

**Columbia River Regional Forum
System Configuration Team Meeting
March 20, 2024
FINAL Official Notes**

Representatives of Corps, ODFW, WDFW, BPA, NOAA, and others participated in today's SCT hybrid meeting facilitated by Blane Bellerud, NOAA. Jonathan Rerecich, The Corps of Engineers, hosted the WebEx to facilitate better notetaking.

Draft and final SCT notes are available on the COE's TMT website under the [FPOM link](#). For copies of documents discussed, contact Bonnie Hossack at Bonnie.Hossack@noaa.gov. See the final page of these minutes for the list of attendees of today's meeting.

1. Review and approve January and February Minutes.

- January and February Minutes Approved

2. FY24 Budget Update

- Good news for FY24, received the full PBud funding.
 - Will not need to prioritize funding as previously thought.
 - It is still coming in incrementally but over the next quarter more funding will drop and we should be able to execute on our capabilities.
 - Note: Because McNary (MCN) was an unbudgeted item there is no more excess in the CRS for FY24.

Charles Morrill, WDFW, asked with FY24 fully committed and moving ahead, what are the immediate plans to cover MCN additional cost or will that be addressed later.

Rerecich said for MCN we had \$4.4M so he believes that we have things covered there.

Jonathan Ebel, ID, asked when Rerecich said that there was no extra, did he mean was there some slush built in initially that then this MCN evaluation has taken up or did they go through and base it on the suggestions from last time move funds around.

Rerecich said that it is his understanding that the MCN requirements on that additional funding was taken from what Ida Royer had informed him was labeled as CRS excess. He said he was not 100% sure if those included any of the carry-in funds from the prior year.

Ian Chane, Corps, said that his understanding, and this can be clarified once Royer gets back, was related to where we are at for execution on some of the projects. He said that he thinks that they identified higher capability for some, and they are not going to execute all of their funds. So, he thinks what it did is free up the funding to allow us to budget for MCN because this was not a line item in the budget this year. Chane said that he thinks it was looking where we are at with the other projects, and we are able to ship the funds toward that new priority. He believes that was what Royer did on this but we would have to clarify with Royer if those at the meeting are curious which projects those funds came from. Ebel thanks Chane for the information.

Chane added that when they budgeted for this program, they never have a slush fund, they would love to have it but it is nothing that they ever get. Typically, what happens is if they have a project that comes up, they have to look at funds within the program. If one project is not executing as much as they had thought that might free up some funding and then ultimately sometimes, they have to make the tough decisions whether to prioritize the project over another just because the funds are not available. That is typically how it works. He said that they wish that they did have a little bucket to work with, but they do not have that luxury unfortunately.

Erick Van Dyke, ODFW, said that he has not seen the spreadsheet yet. Part of what he just heard was checking things to understand where things came from. He asked if that would come out again or can it be resent so they can actually take a look.

Rerecich said that the latest spreadsheet that he has, the FY24 ranking sheet, had a date of 18 January. He had not changed any numbers in it, and he does not think that anything had changed over the last couple of months. He said that he would be happy to send it out again or put it up on the screen. He asked how SCT would typically do this.

Morrill said that if it had not changed, and that was his understanding, that there were no changes. It is still prioritized based on the \$66M. He said unless someone had a request, he did not need to look at it again at this point.

Van Dyke said that he was trying to understand how we were going to achieve what was suggested of taking a look at where money might have been moved around. He said that if the group already had what they have done he would not want Rerecich to have to do it again. He said it is just confusing.

Rerecich said that he understands. For him being the new guy in the seat he is trying to learn as well. Rerecich proposed that he take a look at it and he could send it out, but he would need to get more familiar with it to better understand where the MCN money was pulled from or how the \$4.2M was developed.

Van Dyke said do not spit it out again if the information is not different but at the same time, please help the SM get to the point that they are understanding where the money came from.

- Rerecich will look into the FY24 Budget to see where the funds were moved from to support MCN.

Ebel said that right now MCN both ERDC modeling and the vague early-January Balloon Tag study were both in the budget at \$1.5M. He said essentially under the PBud somehow \$3M appeared or got shifted. Ebel said that he would be interested in where those monies came from. Just out of curiosity, he is glad that they got the money, and they can do it.

Morrill said that he is glad too.

Chane said that he wanted to add some details so that everyone is tracked. He said that he looked back at the spreadsheet and that spreadsheet does not indicate the switch that was made. They did have to brief up the changes in FY24 to make this project full (Chane apologized because it came to mind right at the moment) to Assistant Secretary of the Army (ASA) a month ago. Until they did that, they could not provide the difference with the spreading things out to actually fully fund MCN on the spreadsheet. Chane told Rerecich that he would work with him on looking into the information because just in a matter of Process-wise, they did have to reallocate the FY24 PBud and when they do that reallocation, they do have to get the thumbs up from the ASA before moving forward. Chane said that just occurred, so that is probably why you are not seeing the update on the January spreadsheet.

- Chane will assist Rerecich in looking into the movement of funds for MCN.

Ebel said that he has a general question for the group, and it goes to the turn pool gate. He said that the IDFG staff at the Lower Granite (LWG) trap have been PIT tagging walleye and sending them back to the tailrace. They are starting to see a pattern over the last year where it appears that walleye often get blocked in the area of the turn pool gate currently. He asked if there is a place for IDFG to present some of this data to the Corps as they continue to make further decisions and take a different view of the turn pool gate or potentially its design, without the understanding that it might actually be a partial walleye blockage. Ebel said that he feels that the Corps has a plan to change that turn pool gate in a way specifically so that it would be open more of the time and right now it is slowing walleye significantly.

Rerecich asked if the turn pool gate is currently a FFDRWG or FPOM item. He asked where it currently lands. Tom Lorz, Umatilla, said right now they have not built it.

Chuck Barnes, Corps, said that it is his FFDRWG project, and he is the POC for it. He said like Ebel said, the design is finalized and the parts are already procured by the projects but they are not going to be able to get it in place until next Winter. It might be beneficial to have Ebel or the appropriate representatives from IDFG to give an update or give a quick call to fill the Corps in on what they found with the walleye.

Lorz said that he would strongly encourage this to be a regional thing. Lorz said that he just yelled at the Corps yesterday about playing in the sandbox with select individuals, Lorz said that they all want to play in the sandbox so let's all just go get dirty.

Ebel said that he was not suggesting just between the Corps and IDFG. He was asking where in the forums, FPOM or FFDRWG?

Lorz said that this would be FFDRWG because if you want to tweak the design or something like that.

Ebel said that it is also Operation.

Trevor Conder, NOAA, said that operation is FPOM.

Lorz said yes, but we usually have some idea in FFDRWG of how we are going operate it and then we finalize that in FPOM. He said that he does not think that we need to. He said that he would put on his FPOM hat while we are in the FFDRWG meeting if that would make everyone feel better.

Conder said that the current design allows no upstream passage when it is in the down position, and the up and down frequency would be determined at FPOM or altered at FPOM.

Ebel said that he plans to communicate with the IDFG program at LWG and set it up for the next FFDRWG meeting and maybe they can come in and present some of their observations. He said then we can figure out how this might mesh. Ebel said that they did not have the data to look at it until this past year so it had not been incorporated into either Ebel's thought processes on the turn pool gate or anyone else's probably.

Conder said that this is interesting because they just had a presentation from some representatives at their Science Center that were looking for funding to do something similar. He said that he did not know that IDFG was already doing that. The Science Center had couched LWG as a blockage but the problem with that is there are significant numbers of walleye above LWG already. Conder said that his concern with that is getting momentum towards an alteration of that plan to prohibit further walleye when they have already established could impact salmonids but not really have a benefit to preventing walleye because they are already up there. They go through the lock and the trap is not operated 365 days a year, so that thing is open considerable time throughout the year

when the ladder is open. Conder opined that they would say that we are going to slow the walleye down but how much are we going to affect this salmonid plan just to slow down walleye that have already been established.

Ebel said that they have learned a lot about walleye in the last few years. He said that we do not know that they have established. They do not have evidence of reproduction above LWG yet, Ebel is sure that they are but there are not many of them. There is enough that they occasionally show up, but occasionally he said, 15 times a year caught by anglers in various spots in some concerning places like Twin Bridges.

Conder said that they have been detected in the RSW as well.

Ebel said to make sure that this forum is caught up with what IDFG has done. He will ask them to come in and present in FFDRWG so that everyone, including Conder, can know the state of IDFG's knowledge of this because IDFG has been in communication with those at the Science Center that are looking into walleye because IDFG started this a couple of years ago. Ebel said that he wants to make sure that everyone is on the same page. IDFG also presented this in high level view to NPCC last month.

Kate Self, NPCC, said that it was last month, and the recordings are available online if anyone is interested in reviewing that.

[Council Meeting | Northwest Power and Conservation Council \(nwcouncil.org\)](https://www.nwcouncil.org)

March 12 – 13, 2024

Expansion of Non-native Walleye: Another Threat to Salmon and Steelhead:
Marika Dobos and Dr. John Powell, Idaho Department of Fish and Game (WS)

https://www.nwcouncil.org/f/18652/2024_03_f2.pdf

<https://vimeo.com/923488441#t=13m47s>

Ebel said that they have more detail that would not be presented to the Policy level at the Council and that might be appropriate in this case for FFDRWG, so Ebel will set that up. He wanted to put that on folks' radar as we consider changing of turn pool gate and the future operations of that.

Barnes thanked Ebel and asked him to let him know so they can put it on the agenda for them.

Jacob Macdonald, Corps, said that the next FFDRWG is April 4.

Morrill asked where the turn pool gate was on the priority list. He asked if we had that funded for FY24 or if it was pushed off until FY25.

Steven Sipe, Corps, said that it is funded in FY24 and as they mentioned, the design is done now and so now, they are working on getting it available so they will be doing construction in FY25.

3. FY25 Budget Update

- CRFM did get the President’s Budget for FY25.
- Received full funding requested: \$74.2M
- CRS received: \$24.65M
- Willamette received: \$50.55M
- Congress has not passed this budget yet. With the PBud out we are still waiting for the J-sheet which provides the breakout by project. That is not yet available, so those line-item details were not available yet. It should be published before the next SCT meeting.
- The CRS would include CRS, Willamette, and Lamprey capability.

Iverson said that the Corps committed \$5M additional Lamprey dollars in FY25 in the USG commitment. He asked if that is part of the \$50M dedicated to Columbia River or is that in addition to?

Rerecich said that he believed that is separate. He asked if Chane had additional information.

Chane said in reference to what Rerecich said with the FY25 budget on this, he thinks their commitment to express the capability and need for that and because they do not know the line items at this point for FY25 they cannot really say what exact dollar amount is, they do not know what is in there for lamprey until they release the J-sheet, but the commitment for us was to move forward and express capability for those types of projects for lampreys. Chane said that hope is, he is crossing his fingers, yes, it is in there, they just do not know the amount.

Iverson said that he got it and thanked Chane.

Lorz asked Rerecich what number he had said for the PBud for FY25.

Rerecich said for FY25 the PBud is \$75.2M and of that \$75.2M, \$24.65M is for CRS.

Lorz asked what the difference is between CRS and CRFM.

Rerecich said that it is the Columbia River bucket versus the Willamette Valley bucket.

Lorz said that he had seen numbers in the PBud that talked about \$145M to the COE Program so that is why he was trying to detangle the numbers. He said that he was trying to understand the numbers that he had seen in the PBud budget versus what Rerecich had seen.

Chane said that he was laughing as Lorz said that because they are trying to understand it all too. Chane said that they know that there are numbers out there but even under VO&M lines they know what the details are at this point. So, all they are seeing are the buckets and they are not sure what they are falling into.

Lorz said perfect and that he is glad to see that he is not the only one confused.

Chane said it has been one of those years.

Lorz said and it continues, hopefully you guys will still be working there on Friday.

Chane said that he thinks their budget was passed into the last CR that went through so this is the other part of the government that might shut down.

Lorz said that Conder needs a vacation anyways. He asked Rerecich if by next month he will have more clarity about all of the numbers floating around.

Rerecich said yes, that is what he thinks they will have by next month, is more clarity on this. Once the J-sheet gets published we can talk about line items.

4. Columbia Basin Settlement – Settlement Funds

- The Corps is aware of the \$50M commitment but the agreements were made at a very high level.
- They are trying to understand what that means at the “boots on the ground” -level.
- The administration made the decision, and the details of these commitments are still being worked through in a sense of what that means for implementation.
 - Trying to figure out the details and intent.
 - In Chane’s experience with these types of agreements with these substantial ties and commitments it takes time to turn that language into implementation.
- Once more information is available, they will provide a more comprehensive update.

- They are looking through the agreement and trying to piece together to see what that means to the Corps in the sense of how they will be implementing the items.
- The Corps understands how important it is. It is in the Stay-Agreement, and it is important to the Sovereigns and other stakeholders so they are pushing internally to try to figure out what this all means in the sense of how they implement and what the \$50M is. There are still people asking questions and trying to get clarity.

Iverson said he would like to make sure when Chane is finally made aware of where the money is and how it is going to hit the ground. Then we can call a very urgent, quick SCT meeting so they can help prioritize those funds. He said that the co-managers would like to be involved in assigning those funds. Iverson said that he also would love to brainstorm on prioritizing a one-time \$50M hit to the program on sort of where that money is best spent. He said that he thinks that it is addressing things such as short-term acquisition stuff like buying pumps and all the broken pieces and parts that are limiting our ability to do effective fish passage, but that is for a larger group conversation. He said that he just wanted to express that desire to be involved as the money gets into the region so that they can help spread it around.

Chane said that sounds great. He said one thing, that he is under the assumption that this is an additional \$50M that is going to be dropped on us. Chane said that is what they are trying to figure out right now, what does this commitment mean in the sense of that funding and at least from what he has read into the agreement and that \$50M. It is definitely things that typically would not include things that would not all fall under CRFM. Chane said that is what they are trying to work through right now, it might be coming from different funding sources, different business lines. He said that he is not sure if it is going to be directly brought in or what is going on. There are a lot of things to work through. He told Iverson that like a lot of the CRFM projects they will continue to work with the region on prioritization and get input on these regardless of if we get an additional flush of money or we are just talking about this year's budget. Chane said that he did want to highlight that Rerecich's good news about the budget is that it has brought a big spotlight on to this region with the Stay-Agreement. He said that he thinks that we are seeing that with the budget support that we are getting to the capabilities we have expressed. Ultimately that is a good thing because that has not happened every year, we have struggled for some years to get our full funding. We have gotten the attention, and we are getting full funding for the program so overall this is good news. But again, as we find out more information about this and the other commitments that could relate to this program they will make sure that they will provide more information as they get it. That is all he had for an update.

Lorz said that they are halfway through their fiscal year, he asked if the money does not come very quickly, will they be able to get it out the door or do they have some other method, prebuy stuff for next year, jockey around that way. He said that the contracting process is slow.

Chane said that is a great question and that will happen to them a lot of times when we get a final budget four months away from the end of the year and then they ask why we cannot execute our funding. There is definitely a concern. If we do get additional funding in, are there expectations of obligations of funding. Chane said that he did not want to assume that we are getting more funding. He said that he would want to find out more details first before he gets people excited that there is \$50M that we can jump on. He told Lorz that it is always a risk, and it happens to them sometimes and they get additional funding through Work Plan or Congress, and it is late in the year and it is “here you go do good with it”. He said more to come when they have information on that but he is not hearing anything now directly on that.

Lorz said that he would encourage Chane to talk to, under the Stay-Agreement there are people notified at Point of Contacts because they are the ones most closely understanding the value of the numbers, otherwise Lorz said they will start calling the Corps “the delinquent daddies” if we do not get the \$50M.

Iverson said that he can add some insight that they were assured that this was \$50M in addition to any commitments already in place in the CRFM. He said hopefully we will have a windfall to spread around.

Chane said that Iverson might be closer to this than himself and again this conversation is about the SCT group. If more information becomes available, he will try to provide updates on this, but he is not privy to any of those conversations or what those details were. Chane said that he apologizes that he cannot provide any more insight.

Morrill asked Iverson if in that agreement if there was any indication that the \$50M had to be spent within a certain timeline or that it was simply a commitment that they would provide \$50M for the region to use as the Sovereign’s deemed fit with the Corps.

Iverson said that it was identified for FY24.

Morrill asked if the money goes away if we do not use it in 2024.

Iverson said that we are going to use it.

Ongoing Topics

- FY25 Budget
- Columbia Basin Settlement

Next Agenda Topics

Next meeting: April 18, 2023 (Hybrid)

NOAA offices at 1201 NE Lloyd in Portland (11th floor)

Today’s Attendees:

Name	Affiliation
Christine Peterson	<i>BPA</i>
Tammy Mackey	<i>BPA</i>
Ian Chane	<i>Corps</i>
Charles Barnes	<i>Corps</i>
Jonathan Rerecich	<i>Corps</i>
Steven Sipe	<i>Corps</i>
Jacob Macdonald	<i>Corps</i>
Scott Fielding	<i>Corps</i>
Jonathan Ebel	<i>IDFG</i>
Blane Bellerud	<i>NOAA</i>
Trevor Conder	<i>NOAA</i>
Kelsey Swieca	<i>NOAA</i>
Kate Self	<i>NPCC</i>
Erick Van Dyke	<i>ODFW</i>
Tom Lorz	<i>Umatilla/CRITFC</i>
Charles Morrill	<i>WDFW</i>
Tom Iverson	<i>Yakama Nation</i>
Andrea Ausmus (<i>recording</i>)	<i>BPA Notetaker</i>

Minutes by Andrea Ausmus, CorSource Technology Group LLC, Contractor for Bonneville, amausmus@bpa.gov (971-442-5931).

Please send any requested edits to Bonnie Hossack, NOAA, Bonnie.Hossack@noaa.gov