

Methow Restoration Council

September 21, 2021

Participants: Kate Terrell (USFWS), Maddie Eckmann (Yakama Nation), Tracy Bowerman (UCSRB), Chris Johnson (MSRF), Jamie Cleveland (BPA), Kristen Kirkby (Cascade Fisheries), Jarred Johnson (YN), Matt Young (Colville Tribes), Jessica Goldberg (MSRF)

Notes:

RTT Review of Design Projects

Tracy Bowerman – UCSRB: the RCO, RTT, & CAC have expressed interest in giving additional feedback on SRFB design projects to provide earlier feedback before sponsor comes back with a design project. This year some of the designs were so preliminary that CAC struggled to rank them, RTT has expressed similar concerns with how difficult it is to score a design project. Looking feedback from the WATs, project sponsors. Could be as informal as a check in, allows sponsors to address concerns early in the design process. Could be optional, RCO willing to provide additional funding to allow for design check in, would have to be written in the design process.

Chris Johnson – MSRF: I appreciate the RTT as a review body, making sure that the projects are focused on the actions in the reaches that they think are appropriate. There has been a tussle for years between CAC and RTT, and can't help but see this as RTT as having a redo, see RTT as having a different role than the CAC. Worried about how RTT would evaluate projects that they already have disagreement with CAC on. Suggest that other review bodies, including SRP, Trib have a role

Tracy – this year the two projects the RTT had questions about were the same two that the CAC and the SRP had questions about, but that is good feedback.

Chris – agree that if all three groups have concerns that it is a good idea

Kate Terrell – USFWS: I think you are overreacting, Chris. This is an issue that has happened for years, which is that when design projects come to RTT for review, it is difficult to review and assess biological benefit at the conceptual point. Some sponsors come in for review later, but many do not. It would be helpful to have the sponsors come in and receive feedback early in the process, which will help create a better project. The purpose is not to override the CAC, but to create a better project in the end.

Kristen Kirkby – CF: one of the challenges we have come across is that sometimes there isn't consensus from the RTT on feedback, so I'm wondering whether it would be recommendations or requirements, and how to handle disparate feedback/opinions

Tracy – that came up in the Wenatchee WAT meeting, one thought was to create a process where the sponsors would respond to a unified comment from RTT

Kate – I think it would be helpful for the sponsor if the RTT gives comments in a written format to allow sponsors to respond. Tracy Hillman does a good job of synthesizing what other members of the RTT are trying to say.

Chris – I agree that Tracy H does a good job of merging comments into feedback. Hate the term consensus, having things in a written format without consensus helps us tease out the personalities, where the comments might be coming from. Would avoid consensus, definitely have a written format.

Kate – and the RTT is not consensus based

Tracy – I think a synthesis is good, if there are opposite comments, then the expectations should be clear for the sponsor.

Chris – this year the SRP gave us very clear requirements for our funding condition that we provide the preferred alternative and how we got there. Think that the RTT provides feedback on biological priorities for the reach, but difficult when tied to a funding decision.

Tracy – I think the outcome of the process is not directly tied to funding; it would lead to a project that could score better when they come back for construction funding

Kate – yes, a project that goes through this should score higher on biological benefit when the sponsor comes back for implementation funding

Kristen – need to be clear on the requirements/what the process is. Difficult to provide a lot of feedback on the idea now until it is more clear what the process is and what the burden/benefit would be.

Chris – guidance is good, and I have the same concerns that we need to have clarity on the process, that this wouldn't give RTT veto power

Tracy – not veto power, just providing additional review as designs progress, beneficial for RTT to see how the conditions are changing

Kristen – is there also discussion of scale of project that would trigger this? For example, a culvert project doesn't seem like it would trigger review, as opposed to a more complicated project

Tracy – I think it would create a process where the RTT could flag a project for additional review during the design process, so something simple likely would not be flagged

I am hearing from sponsors that there is value, but that the details need to be ironed out with the process with the SRFB as well. We need to understand what the expectations of sponsors would be, and what types of projects would be flagged.

Chris – if this was an optional process, where the RTT could indicate that they would like to provide feedback, that sponsors could take advantage of. Framed as a way to improve projects, rather than “flagging” or other potentially sensitive terminology

Tracy – I think that the RTT left it optional for this year, RCO is willing to provide additional funding support for the time needed for check in for sponsors that would like that

Chris – think that is a good way to try it out, and alleviates some concerns.

Data Gaps

Tracy – Greer asked me to go through the data gaps identified by MaDMC, would like to see if people have any additional comments. Some data gaps because there was no data, others because there has been substantial change due to fires, restoration, or data is very old

[Data gaps list review]

Discussion – fire affected watersheds, two new fires in the Methow this year; BAER report available: <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/article/7832/66342/>

FBRB Priority Watersheds

Tracy – every two years WDFW has a grant round for barrier removal, the 2023-25 biennium is about to open up. In the past there were two pathways, but they are now combined. Project gets bonus points if the barrier falls within a priority watershed, new scoring system details coming soon. Multiple removals on same stream/watershed or barriers lower in the watershed scored higher.

[RCO timeframe]

Applicant workshop on October 27th, window for applications is Nov 1 – January 13

Current priority watershed is in Wenatchee, operate on HUC 10; it encompasses several tribs to Wenatchee River.

Looking for feedback on whether we have the correct priority watershed, it is only one question of many, so projects can be submitted from other watersheds

Kristen – we are doing an update to the barrier data, that can help inform the choice

Tracy – feedback from Wenatchee group was that CF and CCNRD have been working on developing proposals within the existing priority watershed and so we shouldn't change within this round, but it is possible

Chris – I thought that previously projects had to be in the priority watershed

Tracy – I was told that other areas could qualify, but I recommend that you talk with the RCO lead Casey Costello, he helped develop the scoring criteria and knows a lot about the process

Greer went through and looked at the current data on barriers, and she pulled out a couple HUC 10s that may be worth considering.

Kristen – would be good to look them over prior to identifying them as priorities, some of the areas the data is old because we couldn't get access to survey during the barrier assessments

Discussion – Bear Creek now that it hits the Methow, Beaver & Frazer

Matt Young – CTCR: if people are interested I can help with putting in PIT array through our program, a good tool for barrier assessment

Kristen – there are a lot of barriers in the system that are high up, for a lot of our basins

Chris – one issue with prioritizing the lowest barriers first is that it increases the cost because you are working in streams with fish

Kristen – think it is lowest for biological benefit, not considering cost

Chris – it does complicate things

Tracy – an interesting point, could be an additional consideration by adding feasibility of bottommost barriers. If lowest barriers are unlikely to be removed then it would not make sense to do upper, but if they are grouped then may make sense

Kristen – I think there was some talk of grouping barriers

Chris – would be good to find out if we can complete a project without disrupting the previously priority process, will circle back

Tracy – timeline is tricky having to think two years out. It would be good to think about this for two years down the road as well

Link to Fish Barrier Removal Board info on RCO website: <https://rco.wa.gov/grant/brian-abbott-fish-barrier-removal-board/>

Contact at WDFW: Costello, Casey D (DFW) Casey.Costello@dfw.wa.gov

GSRO Office updates

Tracy – a lot of talk among governor Inslee's folks about climate change and salmon recovery, a lot more funding could be coming down the pipe. The more that regions have projects ready to go, so the more that you can get projects up to the near ready to move phase, there is hope that additional funding will be opening up in the next few years. Also federal infrastructure funding, but hard to know about that.

Chris – since the fires we have spent time with irrigators and others at conflicts that they will not be able to address. Is there any standard review that UCSRB can help data base?

Tracy – there is the planned project forecast list developed a few years ago, my hope is to continue to curate that list, keep it up to date so that it is available to the governor's office in a form that makes it easy to act on.

Chris – suggest a two tier list, habitat list that take time, and the other type that could be put on the ground quickly, crimes of opportunity, projects that don't take extensive design and review separated from those that do

Tracy – a good way to look at the list, which have been implemented and which have not and why not

Chris – watershed planning efforts, like they have in the Okanogan now can also have benefits but may not compete well with fish projects in traditional processes

Tracy – DOE has gotten a lot of funding, a few open grants now. Money available for water banking and flow restoration:

Dept. of Ecology Water Banking and Streamflow Restoration Grants

In July 2021, the Legislature provided up to \$14 million in funding to buy water for water banks in rural counties with headwater streams. This funding is designed to help public entities and their partners preserve water rights in their basin for local use and streamflow.

[Water banking grants – Washington State Department of Ecology](#)

Staffing Changes at UCSRB

Tracy – Greer is going to be leaving UCSRB in mid-October, she wanted to extend her thanks to everyone. I will be taking on most of her responsibilities as the science manager, so we will be hiring for the lead entity coordinator. We will be meeting with sponsors when there is a new LE Coordinator to learn how we can help and to make sure there is not too much continuity loss.

There will not be a science conference this year due to uncertainties due to COVID, will be resuming in the future

UCSRB Board meeting is this Thursday, the first hour and a half is follow up to the Ruckelshaus regional evaluation to continue the discussion, including the future role of the IT.

SRFB is meeting tomorrow to finalize the riparian buffer amendment to Manual 18 as well targeted investments for orca populations, as well as finalizing the SRFB list

Round Table

Kristen – Cascade Fisheries update: spring chinook spawning in Hancock for the first time in 6 years. Have been back in classrooms in the Okanogan and Methow. Trying to move forward with wood amendments projects in Mission, waiting on the FS.

Barrier Prioritization should be finalized this fall, waiting on Okanogan data, then will be an updated data set for all of the Methow. Have also been running CTCR passability model, gives passage by life stage and month, if interested in that for culverts let Kristen know. Have done a bunch more planting at Hancock Springs, will extend to create a connected corridor out to the river with USFWS support

Matt– CTCR Update: we are waiting to hear back from FS on how the fires are going to set back proposed work in the Twisp River next year, Little Bridge Creek, and Twisp River Corridor

Chris – MSRF Update: we are getting ready to implement repair work at Upper Beaver Creek/Marracci, working on a change in landownership, looking forward to getting that done prior to high flows next year.

We worked with Chris Nygaard/BPA and Reclamation's TSC to move the Sugar Levee/left project to a preferred alternative that we will be sharing with SRP

Tracy – UCSRB Update: Salmon Recovery Portal, RCO is in the process of revamping it with a goal that it syncs better with PRISM. They are doing it regionally, and we are slated to do it in November/December.

Jessica – MRC: Mark Peterschmidt with the Department of Ecology has offered to talk at a future MRC meeting about implications of new Methow listings on the 303(d) list, so stay tuned for that

Next MRC Meeting: October 19