

**Columbia River Regional Forum
System Configuration Team Meeting
January 20, 2022
Final Official Notes**

Representatives of Corps, OR, ID, WA, BPA, NOAA, Umatilla/CRITFC and others participated in today’s SCT meeting facilitated by Blane Bellerud, NOAA. Draft and final SCT notes are available on the COE’s TMT website under the FPOM link. For copies of documents discussed in the meeting, contact kathy.ceballos@noaa.gov. See the last page of these minutes for a list of attendees at today’s meeting.

1. CRFM Budget Updates

Ida shared with the group that the PBud has still not been approved and the government is in a continuing resolution for the time being. It will expire mid-February. The Corps is hopeful a budget will be passed at that point, but it is possible another continuing resolution will be signed. Supplemental spending bills have not passed yet. CRFM was part of that package. Ida hopes to have more information by the next SCT meeting. Ida reminded SCT that budgets have to be submitted two years in advance so the Corps is preparing to submit the FY24 budget.

2. Continuing Objectives

- Cooling structures – Ida shared that the Corps has submitted a budget request for FY24. It would be a phased implementation, starting at McNary. She thinks that the probability of receiving funding for the project is higher if implementation is phased. The Corps is not certain that the cooling structures will be as successful at John Day. To investigate this, it plans to conduct a short study lead by one technical person. She thinks this will be quick and just involve the technical lead looking into available data. Tom Lorz was not as confident it would be quick, noting that he has heard this in the past and then waited for a paper for upwards of half a year. Meanwhile, the project funding and construction ends up in limbo waiting on the paper. Trevor Conder, NOAA, would like to know who the lead is so that he can touch base with her. He advocated for having additional conversation before funding a study. Jonathan Ebel, ID, wondered why McNary is being funded. Chris Peery shared that there was strong agreement at FFDRWG to fund McNary first because it has the potential to impact more fish. However, it was on the agenda to discuss further, after Peery had a chance to review the FY21 data since the conditions were so extreme. Ida mentioned that the order can likely still be changed. Karl Anderson noted that the last FFDRWG was cancelled due to technical difficulties. Karl will try to reschedule the meeting sometime in the next few weeks. Peery thinks it is worth discussing if Lower Monumental or McNary should be funded first. Lorz wondered if it was possible to fund both Lower Monumental and McNary in FY24. Ida noted that partial funding does not happen. Projects are either funded in full or not at all.

- Avian wires at McNary – This is an idea from the Umatilla tribe/CRITFC. Tom noted that this year was a particularly bad year for avian predation, which seems to be reducing survival below McNary. He feels pressure to address the issue quickly due to the dwindling survival rates. FFDRWG has a preliminary design. Ida shared that the Corps is looking to see if lasers are cost-effective ways to deter birds at the outfall at McNary. There are some challenges to putting wires up at McNary, she noted. The challenge will be finding a cost-effective tool to deter avian predation, she added. Ida thinks the Corps is waiting on results from a report from Chris Peery before taking any next steps. Charles noted that avian predation is also of concern to WA. Tom also shared that the cost and setup at McNary will be a lot different (less involved and less expensive) than at John Day. Tom added again that if there is anything that can be done to push this along any faster, that would be his preference.
- Improved pit tag detection (especially below BON, BON and MCN) – This agenda item received significant attention at today’s meeting. Ida shared that ideas have been floated for evaluating juvenile survival under the new flexible spill operations. The BiOp requires that the Action Agencies continue to evaluate reach survival using existing methods. However, precision may be decreased due to low fish numbers. In order to get fish numbers up, either more will need to be released or detection capability will need to improve. What becomes tricky is that the budget cycle runs 2 years out, so even if the method is not 100% agreed on and decided, something needs to be put in the FY24 budget as a placeholder, otherwise there will be no funds in FY24 for this item. The group discussed various methods of PIT detection, including the barge that was used a few years ago. Lorz noted that it was only tried once and it was unclear if an issue with the anchor resulted in skewed data. The Barge is low-cost and still available for rent. However, Scott Bettin noted that barges will not increase the amount of detections enough to make a difference. The group discussed additional details, including that some members would like to see detection increased in the forebay compared to the tailrace. After discussing the topic at length, the group decided on three actions:
 1. Blane will reach out to the science center to see if they can set up a presentation or workshop prior to the next SCT meeting.
 2. The group will consider initiating a feasibility study.
 3. A placeholder will be added to the FY24 budget for this item and it will be revisited at the next SCT meeting.

Additionally, Ida noted that to move forward with a budget request, the Corps needs a plan of action. To get something approved, it must be defensible and have known benefits to the region. She added that the Corps does not fund R & D.

- Flex Spill Evaluation (no funding has been identified) – NOAA is looking into ways to evaluate changes in reach survival using the existing infrastructure and data. It would compare new data to SAR ratios and bypass fish information. It has not committed to anything at the policy level. NOAA and BPA are trying to move this along but do not

have a timeline they can share at this time. PNNL asked if the Action Agencies would want to add juvenile salmonids to a study they are about to start using acoustic telemetry. This is being looked into.

3. Other

Lorz and others expressed frustration that they are unable to see the FY24 budget. The lack of information makes it difficult to evaluate potential projects, he said. Ida noted that she legally is not allowed to share the FY24 capability list. However, what happens is she takes the information from each SCT meeting as well as from other groups to her agency for evaluation. The FY24 budget request has been submitted but can still be amended.

Following today's discussion about CRFM objectives and CRFM budget updates, Tammy Mackey lead a discussion on maintenance priorities. For notes on this discussion, please contact Tammy.

Today's Attendees:

Ben Hausmann, BPA
Blane Bellerud, NOAA
Charles Morrill, WA
Christine Petersen, BPA
Douglass Newton, Corps
Elizabeth Holdren, Corps
Erick Van Dyke, OR
Gregory Silver, Unknown affiliation
Ida Royer, Corps
Jeanette Wendler
Jonathan Ebel, ID
Karl Anderson
Leah Sullivan, BPA
Lisa Wright, Corps
Melissa Haskin, BPA (CONTR)
Scott Bettin, BPA
Scott St. John, Corps
Shane Scott, Public Power Council
Tammy Mackey, Corps
Tom Iverson, Yakama Nation Fisheries
Tom Lorz, Umatilla/CRITFC
Trevor Conder, NOAA

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