



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

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

### **PRESENT**

Arnie Aspelund, Cary Feldmann, Haley Edwards, Nathanael Overman, Irena Netik, Jacob Venard, Lynda Kupfer, Earl Shepard, Jory Oppenheimer by phone, and Nick Verretto (PSE); Steve Fransen (NMFS); Bob Helton (Citizen); Stan Walsh (SRSC); Chal Martin (Burlington, guest); Lorna Ellestad, Dan Berentson (Skagit County); Greta Movassaghi (USFS); Lou Ellyn Jones by phone (USFWS); Brett Barkdull, Brock Applegate, and Kevin Kurras (WDFW); Robert Franklin (Swinomish); Esco Bell (Mt. Vernon, guest); Phil Hilgert by phone (R2); Lyn Wiltse and Jamie Riche (facilitators, PDSA Consulting).

**DECISIONS** – none today

**2011 ARG MEETING DATES:** Nov. 8 (9–10:30) w/ ARHWG (10:30–3); and Dec. 13 (9-3 pm)

**2012 ARG DATES:** Jan. 10, Feb. 14, Mar. 13, Apr. 10, May 8, June 12, July 10, Aug. 14, Sept. 11, Oct. 9, Nov. 13, Dec. 11

**FPTWG:** October 12, 2011, with a tour of the LB FSC Construction

**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 ITEMS**

- Arnie      Distribute electronic copies of today's presentations & handouts along with the notes.

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

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

### **ANNUAL FISH PRODUCTION PLAN**

PSE asked for an update from the Fish Co-managers regarding the Annual Fish Production Plan for the hatchery operations (Article 101). Stan reported that the Fish Co-managers are still working on the details of the plan. In the meantime, anything that has to do with the hatchery operations should remain status quo. We will get an update at the next ARG meeting.

### **BRCC UPDATE**

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 meeting is scheduled for this afternoon, directly following this ARG meeting.

## UPDATE ON IMMINENT FLOOD DRAWDOWN (107c) REPORT

Cary reported that the 107c report was submitted to FERC yesterday.

Lorna stated that some of her comments in the 107c document might not have been clear; she shared a handout titled, “Summary of Skagit County Comments, October 10, 2011” to provide clarification *and will provide the electronic file for the Summary document and the emergency exclusion reference*. She asked what the process would be for providing additional comments to FERC. Cary stated that the next steps related to this report will be defined by FERC. They might accept the report as submitted, may return it with direction for changes, or could take some other action within their discretion.

Cary also noted that two-thirds of the submitted report is dedicated to the comments and responses, so FERC will certainly be able to see that there is an elevated level of interest in this report. Steve concurred, sharing his opinion that the volume of comments will probably lead FERC to take a closer look.

Chal emphasized that this continues to be an important issue to downstream communities. He asked if there could be a process the ARG would feel comfortable with that would result in a changed, stronger protocol. Stan responded that Steve Hocking of FERC told the ARG via the Sept. 8 conference call that a protocol change would require a license amendment.

Chal then asked what it takes to file an amendment. Cary reviewed the process outlined in Sections 3.5 – 3.7 of the Settlement Agreement. The settlement agreement (with certain exceptions) prohibits PSE from seeking an amendment to the license. However, any of the signatories may suggest an amendment to the License but process would start at the resource group level and would then continue into the BRCC for adoption and then submitted as a proposed amendment to the license.

Changing the Settlement Agreement requires unanimous consensus of all signatories. PSE would be obligated to submit the amendment to FERC, where it would then be up to FERC whether or not to approve the requested change. Depending on the nature of the amendment, there may be a need to update the 401 Water Quality Certification, USFS 4(e) conditions, and/or Biological Opinion. If the amendment to the Settlement Agreement would change conditions in the license, there is a process for amending the license, too.

Chal then asked whether his presentation from an earlier 107c meeting was on the right track in terms of fish impacts of drawdowns. Stan replied that the basics are correct, but the numbers are reflecting the entire basin rather than just downstream from the project. He commented that it is more than a simple math equation; the basin is a complicated system *and flows need to be routed through the system*. Stan said there were *extensive studies performed for 106*.

Cary stated that what the County was asking for was essentially “hard” storage and Lorna clarified that the County is not requesting additional hard storage, but is requesting studies to understand rate and duration of discharge *flows so they can be routed through the system to determine how to balance drawdown discharge with the needs of other resources*. There was dialogue around the County’s desire for additional studies, funding studies, and some ideas for how to approach scoping and consultant selection if the purpose is to use them to help achieve consensus toward a license amendment.

*Bob Helton asked what new information could possibly be necessary and wouldn’t that need to be determined before additional studies were performed?*

Cary reiterated that PSE is fully compliant with the settlement agreement and license. They are committed to undertake reasonable best efforts to achieve the target elevations described in the license and the report reflects that perspective with the additional communication protocols proposed to improve communication. Cary mentioned that there will be times based on the complex number of antecedent conditions, when PSE may not be able to reach 4.1.1 target reservoir elevations.

## **2011 INTERIM PROTECTION PLAN – OPERATIONS UPDATE**

Irena Netik, Manager of Generation Operations, introduced herself and Earl Shepard, Real Time Operations Supervisor. Earl noted that this has been a good year so far, with a limited number of high inflow events.

Irena walked the group through a presentation of the Project Inflow and Discharge this fall. PSE is on track to meet the Nov. 15 target of 115,000 acre-feet of available storage. Since Sept. 15, PSE has maintained the daily 3-4 hour period of discharge as conducted previously for the IPP, with the exception of two periods in late September where the inflows were high and required additional generation to maintain elevations and storage. These were events when the flow constraints were released per the IPP. There is a high inflow event underway now; *7,000 cfs inflow to Upper Baker.*

*There was a detailed discussion on why USGS data is listed as provisional on their website, Steve Fransen responded that the GS data remains provisional for 1 year. Irena explained to the group the concerns PSE had with the accuracy of the USGS gage data for Baker River.*

*Further discussion pursued on the need for the reconciliation of our flow measurement once the new turbine comes on line since compliance with the license relies on the USGS gage.*

Lorna asked whether PSE maintains a log of changed operations. Cary clarified that PSE has not deviated from the IPP; the September discharges related to higher inflows were within the IPP. If there were deviations, though, they would be reflected in the 106 annual report and would be required in a biannual report to the NMFS.

## **SPRING DRAWDOWN PERIOD**

Jory Oppenheimer reported that upcoming projects at Upper and Lower Baker will require lowering the reservoirs below target elevations from late January through April 1, 2012. They will lower the reservoirs to an elevation of *approximately 680* at Upper Baker, *380* at Lower Baker in order to install guide net anchors for the Lower Baker FSC and *refurbish the stairs* at the Upper Baker FSC.

This is similar to a request last year. The only agency concern expressed last year was to ensure that the reduced elevation did not extend beyond April 1. This year's projects have been coordinated accordingly.

Greta asked whether the reservoir would be refilled by the third week of April for fishing season. Jory reported that it is difficult to predict at this early date, but the drawdown earlier this year was able to be brought back up to recreational elevation targets. Stan asked and Jory confirmed that the work is being coordinated with the Cultural group; they will be taking advantage of the lower reservoir elevation for concurrent projects. Jory indicated they were coordinating with Elizabeth Dubreuil.

Irena noted that PSE is committed to meeting all targets and continuously monitors conditions at the site related to all of the settlement articles.

## **BAKER HATCHERY FISH INVENTORY**

Arnie briefly walked the group through the juvenile fish rearing at the hatchery. About 126,175 Sockeye, 59,885 Coho, and 19,729 Rainbow Trout are in the new hatchery. Total facility: 205,789. Kevin reported no disease among the juveniles, ad clipping is complete, and operations are running well.

There is also 3,761 adult sockeye in the AI broodstock raceways and 1,578 adult sockeye in Spawning Beach 4. IHN testing had detected positive among adults in both the spawning beaches and the AI group, so the hatchery is following heightened bio-security measures (limited tours, extra disinfection precautions, and equipment segregation). Adult mortality is running a little higher than normal, but Kevin does not anticipate ongoing problems this year. They will continue to sample for IHN throughout the spawning season as per protocol. Juvenile rearing will continue and spawning gets underway next Tuesday.

## UPSTREAM FISH TRAP OPERATIONS PROTOCOL

Arnie asked for confirmation from the co-managers regarding the correct protocol for the Upstream Fish Trap. Brett confirmed that the Adult Trap Protocol dated October 7, 2011 is the current and correct protocol to follow. He noted that there might have been some confusion related to a plan developed by Gary Sprague back in 2002; that plan no longer applies and has been completely superseded by the current plan.

In the future, Cary asked the co-managers to forward an email chain or a signed document that demonstrates concurrence amongst all co-managers when directing a change in the protocol so that PSE knows that it has clear and fully agreed direction.

## UPDATE ON REPORTS

Arnie walked briefly through the list of current and upcoming reports and updates. He will distribute the list when he distributes the draft notes.

**Article 104 Connectivity Report:** Nathanael shared that the Article 104 annual report and fish connectivity implementation plan completed their 30-day ARG review; the implementation plan will be submitted to FERC soon. He shared some high level information about the fish counts. So far this year, there have been 98 bull trout in the collection facilities and another 60 caught by angling. The native char snorkel surveys are currently underway.

**Article 505 Aquatic Riparian Habitat** – Jacob reported that he has received six “pre-proposals” (all new) for the ARG and TRIG to consider for funding through Article 505. Jacob is working to schedule an ARHWG meeting after the Nov. 8 ARG meeting. Jacob will be posting those proposals to the TRIG FTP site and send out a link so ARG and TRIG members can review the proposals in advance if they would like.

**Article 106 Flow Implementation Plan** – *The draft FIP is anticipated to be available by February 2012 [now revised to March] and the final submitted to FERC October 17, 2012.*

## LB FSC UPDATE

Nick reported that the next FPTWG meeting is scheduled for tomorrow. They will review design modifications and the 2011 performance study, *net design changes, sub-sampling results and Lower Baker FSC performance study plan* before visiting the Lower Baker FSC construction site.

PSE is *planning* to replace the Upper Baker guide net for the 2013 season, *installing the nets late Fall 2012, at approximately the same time that the new Lower Baker net is installed. PSE plans to use the stronger, more durable Dyneema mesh material and will incorporate similar design features used on the Lower Baker net based on lessons learned from the 2011 remediation at Upper Baker. These changes include a “tiled” modular design with frequent ripstops, spare panels to allow for quick field repairs, changed mesh hanging direction, and revised intermediate float and tension line locations.*

## Meeting Evaluation

- Provide print copies of presentations
- Address phone issues
- Fewer mixed metaphors