FPOM Avian Task Group / Falconry Discussion - 9 February 2023

Summary notes

Morrill; Three documents provided on FPOM website for this discussion.

Peery: Goal of discussion is to investigate if we can develop an acceptable plan where falconry could be used to deter avian predators at McNary Dam in place of bird hazing in 2024. Unless other funding were available, 2024 is the earliest falconry could occur at McNary and this would occur instead of hazing by USDA. Daily average bird counts by month for last six years with mean smolt collection numbers and USDA hazing schedule for 2023 were shown and described.

Morrill: Described minutes from FPAC meeting discussion on avian predation. Third document was information from falconry contractor shared with FPAC as an example of services that could be available.

Bellerud: Falconry needs to be evaluated for effectiveness before used in place of other avian deterrents. We need real quantifiable effects.

Morrill: He understood concerns. He suggested that an approach would be to see a proposal of what falconry program would look like/include with how much it would cost. There is time to discuss the proposal before decision needs to be made for 2024.

Bellerud: We should fund a study and it should be done by independent people.

Parker: Deterrents used now are not actually working because birds are still present. We will know if falconry it is working if the birds leave.

Peery: If we decide that falconry needs to be evaluated in a study, it will likely be 3 years down the road before it can be funded.

Ebel: Related discussion at FPAC acknowledging how difficult it would be to set up an evaluation in a fluid/adaptive environment, where contractor and animals are reacting to each other and learning what does and does not work.

*[There was then a spirited discussion on the merits of conducting a formal evaluation to determine effectiveness of falconry versus the value of trying it and see if it produces an obvious reduction in birds present at the dam.]*

Macdonald: Pointed out that planning for a study (research summary) of the effectiveness of falconry is on the agenda for the SRWG meeting the following week. What this type of study would look like can be discussed then.

Cordie: For The Dalles in 2023, they will trim USDA shore hazing and add falconry. The combination is more expensive overall but they think it is worth the effort to see if it can improve deterrents.

Day: They will monitor bird numbers at The Dalles and calculate daily average numbers of birds to try and see if the combination of methods reduces bird numbers. This will include monitoring hot spots and gull attack counts. Should provide more resolution.

Ebel was supportive of trying the falconry.

Grosvenor also expressed interest in the potential for falconry at John Day Dam.

Morrill asked if, from this discussion and discussion to take place at SRWG, would we be able to develop a recommendation to the Corps on what they [FPOM] would like to see for 2024 at McNary Dam?

Peery: Yes, if there is a decision [consensus] on what route FPOM wants to take by September 2023, there should be sufficient time to get contractor lined up for work by April 2024.