to try to address agricultural interests and Flathead Lake levels. He said if there is a way to include the uncertainty of the operations of SKQ dam.

Swank said that he would like to suggest that TMT makes the vote sort of a contingent vote on the forecasted Flathead elevation that Fenolio has proposed. If TMT gets a decision from Energy Keepers that they are going to release most of this flow augmentation from HGH that will defeat the purpose of Fenolio's operation. He said having it a contingent vote upon that decision so that is recorded in the minutes.

Stranz circled back with Lipscomb and Energy Keepers, to see if it would be helpful to take a caucus and give him and his team a few minutes to think on this and look closely at the BiOp and see what they think of what the operations could look like within the parameters they need to follow.

Lipscomb said they will operate SKQ within their license bounds and within what is ecologically and economically the right decision to make given the circumstances in August. He said that if the Biological Opinion and the use of the water out of HGH is meant for fish locally and regionally and there is an obligation to move that water through. If there is not an obligation to move the water through and you are using HGH to move it downstream and it does not come with any biological constraints that lands into SKQ then they will operate under the parameters that he just stated they will do what is ecologically and economically beneficial for the entire region given the circumstances in August.

Stranz said that what she is hearing from Lipscomb is that he is not able at this time to make a commitment to guarantee the water would stay in the lake through September.

Lipscomb said that under two circumstances that if the federal agencies tell them to leave the water in Flathead Lake as an action they will leave it in Flathead Lake, he said that he does not think that they can request them to leave the water in Flathead Lake, if they do not tell them to leave it in the lake they will make their own decisions on the water based on what is best ecologically and economically locally.

Stranz asked Fenolio if it is his understanding of his BiOp that you can say that the water needs to stay in Flathead Lake.

Fenolio said that he does not think that they can make that determination that the water has to stay in Flathead. He said that he thinks he has heard from Senior Managers in that they would want that some assurance that the water would be passed through by next September. He said that there are also concerns that they will be bringing releases up with the South Fork of the Flathead and Columbia Falls and that could go against the gradual decline in releases. He said that he does not know what those impacts necessarily are to that increase. He said that there is also the potential that this is going to increase releases downstream in September to try to get the water out.

Lipscomb said that there would be assurances that the water would be released by the end of September.

Stranz said that she would like to do a polling on what was discussed, and TMT was given an assurance from Lipscomb by the end of September this water would move through. This could be taken into consideration in TMT members' responses.

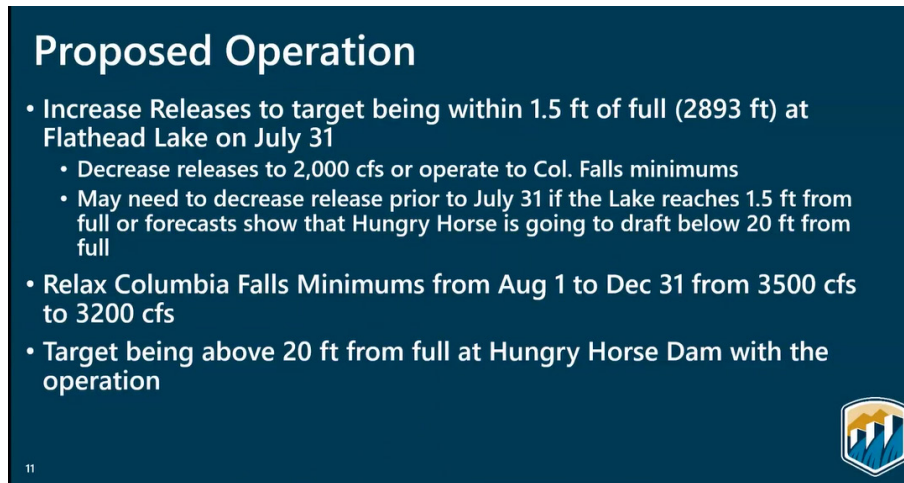
Swieca said that she was not sure that we were going to have the numbers at hand but she thinks an important component that needs to go into this decision is how the 12-foot draft out of HGH is allocated for flow augmentation water. She asked what that is in acre feet and how quickly that could be passed through the SKQ project. She said for instance if that large amount of water takes three weeks to pass through, then they can only maintain the increase elevation until the first week of September. She said that she thinks that TMT needs to talk about the quantity of water that is 12-feet of flow augmentation water and how long it will actually take to pass through, if we consider that it needs to be passed through by September 30.

Fenolio said that it is only ~2.3 feet (because of the coordinated operation) and we do not really know what the actual volume is going to be at the end September. He said that we are looking at potentially about a 2.3-foot difference in elevation at HGH based off the end of September, with the current operation of holding 2000 cfs then ramping up in terms of Columbia Falls Minimums. He said he thinks the only way to do it would be to have Flathead Lake elevation match its current elevation at the end of September.

Hesse said that he had a process observation and request. He said that the SOR is different than what TMT deals with in this forum. He said that TMT has gone and demonstrated some real effort to figure out what that request is and moved forward with something tangible. He said that he is pretty twitchy that TMT is about to poll on an implementable action that is not on paper. He said that TMT's normal process in here is specific to words on paper and so understanding that level of analysis is not being documented. He said that he feels comfortable with the discussion of that technical aspect but he would suggest that if TMT were going to poll on something, that being Reclamations' suggestion of implementability that we take a caucus to put it onto paper and TMT polls on something that is documented. He said that he would feel more comfortable on that and he believes that would be more consistent with the process and expectations that we typically have within this forum.

Barquin agreed via chat.


Stranz said that Fenolio did share a slide that had various pieces of the potential proposed operation.



Proposed Operation

- Increase Releases to target being within 1.5 ft of full (2893 ft) at Flathead Lake on July 31
 - Decrease releases to 2,000 cfs or operate to Col. Falls minimums
 - May need to decrease release prior to July 31 if the Lake reaches 1.5 ft from full or forecasts show that Hungry Horse is going to draft below 20 ft from full
- Relax Columbia Falls Minimums from Aug 1 to Dec 31 from 3500 cfs to 3200 cfs
- Target being above 20 ft from full at Hungry Horse Dam with the operation

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Stranz said that there is this language to help with that.

Hesse asked if that could be modified to talk about the timing of the release.

Stranz said yes, it needs to have the timing piece added to it. Modify to include timing of release. That the expectation is that the water would move through the system by the end of September. Stranz asked Fenolio to do that for TMT members to see if it is something that we can pull directly into the notes.

Morrill said that he appreciates the discussion and agrees with Hesse's comments, it was not what Morrill was going to speak to but he agrees with what he said. He said that he believed that he heard that the Commissioners say that the proposed action would not fully address their needs. He also said that he is concerned that going into an El Niño event that if HGH drafts or goes to 12'/18' plus so that HGH winds up below 20 feet the potential impact to water management for 2024 water year could be significant. Morrill said that in his opinion this has not been addressed. He said that he appreciates the difficulty that Montana is in, and he appreciates the information that has been provided.

Marotz said that he is incredibly close to this because he has nearly thirty years invested in developing the operations and what is known as the "Montana Operation". Which is not even considered controversial anymore, it has become routine operation. One of the things in the Montana Operation that they are trying to avoid, especially during the biologically productive months is having the river fluctuate. Having it go negative, lowering the flow for about five days will reset the system to that lower level for about a month and a half, which means the short growing season is blown in the river. Going above has a reduction in usable area for the more sensitive bull trout which are the juveniles. Having what they have tried for years, and they have been successful – Not having a double peak in the river. Marotz said that this essentially would do that. He said in addition they would have to then maintain the native species assemblage in the reservoir proper. To lose that extra amount of volume, that would cascade and carry forward into 2024, that to him is a huge impact that has not been fully vetted. He said that that the group has not talked about how the recreational aspect of the river itself is fishing

fabulous he is hearing and that is because we have had stable or gradually declining flows in the summer and the fall which are the peak biological offshore growing season in Montana. He said that none of this has been addressed. He said that he had yet to talk to anyone that had made this ask, he is the TMT representative, along with Matt Boyer, and he has not been in this conversation, so he does not have anything prepared. He said that he is shooting from the hip. He said that we have missed some big-ticket items that he does not even think the USFWS is aware of. He asked where we go from here.

Stranz said that she does not want Marotz to walk away feeling that TMT has not discussed things that are important for this operation, so she opened it up to responses or thoughts on what Marotz has put on the table.

Ebel said that appreciates Marotz's comments on that and said that he had tried to allude to those with his own comments. Such as it does not seem like anyone is going to get what they want at Flathead; we are also having a biological impact above and below Flathead Lake. He said that he thinks those are critical and that all has been well documented by MT FWP and USGS over a long period of time in grey literature and peer-reviewed publications. Ebel said that he thinks that many on TMT can agree that the best available science on which they base TMT recommendations that Marotz concerns are valid.

Swieca said that she wanted to echo what Marotz said. She said that as biologists they forget sometimes that people are not aware of the actions that have gone into place for the protection and enhancement of the species that our organizations are charged with protecting. She said that NOAA's concerns are primarily regarding the securities for flow augmentation both this year and next year. She said that everyone may not be aware of the impact flow augmentation had for NOAA's trust species and species that the State and Tribal Agencies and other agencies are interested. All of this is outlined in detail in NOAA's Biological Opinion, the importance of flow augmentation and the strategies that they use to secure that flow augmentation. She said that she agrees with Marotz, she thinks that TMT would be lacking if we did not discuss the reasons behind the recommendations they have provided in the past and those that are outlined in NOAA's Biological Opinions, and the biological basis for the discussion today.

from Charles Morrill to everyone: 11:34 AM

I agree wiht Brian amd Jonathan's comments

from Billy Barquin - Kootenai Tribe to everyone: 11:35 AM

I concur as well.

from Charles Morrill to everyone: 11:35 AM

and Kelsey's

Stranz said that she was seeing some concurrence from other managers in the chat.

Billy Barquin, Kootenai, said that he agrees with Marotz, there are so many unknowns. Including, he knows Fenolio will put up the SOR, but it sounds like the SOR does not actually accomplish what was requested. He said that he is comfortable with polling. He said that because there are so many unknowns, he thinks that the only vote would be to

vote no on it because he is not sure then what TMT is trying to accomplish with the operation.

Stranz said that she thinks that there are quite a few TMT members that have the same sentiment – that TMT is polling on something that does not meet the needs of those that are asking for it. She said that it is sort of a formality that Freeman was suggesting would be helpful from the State of Montana’s perspective.

Van Dyke said that he had something to add to what Marotz alluded to. He also said that in Wednesday’s meeting they had requested more information about the nimbleness of the actions that go on the lake, including irrigation and other uses of water. He said that this has not been included in the one-day turnaround to have a conversation. He said that Marotz and other’s input have been mostly on the biological, which is what TMT tends to be focused on but these decisions are also wrapped into all the authorized uses that also have been vetted. He said that he is happy to share Oregon’s position and he wanted to make sure that this is defined as an irregular approach to this ever-changing process that TMT has defined here in the last year or two. He wanted to make sure to share that openly and hopes that was helpful.

Stranz said there was a question on chat for the irrigators and that was whether there were upstream irrigators who could forgo the withdrawals to support and whether there was than flexibility. What they heard from Brodehl was that it was “*Likely too late for the ask as our irrigators were not aware they would face a need to reduce*”. She said that was one bit, though it is not a fully vetted conversation, but it was noted earlier.

Van Dyke said it is nice to have the commentary, but TMT uses information to make rational decisions; decisions to change operation that have been planned in multiple documents based on multiple reasons and multiple laws. That part has not been vetted and will not be it sounds like to him.

Stranz said that she will keep the meeting moving because at this point, we are talking about a proposed operation that will not meet the needs of anybody. TMT will be going through the formality of polling on it so that we can conclude this conversation. She said that she will go to Togo next and then will ask Fenolio to pull up the written proposal on screen.

Togo said that everyone that just chimed in covered what he would like to say. He said that he would like to offer one parting thought, as Lipscomb mentioned if the intent of this water is to pass through Flathead Lake, to avoid the biological problem that would result on the South Fork of having a double peak on the lower river than this would result in them having a higher flat flow. If they are going to try to avoid the same biological problem that is about to happen on the South Fork on the Lower River. He said that he does not think that even if voted on and attempted to implement the outcome would be what anyone thinks it would be. It would just result in a higher flat flow on the river.

Stranz said that was helpful.


d. Summary - Stranz

- Asked by the Governor of Montana to consider what operations could look like to release water from Hungry Horse into Flat Head Lake, within the constraints of the Federal and State laws and regulations.
- TMT has had 1 hour and 41 minutes of conversation.
- The SOR does not contain the typical amount of information in the request that TMT needs and expects. The request from the Commissioners is to fill the lake to 12” from full (14” from full at a minimum).
- Reclamation proposed an operation that they could implement within the constraints of Federal and State laws and regulations that could fill the lake to 18” from full (dependent on SKQ maintaining minimum outflow).
- Reclamation’s proposed operation appears to not meet the needs of the Commissioners.
- TMT will poll on Reclamation’s proposed operation to get each member’s formal response.

e. Polling on Proposal Operation – Fenolio

Proposed Operation

- Increase Releases to target being within 1.5 ft of full (2893 ft) at Flathead Lake on July 31
 - Decrease releases to 2,000 cfs or operate to Col. Falls minimums
 - May need to decrease release prior to July 31 if the Lake reaches 1.5 ft from full or forecasts show that Hungry Horse is going to draft below 20 ft from full
- Relax Columbia Falls Minimums from Aug 1 to Dec 31 from 3500 cfs to 3200 cfs
- Target being above 20 ft from full at Hungry Horse Dam with the operation
- This operation would result in a higher flat flow from SKQ through the rest of the summer



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Fenolio said that what he heard was that TMT can go through all of these machinations in terms HGH and staying within their biological balances, what was proposed in the Record of Decision and consulted on in the Biological Opinions. What Fenolio thought he heard Togo say was this operation would just result in a higher flat flow from SKQ Dam through the rest of the summer to minimize downstream impacts on the Lower Flathead.

Togo said yes, he believes that to be true. They should be avoiding the peak in the bull trout fishery.

Fenolio said that is basically what the results of what this proposed operation would be.

Polling Options: *Support / Object / No Objection / Abstain*

NOAA:	Abstain
OR:	Object
WA:	Object
Kootenai	Object
Umatilla:	Object
BOR:	No Objection
Corps:	No Objection
USFWS:	Abstain
ID:	Object
MT:	Object
Nez Perce:	Object
BPA:	No Objection

NOAA – NOAA considers flow augmentation as was described in the Proposed Action and considered in NOAA’s Biological Opinion to be one of the most critical resource management tools for the protection and enhancement of our trust species. Flow augmentation water contributes to measurable improvements to fish travel time, which the data generally shows improves survival and increases adult returns. As they have discussed at length in the BiOp the strategy for securing that flow augmentation water typically involves protecting the probability of storage refill. The modified proposal put forth by Reclamation technically is within the bounds of what was considered in the Biological Opinion; however, it does increase out risk of the probability of refill for next year going into an El Niño year and NOAA is not sure that this proposal is even going to achieve the desired outcome for those who put it forward. For those reasons, NOAA chooses to abstain. They would like to add that they are sympathetic towards Montana’s recreational and commercial concerns at Flathead Lake and look forward to working with the State to find an equitable solution to help preserve their recreational resources while ensuring the protection of ESA-listed salmon and steelhead.

WA – Morrill said that he fully agrees with Swieca, except Washington is not engaged in the discussion with Montana. Washington certainly is sympathetic to their concerns, but Swieca identified all the reasons that Washington is concerned and has chosen to object.

Kootenai – Kootenai objects because there are too many uncertainties with this operation, there is too much potential for biological harm and the suggested operation may not meet the need that was identified.

Umatilla – Basically what has been said before. It is unclear if this operation would actually meet needs, so why do something that is not going to meet the needs and have a negative biological impact? I could not support something like that.

Reclamation – Reclamation hears the impacts that are going on recreationally and from the agricultural community around Flathead Lake Basin. This has been a tough year in terms of both forecasting and operations going through May and June. I think we have seen this whole situation on hold in terms of really dire and low stream flows occurring throughout the Flathead Basin. Our “No Objection” was generally because we could see this operation moving forward within was consulted on in the BiOp, but we do have concerns about its biological impacts both to the South Fork of the Flathead and below the Lower Flathead River and all the way through to the Columbia River System moving forward. And also for our potential for refill for next year, just given that we are in an El Niño sequence and I know maybe those correlations between El Niño and La Niña aren’t quite as robust as what we’ve seen in the past but I think given that we are going into a long hot dry summer there are some serious risks and concerns with this operation and potentially drafting Hungry Horse lower. So, those are our main concerns and risks that we’re seeing moving forward. I do appreciate everybody taking the time, under extremely pressurized circumstances considering this proposal from the State of Montana.

Corps – The Corps defers to the Bureau since they are the lead on this Action Agency request, so we have no objection. However, we do have concerns that there may be biological impacts, a lack of regional support, and it does not seem to provide the benefit to Montana.

As a process note, Baus said that he did not recall yet hearing back from Montana. He wanted to reiterate that he believes that is a critical piece of this procedural conversation.

Stranz said that it Marotz responded via chat. On the behalf of Montana, Marotz objected. We will circle back around for rationale.

USFWS – Swank said that this is an interesting one. FWS while we had some serious concerns about Fenolio’s alternative proposal we were prepared initially to vote no objection to try to provide some relief to the Flathead Lake community but what we’ve learned in this discussion is that it seems that at least likely that those releases are just going to be passed through Flathead Lake and it will not even achieve the target or goal of the operation. So we decided to abstain just because of the uncertainty of whether it’s going to achieve any of the goals that Reclamation put forth in developing this proposal.

ID – Ebel said that he does not need to repeat what many already have said. Having an action that does not achieve its goals and has negative biological impacts clearly is not something that is supportable from the State of Idaho. I just hope that we learn from this experience and that the State of Montana learns from this experience, make sure you have an implementable dry year plan for when outflows exceed inflows because it is very challenging. You can’t take that water back and it’s very challenging and there’s a lot of tendrils and legal issues with altering storage project operations in the Columbia Basin.

MT – Matt Boyer said that their concerns are that the operation, there are not solid guarantees that it’s going to achieve some relief for Flathead Lake and that was the rationale for putting this forth. Thank you to Fenolio and Reclamation for running the numbers. Just there wasn’t enough water to release within the BiOp constraints.

Nez Perce – Hesse said he appreciates the efforts that went into establishing criteria that support resident fish and downstream migration conditions that are the base operation here and that effort over the last decades is robust. The requested action here does not achieve the intended outcomes and just has the impact to both downstream fish and resident fish so those are consistent concerns that others have expressed and we share those.

BPA – Norris said that we did not object, but it is concerning that there definitely would be impacts if implemented and additionally that this wouldn't necessarily resolve the issues that Montana has brought forward regarding the lake elevation.

OR – Van Dyke said that he would like to acknowledge that Wednesday there was a set of tasks that were set out that _____ working with to achieve an eight-hour workdays delivery of what we saw today. Fenolio thank you and others I appreciate it. I do have to say we asked for other things that weren't shared and that part of the process we are frustrated. So, specifically our response objection is that the process is highly irregular and that it didn't provide adequate time to even consider all of the details to come up with rational lines calling response. That response you provided is based on what we heard today and the details that were shared in that it is clear that even the representative from Montana was not adequately provided opportunity to inform conversation to him due to concern about that. I'm not going to talk a lot more because my colleagues adequately describe why they would object to this. But we have to recall that this system's managed many many years of consideration of details. I have come up with plans that not all of us have been supportive in full of but have learned to work within. This one does not seem to provide us with assurance that there is going to be a benefit for the request and its likely to have ramifications that fly long after this larger conversation. That is why we object.

f. Bureau of Reclamation's Plan Moving Forward – Fenolio

Fenolio once again wants to reiterate that they do, and they have heard about the hardships that are going on in the State of Montana.

- Given what Reclamation has heard about the potential biological impacts and the risk to refill for next year they will **not** be implementing the proposed operations as we discussed today.
- **Reclamation will be holding the 2000 cfs out, until Columbia Falls minimums take over through September at Hungry Horse.**

Stranz thanked everyone for the discussion today and providing their input. She gave a special thanks to the Commissioners for showing up and providing their perspective that we do not hear every day.

Stranz also shared that TMT has a Year End Review meeting where we have an opportunity outside of in season management to look back at operations. What worked well and what did not and talk about what could change in the future. She said that she would like to invite everyone, and the Commissioners, to join us in that conversation. It happens usually in the first week of December and will be on the website. It will be a good opportunity to have some more retrospective conversation at that point if they would like to participate in that.

2. Public Comments:

- Brodehl thanked everyone for the really robust discussion. He said that he realizes that they were short in the ask coming out of the State of Montana and if they do this ever again, they will do their best to be more prepared. He said he wanted to say thank you. Thank you to Stranz for putting this together on such short notice and for working with us.
- A phone caller (406-area code) asked if there will there be a summary of the study mentioned earlier that said that there was no benefit.

Stranz said that the analysis that Fenolio did, the slide show, will be available on the website shortly. That shows some of the impacts and the different operations. She said that there was no analysis that showed no benefits, it was simply what we heard from the two commissioners that 18 inches was not going to meet the irrigation and recreation needs. She added that we do have summaries of the meetings. There are two documents; facilitator notes that come out of the DS Consulting Office that are a high-level recap; and Official Meeting Minutes that are more of a word-for-word type of recap. Both documents will be posted on the website within the next couple weeks.

3. Set agenda for next meeting – July 19, 2023

Today’s Attendees:

Agency	TMT Representative(s)
Army Corps of Engineers	Doug Baus (chair), Julie Ammann, Lisa Wright
Bonneville Power Administration	Tony Norris
Bureau of Reclamation	Joel Fenolio
NOAA Fisheries	Kelsey Sweica
US Fish & Wildlife Service	Dave Swank
Washington	Charles Morrill
Oregon	Erick Van Dyke
Idaho	Jonathan Ebel
Montana	Brian Marotz, Matt Boyer
Nez Perce Tribe	Jay Hesse
Umatilla Tribe	Tom Lorz (CRITFC)
Colville Tribe	
Warm Springs Tribe	
Kootenai Tribe	Billy Barquin
Spokane Tribe	

Other Attendees (non-TMT members):

COE – Aaron Marshall, Leon Basdekas, Alexis Mills, Chris Peery, Lumas Helaire

BOR – Jen Johnson, Linda Friar, Eric Rothwell, Melinda H. Burke, Jessica Asbill-Case, Michael Coffey

BPA – Kate Wilson (MT Liaison)

TMT – FRIDAY July 14, 2023

NOAA – Chris Magel, Dana Bethea

Governor Gianforte’s Office – Michael Freeman (Natural Resources Advisor), Misty Kuhl (Director of Indian Affairs)

Senator John Tester’s Office – Chad Campbell

Congressman Zinke’s Office – Steve Howke

Flathead County Commissioner – Randy Brodehl

Lake County Commissioner – Gale Decker

Energy Keepers – Brian Lipscomb (CEO), Travis Togo

DS Consulting – Emily Stranz (Facilitator), Colby Mills

CorSource Technology Group – Andrea Ausmus (BPA note taker, Contractor)