CENWP-OD                                               24 May 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Draft minutes for the 24 May 2018 FPOM Pinniped Task Group meeting.

The meeting was held at the auditorium room, Bonneville Dam, Cascade Locks, OR.  In attendance:

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| **Last** | **First** | **Agency** |
| Anderson | Robert | NOAA |
| Carrothers | Brett | NWP-FFU |
| Conder | Trevor | NOAA |
| Cordie | Robert | NWP-TDA |
| Creason | Anne | BPA |
| D'Alessandro | Dalin | PSU |
| Dishman | Diana | NOAA |
| Halvorson | Leif | NWP-BON |
| Hargrave | Rick | NWP |
| Hockersmith | Eric | NWW |
| Jefferies | Steven | WDFW |
| Kovalchuk | Erin | NWP |
| Lorz | Tom | CRITFC |
| Mackey | Tammy | NWP |
| Morrill | Charlie | WDFW |
| Peery | Chris | NWW |
| Peterson | Christine | BPA |
| Setter | Ann | NWW |
| Sullivan | Leah | BPA |
| Swank | David | USFWS |
| Tidwell | Kyle | NWP-FFU |
| VanDyke | Erick | ODFW |
| Wertheimer | Robert | NWP-FFU |
| West | Steve | LCFRB |
| Whiteaker | John | CRITFC |
| Wright | Bryan | ODFW |

On the phone: Creason

1. **Final decisions or recommendations made at this meeting.** 
   1. March Pinniped Task Group minutes were approved.
2. **Mid-season review of 2018 Monitoring Program (USACE) –** Tidwell gave an overview of the USACE monitoring program. This year, sea lions are hauling out on the B2 Corner Collector apron in addition to Tower Island. Abundance data was presented in three ways to show changes through the years – daily estimates, ten year average and last three year average. California Sea lion (CSL) abundance is below the ten year average; Steller sea lion (SSL) is well above. The focal sampling period is January 1 through May 31. This time period is the same as the one identified in the Section 120 Letter of Authorization (LOA). The total number of predation events by sea lions observed from January 01 through May 23 is 1172; SSL events – 909 and CSL events - 263 (this is raw, unadjusted data). The data will be expanded to cover all day light hours. Similarly, there are more SSL present than CSL in the tail race. One slide showed that there were 76 days without any CSL present. Jefferies asked if there was timeline information to go with the number of CSL present. Tidwell said that there were multiple days in January when no CSL were present. Wertheimer pointed out that the sea lions presence tracks with the increase in prey (fish). Tidwell said that this year’s Chinook run will get a bit of break since the run was late and the number of SSL is decreasing. There were only four SSL today. Twenty eight CSL have been removed to date. The CSL numbers have been decreasing over the last several years most likely due to trapping and SSL presence. Conder asked if there was a way to quantify how much of the decrease is due to the removal program. Wright said it is very hard to know. This year, the states only branded six CSL and recruitment of new animals to the area was very low. There is an exchange of animals between BON and Willamette. Conder asked if the warm water blob that came through California in 2015 could have caused the drop in numbers. Jefferies found it unlikely. There was a spike in Astoria numbers around the same time as the California problems. The numbers in the Columbia systems seem to have corresponded to the decrease with smelt numbers. The die off in California was due to lack of prey so juvenile sea lions came up here in higher numbers than previously seen.
3. **Section 120 updates (NOAA) –** This is year three of the latest authorization. Tidwell had been asked to analyze if changing the criteria in the authorization from “five days present, identified in a predation event and subjected to hazing” to any of those criteria would help to improve the efficiency of the program. Tidwell has completed his analysis and reported to NOAA. Anderson said there are several pieces to the puzzle with ocean conditions and prey availability but they are hoping to see the benefits of the removal program soon. NOAA is working through the request from the States for Willamette Falls and that would mean two programs in play at once. The next Pinniped Task Force meeting is set for August (not FPOM Task Group). Tidwell reported that there would be an efficiency increase of 66% of putting CSL on the removal list if the criteria was lessened. Identifying an animal 500 yards away is very difficult. Paintballs were used this year to help identify from distance. Frequently, the sea lions feed on their back and the brand can’t be seen. Conder asked about the status of the SSL authorization request. Anderson said that there have been informal discussions with the states but no formal authorization request. The two options are to have a separate LOA from CSL or to modify the CSL LOA to add SSL. Two separate LOAs would be helpful if one LOA has litigation issues, the other can continue. Modifying the first LOA would save time and money. Jefferies said that continuing to monitor SSL would be helpful for when they do make an authorization request. There are less than 30 SSL branded currently. Branding SSL are very difficult and the trap can handle one SSL at a time. They can brand 10 CSL in the time of one SSL. Safety is a major factor for the staff since the animals are so large. The states are allowed to mark the SSL under section 109 not 120. Anderson said that even if the criteria for removal was relaxed, they will always require an individual identification (ID). Wertheimer asked if there is any other avenue to try since the SSL are endangering the StW stocks. Anderson said there is no easy action under the MMPA but everyone needs to know how to use the tools to the greatest extent possible. Looking for any sort of waiver takes time and money. Tidwell asked where the conversation needs to go. Anderson said that there are many conversations going on but there are only a few pathways and they are all complicated. Legislative fixes are slow. Wertheimer asked if there were any options under the ESA. Anderson said that “take” doesn’t apply to marine mammals.

1. **Update of trapping program at Bonneville and Willamette (ODFW and WDFW) –** Trapping has concluded at BON for the year. For the first time, the States initiated trapping at Willamette Falls for 6 -7 weeks in January through Mid-March. They relocated 10 individuals and they all came back. The monitoring program is similar to the USACE program going from January to May. They observed up to a dozen SSL but for the last month only single SSL. They consider that trap and relocation program a success because they were able to work out the process. The diet of the SSL was sturgeon and CSL was 85% salmonids and 15% lamprey which was similar to BON a few years ago. They set up traps at BON in early April and removed 28 CSL. On the last day of trapping, they caught 11 CSL but they were all branded already. The States were efficient at removing animals that were on the list the week before. The trapping at Willamette stops once the trapping at BON starts. They use the same crew but different traps. With more staff, they could trap at both locations. SSL exclusion devices were installed on the BON traps. Setter asked if you can use a euthanized animal as an effigy like in avian lethal take. Dead sea lions are common and do not affect other sea lions. Setter asked about shooting an animal in front of the other animals; however, they euthanize by lethal injection not shooting. Two hundred CSLs have been removed and cannot return but the SSL continue to go unchecked. Only three SSL were branded this year. If there was only one sea lion then they could probably change the behavior of the animal with hazing but they are not able to successfully affect a large group. They need to get rid of ring leaders. Jefferies suggested branding SSL in the fall when there are no CSL present, if that program were to move forward. Collecting individual ID data in conjunction with the impact data is essential in planning for an LOA.
2. **Monitoring chum salmon predation (BPA and WDFW) –** WDFW Chum salmon surveyors have been recording anecdotal evidence for years but no data has been quantified or summarized in a report. Tidwell has abundance data that corresponds to when the chum are present. WDFW will see if they can get an internal summary but they need funding. This is a vulnerable location and population.
3. **Discussion on summer-winter predation impacts to steelhead and Chinook -** Tidwell showed a graph with a sharp increase of SSL on October 1 which corresponds to chum presence. The next report will have monitoring data from 15 August through 31 May. It will also have species specific information. There was a suggestion that trappers could collect scat and possible otoliths from Tower Island. Since funding is limited, the FFU needs to focus management actions during certain times of the year. The pinniped issue is not going away and could potentially get worse. Wertheimer said that the monitoring program has increased substantially and now the FFU has to focus on what they can do with the current funding. All the current monitoring is leading to a future SSL plan. The CSL LOA is specific to the time frame is from January 1 – May 31 not Spring Chinook. If there was unlimited funds, there could be both a spring and fall program. Anderson said that this is a good place to get consensus of the problem but now the issue needs to be elevated. The Federal Execs is a forum that can be used to introduce the problem to higher level. The SSL LOA discussion has been elevated to the director’s level at WDFW and ODFW. Funding sources are an important issue. The monitoring at least has to be in the next BiOp if not further measures to help secure funding.
4. **Open discussion on hazing program effort, goals, effectiveness, and future funding –**Future funding is a huge problem with increases in effort, monitoring and hazing. FFU doesn’t have the funding to continue this level of effort never mind increasing the effort. Actions need to be in the BiOp to justify the funding. Tidwell doesn’t have kelt specific data but does have ST and timeframe data. The StW get hit twice – once on the way up and then females on the way down. There has always been the belief that hazing is minimally effective but Robert Stansell reportedly said that hazing directly at the entrance is effective for a short period of time. From the recommendation at the last meeting, the SSL were hazed off Tower Island but not frequently. Conder didn’t feel that the hazing effort was enough to be effective. The hazing program’s purpose is to reduce the consumption rate not just to cover the Section 120 requirement. Guidance needs to be clearer next time. Tidwell presented preliminary data on the hazing effectiveness. Hazing does make a small difference with ~10% change in foraging levels. Conder asked if increased hazing could increase the effectiveness but the answer is unknown. The animals hazed in April were most likely hazed in March as well. Animals are cued into the hazer more than the hazing itself. There was a 30% zone change where animals moved out to different zones after being hazed. This data is dam based hazing only and was conducted before the boat based hazing started. Both CRITFC and USDA hazed Tower Island. A week after Tower Island hazing started, animals started hauling out on the B2CC Apron. Jefferies suggested a cannon as a cost effective solution to hazing. Even if hazing isn’t the silver bullet, without hazing, the sea lions will move into the most effective fishing spots. Jefferies still recommends hazing off the haul out sites and if they haul out on a new site, they should be hazed from there as well.