



Baker River Project License Implementation **Aquatic Resources Group**

Team Leader: Arnie Aspelund (PSE), arnie.aspelund@pse.com

PRESENT

Arnie Aspelund, Cary Feldmann, Mark Killgore, Jacob Venard (by phone), Doug Bruland, Cory Ertel, (PSE); Brock Applegate and Brett Barkdull (WDFW); Lorna Ellestad, Dan Berentson, Kara Symonds (Skagit County); Chal Martin (City of Burlington, guest), Steve Fransen (by phone) (NMFS); Bob Helton (Citizen); Robert Franklin (Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe); John Schultz (Dike Districts #1 and #12, guest); Daryl Hamburg (Dike District 17, guest); Eron Berg (City of Sedro-Woolley, guest); Dan Johnson, Ken Brettman, Hannah Hadley, Linda Smith (by phone) (USACE), Tom Van Gelder (by phone) (Trout Unlimited); Phil Hilgert (by phone) (R2); Lyn Wiltse (facilitator, PDSA Consulting).

DECISIONS – none today

2011 ARG MEETING DATES: Sept. 13 (Conference Call); Oct. 11 combined with BRCC Meeting PSE Snoqualmie Office (9-3 pm); Nov. 8 Conference Call (9-11 am); and Dec. 13 Meeting / Video Conference at PSE Snoqualmie and Skagit Offices (9-3 pm).

107c MEETING: Aug. 24 from 9:00 – noon at Skagit Farmers Supply Office (across the street from PSE Skagit Office in Burlington) to discuss the comments / revisions to Draft Report.

FPTWG: Oct. 12 from 9:00 – 3:00 at PSE Lower Baker Office in Concrete.

Website: You can find Baker River documents available to the resource groups such as resource group plans, reports, meeting notes, etc., via PSE.com:

<http://pse.com/aboutpse/HydroLicensing/Pages/Baker-River-Licensing.aspx>

ACTION ITEM

- Cary Send out compilation of comments received on 107c Draft Report by August 12 to ARG members for review.
- Cary Send out revised 107c draft report by August 19 (with response to/integration of comments).
- Cary Reserve Skagit (Burlington) Conference Room for September 13 ARG meeting in case it is determined that a conference call would be insufficient.
- Lyn Reserve Skagit Farmers Supply office (Burlington across from PSE office) for August 24 technical meeting to discuss the 107c draft report.
- Arnie Send out IPP Operations PowerPoint Graph to ARG members.
- Dan See if Corps can release GI work schedule for ARG review.
- All Provide informal comments on the draft 107c Report to Arnie by August 12.

PREVIOUS - STILL RELEVANT - ACTION ITEMS

- Steve Identify the Olympia contact to coordinate re. HGMP with WDFW.
- Co-Mgrs Send a draft Fish Production Plan to Arnie ASAP.
- All Review / update the ARG representation list for your organization (ongoing).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Safety Minute: Watch for slips, trips, and falls & take initiative to remove potential slips, trips, and fall hazards.

BRCC UPDATE

Cary reported the fourth Wednesdays will continue to be reserved throughout 2011 for BRCC conference calls as needed. In-person meetings are scheduled semi-annually (spring and fall); the next get-together is tentatively planned for October and to be combined with the October 11 ARG meeting.

Cary sent out the summary from the working groups in early August. Highlights follow:

ARG – Notification of 107c Preliminary Draft Report out for informal 30-day ARG review. We are having a record sockeye adult run with the highest trap return on record. WaHOOO!

FPTWG – We are set to initiate construction of the Lower Baker FSC in September of this year.

TRIG – The newly-acquired Burpee Hill property will be managed for a variety of resources. They are developing a management plan for this. The Alder Creek management plan is also underway. They are also conducting loon and osprey surveys.

RRG – The Recreation Group is in the middle of the season. Law enforcement is in place and there have been few reported incidents. They will be coordinating the development of the Lower Baker Recreation Development Plan with the Lower Baker FSC to take advantage of efficiencies that can be gained for both projects.

PSE conducted public tours of the Baker Project on July 23rd with 250 people in attendance.

CRAG – Their next meeting will be in August. They are developing a cultural response to ground-disturbing activities including the recently-acquired Alder Creek and Burpee Hill properties.

UPDATE ON IMMINENT FLOOD DRAWDOWN (107c) PRELIMINARY REPORT

Cary reported that comments (informal comment period) on this draft report are due August 12. So far comments have only been received from Skagit County. Skagit County plans to submit some additional comments by the end of the week. The USACE said that while they have reviewed the report, they will not be commenting on the report and will be taking it into consideration as input into their feasibility study. The timeline for this report follows:

- By August 12: Comments due (informal comment period for draft report)
- By August 19: PSE to send out comments received along with any revisions to the draft report
- On August 24: Meeting from 9:00 – noon at Skagit Farmer's Supply on Park Lane in Burlington to discuss comments, next revision of the report
- In early September: PSE to send out revised report for formal ARG review
- From early September – early October: Formal comment period on revised draft report
- By October 17: PSE submits report to FERC

UPDATE ON SKAGIT GI & SEATTLE DISTRICT WATER MANAGEMENT

Dan Johnson reported that the Corps has been working on the technical report for environmental / geo-tech analysis of the levees along the Skagit River. They have also been analyzing hydraulics and doing associated modeling.

He explained the USACE “reset” process which reviews projects older than 10 years (this one has been underway for 13 years now). In these cases, they pause the project, review project status, scope, etc. and then try to set the project back on course. They have been working with the Corps Portland and Washington DC offices on this. These review sessions have helped identify places where the process can be streamlined. For example, they are now able to rely on Burlington's analyses of the levees rather than having to conduct extensive research and data gathering themselves. They will be updating the draft technical report from 2009.

Dan reported that since the June, 2011 meeting in Washington DC they have better alignment, and are re-responding to those comments. The plan is to have this report revised by the first of October, 2011.

They have good current data to provide. Future direction depends on a very limited budget. In the past, the money the GI has gotten has been through congressional earmarks. These will not continue given the current economic climate. Funds for this study have not been in the President's budget since 2005. Nevertheless, smart people in the Corps are looking to find money for the project. There is currently no guaranteed budget for FY 2012.

When money becomes available, they will be in a good position to move forward, They needed to reissue the NOI to produce an EIS. Hanna explained that they published the NOI in the Federal Register. The 30-day notice expires August 29, 2011. There will be an open house August 10 from 5:00-6:00 followed by a presentation and public hearing where they will be soliciting comments from 6:30-8:30. This will be held at the Skagit Train Station at 105 E Kincaid Street in Mt. Vernon. Comments will be received regarding the study, project alternatives, etc. Hanna explained the Corps' desire to reach out again to the public since it has been a while and there are new players involved now. Comments will be included in the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) / Feasibility Study. The next phase will be issuing draft EIS. They will respond to public comments in the Final EIS. Hanna welcomes comments also by email: Hannah.f.hadley@usace.army.mil.

Note: Ken noted that the Corps' Water Control Manual reflects current authorized flood control at Upper Baker. The Lower Baker operations won't be included. The manual simply memorializes the federal interest.

OPERATIONS UPDATES

Upstream Fish Trap Operations

Cary described the circumstances and likely cause of an event that occurred at the upstream trap a couple of weeks ago wherein a number of sockeye mortalities resulted. He showed a photo of how a guide track for a barrier panel bent out and broke loose allowing fish to access an area below the brail (where they weren't supposed to be). Crew attending to the trap noticed a gap in the barrier along the side walls where it had broken free. The fish looked to be in good condition so they continued operation, planning to get past the peak of the run before initiating any repairs. On Friday July 24th it was reported there were several hundred fish present under the brail. The project shut down the trap entrance to keep fish in the river Friday night and began mobilizing crews to respond. Nick and Cary arrived on site Saturday morning. The project performed one trap & haul that morning to transport already trapped fish. and. On Sunday morning with additional crews in place they initiated the recovery and began the repairs.

They discovered that many fish (more than 200) had gotten into the plumbing system as well . They were not able to free these. They were able to recover ~600 fish. Another ~600 were dead. In total, there were 943 dead fish. Since the event, folks have engaged in a detailed review of the event and are conducting a root cause analysis. They initiated actions to correct the failure of the guide tracks. The new tracks are considerably thicker and welded in a very sturdy way. They also restored the interlox barrier.

The trap restored to full service on Wednesday of that week. They successfully passed over 3,200 fish / day for the next 2 days and the trap is once again operating safely and efficiently. One of the design improvements resulting from this event is the addition of an access port to facilitate future inspections. PSE deeply regrets the mortalities that resulted. They are proud of this facility. It is state of the art and working well.

Stan noted this is the 2nd failure at the fish trap due to things bending out of shape. Are the hydraulic forces in the trap greater than the trap was intended to serve? Cary thinks not. They are investigating the competency and spacing of the welds. They think the mechanisms for failure are different between the first failure and this one because the damage in the second event was against the hydraulic gradient. Brett wants the after-incident report to include a well-defined decision-making protocol and recommendations on what constitutes an emergency, when the trap should be shut down, etc. He would have appreciated earlier notification.

Interim Protection Plan (IPP)

Mark Killgore explained we are in high run-off situation this year that will continue into the fall months. The flows forecast by the NW Weather Forecast Center last week are 183% above the 10 year average. He expressed concern about how this might affect how PSE will operate during the Interim Protection Plan (IPP) period as prescribed by NMFS. Because the IPP was developed for more generalized flow conditions, flows this year are more in the range of extreme conditions and may require adjustments to achieve the best overall outcome.

Discussion followed regarding the biological impacts of adjusting the flow regime to moderate the high seasonal flows, in particular during the Chinook spawning period (which per the IPP is mid-September through mid-November). The ARG acknowledged the unique situation and agreed to continue discussions offline. PSE will do some analysis on some potential scenarios for those discussions and provide an update on the plan for operations at the September 13 ARG meeting.

Juvenile Outmigration Update / Adult Sockeye Return, Fishery Updates

The FSC has been shut down for the season and de-ballasting is underway. They are constructing a ramp to facilitate access. This should be complete by the end of the week. The crew is busy removing gear and performing annual maintenance through the month of August.

Doug reported that the outmigration reached 268,901 at Upper Baker. Recovery rates are up slightly from last month with the coho freezebrand groups at over 73-76%; fall release sockeye group at 60%; and over 72% recovery for sockeye right C brand. 21,041 have been recovered from the Lower Baker juvenile trap.

- Lower Baker juvenile trap: Total sockeye no-mark is at 5,753. Coho no-mark is at 13,903.
- Upper Baker juvenile trap: Total sockeye no-mark is at 162,133. Coho no-mark is at 55,119.

Brett explained that there is quite a lot of variability in return rates (of smolt to adult). Over the last 20 years the range has been from .28 - 31%. This year's outmigration numbers are within the range from the last 10 years. Last year was a record year.

In 2010, the stress relief pond came online when the majority of the smolt season was over. This year they utilized it throughout the entire season. Doug reminded all of the protocol that calls for holding the smolts there for 24 hours, then opening up the screen, allowing them to leave volitionally, and then forcing them out after a total of 48 hours. To limit predation (mostly char) the decision was made to drain the pond when generating. First they lower the level in the pond, then they open up the screen and drain the fish out. The smolts leave with very little flow, limiting the impacts on them as they move out. Less predation has been observed while generating.

The failure of the guide net at Upper Baker occurred very early in the season. The damaged area was quickly patched. The numbers show that fish from the two coho groups released after the net repair were not recovered down at the Lower Baker juvenile trap. So it seems we effected the repair before many fish made it through the hole in the net. This Thursday / Friday, they will be putting a patch repair into the net and evaluating the condition of the rest of the net (appears to be good).

Doug reported that the biological evaluation data will be summarized at the FPTWG meeting on October 12. There are no results out yet. We may get an update at the September 13 ARG meeting.

Upstream Fish Trap: Season total of 25,289 (not including today's numbers), plus reported 9,500 in the Tribal fishery makes this year's sockeye return over 34,000 one for the record books. As the run winds down they are continuing to get a few hundred fish per day. Fish are being recovered by the three tribes now for ceremonial and subsistence use. We will continue with this process until the numbers drop off. We are still getting a couple hundred each day.

Other Totals:

- Sockeye to beaches: 1,535 (goal 1,600), remaining allocation to be completed this week
- Sockeye to AI: 3,850 (goal met)

- Sockeye to Baker Lake: 15,915
- Live Sockeye to Baker System: 21,300

Upstream Fish Trap Protocols

Brett reported that the co-managers have made some minor changes to the Chinook protocol. These changes require less handling of the fish and operc punching in late summer and fall.

Baker Fish Hatchery Operations, Fish Inventory

At the hatchery the AI ponds (brood stock for spawning fish) are full. Doug believes we will reach the allocation for the spawning beaches by the end of this week. The hatchery will then be full to capacity.

They are set to start clipping the sockeye for later release. There are 200 rainbow trout left from last year. These will be donated to two upcoming fundraising events: Eagles Club Derby and Cascade Days at Concrete. 20,000 rainbow trout were received from the Arlington Hatchery in July.

Fish Hatchery Inventory Totals:

- Juvenile coho: 59,935
- Juvenile Sockeye: 126,299
- Rainbow: 20,172
- Total Facility (excluding adults): 206,396

A new screen and grating were recently installed in the headworks. There haven't been any issues with debris moving into the water supply. They are scrubbing the screen regularly to keep it clean.

SOCKEYE FISHERY UPDATE

The public response to the fishery has been a little overwhelming. Brett reported there have been few enforcement issues this year. Folks seem well behaved. There have been some problems with capacity at access sites, mostly on weekends. Fishing effort on weekends have been as high as 250 boats. The USFS has had a lot of staff on site and is providing funding for additional law enforcement. They are conducting onsite boat checks for invasive species, etc.

PLANS AND REPORTS

Arnie reviewed the list showing the status of the Baker River Project Aquatic Resource Plans & Reports.

- The Upstream Fish Passage and Connectivity Plan will be out in mid August and the annual report by end of August.
- The interim plans for Upper Baker FSC will be out by the end of the year.
- The Fish Propagation annual report will be out by October 31.
- The Downstream Fish Passage report and Flow Implementation report will be out by November 30.
- Comments on the Aquatic Riparian Article 505 Report are due August 16, 2011.
- Comments on the Required Funding Report (Article 602) are due August 29, 2011.
- Comments on the Lake Shannon Developed Recreation (Article 305) Report are due by August 31.

POTENTIAL TOPICS FOR SEPT 13 MEETING (planned at this time to be a conference call)

- Update on IPP Operations
- Status of 107c report (will be out for formal review)
- Annual fish production plan
- Fish trap operations

MEETING EVALUATION

Worked Well

- Good information sharing
- Good update on the USACE GI

- Nice to have members of the USACE in attendance

Do Differently

- Ran a bit late
- Tech difficulty with the phone cutting out
- Get longer microphone cords