

FISH PASSAGE CENTER OVERSIGHT BOARD
Meeting Notes for December 7, 2009 – Portland, Oregon

The following members were present or on the phone: Chairman Bruce Measure, Daniel Goodman, Doug Taki, Sue Ireland (phone), John Ferguson (phone), Bill Tweit (phone), Brian Marotz (phone), and Tony Nigro (phone). Other participants included Brian Lipscomb, Michele DeHart (phone), Rob Lothrop (phone), Council member Dick Wallace, and Council staff Kerry Berg, Steve Crow, Tony Grover, and Karl Weist.

Bruce Measure called the meeting to order and conducted a roll call to confirm who was on the phone. He introduced the people present in the room.

Presentation on FPC 2009 Accomplishments Report

Fish Passage Center (FPC) director Michele Dehart went over the highlights of the center's 2009 accomplishments report. She listed reports the center produces under its contract with BPA. DeHart also pointed out that the FPC provides a report on fish condition under a contract with the Corps of Engineers.

In carrying these out our assignments in 2009, we did a lot of work on the smolt monitoring program, she said. Last year, we had a request to include data on fish condition, and we developed a protocol for sampling to collect that data, DeHart reported. She also said 2009 was an implementation year for the fish condition data, and the FPC spent considerable time developing customized software.

Staff went out to each remote data-collection site to conduct training in the use of the software program, she said, noting that during these sessions, problems were noted and remedied. DeHart pointed out that each site needed customized software to access the database, and FPC staff carried out that work.

She presented a slide of a touch-screen used to collect data on fish condition and incorporate it with the daily smolt monitoring data. There are many different fish injuries and conditions to incorporate, and it was a lot of work, DeHart commented.

On succeeding slides, she presented examples of individualized software that standardizes data from individual sites with overall program data. DeHart demonstrated a new software function that allows the FPC to monitor collection sites in real time.

Staff spent a lot of time this year on improvements to the FPC website, she continued. The improvements came about as a result of requests from agencies and tribes, who asked that additional queries be added to the data retrieval protocols. DeHart explained how the new queries work on the site.

FPC also spent a lot of time on hatchery release data, she said. We have a lot of requests to make the data more accessible and decided the best way was to make it web based; we

got that well on the way in 2009, DeHart said. We will be putting hatcheries with their locations and release sites on a map that will be easily accessible, she explained.

DeHart went through statistics on FPC data requests and how they were handled. Most requests came from tribes and agencies, but some were from the public. FPC had about 60,000 hits per day on its website; 83 percent from within the United States, DeHart said.

The patterns of use are consistent with those from past years, she said. The daily spring and summer use is the highest, and the pattern is no different than in the past. Data downloads per day have gone up, which I think is a function of making the website easier and faster to use, DeHart added.

She went over a summary of the top 30 pages accessed on the website. The adult counts and adult pages have the highest per-day use. Compared with previous years, the order in which various pages are used is about the same. The only change was that the FPC weekly reports and summaries have moved up the ranks from past years, DeHart said.

In summary, we put a lot of staff effort into improving the website and data access for the public; standardization of fish injury and condition data; and reporting condition data and incorporating it into the new software, DeHart stated. She pointed out that the revamps took staff time and onsite visits. Everything went smoothly, she said, noting that she is really happy with the success of such a big undertaking.

Measure asked for any questions, noting that the accomplishments represent a formidable undertaking. He asked if Council staff uses the site. Tony Grover reported he uses the site a few times a day during the migration season, adding that he finds it extremely easy to navigate and use. John Ferguson said NOAA's Seattle office generally goes directly to the Corps site for adult return data, but the Portland office uses the FPC site.

Bill Tweit said he uses the site. It is our primary means of tracking fish over the dams, he said, and we also use it to track data on migration downstream, data which we feed into our models. It's our "go-to library" for old data. I've used it for 15 years, so I know my way around it, he added. I don't know how a first-time user would experience it, but I refer people to the site and have never heard they had trouble navigating it, Tweit said.

DeHart pointed out the site includes a note that if someone needs help, they should call the FPC. We are here to help people navigate it, and we find that once we walk people through, they seem comfortable and we don't get repeat calls, she wrapped up.

Discussion and Decision on FPC Product Peer Review

Kerry Berg explained that a small group met in October to discuss the peer review provision for FPC products that is in the Council's Fish and Wildlife (F&W) Program. As a follow-up, staff drafted a memo and sent it out to get the board's reaction.

Basically, there was a general consensus it would be appropriate to get ISAB moving on a review of the FPC annual report and cumulative survival study (CSS) annual report, he said. There are also shorter-term FPC analyses that pose a dilemma because there might not be time to review them before they go out. An example brought up in the small group was the sockeye analysis last year, Berg said.

Doug Taki pointed out that there was a fairly exhaustive ISAB and ISRP review of the FPC reports just two years ago. After that report, I don't see a need for anything else so soon, he said.

Ferguson said Rich Alldredge, who was part of the small group, was open to and interested in looking at the 2008 FPC annual report to get familiar with it. The group talked about the process for reviewing documents and whether a review would be done on preliminary or final FPC work, he said. We had a discussion of the in-season SORs, but those would be tough to review, so we put that issue aside for now, Ferguson said. He reported that he consulted with NOAA staff about whether the reviews would have an impact on Biological Opinion implementation, but it seems they would not.

Measure noted that the board "is stuck in about the same spot" as it was in previous discussions on the reviews.

John Shurts explained that the discussion is driven by a F&W program provision that calls for establishing a regular method of FPC peer review. We have to start somewhere, so the proposal is to start with reviewing the annual FPC reports, he said. This would help frame a way to do regular reviews that wouldn't interfere with FPC getting out timely information. We could start with the annual report because it frames everything else. If we do, we would be starting to implement the F&W program provision, he said.

I can't stress enough that in-season, we need the ability to get analyses done and then make a judgment, Tweit said. As an agency, we have always drawn a clear distinction between information for the in-season management of fisheries as opposed to information that is peer-reviewed and part of a long-term scientific inquiry. We understand how to work with both; both are needed, and the FPC's ability to do both is important. For a broad scale analysis, we think peer review is very important, he added.

Ferguson asked whether the oversight board should recommend the ISAB review the 2008 CSS and FPC annual report in order for members to get familiar with the operations requested. He added that there is still the question of what to do with the one-time analyses, like the sockeye report. We could ask for the ISAB reaction to the idea and whether it could be done in a timely manner. We also need to consider whether the ISAB should look at something considered preliminary or wait for the final, he said.

Tweit said it made sense to have the ISAB look at the annual reports. Do we expect the FPC to respond to ISAB comments and revise the reports? he asked

Ferguson said he thought the point was for the ISAB to get up to speed on the documents. We just want them to see the documents and think about how their review might work – I can't see anything major that would require changes. We want them to help us design a review system that would become more formal, he added.

If we are going to ask the ISAB for its opinion about the peer review process, we need to be very explicit about what we are asking them to provide thoughts on, Tony Nigro stated. I would be uncomfortable asking the ISAB how we should label or treat FPC reports; that's more our call than theirs, he said.

I'd prefer to move forward on the reviews, Measure stated. "We've been scratching our heads on this for three meetings." We'd ask them for advice on where the constraints in their reviews might be, he added.

Ultimately, we would want a review that improves the documents, Shurts said. A review of the 2008 reports would not do that; the main point is to begin to look into how the reviews could take place, he said.

Ferguson made a motion that the FPCOB request of the Council's ISAB a review of the 2008 FPC and CSS annual reports in the context of getting familiar with those two documents and to give general comments on the documents; raise specific review issues that should come to the FPCOB and the FPC; get their ideas on issues about peer review, such as the nature of the documents to be reviewed (for example, whether they need to be final). We are asking the ISAB how this review might be done, he stated. Sue Ireland seconded.

Taki said the CSS review seemed unnecessary based on the fact it was thoroughly reviewed in 2007. We could ask the ISAB if they think it is necessary, he said.

Ferguson said one issue for the ISAB was that the membership had gone through a big turnover. One goal is to get new players up to speed on FPC products and issues, he said.

Nigro said he was not interested in delaying action on the reviews, but he wanted to clarify what the FPCOB is asking the ISAB to consider. My understanding was this is a question of what they can manage logistically. Our call is how to label the FPC products in the interim and how to use products pending review, he said, adding that the FPCOB should be very clear about what it is asking the ISAB to provide feedback about.

Dan Goodman said he supported sending the request to the ISAB. It could become the mechanism of review for FPC annual products, but it might not be the way to deal with the "one-off" products. You may want to explore other mechanisms to deal with "brushfires." Perhaps the ISAB could set up a standing committee to deal with brushfires when they arise, he suggested.

Rob Lothrop raised concerns about Ferguson's motion. He said it made sense when Shurts suggested asking the ISAB to look at the annual reports and to give the FPCOB

suggestions about how they might organize other reviews. Lothrop said he objected to referring to the ISAB as “the Council’s ISAB” since it serves the region. There is an injunction from the Ninth Circuit Court related to the scope of the FPC. The concerns that caused the Yakama Nation to bring a lawsuit were related to interjecting Battelle into the process, he pointed out.

Lothrop said CRITFC may not have an issue with outside review of FPC documents, but with “when and in what context” such a review takes place. The FPC serves as technical staff for our organization and others, which is one of the reasons our Columbia Basin Accord has provisions for the continued operation of the FPC. We have an agreement with BPA on the FPC budget and would take it very seriously if accommodating these changes would require more effort from the FPC. The idea of having a standing committee for the one-off reviews strays into process issues – political and legal issues – not science issues, he said. He voiced concerns about asking the ISAB to design a review process for FPC correspondence. While we can’t vote on the FPCOB, we’d make our concerns known, Lothrop stated.

Measure noted that the FPCOB had extended an invitation to CRITFC to participate as a voting member. That offer is always open, but your comments will be taken into consideration, he stated. Measure asked to clarify whether Tweit or Nigro would cast a vote on behalf of Oregon and Washington. Nigro said Tweit is the states’ lead on the issue and would cast the vote.

Ireland asked for clarification on the motion and said what seemed pretty basic has now become complicated. She withdrew her second of the motion.

The discussion made me nervous, Tweit agreed. Using the 2008 reports as tools to get the ISAB’s thoughts would be useful, and a tightly focused motion might pass the FPCOB with consensus. I’m interested in getting a tightly focused reaction to those two documents and not making their charge too sweeping, he said.

Measure asked whether there was a second to Ferguson’s motion and no one responded.

The FPC took a break while Shurts drafted a new motion to reflect the discussion.

Shurts offered the new motion as follows: That the Fish Passage Center Oversight Board request that the ISAB review the 2008 Fish Passage Center and CSS Annual Reports and based on that review, provide recommendations to the Board on how to organize a useful regular review of Fish Passage Center products.

Ferguson said he would withdraw his original motion and move the motion Shurts drafted. Ireland seconded. Measure called for the vote: Goodman, Taki, Ferguson, Marotz, Ireland, and Tweit voted aye. There were no votes opposed.

Future Agenda Items

Berg asked members to email him with ideas for future agenda items. After some discussion, the FPCOB settled on the following 2010 meeting dates: March 8 in Portland; June 7 in Missoula; and December 13 in Portland.

Discussion of New Research Related to PIT Tag Mortality and Tag Loss

Ferguson asked why the PIT Tag research topic was on the agenda. This seems to fall under RM&E and is a discussion for the Council in general, not just the FPCOB, he said.

DeHart noted that the FCP got data requests from Tom Karier, with four specific questions, and from Tony Grover, with one additional question, that pertained to Pit Tag mortality and tag loss. We combined them into one request and responded, she said.

Measure asked if the issue was ripe for FPCOB discussion, and Taki said he thought it was premature.

The Council is about to start a categorical review of RM&E, and the response from the FPC will be extremely helpful, Grover said. I'd recommend you let this response inform the categorical review and if there is anything further for the FPCOB, you could revisit the topic, he suggested.

DeHart said she would send out copies of the response the FCP made to Karier.

"This is a poster child" for the one-off issues, Goodman commented. We ought to be interested in how the region handles it, how long it takes, and by what route it will reach the ISAB. We could use regular updates on it, he said.

I second that, given that the FCP response memo is out, Ferguson said. This is a good example of issues that pop up and how a review takes place, he said.

This will be part of the categorical review of RM&E, Grover said. The FPC is intimately involved in RM&E in the basin, and we will be doing a thorough review; we would be happy to update the FPCOB routinely, he said.

The meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Prepared by Sonya Bruce, NWPC Contractor