

Willamette Action Team for Ecosystem Restoration (WATER)

Steering Team Meeting

March 2, 2021

http://pweb.crohms.org/tmt/documents/FPOM/2010/Willamette_Coordination/Steering_team/WST.html

FINAL Facilitators Summary

[Review from: NPCC, ODEQ, ODFW]

Action	Who	By When
Check with the contract officer about options for modification and email the screw-trapping contract scope of work to the Steering Team.	Brad	April 6
Email the study/monitoring plan for the Stage 0 project to the Steering Team.	Anne	April 6
Add WATER team's inputs to the Cougar study concept and continue vetting process.	Anne/teams	Next RM&E meeting
Summarize available information/data gaps for a Middle Fork Check-In with the Managers later this year.	RM&E Team	April RM&E meeting

Participants on the phone: Ian Chane (Corps), Brad Eppard (Corps), Nancy Gramlich (DEQ), Mike Hudson (USFWS), Anne Mullan (NOAA), Kelly Reis (ODFW), Ida Royer (Corps), Lawrence Schwabe (CTGR), Daniel Spear (BPA), Karl Weist (NPCC), Kate Wells (NOAA);

Facilitator and Notes: Nancy Pionk & Emily Stranz, DS Consulting.

Welcome & Introductions

Nancy Pionk, DS Consulting Facilitator, welcomed the group and noted that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss issues and seek consensus on process, substance and outcomes for efforts affecting participants engaged in the Willamette system. The Steering Team reviewed and approved the February 2, 2021 meeting summary.

Action Items from Prior ST Meeting/Progress Reports

Nancy noted that DS Consulting is working to schedule the next Managers Forum for the end of April and the intention is to use that session for a general update and opportunity for Kevin to share insights prior to his retirement in May. *[Note: Following the meeting the Managers Forum session was confirmed for April 29th from 12:30-2:00.]*

2021 Planning & Updates

FY 21 Budget and Projects – Ian Chane, Corps, noted that other than a few research contracts which are lagging, all other FY21 projects are on track, including the Foster Adult Fish Facility and Falls Creek work. The Corps is in the process of reviewing the budget and confirming it for the remainder of the fiscal year. Ian did not anticipate any major changes to the Willamette projects.

In terms of the FY23 Budget, the Corps is designing the budget, however, it has not yet received input from OMB on the FY22 PBUD. This information would typically be provided in November of the prior year; however, it is now expected towards the end of March. This has made it challenging for the Corps to project the FY23 budget needs. The Corps is meeting with OMB next week and hope to have more information soon. The FY23 budget ask is due the last week of March. Ian reminded the team of the potential for restrictive language and guidance, which has been common in recent years and impacts how funds are to be used.

Interim Measures Implementation Updates - Regarding the Interim Measures (IMs), Ian expressed appreciation for Anne Mullan's, NOAA, work on the spring spill operation at Foster. Ian noted that the operations were initially planned in the fall to start on March 1st, however, at the time, the in-stream flow requirements did not match spill timing and the operation was shifted to a later start date. For this season, the water supply forecast is

Willamette Action Team for Ecosystem Restoration (WATER)

looking better, and it appears that the spring spill operation can start on March 1st. Moving forward, if the water is available and impacts are not significant, the Corps will plan to use March 1st as the start date.

Ian noted that some of the IMs need Environmental Assessments (IM 16 and 17) and that the Corps plans to work with the Services to clarify details, then will report back to the Steering Team.

Screw-trapping Contract Modification & Monitoring - Brad Eppard, Corps, noted that any modifications to a contract need to be within the original scope of work for an easy and quick modification to be made. If the modification is outside of the scope of work, it requires a new task order, which takes time. Brad shared that from his experience, he expects that adding PIT tagging to the screw-trapping contract would be outside of the scope of the original contract.

Kate Wells, NOAA, questioned if there are mechanisms to add work order options within a contract which may or may not be exercised? There are mechanisms, however, the current screw-trapping contract does not include them. Mike Hudson, FWS, questioned if there was any mention of marking fish in the contract, and if so, could that language be expanded to include PIT tagging? He noted that data gathering and evaluation could be implemented by another agency. Brad was not sure about specific language in the contract, however, agreed to ask the contract officer about options for modification and to send the contract to the team. He noted that before exploring options much further, the Corps would like to gain a better understanding of how PIT tags would answer the questions that have been identified for the management objectives. Brad noted that there are limited resources, and the Corps needs to know how this information would be used to evaluate the IM. To provide more detail around the metrics, Anne presented a concept paper that is currently being reviewed and discussed at the RM&E Team.

→ **ACTION: Brad will check with the contract officer about options for modification and send the screw-trapping contract scope of work to the Steering Team.**

Report back from RM&E Team on Purpose & Metrics of PIT Tagging - Anne explained that the intention of the PIT tagging effort would be to try to understand how the IMs can impact life history, timing of out migration, and behavior. She noted that the study concept builds off of previous work done by Schroder, et.al, around “mover and stayers”, and explores how different life-stage strategies would be impacted by the operations. For instance, there is information on the distribution of movers/stayers and if fish are PIT tagged and tracked as they move downstream, more information on the timing and speed of movement will shed light on whether the operations favor certain life-stage strategies (i.e. will lower elevations favor movers or stayers?). Anne noted that the operation may attract movers, and not stayers (who then are left in the reservoir until later), or get some stayers in the spring operations, which would indicate that those fish are benefiting from the operation. If these operations are to be implemented for a period of time, it will be important to know how they are impacting both life strategies of fish. Anne noted that NOAA or another agency could conduct the PIT tag data collection and assessment.

There was interest in whether the Stage 0 restoration project will impact the fish’s decision to stay or move (will the fish see the new habitat and want to stay?). It was noted that this will be a constant signal in the data, regardless of the operation. However, there may be opportunities to partner or share information between the screw-trapping effort and the studies planned for the Stage 0 work.

→ **ACTION: Anne will send the team the study/monitoring plan for the Stage 0 project.**

Ian noted that the Corps is focused on monitoring the IMs and given the region’s interest on spill and impacts to fish, it is important to have a clearly defined study design that will answer the questions and clarify the triggers that impact the operation. He noted concern that the current PIT tag study approach will not provide the level of precision that will allow the Corps to then modify and evaluate the operations. He noted the auxiliary value of tagging the fish, however, did not think that it was enough to inform the operations. Ian suggested that if the need is for more data on passage routes, timing, and reservoir survival, then the RM&E Team should focus on the

Willamette Action Team for Ecosystem Restoration (WATER)

objectives and criteria before identifying the tool to use. Mike noted that the RM&E team started talking about PIT tagging the fish that were already going to be handled as a way to gain more information to inform that broader study need. He also pointed out that methodology needs to be discussed as well, as it is an important consideration and can be informed by the expertise in the region.

As next steps, Anne will continue to incorporate the team's input into the concept revisions and the concept will move through the vetting process. The RM&E and Steering Teams will continue thinking on what is needed to assess passage route, reservoir survival and timing. And the team will continue working together to improve/learn from the planning and preparation for contracting. Brad added that if another agency wants to PIT tag the fish that are handled via the screw-trap, the contract likely could be modified to allow for that in the short term, while the longer-term study needs are being worked on.

Request for multi-year contracts with same contractor - There was concern at the RM&E Team meeting that a single year contract for the screw-trapping work would be disruptive and request for the Corps to consider options to limit transitioning contractors on an annual basis. Some RM&E team members noted concern around losing institutional knowledge and consistency if the contractors change. Additionally, it was noted that the WATER teams frequently talk about contracting and the impacts it has on implementing work. Some felt that contracting is driving the work that can or cannot get done and that if these concerns cannot be addressed at this level, there may be a need to elevate it to the Managers. The group aligned on the need to have any contracting transitions be as seamless as possible and it was suggested that the Corps take on the role of aiding the transition, specifically for screw-trapping, permitting and surrogate fish contracting.

Middle Fork 2021 Decision Point Check-in - Nancy recapped the Steering Team's request (from the February meeting) to the RM&E Team around timing for Middle Fork check-ins. When the RM&E Team started talking about it, they reflected on the current ongoing in the basin and in response, wanted the Steering Team to weigh in on the RM&E decision path. Mike added that the Middle Fork RM&E plan calls for a FY21 decision point, however, since the drafting of the plan, the FY19 check-in was pushed out due to the SDM process, USGS was funded for another year of the desktop exercise, and there is ongoing litigation. Mike pointed out that, due to the circumstances, the region is not at a point to decide on passage. Ian agreed that circumstances have changed since the RM&E plan was drafted. He noted that the 2021 decision point was very specific on whether to launch an EDR, however, now that the Corps is in the NEPA process, it would be pre-decisional to move forward with a passage option prior to NEPA ROD. Additionally, the Corps has received direction that they are not allowed to fund projects that are designing construction. Ian suggested that at this point, the effort should refocus on summarizing the available information and the conversation with the Managers will be around the reality of the situation: this is what we know, this is what we have learned regarding the feasibility of passage, and these are the remaining data gaps. Anne noted that there are actions in the IMs that will provide more information.

→ **ACTION: The RM&E Team will summarize available information/data gaps for a Middle Fork Check-In with the Managers later this year.**

Regional Updates

- **FWS** - Mike shared that the FWS permit for the screw-trapping work is going to take some time, as the request was submitted in February and can take 90-days or more. For future permitting needs, the agencies may want to explore options for how to ensure the permits are applied for with enough time ahead of implementation (i.e. can the Corps apply for the permit and contracts work under the Corps?)
- **BPA, Corps, CTGR, DEQ, NOAA NPCC, and ODFW** did not have additional updates.

For future Steering Team agendas, DS Consulting will include a standing update on the Willamette EIS process, with the intention of sharing information that is pertinent to the WATER process. Ian noted that he will talk with the EIS team regarding what information can be shared in this forum.

Nancy thanked the team for their participation and with that, the meeting was adjourned.

Willamette Action Team for Ecosystem Restoration (WATER)

The next Steering Team meeting will be on April 6, 2021 at 2:00.