

Methow Restoration Council

September 15, 2020

Meeting Notes

Participants: Hannah Coe (Okanogan Conservation District), Katy Pfannenstein (USFWS), Ryan Niemeyer (UCSRB), Pete Teigen (UCSRB), Crystal Elliot (TU), Steve Kolk (Reclamation), Melody Kreimes (UCSRB), Charlie Snow (WDFW), Jarred Johnson (Yakama Nation), John Crandall (MSRF), Jamie Cleveland (BPA), Jessica Goldberg (MSRF)

Prioritization Update

Ryan Niemeyer: I was hired by UCSRB in January, and came in at the Step 2 part of the reach prioritization. It started at the HUC 12 spatial scale, and we developed a tool to identify RTT priority actions at the reach scale

Step 2 has been going on for almost a year, started in November 2019. The team has been developing the different criteria and pathways. Watershed workgroups met in April, July, and September. There are three pathways for the prioritization.

Habitat quality pathway: we had priority reaches, looked first at unconfined reaches, used DEM layer to identify unconfined vs. confined reaches. Most of the data we then took was from reach assessments and we also used USFS Level 2 surveys, around 45 across the Upper Columbia, and the Methow has around 12. We rated the unconfined reaches, looked at habitat quality indicators, and gave a percentage of impaired. Priority reaches were then identified, with unconfined score of 4 or 5 (we are looking for habitats that are not currently functional and also not too impaired) for habitat quality, identified habitat priorities, then based on the attributes identified habitat action categories that would improve the habitats.

Limiting factors pathway: high priority life stages were identified, and then limiting factors for those life stages. We looked for reaches where the life stage is present, looked at habitat requirements and whether they are unacceptable, and then used that to identify habitat action priorities.

The third pathway is the fish passage pathway: the Methow Barrier Assessment is being integrated, tiered areas from assessment, prioritized based on limiting factors for spring chinook and steelhead.

Project Identification – this is the crosswalk between pathways, habitat attributes, and action categories for those attributes. From action categories, the next step is to identify action types for each category. Across the UC, there were more than 2000 projects, but filtered them down based on priority areas, so they are whittled down to about 40 for areas where there are reach assessments.

Discussion – the whittled down project number seems very low; not clear whether they filtered out projects identified in older reach assessments that already have been completed; there could be more projects in areas where there aren't any RAs, we could increase the range of scores that are included which would increase the number of projects

Ryan – the tool is flexible; we can make the filter to increase the number of projects

Pete Teigen – my understanding is that the smaller number represents the highest priority projects, not the only projects, and it can be expanded to give another suite of projects

Melody Kreimes – there is so much data in this, I'm not concerned that it will be narrowing the field, John Crandall is in the trenches on this with the data review, and ideally we like to have a workgroup member during these calls.

Ryan – also RAs go back 10 years, but there have been fires, so there have been changes that the workgroup is considering.

Upcoming meetings – the prioritization workgroup is meeting today, then watershed workshops – Methow is on the 23rd, then RTT meeting on October 14th. Priorities can be tweaked later, and in subsequent years as needed

Pete – we will also host a regional prioritization workshop at the end of October, to show the tool and answer questions that people have. If you have specific thoughts about the agenda for that email UCSRB staff. We want to make the tool user friendly, and want to figure out the best way to implement the tool. Goals include tracking priority projects, foster collaboration, and identify challenges to implementation.

Where we are at is identifying how it could work: where to input the actions (also who and when will do that) – we could use Salmon Recovery Portal

Discussion – SRP is not used by project sponsors except to enter projects when requested, SRP is connected to PRISM, RCO is working hard to improve SRP, becoming more useful than in the past, has projects and metrics, tool accessible on data tool on UCSRB portal

Pete – we track projects through the Implementation Schedule annually, and report to NOAA. In the current Implementation Schedule, we have project types, Ecological Concerns, Assessment Units, possibly in the future would add action categories, action types, etc. also we can add feasibility ratings.

Feasibility criteria – this was initially called Step 3, but then through feedback we determined that this was best left with the WATs. We need to discuss the criteria – land ownership constraints, land use constraints, cost effectiveness, probability of success, regulatory constraints, societal issues

Pete – Do sponsors think that high/medium/low or a numerical rating be more palatable?

Jarred Johnson – high medium low generally gives you what you are looking for, that is what we use in our RAs,

Steve Kolk – what is the intent of having probability of success in here? I think of feasibility is whether you can implement, probability of success doesn't seem to play into that

Discussion – this came from RTT, and it could impact whether it would be supported for funding, whether a project is a good idea

Steve – feasibility seems separate, whether an action seems likely to have intended outcome seems to figure in to biological benefit

Pete – it could be captured in something else

Steve – doesn't make sense to have whether something is feasible as a feasibility criteria

Pete – if people can think about these things and give feedback that would be helpful; whether the list is redundant, criteria and rating system will be iterative

We will have more opportunities to discuss implementation, at WATs in Sept/Oct, the regional workgroup, WATs/IT/UCSRB

Pete – if people have questions about Implementation, please reach out to UCSRB staff

SRFB Process Discussion

Pete Teigen: one of the topics for discussion is virtual vs. in person site tours. This year we were forced into virtual tours, and I got nothing but positive feedback. Virtual tours have been discussed for several years at the state level, and they were a recommendation from the RCO Lean Study for efficiencies/savings. This year was a good beta test for folks. Reviewers gave positive feedback, said they gave an opportunity to see projects from a different perspective, and that a birds eye view is a good way to help folks understand. There was still additional discussion about value of in person tours, and the social part is important, but also that some sites benefit from being on the ground. Using many virtual tours could be a way to be more efficient, but for some projects particularly there is some value to being on the ground, so I'm looking for suggestions on criteria for how to decide which sites would be visited
Jessica – potentially sites that had been visited recently by the majority of reviewers could be virtual

Steve – coming up with criteria is difficult, and that criteria may vary by project; will depend on the project

Pete – project types could also be a filter

Discussion – culverts, passage criteria seem straightforward, but people may want to see how the stream interacts, but it is also true that sometimes people second guess projects when they are on site, project sponsors with multiple projects could be limited to a certain maximum number of projects to visit in person per round

Pete – what about drone imagery?

Hannah Coe – funding is a barrier for us; this is already a lengthy and costly process, adding drone imagery was not feasible, but if it could be funded instead of SRP visits, that would be helpful

Pete – for lengthy sites, it does seem to help. Cost has been something that Lead Entities have brought up for drones, it does allow people to have the birds eye view but it does get expensive.

Steve – an issue that we often run into is the cost and effort that goes into conceptual development. It takes money to develop good projects; it is an area of project development that doesn't get enough attention. We need more resources to be put towards the development of projects. It sounds like what we are trying to do is cheapen the upfront process, but I am saying that is not the time to cut costs without justification. These are the times when decisions are made affecting hundreds of thousands of dollars. If a project is worth seeing then it is worth seeing and you should take the time that is required. We may need more time, and I'm not sure that it is the sponsors that should make the determine who goes to the site, people making the investment should have a big say in what they go see.

Pete – it is unknown what the State Review Panel is going to recommend and what they will do going forward. We may not have a whole lot of say, we can track and give guidance. If you have thoughts or comments please let me know and I'll keep folks informed

Paper of the Month

John Crandall: this month we have one from the Canadian Journal of Fisheries: *Impact of in-stream restoration structures on salmonid abundance and biomass: an updated meta-analysis*. This paper is by Foote, Biron, and Grant out of Concordia University. They took a look at the effectiveness of instream restoration, specifically types of structures to promote increased survival and productivity of target fish. They did a meta-analysis, the power comes through increasing sample size, but there is also a dilution in terms of location, types of structures, and species. The overall message is that instream structures do increase productivity. The timeframe was pretty long, around 30-40 years. Things have changed overall in the last few decades, getting away from weirs and deflector structures, now using more wood and natural material. A lot of this type of work is not really processed based; it is a systematic treatment to treat symptoms of a larger scale issue to increase growth and survival of the species that we are interested in.

They looked at a lot of different species' response; you can look at those relationships in the paper. They also looked at the longevity of the monitoring and the structures. There were few examples where the monitoring lasted more than 5 years, so few were long-term. Also, a lot of the structures didn't last very long. So a non-processed based treatment goes in and then doesn't last very long, so the benefits do not persist. As we put resources in to doing habitat restoration is that they have a time frame, something to consider is to have something that is a little more resilient to have a better return on the investment. So structures are doing good things, but there is more to consider.

A follow up on Prioritization

[John came over from the prioritization workgroup call – meeting concurrently - for the Paper of the Month segment, and added the following to the previous discussion on Prioritization]

John: this prioritization process will help project sponsors and funders figure out what to do and where. We want it to make sense, and we're on the right path, but it's not perfect. The projects identified in reach assessments that have already gone in have not been well captured unless there is post project data collection that would feed into the tool. That is something that will have to be rectified for the tool.

Round Table

Charlie Snow – WDFW: we are conducting surveys, having the forest closures affects them but we don't have that now. We hope to have the smoke clear by the end of the week. Spring Chinook abundance is low, and we are having a hard time finding carcasses. This week we will be over the hump for the peak of spawning. This week and next week good weeks for finding carcasses. We will be transitioning off to bull trout spawning in the next few weeks

Hannah Coe – OCD: we're dealing with post fire stuff in the Okanogan. The recent fire went through an area of some planned plantings, but they did keep it away. Lots of post fire recovery will be needed up on the flats, many of the same areas affected as in the Okanogan Complex

Katy Pfannenstien – USFWS: Robes and I are coming up to Hancock next week, we are able to come but have to travel in separate vehicles

Pete Teigen – UCSRB: we had 5 applications for the Okanogan County outreach grant. We are working on getting contracts developed with partners that received funding. The WA Salmon Coalition normally has a retreat at this time of year and prior to COVID were planning on going to Hancock this October, people were very sad because they were going to stay at Sun Mountain and go out. Hopefully they will reschedule

Jessica Goldberg: Following up on some topics that we had discussed at the last meeting as potential topics for today: Gene Shull was unable to attend today but he let me know that the EA for the Twisp Project has not yet been signed, so he's not able to give a presentation on that yet. Also, Kristen Kirkby had a conflict today, so she will give her planned presentation on Hancock at a future date.

Next MRC October 20