

Methow Restoration Council

Teleconference Meeting

April 21, 2020

Participants: Amy Martin (Okanogan Conservation District), Chris Johnson (Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation), Lee Bernheisel (Okanogan Wilderness League), Maddie Eckmann (Yakama Nation), Lynda Hofmann (WDFW), John Crandall (MSRF), Kate Terrell (US Fish and Wildlife Service), Gene Shull (US Forest Service), Pete Teigen (Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board), Allen Lebovitz (WA Department of Natural Resources), Sarah Walker (UCSRB), Matt Young (Colville Tribes), Chris Butler (YN), Steve Kolk (Bureau of Reclamation), Robes Parrish (USFWS), Hannah Coe (OCD), Katy Pfannenstien (USFWS), Andrea Jedel (WA Ecology), Kristen Kirkby (Cascade Fisheries), Alexa Whipple (Methow Beaver Project), Jessica Goldberg (MSRF)

Notes:

Pete Teigen – UCSRB Updates: Currently working on the planned project forecast list as requested by RCO. If you are considering submitting a SRFB application in 2021 or 2022, please let Pete know so that he can include that information on the list. Have taken privacy, etc. into consideration. This is part of the state's effort to go in with a big legislative request for salmon recovery next session. There are mixed signals for what the appetite for salmon funding will be in light of Coronavirus and reduced revenues, but they are trying to include salmon recovery in stimulus efforts.

If you are a project sponsor and you completed any projects in 2019, please go into Habitat Work Schedule (HWS), now known as Salmon Recovery Portal (SRP), and close those projects out. There is a process guide for this under guiding documents on our web site (<https://www.ucsrb.org/mdocs-posts/2020-upper-columbia-hws-guidance/>). If you have questions please contact Pete or Greer. We would like to have that done by May 1

If there is anything that UCSRB can do to help folks during the Coronavirus, let us know. I sent out a draft risk analysis plan for folks to use as a template; this will likely be required by the state after restrictions are lifted. Let me know if you have any questions about what we have talked about today.

We got our draft applications for the SRFB – there are 5 project proposals from Okanogan county, 11 proposals in Chelan County. Working on scheduling virtual site tours in May.

Sarah Walker – an update on the Targeted process for FY 20 dollars: BPA with RTT went through scoring, and we notified sponsors this last Monday. We are starting contracts throughout the region. Hoping to see extra dollars for folks in the region.

Chris Johnson – for the virtual SRFB tours, any ideas for what types of material would make those more effective?

Pete – what I'm gathering from other Lead Entities that have already done this, is that you provide the best photos you can that show the site, upstream/downstream, LiDAR imagery, drone footage where possible, etc. Anything that can help paint a visual picture for the State Review Panel that may not know these areas. I'm working on scheduling things out now, hope to have a draft this week. Sponsors will have more time than the presentations to RTT, probably a lot of Q and A. In other areas there has been a lot of "Need more Information" and comments on lack of clarity, so I'm putting together a list of tips from other areas that have done these virtual tours.

Robes Parrish – I recommend the Google Earth fly in feature if you are lacking drone footage; it gives a moving perspective that is a compelling view

Pete – the two SRP folks this year are Michele Cramer and Paul Schlenger, and they have reviewed projects here before

John Crandall – Prioritization Update: Yesterday we had a meeting to get into Step 2 of the prioritization process for the Methow. There were a number of local folks on the call. Step 2 is all about prioritizing areas for projects and project types in different Assessment Units. Step 1 was looking at priorities for restoration and protection efforts, that is complete; step 2 is looking at life stage priorities for the three species within each AU. Each species is broken out into life stages, spring Chinook and steelhead are basically identical priorities; bull trout a little different. The prioritization covers all of their life history within the basin itself. The AUs get ranked by priority for life stage. A lot is based on expert opinion, there is a dearth of data especially for certain locations, like smaller tributaries where there hasn't been a lot of work, and spawning distribution is key to understanding which life stages are where. We got through that yesterday, with a lot of good participation. Methow was first, by first week of May this should be done for all 4 subbasins. UCSRB is compiling the data for all of these AUs and habitat units. Which is not a small task. One other piece that is important is that the AUs are overlaying a stream shape in the HUC, within the AUs, the stream segments are broken into smaller segments similar to EDT. For the most part, the reaches within the prioritization match up with the reaches in EDT. Fine tuning it is next, it's an ongoing process. We will be meeting as a smaller prioritization group, and we will be prioritizing by reach.

Chris J – the purpose of prioritization is it will help funders BPA, RTT, etc. identify a more consistent way to review projects and target their funding to the regions

John – what you will get is project types within a reach that will have a score attached to project types. There will be areas where certain types of projects within certain areas will be prioritized. It's not a perfect process and we know that, so we will see what funders do with that. It will be the first thing that tries to use the available data on the reaches and the fish populations within them. You could have a high habitat priority in a low priority AU, and that will have a certain type of score, etc. and it's not clear on how that will lead to who funds what. For the long-term view, there is the component of project sequencing, landowner support, and other variables that go along with this. There are a lot of moving parts.

Chris J – what I've heard from BPA is that they are looking for a more transparent way of identifying where to spend their money and explain why certain projects are getting funded.

John – it is bringing in a lot of the information that we have on the ground, identifies what we know and where there are gaps

Robes Parrish – Hydrologic Outlook (Presentation)

As of April 1, the snow water equivalent (SWE) looks pretty good in the our area, and is looking worse in southern Idaho and southern Oregon. We ended the year about normal to somewhat above normal in Washington. The Upper Yakima is the exception. Up in Canada they are also above normal at the headwaters of the Upper Columbia. In CA, in northern CA it is not good for snow pack, in the southern coastal areas they were at above normal precipitation.

In terms of precipitation, we have normal snowpack in most places but we had a very dry fall and so many areas had below normal conditions going into the winter months. In WA we have above normal snowpack on the west side of the crest, but a strong drop in precipitation on the east side; the upper Okanogan is very dry, as are Wenatchee and Yakima. More recently from the end of February, I is uniformly dry everywhere, very dry in the Okanogan and the Wenatchee, and things have trended drier. Omak had 3% of the normal precipitation for March.

From Jan 1st to April 1st there has been very low pressure over the north pole and high pressure over the north Atlantic, the Arctic Oscillation. Positive phase is when we have very cold stormy conditions bottled up in the north, negative phase is more related to the very wavy Jetstream. Very strong arctic oscillation has kept a lot of the storm track bottled up north, which is why we have the dry conditions in our area; there is very strong drought in much of the eastern part of the state.

Three month outlook: we have above normal chances for above normal temperature and below normal precipitation conditions. Winthrop has a 60% chance of above normal temperatures

In terms of runoff, the prediction for the Methow is close to normal, possibly a bit early. Okanogan is looking normal for timing, but below normal for volume.

Robes – in terms of sea surface temperatures, which strongly influence our fish returns, the blob started at the end of 2013, through 2015, things started to moderate in late fall 2016, things stayed moderate through 2017. In 2018 people started talking about the return of the blob, then things moderated in the first half of 2019, but there were very warm conditions that persisted in the north pacific. We had fairly normal sea conditions for the first three months of 2020, which is a good thing, but at the moment, the north pacific is on average about ½ degree C above normal, so warmer than normal conditions still exist, and they don't expect these conditions to change much into the future. We've been in neutral el Niño/la Niña conditions for most of 2019, and they are currently expecting neutral conditions to persist into the fall. However, the models tend to do a poor job of predicting during seasonal transitions (spring/fall), so don't put too much stock in the forecasts. I will send out a pdf of the presentation for Jessica to share; the ocean conditions is a reminder of how difficult our work is.

We have good snowpack up the mountains, runoff forecast is good, so rearing conditions for fish is good

Discussion – fire season, predictions, implications, agencies are concerned and preparing

Gene Shull – the FS is taking a hard look at how to fight fire with COVID restrictions, how to manage it with some level of social distancing. They are looking at potentially increasing aggressiveness of aerial support, fighting fire more aggressively, using more heavy equipment, and fire camps are a big question right now. They are considering not moving resources between regions, which could translate to less resources available. They're looking at ways to reduce the potential for human caused fires; I recommend people fire proof their places this summer, be proactive.

Robes – air resources are already on, and have been used recently in our area

Gene – there was no prescribed fire this year, in order to avoid smoke in OR and WA

Alexa Whipple – I'm wondering about Columbia River conditions in terms of temperature and water levels, and how that might affect fish movement through dams, etc.

Robes – I haven't seen any predictive models that incorporate flow and temperature, in the spring temperature will be strongly influenced by runoff, but as we get to base flow you can see the potential for challenging conditions for fish in mid to late summer

John – WDFW and ODFW have looked at it, and a lot depends on the air temperatures in July and August, temperature outlook is a big driver at low flows. For steelhead they looked at making temperature sanctuaries for the adults moving up by shutting down fishing at the mouths of tributaries. They looked at it, but I'm not sure where it went.

Kristen Kirkby – there was a public comment on that; I think it's still open

Roundtable

Discussion – Salmon Recovery under current restrictions:

Pete – I shared a risk plan example for people to look at, and I got an email from Melody that we're developing one for our organization. Let us know how we can help. I will continue sharing information from RCO and other partners

Chris J – MSRF is doing some work in the field where people can do it individually, we should and will be formalizing plans.

Gene – the Forest service has a couple of people out driving singly, we have heard about it from the public, trying to limit it, we're slowly getting out to the field, looking at different risks

Steve Kolk – Colin has been out surveying by himself, that's about it for us

Kristen – Cascade Fisheries is doing work where we have investments that might be lost. The RFEs have been talking about how to manage bidding, riparian planting plans for existing stock that might be lost

Chris J – the contractors that we're using for riparian qualify as essential if the stock is on hand and may be lost

Pete – for the essential vs non-essential, my understanding is that RCO is allowing sponsors to determine whether their activity is essential based on the governor's guidance, they are not doing individual assessments of what is essential

Matt Young – CTCR is fairly restricted in terms of field work, but we are still meeting contractual obligations as required

Chris Butler – the YN is similar; we're restricted and trying to meet the guidelines as possible, we're moving forward as if we will be able to get out this summer and do work, and for bids we're attempting to do virtual walk through tours. The idea is to put up as many pictures as possible with the designs and go into as much details as possible

Chris J – we're going to be doing the same thing this summer

Chris B – We don't have any construction planned in the Methow, but projects are planned down in the Wenatchee this summer

Allen Lebovitz – I'm on the Lower Columbia Technical Advisory Committee, and our virtual (SRFB) tours went quite well, pretty smoothly, so it is possible and in some ways more efficient than being in the field.

Chris J – I've had 2 calls this week about gates being left open and trespass onto lands. Talked to adjacent property owners about putting up game cameras, I guess it's not surprising that people are taking advantage of people not being present

Pete – regarding the Okanogan Outreach funding – the UCSRB board is meeting this Thursday and will decide on that; we will try to be flexible. We will be doing another solicitation this summer for next year. We're in the middle of a biennium so the funding is a little more flexible

Amy Martin - We're starting to see effects related to state funding in a year or two out

Since we're limited with site visits now, the impacts are more likely in a couple years. However, agriculture related projects are considered essential. State agencies are being requested to cut budgets or return unspent funds.

Pete – we're all in the same boat, and if people keep us in the loop that would be helpful. It is a very dynamic situation.

Kristen – the hardest thing for the field season is trying to anticipate when a start date could happen, how people will use vehicles; in the Okanogan we have a barrier crew that we're waiting to see what will happen with

Gene – we've developed COVID risk assessments and are trying to figure out ways to mitigate those.

Looking at minimizing the number of people in the car, use bigger rigs where possible. We're struggling with it, people with field crews are working on some ideas; I could put you in contact with our rec program lead

Chris J – we've been having people using their individual rigs, and getting over the whole carpool notion

Gene – we have also been authorized to use personal vehicles and get paid mileage for the summer because we don't have that many rigs

Pete –for projects that are SRFB funded, we can do amendment requests for potential cost increases, but there may or may not be enough money to help folks out

Matt – has anyone been looking at contract extensions moving funds out?

Chris J – we have been looking at extending our BPA contracts, we’re looking at how many projects we can get done; it’s a balancing act. It makes sense to talk with all of our project funders

Kristen – for education, we’ve been working with teachers to identify needs for lesson options for teachers to send home, we’ve been shifting funding to try to help create resources, if you have any interest connect with Kristen

John – I updated for the outreach and education plan, and will send that out through Jessica

Gene – I will get some of our COVID risk assessment out to folks

Amy – we’ve worked TU with our irrigation efficiencies program for the Barkley project, it’s a cost share program through Ecology, and it is a pretty good source of funding if you need to fill in gaps.

Chris J – is there a percentage of stream flow, or is it open?

Amy – there is a percentage, but I don’t have it at hand, a portion of the water savings does have to be trusted; I can follow up with you with the requirements

Chris J – we’re looking at two potential construction projects, depending on contractor interest and budget. We may be doing a project at the Barkley Bear habitat, and a late season action at the area around the Sugar Reach

Kristen – we’re doing some last edits on the results of the barrier prioritization, and will have that ready for review and comment. It’s based on the framework for the Wenatchee; I may present at next MRC, if you have specific questions about barriers let me know

Pete – the Fish Barrier Removal Board didn’t get any applications from the Methow this round; it could be a good opportunity next year so look at the list

Matt – yesterday at the prioritization meeting, when we were talking about Goat Creek and PIT tag arrays, as a follow up on that I talked to WDFW and there were no adult hits on the upper array, the hits were on the lower array near the mouth

John – we’re entering the summer season, with the issue of play dams in the river, pretty amazing architectural constructions in the creek; need to be aware where the trouble spots, and having a campaign to post things before people are camping

Robes – the mid-Columbia fisheries group has a crew they hire every year to do dam amelioration and they do outreach as well, may be good to reach out to them and see about ideas for mitigation

Kristen – they get funding from the bull trout working group; we’ve put things forward before but didn’t get funding

Kate Terrell – try the recovery office through USFWS, call Sierra there

Pete – it could be appropriate through the Okanogan Outreach

Kristen – the timing of that funding makes it tricky

Gene – we still have a lot of old materials/signs that could be put out, we don’t have funding to pay for someone designated to do that , but we could help to some degree through our existing rec program. I would like to be involved

Matt – we saw a lot fewer pushup dams in the years when the campground hosts were really educated on the problems with pushup dams

Pete – Okanogan Outreach grant could pay for materials

Lynda Hofmann – I have some signs from past drought efforts that I could donate or put up if you tell me where

Chris B – would be good at River Right

John – I would be peppering the campgrounds where we have fish and low water

Chris J – at Whitefish or WDFW would be good places too

Jessica – if we have an MRC meeting next month it will likely be via teleconference only again. If you have agenda items or topics you would like to have a discussion or presentation on, please let me know.

John – I will bring back the paper of the month in future MRC meetings

Next MRC Meeting May 19