



Independent Scientific Review Panel

for the Northwest Power & Conservation Council
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Memorandum (ISRP 2016-13)

October 6, 2016

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

From: Steve Schroder, ISRP Chair

Subject: Response Review for the John Day Habitat Enhancement Implementation Strategy
(Project #2007-397-00)

Background

At the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's July 26, 2016 request, the ISRP reviewed a [Response](#) from the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (Tribes) concerning the *John Day River Watershed Restoration Strategy* (Strategy) for the *John Day Watershed Restoration Program* (Project #2007-397-00). The Tribes' Response addresses concerns raised in the ISRP's initial review of the Strategy ([ISRP 2016-4](#); February 26, 2016). The Strategy was developed to address the Council's recommendation and qualification from the Geographic Category Review (November 2013). That review called for an ISRP and Council review of the Tribes' Strategy for the project, which was to be developed in coordination with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) John Day habitat restoration and irrigation screening projects (#1984-021-00 and #1993-066-00) and with appropriate local governments.

In the ISRP's initial review, we found the Strategy to be "an informative, well-produced, highly visual document that presents a basin-wide approach and perspective for protection and restoration of the John Day Basin." However, despite significant evidence of progress with the Strategy document, we found that the project proponent had not fully addressed the qualifications from the Geographic Review, and thus we requested a response on four primary issues.

The Response did not fully address the four primary issues raised in our earlier review. Although the ISRP appreciates the clarifications and frankness of the Tribes' response, our present review would have been more efficient had the Tribes addressed our request point-by-point, as is standard practice. A major weakness with the Response document is that the ISRP's request regarding monitoring and evaluation was not covered.

ISRP Recommendation

Meets Scientific Review Criteria (Qualified)

The Response was useful in providing a better understanding of the motivation and purpose for development of the Strategy. It helped to highlight that the Strategy represents an impressive effort in critiquing the effectiveness of past restoration approaches. The Strategy also establishes a new science-based, landscape- and watershed-level approach for future restoration, based on funding obtained and administered by the Tribes. The Response helped to underscore the extensive efforts that were employed to coordinate and engage a wide range of stakeholders in developing the strategy. The Strategy, however, needs to be strengthened in a number of areas by additional updating and revision as implementation proceeds. Thus, the ISRP's recommendation remains "Meets Scientific Review Criteria (Qualified)." Key qualifications include:

1. Provide a comprehensive discussion of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) linked to a more formal process for adaptive management. The ISRP regards this as the most important qualification. A discussion is needed to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the Strategy, both in its implementation and in the ecological outcomes of protection and restoration. A more formal approach would include tracking of Strategy implementation relative to a clear set of quantifiable Strategy objectives, periodic evaluations, and updates based on lessons learned and new information. The M&E activities could, for example, incorporate and link to ongoing broad-scale monitoring initiatives such as CHaMP, PIBO, Action Effectiveness monitoring (AEM), and ISEMP to the Strategy.
2. Describe additional efforts supporting expanded information sharing and public involvement. Although the Tribes' initial efforts to engage stakeholders appear to have had some success, it is apparent that continued improvement in public involvement and support will be a key factor in the long term success of the Strategy. Some partners and stakeholders seem to be on board with the Strategy while others remain skeptical. More emphasis on development of approaches to achieve greater understanding and engagement by the entire community and by other partners and stakeholders is an important addition that is fundamental for a successful Strategy.
3. Modify Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) membership to increase the range of disciplines represented and the diversity and objectivity of its membership. The Stakeholder and Science TACs should be periodically assessed in terms of adequate breadth of disciplines, adequate composition of diverse stakeholder interests, and independence (i.e., no conflict of interest).
4. Comprehensively consider upslope conditions. Upslope conditions play a major role in defining watershed health and in controlling processes that create and maintain riparian and aquatic habitat conditions. They are an important consideration in any landscape and watershed scale restoration strategy. As such, upslope conditions and processes should be

more fully addressed and integrated into the Strategy and reflected in goals, objectives, and priorities. Doing so would ultimately lead to a more complete landscape approach for the protection and restoration of entire watersheds.

Progress on addressing these qualifications should be reviewed by the ISRP within the next year, potentially during the [upcoming 2017 review](#) of the Fish and Wildlife Program’s “umbrella” habitat restoration projects. The Tribe’s John Day project shares many aspects with the Program’s other “umbrella” projects (Grand Ronde Model Watershed, Columbia River Estuary Habitat Restoration, etc.) that solicit, rank, select, and fund specific habitat restoration projects. The ISRP believes the Tribes’ project could share lessons learned with the Program’s umbrella projects. In future reviews, the ISRP would appreciate a point-by-point response to our four concerns to help facilitate an efficient dialogue and review. Finally, the ISRP welcomes more interactions with the Tribes on this project including a teleconference, a face-to-face meeting, and/or a site visit.

ISRP Comments

Contextual Overview

The Contextual overview helped the ISRP to appreciate the factors driving the need for development of the Strategy. The complexity of creating the Strategy is apparent, including the coordination and involvement of a wide range of agencies, landowners, and other interests. Specific questions regarding the scientific basis for development of the Strategy were adequately addressed. As explained by the Tribes, the intent is to move away from a “first-come first-served” basis to a more scientifically grounded prioritization approach.

Some questions still remain among ISRP members about the proposed scope and reach of this strategy throughout the numerous stakeholders in the John Day Basin. The questions center on the clear statement by the proponents that this is a Tribal strategy and the statement that they are “not responsible for overall coordination in the basin or defining roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and partners operating in the basin. In addition, the Tribes are not a third party funding administrator, and implement many of its own projects annually” (p. 4). Yet information presented in the Strategy and Response indicates that the Tribes may in some instances be passing funds from other sources (e.g., BPA) to partners. This issue of the scope and reach of the Strategy—that is, whether this is strictly a tribal strategy or also a basin strategy—is not clearly explained. The ISRP sees this issue as a policy question largely beyond our scientific purview, except as it relates to the scientific cooperation and collaboration needed to achieve the Strategy’s restoration goals and objectives. Restoration has the greatest chance for success with broad coordination and sharing of information. The ISRP is obliged to determine if adequate coordination and information sharing is occurring, as well as its effectiveness in terms of ensuring successful restoration outcomes.

Although the project prioritization process is addressed, additional quantification of criteria, testing of potential criteria weightings, and evaluation of project prioritization across a range of projects and settings are needed to ensure continued refinement and improvement. Currently, the prioritization process covers a range of considerations but appears qualitative and, therefore, subject to bias.

Transparency and documentation of the prioritization process are also needed to allow evaluation of project success and adaptive management. For example, it was not clear where the “Target or Focus Action Weight” values in Figure 19 originated. Although the Response acknowledges that refinements in the prioritization model will occur, it does not provide specifics, such as the timing, process, and responsibilities needed to ensure that adjustments are made. On page 7 it is stated, “It is expected that future restoration planning documents will include ongoing prioritization refinement and adaptive management based on the results of the current process, future research, new scientific approaches as well as ongoing designation and protection of key watersheds.” Unfortunately, there is little follow-up detail on when and how this will occur. The project prioritization process and the weighting factors are basic scientific issues related to restoration effectiveness; specific quantitative information is necessary. A more detailed discussion would ensure that the prioritization model can be refined based on learning from the review and critique of past experience (e.g., the Adaptive Management Process).

History and Coordination - Roles of Partners, Stakeholders, and TACs

Roles and Responsibilities in the Strategy Development – adequately addressed.

The roles and responsibilities for partners – adequately addressed.

Proposal Review Team – Information on historical development of the TACs provided was adequate. Additional issues and considerations with the TACs are discussed below.

Coordination with ODFW – Efforts to involve ODFW at both stakeholder and Science TAC meetings are documented in the report along with letters of support. Higher ODFW attendance occurred at Science TAC meetings.

Partners and Stakeholders - Although there was adequate additional detail provided about the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and partners (Item 2b.), increasing the breadth of agency and public support will be an important issue for improving the future effectiveness of the Strategy. It is clear that past efforts have had some major successes, but it is also clear that continued improvements in coordination and participation among stakeholders will be needed to ensure the long-term success of the Strategy. It was apparent in the diversity of public comments on the ISRP review of the Strategy that a continuing challenge will be to keep a wide

range of interested parties informed and engaged. Addressing this challenge will likely require increasing transparency and improving the amount, and effectiveness, of information sharing and public involvement. In particular, the need to build on past efforts to engage and get support from local land owners is clear. Regular, periodic reporting on Strategy implementation and accomplishments, as well as completion of specific quantitative milestones (objectives), to a wide range of audiences (participants, land owners, interested parties, etc.) could serve to increase interest and involvement in this important work. An appendix or table detailing the roles and responsibilities for each existing and potential stakeholder and partner could be added for clarity.

Science Technical Advisory Committees (TAC) - There was a general description of the role of the Science TAC and its membership. The Tribes, however, did not address the issue that the Science TAC is limited in its disciplinary and geographical representation. Given that the focus of the Strategy is to accomplish landscape and watershed scale restoration, it is important that the Science TAC membership include expertise in a wide range of disciplines. Potential additional disciplines for consideration include Riparian Ecology, Silviculture, Soils, Hydrology, Transportation Planning/Engineering, Fire Management, and Forestry. Changes in TAC composition could be considered as the Strategy is implemented. This would facilitate more comprehensive consideration of a wide range of project types important in achieving watershed and landscape scale restoration.

Additionally, although the general description of membership in the Proposal Review Team and its role in priority setting is clear, it appears that some potential partners question the impartiality of the process and suspect possible conflicts of interest. Continued focus on ways to make the process more quantitative and transparent will be essential.

The Tribes did not provide the information requested on the roles and responsibilities of the Science and Stakeholder TACs. Specifically,

- How were individuals chosen for the two TACs?
- How long will they serve on these panels (i.e., what is the length of their appointments)?
- What is the composition of the team that will review proposals? How many reviewers will examine a proposal?
- Will the three landowner groups, who were involved in prioritizing restoration actions in the Basin, continue to play a role in sub-basin restoration?

Although the use of TACs seems to provide a good foundation for the Strategy, it is difficult to determine *a priori* exactly what the most effective composition of TACs should be. Moving forward, the ISRP suggests that, in the interests of maximizing scientific effectiveness and credibility of the Strategy, the Stakeholder and Science TACs should be periodically evaluated in terms of adequate breadth of disciplines, adequate composition of diverse stakeholder interests, and independence (i.e., no conflict of interest).

Coordination with the U. S. Forest Service - The ISRP concern about improving coordination and collaboration with the ongoing Forest Plan revision process for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa Whitman National Forests is fully addressed in the Response. The Tribes have signed an agreement with the USFS and the letter of support states that the Forest Plan revision will generally complement Strategy goals.

Restoration Potential Benefit

The overall Response was adequate. It provided a clear discussion on application of a stronghold approach for the Strategy and how it links to fish populations and their restoration and recovery. Additional information and detail on Tribal coordination with land management agencies was useful, especially regarding forest- and watershed-scale restoration planning, including selection and protection of future strongholds (Key Watersheds). The determination of Restoration Potential Benefits (RPB) is more comprehensively described in the Response, though it was not clear from the overlaying of GIS layers that an actual quantitative determination was made. If not, the ISRP believes that quantitative determination is necessary.

One specific area that was confusing is the discussion on potential stronghold areas. It is noted on page 14 that “stronghold areas fall into two main categories: 1. Protection with restoration of processes to promote strongholds 2. Protection with restoration of habitat and process that promote strongholds.” Although an example was offered, it remains unclear as to how the two categories are different and how they will be used to select individual watersheds for stronghold status.

While the RPB is a step to identify strongholds, it needs to be combined with quantitative objectives and a well-functioning adaptive management framework. Setting quantitative objectives is essential for evaluating the success of restoration actions. Continuous learning and adjustments will need to occur for the effort to be successful, so an adaptive management framework is essential. An adaptive management framework was not described in the Response or in the Strategy. Although it may be available in other documents, it should be examined by the ISRP for potential effectiveness.

Ecological Linkage to Restoration Actions

There is a continuing need to more fully address upslope issues and conditions that play important roles in watershed health, including the creation and maintenance of fully functioning riparian and aquatic habitat.

Additionally, the ISRP agrees that it is worthwhile to make the necessary adaptive changes to move away from singular or bundled, opportunistic restoration actions, and move toward

targeted and focused actions directed at population scale responses at the HUC 5 or subbasin level. Nevertheless, it is not clear how the numerous restoration actions described in the document are targeted and focused actions rather than singular/bundled opportunities. Are there clear criteria that distinguish the two approaches? The criteria need to be clearly described.

Strongholds, Climate Change, Density-Dependence, and Resilience

Strongholds - Cooperation with the USFS in developing a stronghold network seems appropriate, particularly given the large percentage of National Forest System land in many subbasins. However, the text on strongholds is very general. It is not clear what the Tribes are specifically doing to restore, maintain, and manage identified strongholds.

Climate Change - The response on climate change helped considerably in clarifying the attention it will be given in the Strategy. The use of restoration actions (e.g., floodplain connectivity, habitat complexity, meadow restoration, water temperature considerations, and riparian planting) to help alleviate predicted climate change impacts are scientifically supported. It is not clear, however, if the collective actions will be sufficient to counteract changes in water temperature and flow at levels commensurate with the spatial scale and rates of change projected to occur. Additionally, there are increasing issues with non-native species and predation that must be addressed concurrently. These issues will need to be reconsidered and addressed periodically as the program moves forward.

Density Dependence - There was general discussion on broad-scale considerations and incorporation of structural features (diversions, screens, passage improvements) that will affect density dependence. The lack of a clear adaptive management process, including periodic evaluation and update of the Strategy, may limit the incorporation of new data and findings on this important issue.

Resilience - In the Response, it is stated that it is “outside the boundaries of the Tribes 2008 Fish Accord Agreement with the Action Agencies and the scope of the Tribes Watershed Restoration Program direction to conduct an ‘investigative and quantitative analysis’ to demonstrate their understanding of resilience and its application to restoration of cold-water habitats.” Accordingly, the ecological roles of disturbance and system resilience, in helping to influence the creation and maintenance of a mosaic of riparian and aquatic habitat, are not really discussed. However, the ISRP maintains that future consideration and incorporation of these concepts, specific to improvement of watershed and aquatic habitat conditions in the John Day basin is essential to the Strategy.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adaptive Management

The weakest part in the Response was a lack of any details on Monitoring and Evaluation as it relates to project effectiveness, potential linkages to other programs (e.g., CHaMP, ISEMP, Action Effectiveness monitoring (AEM), or PIBO), and for tracking the implementation and effectiveness of the Strategy. All are critical elements for supporting an overall adaptive management approach. Additional details of monitoring and evaluation need to be addressed in tandem with qualitative goals and shorter term quantitative objectives. There was little information provided to answer an initial ISRP question regarding monitoring Strategy implementation and effectiveness. Fundamental ISRP questions were not addressed: “Specifically, how will the progress toward Strategy objectives be quantitatively evaluated? Have quantitative objectives and timelines been developed that can be tracked?” There was no discussion of the potential for using the eight objectives listed on page 3 of the Strategy (all are currently qualitative and lack a timeline for accomplishment) as an initial foundation for the development of quantitative measures to track and evaluate progress of the Strategy. Doing so would facilitate tracking of implementation and would provide a first approximation of Strategy effectiveness. Finally, there were only general statements describing future approaches for adaptive management and how program and project evaluation will be used to support it. These issues need to be adequately considered in any future progress reporting.