

FISH PASSAGE CENTER OVERSIGHT BOARD

Meeting Notes for August 11, 2008 – Spokane, Washington

Those present were: Bruce Measure, Michele DeHart, Brian Lipscomb, Doug Taki, Brian Marotz, Tom Rien, and Kerry Berg. On the phone were: John Ferguson, Sue Ireland, and Liz Hamilton. Chairman Bruce Measure called the meeting to order and went over the agenda.

Amendments to the Council's F&W Program

Measure said the amendments to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Fish and Wildlife (F&W) Program regarding the Fish Passage Center (FPC) are "no surprise." The amendments that have had support were those recommended by the Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Kootenai Tribe, the Upper Snake River Tribes, and the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority (CBFWA), he said. The proposal from Northwest RiverPartners did not receive any support, Measure added.

Kerry Berg said the Council is working on the language for the draft of a new F&W program. Everything the Council is considering with respect to the FPC has been seen by this Board at meetings or through e-mail exchanges, he noted.

John Ferguson asked to be sent an e-mail on the results of the Council's latest round of discussions about the draft program, and Berg said he would do that.

Measure noted the Board had decided not to submit any of its own recommendations to the Council in favor of letting the region make recommendations. Brian Lipscomb of CBFWA said Council member Dick Wallace had proposed a recommendation about the FPC, which says the FPC would confine itself to science, not policy.

Discussion of Recent FPC Documents

Measure said he had received comments about System Operational Request #2008-5, including inquiries as to whether the FPC should be offering such a request to the Technical Management Team. Lipscomb said the SORs come from the salmon managers, and Doug Taki and Michele DeHart explained how SORs are usually put together.

In my view, the FPC is an information-gathering entity, but it has no statutory responsibility, so it looks bad when the FPC asks the action agencies to do something, said Ferguson. The Board is right to take this up because it doesn't look good, he added.

Most of the action agency people realize the FPC's role in developing the data, said DeHart. Ferguson said requests should come from the fish managers and that way the FPC can keep low visibility.

Measure said that was a good suggestion. Having the chair or vice-chair of the salmon managers send the requests should erase the controversy, he added. It would also be helpful to people in the region who aren't that close to how the process works, Measure said. We'll take that suggestion back and talk with the managers about it, and Tony Nigro can report back to you in November on the issue, DeHart said.

Measure brought up the recent FPC report on sockeye returns, which he said attributed fish survival to spill and flow, as opposed to other factors. That report "was a hot-button issue in the region for a couple of days," he noted. I got calls from Council members about it, Measure added.

There are two issues, he said. The first involves who submits a request for a study. It would be good if the correspondence showing who submitted the query was attached to the final report, Measure suggested. That would enable people to see who made the request and what its focus was, he stated. DeHart said the FPC would start doing that.

The second issue involves the questions raised about the role of ocean conditions as a factor in the sockeye returns, said Measure. Since the report was released, BPA has asked us to fold in downstream migration conditions and the ocean, DeHart said. We've done that and posted the results on our website, she noted.

The Independent Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB) asked us a series of questions, and we responded to those in a conference call, DeHart said. Doug Taki asked us to respond to NOAA Fisheries in writing, and we did that, she stated.

What's the status of the request for the ISAB to review the report? Ferguson asked. We simply answered questions, but there wasn't any follow-up, replied DeHart. I don't think the Council has asked the ISAB in a formal way to look into this, said Berg.

The ISAB was asking the questions in the context of the spill transport study, said Lipscomb. There have been no requests for it to look at the FPC analysis separately, he added.

I told Jim Ruff of the Council staff that we are doing a sockeye returns study and will report the results by the end of August, Ferguson said. Ruff asked if our report could be reviewed by the ISAB, and we said "sure," Ferguson stated.

Taki asked about some of the survival percentages and numbers in the FPC's response to NOAA Fisheries. DeHart volunteered to provide him more information on the methodology used.

We produce our own tables each year, as does the Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game, said Taki. One year, NOAA Fisheries estimated 30,000 more fish than actually left Idaho, he noted. Ferguson said he would talk with other NOAA staff about the issue and the numbers.

Ferguson asked about an FPC memo to BPA that said the 1998 ocean year was a good year. It was a terrible year, he said. We'll look at where we got that, DeHart responded.

Brian Marotz suggested the Board start work on several issues which he said could benefit all the fish in the Columbia Basin. One is applying VAR Q operations to all the storage reservoirs to optimize the system, he said. Another involves adjusting cross-sections at John Day and McNary to compare different flow velocities, Marotz stated. We discussed this with Bob Lohn years ago, but I'm not sure that work was ever done, he added.

That work is a little outside the scope of what this Board has done in the past, said Measure. Maybe it should be part of the amendment process, he added. We talked about the John Day study some years ago, but I've not heard any more about it, said Ferguson. He suggested contacting Bruce Suzumoto, and Marotz said he would.

Public Comment

Liz Hamilton of the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association said what she had heard in the Board's discussion about the request was "troubling." She said people who have "heartburn and concerns" about where an SOR came from should be asked to put them in writing to "level the playing field." I find it unfair and disappointing for this Board to spend its valuable time discussing the anxiety levels of unidentified people, Hamilton stated.

Next Meeting

Measure said the next meeting would be November 17 in Coeur d'Alene and at that time, the Board would discuss the portions of the Council's draft F&W program relating to the FPC. Ferguson suggested that if Board members have concerns about what's in the draft program when it comes out in September, they circulate them via e-mail.

The meeting adjourned at 2:05 pm.

Prepared by Susan Whittington, NWPCC Contractor