



Baker River Project License Implementation **Terrestrial Resource Implementation Group**

Team Leader: Tony Fuchs (PSE), 425-462-3553, tony.fuchs@pse.com

PRESENT

Tony Fuchs, Tom Flynn, Jacob Venard, Scott Heller, Haley Edwards, and Joel Schleppi (PSE); Stan Walsh (SRSC); Doug Couvelier (Upper Skagit); Peter McBride by phone (Swinomish); Emily Wirtz (Sauk-Suiattle); Theresa Mathis (USFS); Bill Richardson by phone (RMEF); and Lyn Wiltse, facilitator (PDSA Consulting).

DECISIONS: None today.

2015 TRIG MEETINGS

Quarterly on first Thursdays: June 4 (at Baker Lake Lodge), Sept. 3, Dec. 3 with conference calls as needed

PERSONAL UPDATE

We wish Lou Ellyn the very best in her retirement which starts the end of this month.

ACTION ITEMS

- Tony Reserve the Baker Lake Lodge for the next TRIG meeting on June 4. Set up a site visit to the latest possible acquisition(s); invite TRIG.
- Tony Set up meeting with Fenner Yarrowborough to discuss WDFW's process to review/approve elk acquisition properties.
- Tony Schedule another license docs refresher in spring, after April 1; invite Peter, Fenner, Chris, Mark (and all TRIG). This serves as a good refresher as well as an introduction to those new to group.
- Tony Provide formal instructions on how TRIG members should comment on documents and reports that are PDF documents.
- Tony Send out proposed thinning map to Doug (as soon as possible).
- Tony Email out final proposal for thinning project for 2 week TRIG review and approval.
- All Discuss loon platform options and any other ideas with their respective organizations and come to the next meeting ready to continue the discussion.
- Scott Talk with Hamer Environmental and give an update at the June meeting. Also send Doug the GIS layer with the seven wetland areas from SA 508 for reed canarygrass control.
- Scott, Haley Put together criteria for deciduous forest *and wetland* acquisitions and give to Joel to help to guide his awareness as he scouts for elk forage property.
- Doug Send Tony parcel numbers that correspond with potential wetland properties.
- Tony Send out updated work plan for all to review and approve. Unless there are questions or objections we will move forward with this plan.
- Jacob If ARG members support the requested use of HERC funds to create an additional fry release site on Old Scott Paper Road, send out formal request for decision to ARG and TRIG members.

PREVIOUS / ONGOING ACTION ITEM:

- Stan Coordinate mtg between PSE and the Tribes re: access on acquired lands (still in the works).

SAFETY MOMENT

Be careful to point spray cans away from your face when spraying. If you smell gas when returning to your vehicle, check to see if the fuel line has been cut. There are desperate people out there!

BRCC / LICENSING UPDATE

The next BRCC meeting will be on April 22 at the Skagit Service Center in Burlington. It will include an overview of the entire Baker Settlement Agreement.

Aquatics (ARG)

- Unit 4 will be up and running on April 1. PSE is currently on schedule to begin supplying the Aquatics Table 1 flow regime in October 2015.
- March 1 is the start-up date for the Upper and Lower Baker FSCs.
- The 2015 broodstock goals are to put 2.5 million fry into Lake Shannon and 4.5 million into Baker Lake (about 0.5 million more than last year). Based on the number of outmigrants, we may get close to another record return (around 48K adults).
- Spawning beach decommissioning project is now complete (re-vegetation, in-water work, etc.). We are awaiting final sign-off from the Forest Service.
- On February 25, PSE had consultation with the agencies in Lacey re: bull trout – no changes to the program are anticipated.
- There was a recent blow-out of the weir up at the Channel Creek fry release site so we are currently depending on the Blue Tarp site.

Cultural (CRAG)

- This group last met on February 18. They have produced three video shorts, focused on the fish cultural and historical aspects of the operation. They hope to have these out in mid-year. The videos will be available on the PSE YouTube channel as well as on PSE.com.
- They are developing an MOA for a 2017 project to update the dam crest on the dam at Lower Baker. Mitigation includes converting the existing Club house there into a visitor center. They anticipate doing this in the 2016 -2017 timeframe.

Recreation / Law Enforcement (RRG / LEP)

- These groups last met on February 17. Their focus was on coordination between LEOs from WFDW, Skagit and Whatcom Counties, and the Forest Service and PSE. RAM funding was provided to the Forest Service for expansion of the boat launch at Panorama Point later this year.

Reporting Schedule is Approved

FERC has approved the change in the reporting schedule for all Baker reports. The end of April is when the draft TRIG reports are due out. All 500 series article reports will be provided at that time for a 60-day review (comments due June 30). Comments will be incorporated into the reports and the reports will be provided to FERC by Sept. 30. All reporting now will be for the previous calendar year. These reports will be provided on the FTP site vs. sending out in mass emails. Final documents will still be a link on the website.

Next steps: Tony will provide formal instructions on how to leave comments/responses on reports that are in PDF formats (via sticky notes or other).

Budget

Tony reviewed what funds were left at the end of 2014. He reviewed the funds available in 2015 (escalations will be added the end of March). On the capital side, \$2.5 million is available to buy habitat that is not aquatic/riparian. This information is posted on the FTP site.

Tony announced that the timber harvesting at Burpee Hill cost ~\$380K and we made ~\$670K for a net of nearly \$300K. There was great rejoicing!

HABITAT ENHANCEMENT

SA 502 Forest Habitat

Haley reported that they did restoration plantings, including bare roots in March of 2014 and live stakes in November of 2013. This year they will identify other areas for restoration plantings. Cottonwood and willow are starting to bud out. Everything was still alive – hundreds of willows and cottonwoods. We will need to go back and see if it is necessary to do spot treatments of knotweed. Some native plants are coming in as well. They also did hemlock, cedar and spruce plantings as well. No elk damage was observed. They plan to do the additional planting in the fall. This was paid for with forest habitat funding.

SA 503 Elk Habitat

Elk Forage Habitat Enhancement – the goal is to create more forage patches for elk. Each patch will be 1-3 acres. Bill suggested not going below 1 acre in size otherwise the area will close up fairly quickly.

At least \$10K is budgeted for seed this year. Tony explained they did timber harvest in Units 6 and 4.1. On April 10 and 11 they plan to plant 1,200 lbs of grass seed with volunteers from RMEF in Unit 6. Other volunteers are welcome. Tony modified the preferred seed list from the last time he had sent it out. So far they have used three different mixes at Alder Creek (two that include orchard grass). Last week they did seeding in thinned areas of Unit 5. They also will be doing thinning this spring in the remainder of Unit 5 and in three additional areas on Alder Creek. Burpee Hill doesn't have non-native species except for reed canary grass so it doesn't make sense to assign non-native grasses to the area. They decided to plant native grasses that are also good elk forage. Instead of white clover, they will go with red clover as it is less invasive and good for Nitrogen fixing. Tony recommended buying this native mix of seeds for Units 6 and 4.1 at Burpee Hill to the tune of ~\$8K.

Tony will put in an HPA amendment to the DNR LT Forest Practice Permit to allow building a box culvert bridge (over Stream O) connecting BH1150 to unit 9.5.2 on the Burpee Hill property. We are looking at converting alder patches (through thinning and harvest) on these properties to convert them to elk forage. The alder is now big enough to be sold for firewood or pulp and maybe some saw logs. There was a question about the cost effectiveness of putting in the bridge. Tony explained that the bridge would be the only way to access about ¼ of the property on the plateau. We can apply funds gained from harvest of Unit 6 to pay the \$35-\$40K required to construct the bridge.

After much discussion all agreed to use the suggested seed mix at Burpee Hill. Theresa will double check with her experts and let Tony know if they see a problem with the suggested mix. Tony would like to get this year's work done in June and July before they shut the forest down due to potential drought conditions.

Next steps: Tony will send out proposed thinning map to Doug. He will also email the final proposal for thinning project for TRIG for a 2 week review and approval.

SA 504 Wetland Habitat

Blackberries will be treated in unit AC-W-14.0 in the east parcel of Alder Creek. This is our most degraded wetland as the blackberries are suppressing the existing trees. Scott reported they will do blackberry cutting/native vegetation release in this unit. They will cut the blackberries 3-4 ft. around some of the trees (not in the open area). They plan to do the cutting in June and treat any re-sprouting in September. Phase two might include cutting blackberries on both sides of the seasonal stream that runs through the parcel.

SA 505 AQUATIC RIPARIAN HABITAT UPDATE

New Projects Approved

Scott reported on activity at the Article 505 Aquatic Riparian Habitat Working Group (ARHWG) meeting on January 27 where they approved 5 projects. At their Feb 12 meeting all projects were approved for funding.

Scott will be doing a Doodle poll for a process improvement meeting in April. That meeting will be announced by the end of the week. PSE will be working on work orders for the projects in March and then will begin to put contracts in place. PSE cannot reimburse any monies spent until all contracts are signed and in place.

Hansen Creek Acquisition

Joel announced these parcels were purchased for \$375K on Dec. 31, 2014 of last year. (They were authorized to go as high as \$390). \$402K was the final amount including closing costs. We are in the process of getting the Hansen Creek properties into Open Space designation (all three of them). The Hansen Creek Channel realignment can still occur (est. in 2017). We will have another \$2 million installment accrued by then.

AVIAN UPDATES

SA 506 Osprey Update

Mel reported (prior to the meeting) that the plan is to leave the existing osprey nest (that hasn't been cleaned out) in place and to construct a new one.

SA 507 Loon Platform Maintenance

Haley reviewed all of the requirements of the SA with us: monitoring to determine nesting activity twice a month from April through July for the first 15 years. On the 16th year, PSE will submit a draft effectiveness report to assess loon breeding success of the installed nesting platforms.

For Lake Shannon, the original loon platform was installed in 2007. In 2013 they moved it to the Bear Creek area. They rebuilt it in 2011 with a different design – this was damaged a couple of times so they rebuilt it twice more at the end of the 2011 and 2012 seasons (due to LWD damage). They moved it to a more protected location. We have eight years of loon survey data and platform monitoring on Lake Shannon, with no loons having been observed near or trying to nest on the platforms.

We have six years of data at Baker Lake. Again, there have been no loon sightings near the platforms. There was trouble with Anderson Creek platform that was sitting too low in the water. They will check on that in March in hopes that they will be able to keep vegetation on the platform. When they checked on the Noisy Creek platform in March it had flipped upside down – later it went missing altogether.

There have been small groups of loons sighted on both lakes. There are 17 known nesting loon pairs in western Washington, mostly in King County. There are some in Eastern Washington as well. There are only a few loon platforms that have been found to be successful - in Cedar and Green River. These have log booms around them and there is not much boat traffic. Typically loons become habituated to platforms and *may* start using them after two or three years. Platforms are recommended in areas where there are known breeding populations with low nesting success. Lake fluctuations are typical, even in natural lakes. If a lake is not developed and the water level doesn't fluctuate, it is *possible and maybe* likely that there would be a loon presence. We don't have a known breeding population on our reservoirs. Chester Morse Lake might be an option (Seattle's drinking water – high up in the Cedar River Watershed). Tent (?) Lake (owned by WDFW) might be another option. Baker Lake and Lake Shannon have a lot of exposure due to weather and wave action, recreation, boating, no brood habitat. Vogler Lake (our Burpee Hill property) may be another possibility, except no loons have been observed there.

It was suggested that maybe we could supplement *a lake with nesting platforms* if we have lakes where there are two nesting pairs and we think there should be more. Another suggestion was to reach out to the Audubon Society. We should also keep in mind there will be more fry in the lake – might this encourage loons to nest?

For now we will continue as we have. In the meantime, Haley asked all to consider the following options:

- Continue with the program per the license (survey twice monthly April-July, monitor platforms and access restriction devices, maintain them through year 15).

- Continue with the survey, monitoring and maintenance – but reduce the frequency to monthly.
- Make a determination in consultation with the TRIG before year 15 re the continuation of the program.
- Provide funding to a 3rd party for a loon platform in an alternative location (there is not a robust loon program in Skagit or Whatcom counties).
- Explore options to partner with others in hopes of providing more benefit to the resource.

Next steps: All to discuss these options and any other ideas with their respective organizations and come back ready to continue the discussion.

BOTANICAL UPDATE

SA 508 Noxious Weed Management Activities

Scott said at Alder Creek they will start doing wild chervil treatments on March 23 – as it is best to do so before it flowers. They are treating chervil earlier and earlier each year. *Later in the year*, there will be re-treatments of other weeds – at the Upper Baker compound, around the dam, and hatchery. At Lake Shannon there will be shoreline retreatment. They have eradicated some *Canada* and bull thistle sites. Lake levels will be down so there will be more shoreline available which encourages noxious weed activity.

They are looking at cutting ivy that is climbing up ~60 trees near Lake Shannon Dam, *and* the new FSC – ¾ of an acre. They are trying to reduce reed canary grass in seven selected wetlands. We may look into a consulting firm to supplement our research here. We need help determining where the best areas to treat reed canary grass are (areas that are not totally under water). Some wetlands are very deep due to beaver dams. These wetlands are so remote – it is difficult to get there and monitor them effectively. WB 17 and 30 are the ones we have focused on so far because they are relatively easy to access. Most of the others you have to boat into or do a mile long bushwhack – this would make it really difficult for a person with an herbicide pack to enter. There are some small patches of reed canary grass to treat but we need to prioritize based on cost-effectiveness. Hamer Environmental might be able to help document what is there. There is a lot of funding ~ \$800K for the life of the license (without escalation). Might special permits be needed if transport herbicides by boat over Baker Lake?

Next steps: Scott will talk with Hamer Environmental and then give an update at the June meeting. He will also send Doug the GIS layer with the seven wetland areas that are called out in the SA 508 for reed canarygrass control.

SA 509 Plants of Special Status

Scott explained that *Plants of Special Status* surveys will be conducted as projects come up. In 2016 there will be a survey of all sites surveyed during relicensing (we have developed management plans for all of them). We survey these sites every five years. No changes are expected due to the remote nature of the sites

SA 510 *Carex flava* 2015 Census

Scott reported we are doing a *Carex flava* census every two years in late July – early August. *We anticipate using the Carex Working Group again – census may occur late July because this year has been so mild.*

2015 will be *the next Carex flava* census year. Scott *showed an aerial photo with 2009, 2011, and 2013* survey plots identified and an area identified as being likely sites if *Carex flava* has spread to new locations. They tend to like full sun and disturbance. Many are along transect 2 on the edge where the tributary comes into the opening.

SA 511 Legacy Wood

Alder Creek:

Forest Habitat

- Continuing with what was planned last year. Will look for opportunities to create alder snags / logs in Unit 2 on the west side of the wetland to promote growth of existing conifers for legacy wood. Sap suckers love alder snags especially along the trails.
- Create some logs to discourage recreational use of ATVs and motorcycles.

Elk Forage

- Mgt. Unit 13.1 – Create conifer snags in thinned elk forage area (Canopy Conservation)
- Mgt. Unit 15.0 – Remaining conifers are considered legacy wood and have decadent features. Could convert to snags in the future (Canopy Conservation)
- Mgt. Unit 21.2 – Create conifer snags in WRT / GRT portion of timber harvest (Canopy Conservation)

Burpee Hill:

Forest Habitat

- Conduct site visit with Canopy Conservation to determine safety / feasibility of snag creation in bottomland area
- Create alder snags to promote cottonwood
- Create alder logs to open the canopy to promote other species / restoration planting in the understory under SA 502

Elk Forage

- Mgt Unit 6 – Create conifer snags along edge of clear cut and in WRT / GRT portion of the timber harvest unit (Canopy Conservation)
- Mgt Units 9.1.2, 9.3.1, 9.3.2, and 9.3.4 – Create conifer snags in areas of alder thinning / harvest for elk forage (Janicki)

FRY RELEASE SITE FUNDING

There is a proposal to use 505 funds that are available now and repay them with HERC funds when they become available in order to establish an additional fry release site off Rd. 1148. In Oct. of 2017 the 505 funds would be paid back, with interest. This site would provide access at all pools depths, in shallow still water. It would allow for better dispersal of fry in the upper watershed, better food availability, limits conditioned predation, mimics species habitat use at juvenile life stages.

Site selection is limited to existing road network to reduce costs. The request is to use this money to do the NEPA portion of the project. If both the ARG and the TRIG are generally accepting of the advance funding of \$20K, then an official proposal would be emailed out to ARG and TRIG members for official approval.

The SA 505 planning fund is owned by ARG and TRIG. There is currently \$323K in that fund. Theresa pointed out that the \$20K to do the NEPA is a *rough estimate*.

Next steps: The co-managers will present this request to ARG members at their meeting March 10. If they are in support of this, PSE will send out an email request to ARG and TRIG members for a formal decision.

SA 514 EFFECTIVENESS MONITORING

Breeding Bird Monitoring Planning for 2015

Haley announced she plans to move forward with the second round of surveys following the same protocols we discussed prior to the last season.

Elk Pretreatment Survey Update, Planning

Tony set up a series of survey points and thinning areas, got videos of elk, and did vegetation work. This fall will do a post treatment plot in each of the areas after all the grass has grown back in.

He will do this for Alder Creek and Burpee Hill properties. The monitoring is to see how effective the treatments are. Tony bought six cameras last year. Two have been stolen off the trees.

The pretreatment surveys documented vegetation and elk pellets groups prior to treatment. The survey plots are 17 meters in diameter (following protocol for elk pellet group counts).

SA 602 TERF FUNDS

Sauk-Suiattle Elk Capture Update

Emily is trapping right now at Alder Creek so she was unable to stay once she arrived for this meeting. They previously trapped an adult bull and juvenile (did not collar them), and just got another that she is hoping to collaring at this moment (turns out it was a false alarm). They are hoping to collar cows. Will later set up some tree stands and will try to dart a bull. No collars have been placed so no data yet. Lots of elk use right now.

DOCUMENT UPDATES

Plants of Special Status HMP

Comments were in by December 14. They were incorporated and a new document sent out last Friday for 2 week decision period. Barring any objections, this plan will be approved by March 13 as the current working document (not going to FERC for approval).

Burpee Hill Management Program Document / DNR Permits Update

We have 2 Burpee Hill properties that we are merging in our management plan. Tony got a proposal from Bruce Stoker who did our road and unstable slope geology work to do similar work on the Burpee Hill South property. The estimated cost was \$10K which is typical for what we have done for other properties. Tony is moving forward with this contract. This will result in a really good map. This BHS property is now within the project boundary. After this is mapped we will do the necessary cultural surveys. They won't be doing any management on this property until next year. Will get separate DNR permit for this south property. They will give an update on this in December.

Note: The bridge we are building is over a fish-bearing stream so we will need to get an amendment to our existing forest practices permit. We hope to get this amendment asap so can do the work in August.

Annual Review of SA 501 Documents – Document Refresher

With new members entering the group and with “old” members needing a refresher, it was agreed to ask Tony to schedule a separate meeting to consist of a 2-hour review of the terrestrial SA articles.

LAND ACQUISITION UPDATES

Joel showed us pictures of properties that we might trade for if we purchased property S. Next steps include touching base with DNR and meeting with Sierra Pacific to discuss the possibility of a trade. At our June meeting we will review some properties they think are suitable for elk habitat and we can discuss,

Stan observed that, from a management standpoint, it would be beneficial to have a large chunk of land rather than separate properties that are disconnected / widely dispersed. There are scales of management, connectivity, mutual resource benefits to consider.

How do we prioritize the other money that is set aside for wetlands and deciduous forests? So far all the money we have has been tied up in looking for elk properties. We are not looking in the bottomland areas at all.

Funds: Forest Habitat 502 (\$163 K), aimed at mixed forest including cottonwood in the bottomlands (nearer the Skagit River), and Wetland Habitat 504 (\$68K) might be combined to allow for more options. Do we want to try to target wetlands and forest specifically? It is nice to have this money available as it could tip the scales making a property affordable that otherwise wouldn't be affordable.

Tony reminded all that we did look at deciduous forest habits pretty hard about 4 years ago and what was found was covered with invasives.

Next steps: Scott and Haley to put together criteria for these funds and give to Joel to help to guide his awareness as he scouts for elk forage property. Doug to send potential wetland parcel numbers to Tony.

2015 FINALIZE WORK PLANS FOR ALDER CREEK/BURPEE HILL

Tony walked us through a spreadsheet highlighting the projected costs for each article for the Alder Creek and Burpee Hill properties. He will true up these numbers to the extent possible and send out for all to review. As he gets more information on what these activities cost he will email out an update to all, especially is over the projected amount. Activities that we are obligated to do or were previously approved, then there would be no need to get another round of approval. For the planning of this year's elk enhancement at Burpee Hill, the Alder thinning proposal will be complete soon and then we may want to meet to discuss. This is challenging as we only meet quarterly. Tony will send out updates on real costs that exceed estimates.

Below is a list of the anticipated remaining funds in each article at the end of 2015:

- Forest Habitat: \$10K remaining after projected work at Alder Creek and Burpee Hill.
- 504 Wetland: \$196K left after completing projected work at Alder Creek.
- Legacy Wood: \$55K remains.
- Effectiveness Monitoring: \$90K remains.
- Elk Forage: \$125K (may be closer to \$140K) is projected to remain.

Next Steps: Tony will send out an updated work plan for all to review and approve. Unless there are questions or objections we will move forward with this plan.

Meeting Evaluation

- Good turnout and participation
- Going to miss Lou Ellyn, and wish her well in her retirement!
- Chocolate Pie with PB Doves was much appreciated.
- Problems with Lync system.

Draft TRIG Agenda, June 4, 2015 at Baker Lake Lodge, including site visits

- Welcome, Safety Moment, Agenda, Action Items
- License / BRCC Update
- Standard Updates: Botanical, Osprey, Loons, Legacy Wood, 505, acquisitions
- 2015 Work Plan, Budget Updates
- Field Trip