**Wildlife Advisory Committee**

**HEP Subcommittee**

**May, 28, 2014**

**Spokane, WA**

**DRAFT Meeting Notes**

**Attendees:** Kerry Berg (NPCC), Karl Weist (NPCC), Jason Kesling (BPT), Kelly Singer (CCT), Carl Scheeler (CTUIR), Peter Paquet (NPCC), Alan Wood (MFWP), and Dwight Bergeron (MFWP)

**By Phone:** Sandra Fife (BPA), Scott Soults (KTOI), Norm Merz (KTOI), Paul Ashley (PSMFC), Lawrence Schwabe (CTGR), and Neil Ward (QW Consulting)

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| Item 1 | **Introductions and Approval of Agenda** |
| Item 2 | **Briefing on Draft Fish and Wildlife Program Related Issues** |
|  | Peter Paquet provided an overview of the Wildlife Mitigation Section of the NPCC’s Draft Fish and Wildlife Program with emphasis on the portions pertaining to the: 1) proposed use of habitat units as the preferred unit of measurement for mitigation accounting, 2) Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP) methodology, and 3) operational losses. Peter informed the group that the NPCC continues to endorse the existing Program language and that the proposed program language was copied from the WAC Charter.  As a refresher, Peter described how the HEP process was developed, as well as how the use of HUs was adopted into the NPCC’s Fish and Wildlife Program. Peter reassured the participants that the NPCC recognizes the issues that the managers have identified relative to the HEP process, as well as the use of HUs for the purpose of crediting. Regarding HEP, Peter indicated that the NPCC and the managers are still evaluating whether HEP is the best method available to the region. The use of HEP and HUs is described in greater detail in ITEM 3.    Relative to HUs, participants expressed concerns about limited funding and inequality (i.e., “those to the table first receive the money”). Since inequalities may exist, Carl Scheeler suggested there needs to be leadership from the NPCC to address this issue. Participants agreed that the wildlife section of the Draft Fish and Wildlife Program lacks specificity and process descriptions (definitions). Participants suggested that comments should be submitted recommending that there needs to be clear guidance from the NPCC as to how the process will work. Peter informed the group that the more comments they can provide the better.  Regarding the use of HEP and HUs, Peter informed the participants that the UCUT’s provided a formal letter to the NPCC in which the UCUTs provided recommendations for improving wildlife mitigation efforts in the Columbia Basin (Attachment 1). Included in the UCUT’s letter was a recommendation to phase out HEP as a wildlife crediting tool, as well as the Regional HEP Team after the completion of the current reporting requirements. |
| Item 3 | **Briefing on HEP Subgroup Meeting and Potential Issues** |
|  | Peter provided a review of the following meeting notes from the HEP Subgroup’s May 28, 2014 meeting.  ***HEP Subgroup Meeting Recap (May 29, 2014)***  Prior to reviewing the merits of HEP and alternative methods for crediting and monitoring, Paul Ashley provided an update during which he informed the participants that the “old-guard” (i.e., John Andrews and Paul) would be “fading out” in 10 months and that they are attempting to complete the unfinished reports. Paul indicated that the top priority is new projects followed by unfinished projects (e.g., Colville Reservation property purchase in 1997 (closing-out) and the WDFW acquisition along the Snake River (closing-out). It is Paul’s goal to provide the region with the information by March 31, 2015. Paul also indicated that they are transferring the information to PSMFC where it will be stored until the region decides how it wants to make the information available.  The participants were asked whether HEP is still the correct tool for wildlife crediting, as well as where the region is relative to the use and acceptance of HEP. Participants agreed that HEP was initially used because, at the time, it was the state-of-the-art tool; however, other techniques are now available that are considered superior to HEP. Some participants characterized HEP as a “coarse bean-counting” tool. Participants agreed that if they want a monitoring tool, HEP is not the best choice. This has been backed-up by the ISRP during their reviews in which they reported HEP does not inform us about biological responses and the populations. The participants agreed that the biggest issue associated with HEP is that it was not developed to monitor species responses.  Peter informed the group that it is the WAC’s responsibility to identify a solution for the limitations that are associated with using HEP as a crediting tool. Peter led the participants in an effort to frame the issues associated with continuing to use HEP, as well as identifying methods that could potentially be used to replace HEP (Attachment 2). Participants were asked whether HEP is still the best “tool” for the purpose of wildlife crediting. Meeting participants agreed that the current version of HEP (circa 1982) is now outdated and that it is not necessarily used how the USFWS envisioned its use, but instead has been modified to meet individual needs. Attachment 2 reflects the participants attempt to identify issues associated with continuing to use HEP as well as the challenges that could exist if different methods are employed. |
| Item 4 | **Break** |
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| Item 5 | **Briefing on Operational Losses Subgroup Meeting and Potential Issues** |
|  | Peter provided a review of the following meeting notes from the Operational Losses Subgroup’s May 29, 2014 meeting.  ***Operational Losses Subgroup Meeting Recap (May 29, 2014)***  In addressing operational losses, participants reviewed the proposed definition in the DRAFT Program. The definition that is currently provided focuses only on individual animals, not the populations and habitat that are affected by the daily operations of the hydrosystem. The WAC recommended that the definition for operational losses should include “wildlife habitat” (i.e., direct wildlife and wildlife habitat should be addressed).  To evaluate potential approaches to address operational losses, the participants wanted to know how BPA addressed operational losses relative to the Willamette Agreement. Philip Key provided an overview of the process that BPA and ODFW used for addressing operational losses. Philip indicated that they evaluated different approaches including the method being developed by the KTOI. In the end, BPA and ODFW agreed to rely on ODFW’s biologists to provide a “best professional estimate” of operational effects above pool elevation.  The difficulties associated with addressing wildlife operational losses are recognized by the NPCC and are referenced in the DRAFT Program. In addition, the NPCC recognizes the progress that has been made through the pilot project on the Kootenai River. In the DRAFT Program, the NPCC proposes that the WAC examine the existing options and alternatives for providing mitigation for wildlife operational losses and to provide a recommendation to NPCC, for resolving the issue, by October 1, 2015.  Norm Merz provided an update relative to the KTOI/MFWP Kootenai River project that the NPCC has identified as the potential base methodology (Index of Biological Integrity) for the rest of the basin. Norm indicated that they are preparing to evaluate the transferability of the model (i.e., whether it will work for other river systems). To test the model beyond the Kootenai River, the KTOI and MFWP have decided to evaluate the model and whether the relationships can be applied to the Flathead River. Norm indicated that if all goes as planned, the Flathead River run/results will be available later this year.  Although the participants acknowledged the utility of the model for the Kootenai River, concerns were expressed relative to whether it could be transferred to other basins besides the Flathead. Participants questioned whether a pilot study should be conducted on a larger downriver system, as it will have different issues that must be addressed. Participants suggested that good alternative test cases must be identified and potential prioritized. The participants also questioned how to translate functional impact to mitigation. Norm indicated that they are in the process of developing the translation.  In response to the NPCC’s proposed “definition” for operational losses, Scott Soults, Alan Wood, and Dwight Bergeron provided the group with the following definitions as potential replacements for those which are currently in the Draft Fish and Wildlife Program.    ***Operational Impacts***:  *Direct changes in river hydrology, hydraulics, sediment/nutrient supply and/or transport that cascade throughout the ecosystem to alter physical and ecological processes, vegetation communities, which directly affect fish and wildlife communities. Operational impacts can also occur within reservoirs as a result of fluctuating water levels which cause shoreline erosion. Operational impacts are expressed over time and will continue for the life of the hydropower system operation.*  ***Secondary Wildlife Losses***:  *The indirect reduction in wildlife communities and/or their habitats from changes including, but not limited to, food web alterations, habitat availability, or nutrient availability/transport stemming from the construction, inundation, and/or operation of the hydropower system.* |
| Item 6 | **Next Steps and Other Issues** |
|  | WAC Meeting  August 19, 2014 (1:00pm - 4:30pm) and August 20, 2014 (9:00am – 3:00pm)\*  Spokane, WA  \*all times are Pacific |

**ATTACHMENT 1**

**UCUT Letter**

**ATTACHMENT 2**

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|  | **Continue to use HEP** | **Comments and Concerns** | **No longer use HEP (move towards a monitoring/crediting hybrid)** | **Comments and Concerns** |
| **Cons** | Is not a monitoring tool |  | See comments relative to alternatives |  |
|  | Outdated |  |  |  |
|  | Lack of regional support |  |  |  |
|  | Does not tell us anything about biological responses of species and populations |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Pros** | Provides useful information | Value is limited | Would be able to use a method that allows for evaluation of biological responses |  |
|  | Good for crediting and identifying values as applied to target species | Not all managers agree with this characterization |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Alternatives** | Modified HEP (regional habitat values, ocular HEP) | Use full version including monitoring | CHAP |  |
|  |  |  | IBI |  |
|  |  |  | CHAT |  |
|  |  |  | Remote Sensing |  |
|  |  |  | Acres/RVI |  |
|  |  |  | Existing tools used by FERC projects |  |
|  |  |  | Settlements/Agreements – (regional, individual, capitalization (e.g., Williamette River) **BPA has developed a template that they will be providing** | How would you address facilities with multiple entities (e.g., McNary) |
|  |  |  |  | Timing could lead to bow wave |
|  |  |  |  | O&M Stewardship agreements do not need crediting, use of acres and dollars (negotiate lump sum (earn interest) so can operate and maintain property at a reasonable level) |
|  |  |  |  | Equity issue |

**ATTACHMENT 3**

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| **ISSUES** | | | | | | |
| Transfer to Mitigation (land ownership) | Timing | RFP  characterize hydrosystem  systemwide | Off-site mitigation | Relationship to fish mitigation | Transferability | |
|  |  |  |  |  | Other systems | Other systems with bird data/hydrological data |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | Identify potential projects |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Methods | |  |  |  |  |  |
| IBI | CHAP |  |  |  |  |  |
| Conduct a side-by-side comparison. Tom O’Neill will provide a CHAP presentation prior to the next meeting | |  |  |  |  |  |
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