

Response to ISRP Preliminary Questions and Comments: Cowlitz Proposal, Project ID: 35035

Sponsor: WDFW

Province: Mainstem and Systemwide

Subbasin: Cowlitz

Project ID 35035: Incorporating Pit Tag Technology to Evaluate and Monitor the Reintroduction Effort for Anadromous Salmonids in the Upper Cowlitz Watershed.

Short Description: We propose to update pit tag system to basin ISO standards at the Cowlitz Falls Dam and Fish Facility and use pit tags to monitor and measure collection, collection efficiency, smolt production, and a prototype surface collector entrance.

ISRP Preliminary Questions and Comments:

A response is needed to up-date the ISRP on progress towards a comprehensive study design in the upper Cowlitz River watershed. No further questions on this proposal.

The ISRP recently reviewed this proposal and project # 31005 (Incorporating Pit Tag Technology to Evaluate and Monitor the Reintroduction Effort for Anadromous Salmonids in the Upper Cowlitz Watershed, (WDFW) under the Lower Columbia/Estuary province. The committee was supportive of the upgrading of the PIT detectors to be consistent with downstream detectors, but we strongly noted the unique opportunities for important research in the upper Cowlitz River tributaries. We noted that the real value to the Basin in this upgrade is the monitoring and evaluation capability that could be incorporated into this research. This proposal did not comment on development of such a research program but an organizational group was noted during the presentation. The ISRP has concluded that they must remain consistent with its recent recommendation:

“Defer decision until an appropriate experimental design is developed. Funding of #31005 could proceed independent of #31017 but the value of that investment would be significantly reduced without the full development of the potential studies in the upper Cowlitz River (project #31017).” (see below)

We should note, however, that this proposal has very strong BPA cost sharing already in-place and that costs in this proposal are distributed over a couple of years. Proceeding with the upgrade would be advisable in order to be prepared for future studies. If a research program did not subsequently develop, then the benefit of this investment would be much more localized. There would still be value in the assessment of Cowlitz salmon production.

Agency Response and Comments:

Agency Fish Program staff have met and discussed the process and creation of a Scientific Advisory Team with the goal of developing a comprehensive study plan for the upper watershed. This effort would be a part of an on-going Agency effort to develop a comprehensive management plan for the watershed.

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The agency is in the working on an advisory team composed of Agency Science and Fish Program staff and one or two Scientists from USGS-BRD and NMFS. The advisory team role would be to offer guidance and suggestions on how to develop the current program and work statement into a comprehensive study plan for the reintroduction effort. The plan development would need to be coordinated and integrated with on-going sub-basin planning efforts including the Fisheries Management Plan and HGMP's.

As proposed, this team would spend one day at the project following the opportunity to review the current project annual report, the proposals submitted to the ISRP and the ISRP comments. Following the review of background material and one day at the project, the role of the team would be limited to conference calls and e-mail on an as needed basis to address issues in the plan development. At least one or two members would be familiar with the processes within the basin. How quickly the plan comes together will depend upon staff workloads and funding. The final ISRP review for the Lower Columbia and Estuary Provinces released in June suggested a six-month window to complete this plan.

Feedback received from CBFWA and NWPPC staff and Brian Walsh, our WA state representative to the Council, indicated that even with an adequate and timely response, the Cowlitz proposals would not be funded given basin priorities and available funds. This feedback was disappointing. The effort we've put in over the past year has enabled us to get recognition from the ISRP, CBFWA and the NWPPC for the Cowlitz Falls Reintroduction Project. We clearly met many of the issues identified in the sub-basin summary, regional priorities, and the NMFS Biological Opinion. The ISRP review and critique were generally valid. Our focus in preparing the two proposals was to first address our own needs in the basin. We certainly recognize the potential for the reintroduction program to address a number of other significant needs in the basin.