

**Thompson Falls Sub-Group
TAC Meeting
December 18, 2017
MFWP Office, Missoula, Montana**

Time: 10:00am-11:30am

Meeting called by: Brent Mabbott, NorthWestern **Meeting:** Thompson Falls Sub-TAC group
Note taker: Kristi Webb

Attendees: Andy Welch, NWE; Brent Mabbott, NWE; Jordan Tollefson, NWE; Ladd Knotek, FWP; Kristi Webb, New Wave; Ginger Gillin (phone), GEI; Kevin Aceituno (phone), FWS; Marc Terrazas (phone), FWP; Ryan Kreiner (phone), FWP

Meeting Summary

1. Ladder Operations 2018-2020

NorthWestern has requested the group provide a 3-year recommendation (2018, 2019, 2020) for weir operations at the ladder along with benchmarks for data analysis.

Current objectives of ladder operations include passage of all fish except Lake Trout and Walleye. Top priority is Bull Trout passage. FWP indicated that they have zero tolerance for Walleye passage, thus volitional passage is not an option at this time.

FWS considers the next 3-years as part of the evaluation period. FWP and FWS recommend additional analysis in notch mode to provide a more rigorous analysis and comparison of notch versus orifice mode under variable flow and temperature conditions and confirm 2017 results were not an anomaly.

Jon Hanson (FS) initially provided an example 3-year plan of notch, orifice, and notch mode. With the comprehensive scientific review with recommendations for future operations scheduled for submittal in December 2020, Kristi recommended operating in notch for two consecutive years (2018-2019) to allow for the 2nd year of operations in notch mode to be included in the analysis and comparison to orifice mode operations as well as discussions and recommendations for future operations.

Recommendations this sub-group agreed upon:

2018 – notch mode only

2019 – notch mode only

2020 – orifice mode (unless conditions in river such as spring peak flows may be lower than normal like in 2015 and a flow year data in notch mode has not been obtained)

Operations in 2018

Daily Ladder Checks (During the work week) at 8:30/9am

When water temperatures reach 23 C, daily water checks required (including weekends). Brent – we do not want a fish to be in the holding pool longer than 24 hrs during these warmer water temperatures.

Action Items

Marc – Provide results to group on statistical analysis of fish recorded at the ladder.

NorthWestern – Provide recommendations for 2018-2020 weir mode operations to CSKT to review, comment, and vote.

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2. TAC Funding Geographic Boundaries & Prioritization

NorthWestern's legal team has reviewed the language for projects receiving TAC funding as outlined in the FERC requirements and FWS Biological Opinion and concluded the TAC cannot fund projects downstream of Thompson Falls Dam. Therefore, the two proposals (Prospect Creek PIT TAG array and Crow Creek) approved by the TAC during the November 29, 2017 annual meeting cannot be funded at this time.

Funding is identified as mitigation for downstream migration of bull trout. Funding is specifically for migratory bull trout, not resident populations.

Andy – If the group would like projects in Prospect Creek included for consideration of TAC funds, then an official letter to FERC with agency support will need to be filed. The letter will need to describe the connection between Prospect Creek and the purpose of the mitigation funding identified for downstream migration of Bull Trout. As long as there is agency support, FERC will likely support change. However, an anticipated timeline for receiving a response from FERC is unknown and can vary from weeks to months.

Recommendations this sub-group agreed upon:

This sub-group agreed and supports the idea of submitting a letter to FERC modifying the mitigation funding by the TAC to also include Prospect Creek. The proposed change would not require any changes to the current MOU or BO. The proposal will not include any other tributaries downstream of Thompson Falls Dam. **Ginger and Andy will coordinate to develop a letter for agency review and signature.**

Following this meeting, Ladd contacted Craig Barfoot, CSKT and confirmed Jocko is the only drainage in the lower Flathead that should be included in the prioritization list for funding (does not include Missions or other trib). Below is the proposed prioritization based on the meeting discussion and follow up coordination between FWP and CSKT. The group agreed that the prioritization of geographic areas for TAC funding will not be an official document that is submitted to FERC, but document developed by the TAC to provide guidance for the TAC. This prioritization list serves as a proposal until agreed and voted on by the TAC.

Possible prioritization for tributary drainages upstream of Thompson Falls Dam that would be included for expenditure of funds to mitigate for loss of downstream passage of bull trout at the dam:

**This should be the same list we have been working from since initiation of the program, with exception of possibly adding Prospect Creek.*

- J Tier 1 Stream – *Thompson River drainage*, a tributary immediately upstream of Thompson Falls Dam with known migratory Bull Trout presence.
- J Tier 2 Streams – Tributaries upstream of Thompson Falls Dam between the Thompson River and Fish Creek in the middle Clark Fork R. drainage and the Jocko River in the Flathead R. drainage that still support migratory bull trout. These would include the following: *St. Regis R., Cedar Creek, Trout Creek, Fish Creek and the Jocko River.*
 - o Potential Tier 2 – Also discussed the potential of included Prospect into Tier 2 (Ryan & Kevin). No decision reached by group on how to tier Prospect Ck at this time. Prospect Ck proposals will have to be connected to mitigation funding objectives. We will need to get approval from FERC before Prospect will be included into the prioritization list.
- J Tier 3 Streams – Middle Clark Fork River tributaries upstream of Thompson Falls Dam, in the reach from Fish Creek upstream to the Blackfoot River confluence that still support migratory bull trout. Specific tributary drainages include: *Rattlesnake Creek, Grant Creek, and Albert Creek.*

Kristi Webb

From: Craig Barfoot <Craig.Barfoot@cskt.org>
Sent: Tuesday, December 19, 2017 10:21 AM
To: Kristi Webb; Welch, Andrew; Brent Mabbott (brent.mabbott@northwestern.com); Jordan Tollefson; 'Ladd Knotek (lknotek@mt.gov)'; Ginger Gillin (ggillin@geiconsultants.com); Aceituno, Kevin; Terrazas, Marc; Ryan Kreiner (rkreiner@mt.gov)
Subject: RE: Summary & Recommendations from the Thompson Falls- Subgroup meeting December 18, 2017

CSKT concurs with the subcommittee's recommendations on the proposed ladder operations for 2018-2020, on the proposal to send the FERC a letter to formally include Prospect Creek as eligible for TAC funding, and on the proposed updates to the stream prioritization and eligibility list for mitigation funding.

Craig

From: Kristi Webb [mailto:kwebb@nw-enviro.com]
Sent: Tuesday, December 19, 2017 10:11 AM
To: Welch, Andrew <Andrew.Welch@northwestern.com>; Brent Mabbott (brent.mabbott@northwestern.com) <brent.mabbott@northwestern.com>; Jordan Tollefson <Jordan.Tollefson@northwestern.com>; 'Ladd Knotek (lknotek@mt.gov)' <lknotek@mt.gov>; Kristi Webb <kwebb@nw-enviro.com>; Ginger Gillin (ggillin@geiconsultants.com) <ggillin@geiconsultants.com>; Aceituno, Kevin <kevin_aceituno@fws.gov>; Terrazas, Marc <MTerrazas@mt.gov>; Ryan Kreiner (rkreiner@mt.gov) <rkreiner@mt.gov>
Cc: Craig Barfoot <Craig.Barfoot@cskt.org>
Subject: Summary & Recommendations from the Thompson Falls- Subgroup meeting December 18, 2017

Hi Everyone,

Attached is the summary for the sub-group meeting held yesterday (December 19, 2017) at MFWP's office in Missoula. Two topics were discussed: 1) ladder operations for 2018-2020 and 2) prioritization of geographic areas for TAC funding as well as whether funding can be allocated to project downstream of Thompson Falls Dam.

The sub-group's recommendations (FWP, FWS, and NorthWestern) for CSKT review, comment, and vote include running the ladder in notch mode in 2018 and 2019, followed by orifice mode in 2020 (unless peak streamflows are likely to be low and would provide additional analysis of notch mode under river conditions not observed prior to 2020). The overall goal for running the mode in 2018 and 2019 in notch mode will be to have a larger dataset under variable river conditions to make a more rigorous comparison between orifice and notch operations. Currently, the objectives are to focus on Bull Trout passage, native fish passage, non-native game fish passage and exclusion of LT and WE. Volitional passage is not an option (zero-risk tolerance by FWP) at the moment since it is unclear and even evaluating notch mode for 3 years will likely not provide conclusive evidence regarding WE movement in the ladder in notch mode.

NorthWestern had a legal review of the terms and conditions of the Biological Opinion and FERC requirements and confirmed TAC funding may not be allocated to project downstream of Thompson Falls Project. However, if there is agency support, NorthWestern can file a letter to FERC requesting this to be amended. The sub-group agreed to submitting a letter to FERC that expands TAC funding opportunities to include Prospect Creek (and only this tributary downstream of the dam).

Quick update: Ladd contacted Craig and confirmed that the Jocko is the only drainage in the lower Flathead that should be included in the prioritization list (not Mission Ck or other tribs). The prioritization list provided in this email is also in the attached notes.

Craig - please provide CSKT's input and vote with regards to the recommendations the sub-group provided for ladder operations between 2018 through 2020, recommendation to prepare a letter to FERC with agency approval to include Prospect as an eligible tributary for TAC funding, and the proposed prioritization of tributary drainages that may receive TAC funding. Details of these topics are in the attached meeting summary.

1) 2018 – 2020 ladder operations recommendation:

- 2018 operations – notch mode
- 2019 operations – notch mode
- 2020 operations – orifice mode

2) Recommendation to prepare a letter to FERC to formally include Prospect Creek as an eligible tributary for TAC funding.

3) Possible prioritization for tributary drainages upstream of Thompson Falls Dam that would be included for expenditure of funds to mitigate for loss of downstream passage of bull trout at the dam:

The group agreed that the prioritization of geographic areas for TAC funding will not be an official document that is submitted to FERC, but document developed by the TAC to provide guidance for the TAC. This prioritization list serves as a proposal until agreed and voted on by the TAC.

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- o Potential Tier 2 – Also discussed the potential of included Prospect into Tier 2 (Ryan & Kevin). No decision reached by group on how to tier Prospect Ck at this time. Prospect Ck proposals will have to be connected to mitigation funding objectives. We will need to get approval from FERC before Prospect will be included into the prioritization list.

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**This should be the same list we have been working from since initiation of the program, with exception of possibly adding Prospect Creek.*

If there are any additional thoughts or comments, please provide a response to all in this email to keep all participants in the sub-group meeting involved. Once a final TAC vote (includes CSKT input) is provided regarding ladder operations and the prioritization list of TAC funding, an email to the entire TAC will be submitted providing an update from yesterday's meeting and follow up conversations.

Regards,
Kristi

Kristi Webb
Principal Scientist



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