



Independent Scientific Review Panel

for the Northwest Power & Conservation Council
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Memorandum (2017-12)

November 21, 2017

To: Henry Lorenzen, Chair, Northwest Power and Conservation Council

From: Steve Schroder, ISRP Chair

Subject: Follow-up Review of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation's John Day Habitat Enhancement Implementation Strategy (Project #2007-397-00)

Background

On October 4 and 5, 2017, the ISRP participated in a site visit with the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation's (CTWSR) team, its partners, and staff of the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NPCC) and Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) to discuss the Tribes' John Day Habitat Enhancement Implementation Strategy (Project #2007-397-00). The site visit was organized in response to the ISRP's July 2017 request ([ISRP 2017-8](#)) for a meeting serving two primary purposes: (1) to open a more efficient dialogue for aligning the visions of the ISRP and CTWSR for effective restoration and enhancement, and (2) for the ISRP to learn more about specific elements of the Strategy that were not fully addressed in a May 12, 2017 response to previous qualifications on the project ([ISRP 2016-13](#), [ISRP 2016-4](#), [ISRP 2013-11](#); see also [ISRP 2017-2](#)). Specifically, the site review was to address three remaining ISRP qualifications associated with the CTWSR's [May 12, 2017 response](#).

In summary, these qualifications include:

1. Provide a comprehensive discussion of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) linked to a more formal process for adaptive management.
2. Describe additional efforts supporting expanded information sharing and public involvement.
3. Comprehensively consider upslope conditions.

Site Review Activities and Impressions

For the October 2017 site visit, a subset of ISRP members (S. Gregory, D. Heller, R. Naiman, S. Schroder, D. Tullos, and C. Wood) met with the CTWSR's John Day Habitat Enhancement

Implementation Strategy group and their restoration partners in John Day, Oregon. On the first afternoon, the team toured two sites selected to address the ISRP's request to see upslope work, examples of the Strategy in action, and evidence of communication with landowners and partners. The first site was a meadow restoration project in the upper John Day River and was presented by representatives from the CTWSR, U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). This site, located on National Forest System land, showed a recently completed project designed to reverse gully erosion and to increase the volume and reduce the temperature of late summer flows downstream of the project area. This was a "proof of concept" project designed to show the potential environmental benefits of extensive meadow restoration in the John Day River Basin. The second site was a "Working Conservation Easement" that was in the process of final development. The ISRP, project proponents, and restoration partners met with several local cattle ranchers to better understand opportunities and challenges for improving cooperative restoration actions with private landowners. Discussions were far-reaching and insightful, highlighting the opportunities and complexities involved with protection and restoration along river corridors in private ownership, while still allowing some level of range and agricultural land management to occur.

The field tour was well organized and informative. It was attended by a range of partners and Tribal members who were familiar with details of the projects being observed. The site visit resulted in improved communication between the ISRP, the John Day Habitat Enhancement Implementation Strategy group, and the Tribal members in attendance. The ISRP appreciated the formal invitation for a future visit by the ISRP to the Warm Springs Reservation made by one of the Tribal Council members. The ISRP will discuss this invitation in the future with Council staff and the CTWSR.

On the second day (morning only), the ISRP met with key personnel of the CTWSR's restoration team and several Tribal members, including Tribal Council and Fish and Wildlife Committee representatives. ODFW staff gave a presentation on long term monitoring of anadromous salmonids in the John Day River and a proposed approach for cooperative effectiveness monitoring of restoration actions. In addition to the presentation by ODFW, a range of topics was discussed during the meeting.

The John Day River Basin has a long and meaningful history for the Tribes, and this was shared with the ISRP by Tribal members and Natural Resource staff during the field tour and office discussions. The proponents have made important advancements toward a more strategic approach to watershed restoration at a landscape scale. They are now able to better focus protection and restoration efforts on priority areas to achieve beneficial habitat and fish population results.

The enthusiasm and hospitality of the CTWSR and staff was very much appreciated. The ISRP now has a greater understanding of progress made by the proponents in building and leveraging local partnerships, as well as the challenges and constraints facing the CTWSR in implementing and monitoring restoration actions. The improved communication and increased understanding of the program are important outcomes of the review and should not be underestimated for their long term, positive effects on the project and future cooperation.

ISRP Recommendation

Meets Scientific Review Criteria (Qualified)

It is clear that the CTWSR are committed to restoration of aquatic habitat and fisheries in the John Day River Basin. Following the October meeting, the ISRP now appreciates that more progress has been made in the project than was evident in recent annual reports. It is apparent that restoration and coordination with other monitoring efforts are moving in a positive direction. However, despite productive discussions on a range of topics, none of the ISRP's three qualifications were fully covered during the meeting. A number of questions and concerns remain to be addressed as the project moves forward. The ISRP feels that continued, regular communication is needed to resolve the remaining qualifications. Consequently, the ISRP requests that the proponents respond specifically to each of the three remaining qualifications in their annual report for 2018 covering fiscal year 2017. This could be achieved through a specific section in the annual report or an attached memo that describes progress toward and barriers to addressing the remaining ISRP qualifications.

A detailed discussion on each of the three remaining qualifications follows:

Qualification 1: Monitoring and evaluation, objectives, and adaptive management

M&E: The CTWSR is clearly making progress toward addressing the M&E deficiency, but details of the program and the timeline for implementation need to be documented and articulated for peer and ISRP review. The proposal that effectiveness M&E be coordinated collaboratively between CTWSR and ODFW appears promising. This approach is currently conceptual and remains to be developed in detail; currently, important elements are missing on implementation, scope, timeline, and provisions for data management. Anadromous salmonids and their habitats will be the primary focus of this M&E effort, but it is unclear whether information on other species will be collected. It was also unclear whether the John Day Habitat Enhancement Implementation Strategy group will perform any M&E activities. A clear strength of the plan, however, is that existing and new monitoring data will be integrated with life-cycle models to support and inform further restoration efforts. Existing data have already provided some important insights into relationships between discharge characteristics and salmonid abundance and viability at the landscape scale.

A significant issue affecting resolution of this qualification is the uncertainty of funding support for regional and project-level M&E for habitat restoration projects. The proposed, cooperative M&E plan is ambitious and requires funding and implementation by ODFW and CTWSR. Continued progress will require ODFW support and collaboration for full implementation of the work. This uncertainty raises the importance of an agreement between the Council and BPA regarding appropriate multi-year funding for regional and project-level M&E. This will enable proponents to demonstrate project outcomes critical for successful adaptive management.

Objectives: Although there were potential objectives mentioned in the ODFW presentation, the proponents have not yet formulated quantifiable objectives or explicit timelines for implementation of specific restoration actions or outcomes at the project and landscape scale, collectively. Quantitative objectives for ongoing and new projects will need to be articulated and a rationale and timeline provided in future reporting. This applies to projects listed in the Umbrella Report and to any new projects that might be included in the next annual report. Aligning the CTWSR John Day Strategy to a set of objectives and quantitatively demonstrating effectiveness of restoration actions at the landscape scale remain major challenges that have not been adequately addressed.

Adaptive management: The 2018 annual report should provide additional information to demonstrate that adaptive management is being effectively implemented. The primary components of an effective adaptive management process were not fully discussed at the meeting. Some important questions include: How and when will quantitative habitat and fish population objectives be established? How will new knowledge be acquired, codified into the program and shared (e.g., online databases, annual reports and/or meetings)? Is there a database in place that is adequate to support adaptive management? How are programmatic decisions made if quantitative objectives indicate that goals are not being achieved? That is, what is the process for making adaptive management decisions?

The ISRP recognizes that we have not fully communicated our expectations for a rigorous adaptive management process. There appears to be confusion by many project proponents on what is desired. If a more complete description of general ISRP expectations for an adaptive management framework would be helpful, an outline could be developed and shared. Similar uncertainty on how to produce quantitative and time-explicit objectives exists elsewhere in the Columbia Basin. If desired, the ISRP would be pleased to arrange a workshop that would focus on setting quantitative objectives and developing adaptive management.

Qualification 2. Information sharing and public outreach

The CTWSR's John Day Habitat Enhancement Implementation Strategy group has demonstrated strong partnerships with key agencies and some important members of the John Day

community. The site visit largely resolved this qualification by highlighting a number of outreach activities that were not previously reported. Overall, there appears to be strong participation by a range of project staff, partners, and Tribal members. This likely reflects outcomes of ongoing and past information sharing and outreach efforts by the project proponents. Of particular relevance was a site visit to a future “working” conservation easement. To facilitate development of a pilot agreement, the CTWSR reached out to the Blue Mountain Land Trust and facilitated the establishment of a Land Trust office in the area. Local landowners were present at the site to discuss their reasons for support as well as potential concerns. The hope is that such partnerships will foster a continuing program of cooperation and conservation easements with local landowners that will protect priority areas of the John Day River Basin. It is clear that the CTWSR has invested a great deal of work creating landowner interest and willingness to participate in such a program.

It was also noted during the field tour that the CTWSR will be receiving a national award from the USFS for their important contributions and involvement in cooperative watershed and aquatic habitat restoration of the John Day watershed. Additionally, a brief discussion described continuing progress on development of the John Day Partnership, in which CTWSR has provided important leadership for the diverse group of partners.

However, while it is clear that CTWSR is engaging with the public and forging partnerships, the ISRP remains interested in additional information regarding the following questions: (1) how are data and knowledge shared internally among project partners and with other agencies and the public, (2) what practical results have been achieved by outreach efforts to date, and (3) what is the overall strategy for public outreach in the future? These questions should be addressed in the next annual report.

Qualification 3. Considering upslope conditions in the Strategy

Efforts to integrate assessment of upslope conditions in restoration planning and implementation need to be included in the next annual report. It would be very useful, for example, to learn how priorities for restoration actions in the upslope areas are developed and coordinated as part of a comprehensive restoration effort. It appears that planning and implementation of upslope work will be the primary responsibility of the USFS, local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and private landowners. As a result, the primary guidance for location and prioritization of this work will mainly be the existing USFS Regional/Forest Restoration strategy and the John Day Partnership Strategy, which is currently in development. We urge the Partnership to develop a formal process for linking these strategies to the Tribal plan or for reconciling differences among them. Doing so will take time as well as trust and cooperation. In addition, some careful thought will be needed to incorporate the potential

effects of wildfires and other landscape-scale changes (e.g., climate change) on restoration priorities. Collaboration on upslope work is a critical component of basin protection and restoration that needs continuing attention to ensure that restoration activities will be effective at the watershed-scale and to help ensure effective use of funds and work force. Future progress should be evaluated regularly and documented.