

## *Baker River Project License Implementation*

### **Aquatic Resources Group**

**Team Leader:** Arnie Aspelund (PSE), [arnie.aspelund@pse.com](mailto:arnie.aspelund@pse.com)

#### **PRESENT**

Jacob Venard and Nick Verretto by phone, Arnie Aspelund, Cary Feldmann, Doug Bruland, Jory Oppenheimer, and Lynn Thompson (PSE); Bob Helton (Citizen); Stan Walsh (SRSC); Robert Franklin (Sauk-Suiattle); Steve Fransen by phone (NMFS); Jeremy Gilman (USFS); Brock Applegate by phone and Kevin Kurras (WDFW); Chuck Ebel (USACE); Tracy Drury and Jennifer Goldsmith (Anchor QEA); Lyn Wiltse and Jamie Riche (facilitators, PDSA Consulting).

#### **DECISIONS** – none today

**ARG DATES:** Second Tuesdays, alternating in-person and phone/web meetings:

**Note:** No August meeting; Sept. 11 (conference call), Oct. 9, Nov. 13 (conference call), Dec. 11

Looking at 2013, Arnie suggests we continue to earmark second Tuesdays and move to quarterly in-person meetings: March 12, June 11, Sept. 10, and Dec. 10.

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

- All Send any comments on the spawning beach decommissioning to PSE's project manager, Lynn, at [lynn.thompson@pse.com](mailto:lynn.thompson@pse.com) or 425.456.2801 by July 31.
- All Contact Nick if you want to attend the LB FSC launch starting July 23.
- All Please submit comments to Jory ([jory.oppenheimer@pse.com](mailto:jory.oppenheimer@pse.com)) on the preliminary draft FIP by July 26.
- Arnie Send Cary's Sockeye trend graphs to ARG members.
- Doug Check on any identifiable contributing cause(s) that resulted in the unusually high percentage of return from the Brand-U Coho release. Could this be outage related?

#### **PREVIOUS - STILL RELEVANT - ACTION ITEMS**

- Jed Work with Craig to provide a report of IHN sampling process and this year's outbreak (no IHN detected among small sampling of out-migrating smolts).
- Stan Coordinate co-managers to update the adult trap protocol for sea-run cutthroat.
- Co-Mgrs Send a draft Fish Production Plan to Arnie ASAP, as per FPPF.
- All Review / update the ARG representation list for your organization (ongoing)

#### **UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTION ITEMS**

Jory presented what he learned when he assessed the differences between the stage readings for the old and new Baker River gages for purposes of the FIP. He shared that the old and new gage overlapped for about a year and a half. He used stage data corresponding to the new (Aquatics Table 1) Baker River flow conditions which totaled about 34,000 readings. He found that the stage readings for the two gages were within 3% of each other 92% of the time and they were within 5% of each other 98% of the time. Based on this, he determined that the stage differences between the gages were negligible.

Steve asked whether the deviations occurred randomly regardless of other conditions or if Jory found that deviation was more likely under particular conditions. Jory responded that the widest discrepancies occurred at the highest flows.

### **BRCC UPDATE**

The fourth Wednesdays will continue to be reserved for BRCC conference calls as needed. In-person meetings are scheduled semi-annually (spring and fall).

### **SPAWNING BEACH DECOMMISSIONING**

Lynn Thompson started by providing a summary of the June 26, 2012 Technical Working Group meeting. She noted that the project's overarching goals are to: remove all structures and constructed features on site, return the site as close to natural / native conditions as possible, address noxious weeds, re-vegetate the area, decommission the road, and address the needs for fish habitat. The Anchor QEA design team presented four initial design alternatives to the group. A subgroup of the technical working group then caucused and returned with a consensus request to focus the goal of addressing the needs for fish habitat on the following areas: retain the upper pond as a viable fry release site, maintain the adult sockeye spawning habitat, and retain coho habitat. With that direction in mind, the Technical Working Group discussed with consultant Anchor moving forward toward a hybrid design named as alternative 5.

Lynn then introduced Tracy Drury and Jennifer Goldsmith of Anchor QEA to the ARG. Tracy walked the ARG through the four initial draft designs reviewed by the Technical Working Group. In discussing the differences between each alternative, he pointed out that beavers have largely influenced the area as it exists now and beavers will continue to have a lot of influence over the site once this work is complete. He then walked the group through the new "Version 5" design, which is a hybrid of elements from the earlier designs.

Robert asked if the design takes into account the likelihood of the river coming through the area in the future. Tracy commented that, while we don't know when that might happen, it is definitely a strong possibility and the design doesn't rely on or prevent that from happening. Lynn added that the design does not include any hardened structures. Stan agreed and pointed out that the intention is for there to be no artificial impediments to the river taking whatever course it chooses.

Doug asked how the beach site gravel will be distributed and Tracy shared that there has not been any discussion about moving the gravel. Tracy commented that any attempt to move gravel would be short-lived and probably not worth the cost. Robert agreed, noting that the gravel is very different than the natural materials in the river and suggesting that rearranging the gravel would be unlikely to result in any benefit to fish. [As an after comment by Lynn Thompson, decisions regarding the construction techniques and application of particular materials will be developed during the 60% design phase. The proposed overflow swale and any other areas that could become channels or ponds will be constructed to match natural conditions. An update regarding design decisions will be shared with ARG as progress is made.]

Brock asked if any of the beach fill would be used to grade the spur road for access to the upper pond release site. Stan commented that this could be a good use for the gravel. Lynn noted that refinishing the road is beyond the scope of this project, but that doesn't necessarily mean it won't happen. She noted that they would like to avoid having to bring in or export material from the site, so if site work creates additional material, PSE would talk with the Forest Service to see what they want done with that material.

Lynn asked for input from the ARG regarding this design approach. A formal consensus process is not needed at this time, but PSE is asking whether there is consensus within the ARG to move forward with taking this Version 5 design forward to the 60% design level. Arnie noted that PSE would like to be in a position to conduct work during the construction window of 2013. Robert shared that he feels great about the process to date and asked for clarity about the final decision-making process. Cary shared that, ultimately,

the Forest Service has final approval; the Settlement Agreement and the Forest Service's approach gives all signatories the opportunity to provide input to the process through the ARG.

The ARG agreed that Design Version 5 represents the right direction for the project at this time. Lynn requested that ARG members contact her with any questions or feedback about this process at [lynn.thompson@pse.com](mailto:lynn.thompson@pse.com) or 425.456.2801 by the end of July. She will compile this input and share it with the full ARG via email in August.

#### **“HOT TOPICS” – License Update, PSE Internal Reorganization**

Cary shared information about a recent reorganization within PSE. A new licensing manager, Tom Flynn, has been hired and will be starting in this new position on July 11, 2012. Tom is moving into this role from the compliance side of PSE. Cary will stay on for an undetermined period of time to help orient Tom to the Settlement Agreement and the Baker process. ARG members expressed their appreciation for Cary's participation and expressed concern for process continuity. PSE will make efforts to make the transition seamless. He emphasized that resource team leads and others within PSE have a broad knowledge base and history with the process and expressed full confidence in Tom's ability to step into this role.

#### **LB FSC CONSTRUCTION UPDATE**

Nick gave an update on the construction of the new Lower Baker FSC, confirming that construction progress remains on schedule. The launch is scheduled to start July 23. If you would like to view this process, contact Nick. Bob, Chuck, Steve, and Stan all expressed interest in observing the launch. Nick suggested, depending on on-the-ground conditions, the FSC wouldn't actually hit the water until the 24<sup>th</sup>. He welcomed folks to contact him for the latest timing updates as the launch date gets closer. Note: Arnie will be out of town so it is best to contact Nick directly for this.

#### **OPERATIONS UPDATES**

Upper Baker Fish Juvenile Trap – Doug reported that, as of today, we have three weeks' worth of sampling left in the season. They are still getting the sockeye zeros; the numbers have dropped off quite a bit, but they will continue to sample through July 31<sup>st</sup>. They are following the protocol and putting these fish into the river.

Doug and Nick shared the 2012 subsampling spreadsheet from May 6 (the big 94,244 fish day) and May 8 (46,702 fish). Based on subsample numbers, 98% are estimated to have been Sockeye. About 1.8% of these were coho.

He noted that the Baker's biggest year was 2010, with 525,000 total fish. They are at 522,000 total fish (including all species at both Upper and Lower Baker) already this year, making us very close to breaking the 2010 overall record. The Sockeye record has already been broken and Nick pointed out that this is a very good year regardless of whether the overall record is broken.

Stan commented on the subsampling operation, that his understanding is that the target was to aim for 6,000 fish per trip and noticed that some of the direct outmigration trips were as high as 7,000 or 8,500. Doug shared that the team does its best to estimate and target 6,000, and even when they overestimate the numbers they stay well below the 9,000 safety limit per trip, and moving fish back out of the hopper area once crowded if they find that they are over the target has the potential to impose greater stress on the fish and delay transport at a time when it's important to get fish out as quickly as possible. He noted that, with time, the team is improving its estimation accuracy.

Robert asked for graphical depictions of these tables to make it easier to follow, particularly showing cumulative annual outmigration as compared to average record years. Nick agreed that this would be easy to do. Robert clarified that he isn't looking for graphics on all of the data that are collected, just on the big picture statistics so he can understand trends. Arnie showed plots of historical juvenile outmigration and adult returns from the summary spreadsheet.

Cary shared a couple of graphs of the total sockeye runs by year and the timing of the run over time., which indicate that the run size is increasing and that the migration timing is shifting toward an earlier run, averaging about two weeks earlier now than when data were first collected. The group spent a few minutes speculating about the possible causes of these changes. Stan asked Cary and Arnie to send this graph out to the full ARG, which was done during the meeting.

Doug disclosed that there was no IHN found among the out-migrant Sockeye, which is wonderful news. He also brought the group's attention to the significantly increased return count on the Right-U brand Coho release. The normal return number is 10-15% and this year's return came in at an unheard-of 57%. The group briefly pondered this change, noting that the only significant difference in operations had to do with a changed location on the guide net installation. Kevin asked if there was an outage related to the release this year; Doug will look into this.

### **BAKER HATCHERY FISH INVENTORY**

Doug walked the group through the Baker Hatchery Fish Inventory Spreadsheet:

- Raceway1: 153,000 sockeye, no IHN, looking good and growing well for fall release and 2013 biological studies
- Raceway 3: 65,000 coho held for spring release and 2013 biological studies
- Circular 4: 126 rainbow trout (brood year 2010) held for charity events
- Circulars 6 and 7: 20,000 rainbow trout for 2013 spring planting into Depression Lake and charity events.

Kevin noted that the goal for sockeye is 130,000; there are 153,000 now because he was holding extra as a precaution against IHN. He will release the overage. He also shared that formalin treatments on adult broodstock start today and will continue on a weekly basis through the fall. They will be experimenting with using fewer treatments in each week this year to see if it will remain effective at lower levels. Since there will not be an ARG meeting in August, Kevin invited anyone looking for an update to contact him directly with any questions.

### **POWERHOUSE 4 UPDATE**

Cary reported that they are putting the connection through the powerhouse tailrace and out into the river. The contractor initially requested an outage for that work, then re-evaluated their approach and suggested they may not need an outage after all. If an outage is necessary, it would be scheduled during the no-generation period of the IPP and PSE would inform the ARG in advance.

Kevin suggested that folks who are planning to attend the FSC launch could ask Nick to take them by this project since they will be up there anyway.

### **UPDATE ON PLANS**

#### **Article 106: Flow Implementation Plan**

Jory reminded the ARG to please submit comments on the preliminary draft FIP by July 26. PSE will then submit a draft FIP for formal ARG review by August 16 (maybe sooner, depending on the comments received).

#### **Article 108: Gravel**

Jacob reported that they will be starting the first season of field work this fall.

#### **Article 109: Large Woody Debris**

A total of 36 pieces have been collected at this point and are being stored in the "bone yard" behind the Kulshan campground at Upper Baker until a permanent storage site is finalized. Lynn wondered if it might make sense to store new LWD at the beach sites since it will be needed for the decommissioning project.

### **Article 110: Reservoir Shoreline Erosion Control**

Jacob explained that they are at 90% of the project design at the Swift Creek Campground. This is moving along well; next step will be permitting. Construction was originally slated for October 2012, but securing permitting by that date is unlikely, so the schedule is likely to be delayed.

**Article 505 Aquatic Riparian Habitat:** Jacob reported that PSE is finalizing its internal accounting processes and will establish contracts with the proponents of the selected projects as soon as possible. Stan expressed frustration that PSE's internal delays have now cost the projects an entire field season. Cary acknowledged the ARG's frustration, apologized for the delay, and shared that he has been working intensively with PSE's property accounting folks since last September to get this issue resolved. He said that they (the accountants) are in general agreement on the important points, but PSE can't move forward until they issue an official accounting memo that indicates that these are appropriate capital expenditures. This is not just a PSE issue; other utilities are facing the same challenges with the process for showing habitat improvements as capital assets. FERC could be helpful with this, but they may not elect to issue an accounting directive. Chuck shared that USACE runs into similar challenges; in fact, he writes all contracts with the possibility of rolling the contract forward to the next fiscal year. Stan acknowledged Cary's explanation while encouraging PSE to move forward with all available haste since these delays are out of alignment with the spirit of the Settlement Agreement.

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Jacob has been collecting comments on the 505 RFP process and will schedule a meeting of the Aquatic Riparian Habitat Working Group (ARHWG!) to review the input and update the process.

### **PARKING LOT**

- Sampling rate for Baker Hatchery coho needs to be addressed.
- PSE will propose a sub-sampling protocol.

### **MEETING EVALUATION**

- WhoHoo! Finished early ...
- Great soup, good to have iced tea, <3 deviled eggs
- Good discussions
- More graphics for important spreadsheets
- Technically challenged day with WebEx and conference call dial-in issues
- **Note:** No August meeting; Sept. 11 meeting will be a conference call