

Methow Restoration Council

October 15, 2019

Participants

Name	Organization/Affiliation
Chris Johnson	MSRF
Crystal Elliot	TU
Eireann Pederson	USFS
Gene Shull	USFS
Greer Maier	UCSRB
Greg Knott	MWC
Hans Smith	Yakama Nation
Jessica Goldberg	MSRF
Joe Connor	BPA
Katy Pfannenstein	USFWS
Kristen Kirkby	CCFEG
Lee Bernheisel	OWL
Maddie Eckmann	Yakama Nation
Matt Young	Colville Tribes
Pete Teigen	UCSRB
Steve Kolk	Reclamation
Susan Crampton	Public

UCSRB Updates

Greer Maier –If you are planning to go to the Science Conference, [registration](#) is open. If you can't pay the fee, enter zero, if you can pay that really helps us. You can get a refund up to January 15th. We are also doing a film festival. If you have a film, send it to Barb or to me. Also looking for drone footage that we can share, we would be interested in showing that during the breaks. We are still looking for sponsors, exhibitors, and donations for the silent auction.

Some of you will be there this week for the stage zero workshop. A big group is coming up from the Oregon Forest Service; it should be a great training, an opportunity to share information. Will cover this gradeline tool approach. If you haven't registered and plan to go, please do so I can set up the room and transportation.

MaDMC and RTT Updates: Prioritization – the RTT moved ahead with Step 1; I want to thank Brian Fisher for his comments. We received three sets of comments, from Cascadia, MSRF, and BPA, and the workgroup met to address comments. We were able to adopt some of his suggested changes to the scoring criteria and address some of Brian's concerns, still some concerns with alluvial fans. The workgroup is moving on to step 2, which is limiting factors at the life stage scale. May be a workshop at the watershed level. We are populating information and then go back to the region to discuss. We have EDT, fish data, lots of information to identify which life stage is limiting, good to understand where that information is coming from. Discussion will probably be in December.

MaDMC – they met last Friday, had a good conversation about data gaps and what they want to do for upcoming SRFB round, they will discuss further in December. If you are considering putting forward a monitoring or assessment project, talk to Pete. They also discussed the Columbia Basin Habitat RME

strategy through BPA, Power Council. They will be coming up in December, if you are interested where RME funded by BPA might be going I encourage you to attend that meeting. We will be engaging and MadMC will also, I will send out the information about the meeting when it comes out. Email Greer if you want to get a copy of the draft RME strategy

The Fish Barrier Removal Board for Watershed Pathway Process – the UCSRB board has reviewed and approved the process; the previous watershed was Johnson Creek in the Okanogan. The process is that the RTT barrier work group will review existing information including the CCFEG barrier info and prioritization info. They will review information and criteria – it has to be a high priority watershed for recovery and there has to be a need for dedicated funding for a few years – and then they will make a recommendation to the board and full RTT. They will also review other information and the RTT will make a recommendation to board of directors on which watershed will be forwarded to WDFW. In 2014 Johnson Creek was a perfect fit/need for this funding. One of the hitches in the process is that WDFW has moved up the timeline, so we will have to go through these stages quickly to meet that timeline. We have a lot of new information from the barrier assessment. Casey might ask WDFW for an extension for us in the process. No changes to the coordinated pathway. If anyone has a barrier project I recommend that you look at using this process. It is a really good funding source for addressing barriers. This process is for the coordinated pathway, but sponsors can also go directly to the Fish Barrier Removal Board. They have a great website, Casey Baldwin is our representative there. This will probably be on the agenda for the December RTT meeting, may not be enough time for sponsors. If it's moving fast it's because we are trying to catch up with their new process timeline (January 15).

Upper Columbia Regional Evaluation Draft Work Plan

Melody Kreimes – it's been 12 years since we started implementing our Recovery Plan. The Board would like to check in with partners to hear what we might be doing to improve the structure. Roles of WATs, IT, etc. BEF has partnered with us to provide some funding for this, also they are helping to fund the Biological Strategy update. Board approved the proposed action plan this week, starting with information collection at standing meetings and also a survey for people not at meetings to get feedback on the process. What the process looks like is totally up to the groups to help us craft that, and then we will implement the process.

Chris Johnson – I think this would be a good opportunity to redefine the partners that need to be collaborated with. Some engagement likely hasn't happened, so there may be people who feel that their voices haven't been incorporated. It would be good to know who we may have left off and give them an opportunity to come to the table.

Melody – we would start with some background material and would like to avoid rehashing too many things. I will add the Watershed planning units, are there other forums we should add?

Lee Bernheisel – there are a lot of environmental legal forums, legal review of water, etc., that have often been left out of the picture because they are controversial. There are several that have been active here, something that fisheries group often don't get into, how a water right would relate to a fish. CELP, Earth Justice

Chris – that's a reason I suggested the Watershed Planning groups, as those groups are focusing on water rights. We have a unique opportunity to connect fish groups with watershed planning working on their responsibilities under Hurst.

Steve Kolk – do we know what the future of watershed planning is?

Chris – in the Okanogan there is some funding to reengage watershed planning to offset in response to Hurst. The Methow is ahead of that, but is setting up a foundation to move on to the next step. The Methow Planning Unit made an intentional determination not do work on habitat, which led to creation of the MRC. They are now working on how to integrate with the WAT.

Steve – I was thinking statewide

Chris – there is a limited amount of state funding. Currently there is a focus on groups that had failed to get an adopted plan – that has how the Okanogan regrouped to try to accomplish something. They are trying to get the noncompliant groups compliant first.

Lee – there is a very limited amount of funding for enforcement of what we already have; the legislature doesn't give the state enough money to enforce, leaving it to outside groups. There are some funds to look at adjudications to look at what may happen in the future. The state has given some money to groups, but leaving it up to the locals to develop the plans that they then have to approve. We've been in limbo in the Methow since 2002

Chris – in Okanogan we have a really strong advisory group that includes tribes, WDFW, and some money to get some science. May signal some changes for Okanogan county.

Susan – how do small local groups like MVCC and Methow Conservancy fit in? There is some separation between legal groups and the smaller conservation groups.

Chris – there has been some coordination, we have a lot of good off-record communications

Melody – what are other thoughts on this idea? Will be interested to hear what the group thinks we need; I have things that are on my radar, statewide issues. Want to hear from partners on what areas we focus on

Chris – Robert Warren with BEF is a good person to help with the outreach. I met with an engaged group of landowners last night that are looking at the rivers very differently than we look at rivers. We've had a series of high flows in the last few years after a period without any, and now the river is a bogeyman again. We aren't allowed to care about what they're interested in and they're not interested in what we're interested in. One feedback/comment I got was that we were only supposed to be here for 10-12 years, so why are we still here? We need to have a good answer to that.

Lee – think there is a great need for greater involvement from the tribes; they were very involved in the 1980s and brought a new perspective. An undercurrent of people here who would like to close the door; involvement of the native people here because of fish is very important. By legislation they've been excluded from some of the groups like the watershed units. There are people who don't want development, but those people often don't have a good voice

Chris – having the right people/stakeholders in the room is important

Melody – BEF funding is for one year, but we have a potential for additional funding for whatever may come out of this process. One of the nice things with BEF is that they commit to a longer process.

Steve – we have also had discussions about this, having someone from the outside take a look can be very helpful

Melody – we can use contractors if want

Chris – we did a process with MRC to use a contractor to identify issues between partners; that process really amplified divisions; a facilitated group hug may not improve things.

Melody – for starters I would like to keep it simple and use what we already have, would like to hear what people think.

Lee – most of the resource groups are in tune with the needs of fish, but not so in tune with what you can and can't do in terms of the needs of fish. The more knowledge that the regional groups have about the legal side of water rights would be helpful.

Discussion – landowners are hard to reach, fatigued; may get more response from one on one rather than in meetings; getting feedback on the issues that people have identified will likely be helpful; this isn't intended to trigger a recovery plan update or revision

Twisp Restoration Project

Gene Shull –District Fish Bio for Methow and Tonasket Ranger Districts

Eireann Pederson – District Silviculturalist

Gene – we are giving a snapshot of the new landscape restoration project that the district is working on. We finished NEPA for the Mission project, and the Twisp Restoration Project is our next project. The Twisp is a much more important watershed for fisheries. We hope to get a little feedback, ideas of things we didn't think of. Next month we will be doing our scoping for NEPA, trying to get everything we can in that we can.

Chris – how is the Twisp restoration project working with DNR?

Eireann – we have met with the other ownerships; we are planning on working across boundaries, and anything we do with federal dollars will need to be included in the scope.

Gene - The Wyden agreement allows us to spend federal dollars on private land as part of our treatment strategy; it allows us to work with DNR and others

Project area boundaries includes a big chunk of the Twisp River, also some of Thompson Ridge, Rader Ridge and Wolf Creek. It does not include Buttermilk because that was part of the Mission Project
Eireann – we're following our Okanogan Wenatchee Forest Restoration Strategy, Ecosystem Management Decision Support Process (EMDS). It tells us where we are departed from the historic conditions and then we try to move the landscape to the desired future condition. Roads, vegetation, past disturbances all included.

Proposed vegetation/fuels treatments

- Commercial harvest
- Non-commercial thinning
- Prescribed fire
- Machine piling/burn

Gene – the FS is working on developing our proposed action. Condition-based NEPA, talking about conditions rather than treatments, working to define acres; we want to get through NEPA without exact treatments described; rather, we are looking at available tools.

Crescent Mt. Fire – it burned about 54k acres within the Twisp River Watershed last year. Overall the fire severity wasn't that bad compared to other fires we've had. Looked at both soil burn severity and vegetation burn severity. Estimated post fire impacts include elevated stream temps, peak flows and wood recruitment, and coarse and fine sediment levels. Used modeling based on satellite imagery and then they go out and ground truth. Soils 15% unburned, veg 23% unburned; majority in low to moderate severity.

We've had a few areas with small debris flows near Williams creek and Scaffold Camp Creek. We had a pretty low runoff this spring, after an average snowpack, but we had a very dry fall and the theory is that the spring runoff went to recharging the groundwater. It will be interesting to see how the sediment levels change.

Scaffold Camp Creek, War Creek, Williams Creek, Reynolds Creek, lower part of North Creek all burned

Chris – we are interested in the treatment actions that will be included in the scoping

Eireann – yes

Gene – War Creek had some of the highest burn severity, Scaffold Creek as well. There is largely a lot of low to medium severity, but it could be a lot worse. After about five years it will be close to being back to pre-fire conditions in terms of soil effects. Vegetation severity was much worse than soil; we lost a lot of riparian area, and we will get a lot of wood, which will increase solar radiation. It will take decades to get back that vegetation, but there will also be fewer straws of vegetation pulling groundwater, so we expect only a small effect to temperature

Chris – do we expect that in five years we might be in a better position for fish than pre-fire?

Gene – I think so, we will get increase in wood. The effects of the parallel roads will be episodic. Hopefully we will get some gravels in there as well. We may see something similar to what we saw after the Thirtymile fire where we saw a big increase in complexity; that was mostly in the wilderness, but we are hoping to boost the benefits

Susan Crampton – can you speak about the shrubs, bushes – they look like they're coming back

Gene – if you've been out there and looked at the hillsides, it's pretty amazing that the understory is rebounding very quickly – fireweed, alders, etc. Areas where we had moderate burn severity will help stabilize hillslopes faster. We will see.

We expect mostly positive effects. We could get some more sediment; fortunately the baseline of sediment is low, so the Twisp River can probably handle it. We selected the Twisp River before the fire, and we've now done a lot of course corrections. We changed how we look at the vegetation treatment, how we look at roads. We want to allow the natural processes to happen and not exacerbate any effects. We might do some timing delays to allow the system to recover a bit.

Chris – habitat projects have gone in with wood structures that were designed with the pre-fire wood loading regime; I'm curious if we have a reset. There could be a disconnect.

Gene – we've walked almost the whole section of the Twisp River from South Creek down this summer, we have GPS coordinates on every new piece. There were less than 10 pieces that were new over several miles

Matt Young – but there are many burnt pieces along the margins that will likely fall in

Gene – true, when we look at putting wood in, we will factor that in. I think the lower part of the Twisp will still be limited in wood.

Chris – we may want to decide if we are putting in Velcro or smooth wood, in terms of creating a problem problems for ourselves

Gene – we are hoping that when we put in wood it will be longer pieces from on site. We are using a lot of tools and data collection that we haven't had in the past

- YN collected physical habitat data on the Twisp River and tributaries up to barriers, really up to date stream survey data; also collecting data on Wolf Creek
- Colville Tribe collected fish data, used LiDAR, H2O data, discharge
- Fish barrier Assessment by CCFEG
- Complete road condition survey, assessment of where we have road issues, which ones that we may not need that are high risk vs ones that we definitely want to keep
- Full project area LiDAR through the UCSRB and DNR, huge help in developing a baseline condition for the project; mapped the CMZ and then verified in the field. Also brought in aquatic soils and overlaid that, then used the standard riparian reserve area, which all together gave us the most accurate picture of the stream locations and riparian reserve layer that we have ever had. Also a tool for looking at where we have natural wood accumulation, areas of connected and disconnected floodplains

Gene – the watershed condition framework looks at thing like percent of Forest Service ownership, fish species; areas that have listed fish that have heavier human influence with a higher potential to do landscape projects that can move the needle. This is how we got here. Little Bridge creek has the highest degree of impairment and the highest T&E importance.

We have a number of tools, including the updated Biological Strategy, Limiting Factors analysis, habitat surveys, and local knowledge. Protection is a priority in Upper Twisp and Wolf Creek.

Twisp River – restoration from Biological Strategy

- Reconnect Side channels/wetlands
- Install LWD/complexity
- Restore riparian function
- Reduce sediment impacts from roads
- Increase primary productivity

Objectives

- Protect high quality habitat
- Increase channel complexity
- Reduce artificial sediment delivery/road impacts
- Improve riparian function/resilience
- Increase natural water storage/wetland habitat through beaver site enhancement/BDA's
- Restore fish passage/stormproof road network; Not a lot of roads that aren't primary, so not too much can do with removal
- Increase primary productivity
- Protect bull trout spawning

Gene – for channel complexity/re-connecting side channels, there are a lot of areas that we have limited flows, so we need to talk about whether it is better to keep water into one channel and keep habitat available.

Chris – we need to make sure there is a good discussion on what can be done to keep water in those side channels

Gene – the Twisp River is low in wood levels compared to desired future conditions (have 15-40, but we would like to have 105-172 pieces per mile), so looking to have heavy wood treatment; pool habitat is low, so trying to increase from 6-26% total habitat to 50 to 80% of total habitat; floodplain connection is fair but areas are lacking connection from downcutting, so we are looking to improve these conditions.

Chris – I will be interested in seeing how permitting goes

Gene – we are looking at treating from South Creek to above War Creek on the Twisp River, looking at areas where we can get benefit from putting wood in. We are also looking at Little Bridge Creek and Wolf Creek, and Poorman Creek. Poorman we are looking at putting roughness in to keep the cows out, put some wood in to trap sediment. Buttermilk Creek drainage is not included because it was in the Mission project. The effects of the fire are that it is delaying some of the treatment options identified. The burn severity in Buttermilk creek was mostly low, some patches of high at the lower section. We had proposed to do some streamside tree felling, but we will go back and count the wood first. For wood treatments, look at hand felling along the creek, potentially some helicopter work, looking for placing in key locations, not engineered or buried, in some places put in so that it can be carried downstream into natural positions, and also looking at some ELJs in the banks. In Wolf Creek mostly hand falling trees, tricky getting in with equipment

Discussion – no work planned in the wilderness due to difficulty in getting things approved

Gene – road work will be focused in Little Bridge Creek, which is a really important steelhead stream, but we will be looking at culverts and fish barriers throughout.

Crystal Elliot – you may want to mention the funding issue

Gene – Yes. This landscape restoration plan is to look at it as a restoration process, however, we don't have money for any of these actions yet. We develop the shelf stock, and then we can work with partners. At this point we don't have any funding for any of the work, but we are assuming that the YN

and CTCR will have funding to do the projects that they are proposing. Our NEPA timeline is that we plan to have the EA done in 2021, and may be able to implement things that fall, and then start in 2022 and beyond

Chris – because of the fire, are the culvert issues identified post fire?

Gene – last fall we did a BAER process, and part of that was to identify where we have potential issues with roads; we are looking at some of these roads with a post-fire filter. Our standard for upsizing a culvert, based on modeling for a 100-year flow event. When I can push for a bigger crossing I do, maybe look at a ford/dip.

Melody – with regard to funding, the RCO/SRFB is looking for a forecast look for upcoming need so that they can go ask the legislature for additional funding. MRC could put a forecasted list out there, and show the need in a high priority watershed

Chris – would we need to do a crosswalk with the RTT's prioritization?

Melody – no it would be independent. The due date is August 2020

Discussion – permitting on USFS land projects, partners would need to get HPA, but FS can handle 404/401, cultural

Gene – we're including artificial beaver dams, possibly modifying existing beaver dams, fencing, and releasing beavers, creating habitat to put beavers in.

Chris – having beavers there for the purpose of keeping late season water in the floodplain

Gene – one of the things that came up from the services during Mission was the question of whether the beaver dams create fish barriers. Generally they don't, but during certain low water conditions they can. Maintaining late season access is a priority. NMFS recommendation is to not put BDAs that are full spanning within spawning habitat, so we will look for opportunities in side channels and how to design the structures so that they don't create barriers

Chris – and not design them to withstand the 100-year flood

Gene – improve riparian function – we will look for opportunities, hands off in sensitive areas

Nutrient enhancement – possible treatment, looking for input/data

Kristen – there is some data from the Twisp

Gene – wondering what people think about that, and whether someone might be interested in working with us on that

Estimated project planning completed 2021, estimated implementation can start as early as summer 2021. Looking for partners.

Chris – the best thing for partners would be to spend some time with you before the scoping announcement

Gene – with any new projects, it is better if we can get it in in the next week or two; it doesn't need much detail, can be limited in detail. Can happen on private land, but it has to benefit the resources on our land, benefits to salmon make it easier to make the link. We need to talk this week or early next week. Everything I showed today is on the Forest, ideally we would put in anything additional now, can put it in later but it is harder, working across boundaries for hazard fuel removal can be included

Steve – are there particular actions or contributions that you are searching for?

Gene – we've moved beyond the era of getting our own money to do design in-house, so we're looking for partners that are interested in doing a treatment that have funding for design and construction.

Different possibilities within that, we would be involved in the design, creating new paths to do that. FS review is in-kind. We don't need funding for FS involvement

Discussion – FS capacity for partnering

Gene – we are working on developing frameworks for working with partners, our time is prioritized at the Forest level. I think that because this project is a priority to implement I would get the green light to work on it.

Chris – will each project sponsor need an MOU to work with you? We have short funding cycles...

Crystal – project agreements with the Forest is a long process... There is a backup at the Supervisor's grants and agreements office. There has been a big push to organize that at a high level. I think that is coalescing now; short answer is that you do have to have that agreement in place, maybe a way to get everyone under one agreement. This is something we should talk about. If we can get all of the partners and all of the actions under one agreement that would be best; maybe we can do an MRC or UCSRB agreement, with scopes of work that can be added as addenda later.

Gene – for scoping it is vague, but we will need detail later. If you can push for some kind of programmatic agreement process that would be great. We are working on a programmatic NEPA

Crystal – there is talk of using water storage from BDAs for out of basin use; this is something that TU does not support. I would encourage partners to reach out to the Department of Ecology to express their opinion

Joe Connor – do you have materials that you can supply for the projects?

Gene – we have trees, can potentially use trees on site, or potentially have a harvest unit. We also have rock quarries. And we have all of the funding for the NEPA planning, and for some of the permitting. We have designs for road decommissioning.

Round Table

Group Decision – No Round Table Segment due to lack of time

Next MRC November 19