



## REGIONAL TECHNICAL TEAM MEETING FINAL JULY MEETING SUMMARY

**Date:** Wednesday, 12 July 2023

**Time:** 9:00 AM to 11:30 AM

**Location:** Webinar

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**Members Present:** Catherine Willard, Kate Terrell, Tom Kahler, Amanda Barg, John Arterburn, Brandon Rogers, Joe lang, and Tracy Hillman (Chair).

**Others Present:** Alex Harwell, Kristen Kirkby, Phillip Klenke, Sarah Walker, Jeff Jorgensen, Ryan Niemeyer, Jason Lundgren, Amanda Ward, Robyn Pepin, Leah Hemberry, and Alan Schmidt.

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Tracy Hillman welcomed everyone to the RTT meeting. RTT members reviewed and approved the July draft agenda and June meeting notes as edited.

### Barrier Prioritization Tool Overview

#### Overview of Updated Intrinsic Potential Layer

Robyn Pepin provided an overview of the updates to the IP layer. The biggest update was using a higher resolution stream layer. This updated version also pulls metrics from the BRAT output. Previously, intrinsic potential was based on spawning; the updated version also includes rearing. IP was developed for Spring Chinook, Bull Trout, and *O. mykiss*. Bull Trout includes FMO. Small tributaries to the Columbia River were also included in the IP analysis.

John Arterburn noted that some areas identified as having no steelhead intrinsic potential actually have steelhead in them. As a results, some barriers in these areas will not be identified in the barrier prioritization.

#### Overview of Final Barrier Prioritization Tool

Robyn Pepin provided an overview of the updated Upper Columbia (UC) barrier prioritization tool. Robyn identified the metrics used to generate barrier prioritizations. Revisions included updates to locations of barriers from field data, the new IP layer, better accuracy in counts of barriers and stream miles, as well as using stream length rather than stream area. Also, each species can be analyzed independently. New metrics include counts of downstream barriers and upstream gain. The team also did a sensitivity analysis on the previous metrics and removed metrics (or assigned them zero weight) that did not have a major influence on the ranks.

Tracy Hillman noted that the Barrier Prioritization tool should not be considered final or complete, but rather we should consider it as a “living” tool that can and should be updated periodically based on new information. Tracy also indicated that sponsors can submit proposals to fix barriers that are not ranked high according to the prioritization tool but will need to justify why the project is worthy of funding.

Robyn described how the UC Barrier Prioritization process is similar to approaches used across the state. Indeed, other regions have used the UC tool as the framework for their prioritization tools. In addition, the UC tool has benefited from tools developed in other regions.

John Arterburn agrees that the tool is very useful and hopes the barrier prioritization group continues to improve the tool over time. He highlighted the need to further discuss fish distributions, the Tiering approach, and to be more specific about the cut-offs (scoring rules). John also brought up the issue of assessing the risk-of-failure of a culvert. John has identified metrics and scoring rules for assessing risk-of-failure, which the barrier prioritization group will need to consider.

**Action Item:**

- **Ryan Niemeyer will present the updated barrier tool to the WATs.**

## **RTT and UCSRB Updates**

### **SRFB Grant Round Update**

Ryan Niemeyer provided an overview of the SRFB grant round. He said the total funding available for the Upper Columbia was \$3,816,399. As a reminder, about \$1.5 million was carry-over from 2022. The \$2.3 million was made available through the standard allocation/approval process by the legislature. Eleven projects were identified for funding. Apart from the zipper process, differences between RTT and CACs rankings were as follows:

- Peshastin RM 2.5 moved down to #12. The CAC liked this project but thought another year is needed to better develop the project.
- Mission Creek Protection was moved up to #11 because the timing is right, it will have public access, and can help leverage landowner support for restoration.
- Nason Creek SR207 Re-Alignment was moved down to #13. The CAC liked the project but thought the cumulative benefit from the suite of other projects was greater than the benefit of the one project, which asked for the entire funding available.

### **Prioritization: Reach Ranks for Land Acquisition Projects (Protection vs. Restoration Ranks)**

Ryan Niemeyer and Tracy Hillman discussed protection scores for reaches. Tracy thought that in the past the RTT agreed to use protection reach rankings to score acquisition projects that intend to protect existing, high-quality habitat. In contrast, restoration reach rankings would be used to score acquisition projects that intend to purchase property with relatively poor habitat that can be restored once the property is purchased. He asked the RTT whether he recalled the scoring of reaches for acquisition projects correctly. Kate Terrell said yes but suggested that a conceptual design must accompany an acquisition project that is acquiring property for restoration. This is needed to help the RTT evaluate the biological benefit of the project. Brandon Rogers agreed and said the proposals the Yakama Nation submitted for property acquisition, in which the habitat would be restored, included a conceptual design.

**Decisions:**

- **The RTT agreed to use restoration reach rankings to score acquisition projects that intend to purchase property with relatively poor habitat that can be restored once the property is acquired. Applications will need to include conceptual restoration designs. The RTT will use protection reach rankings to score acquisition projects that intend to protect existing, high-quality habitat.**

**Action Item:**

- **Ryan Niemeyer and Tracy Hillman will draft language describing which reach rankings are used to score acquisition projects.**

**Prioritization Tool Updates**

Ryan Niemeyer indicated that these updates will be shared at a later RTT meeting.

**MaDMC Updates**

Ryan Niemeyer reported that the MaDMC approved inclusion of small tributaries that drain directly into the Columbia River in the MaDMC data gaps list. Ryan also shared that the group will identify and link specific management actions to each data gap in the list. Finally, Ryan shared that the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest was seeking a letter of support for flying additional FLIR data. Because this addresses a data gap, Ryan provided a letter of support, which was viewed by Tracy Hillman before it was sent.

**HARP Meeting**

Tracy Hillman briefly described the Habitat Assessment and Restoration Planning (HARP) model and noted that scientists from the NOAA Center are developing the model for a large portion of the Columbia River Basin. NOAA scientists will provide a more detailed overview of the model on 9 August and will seek feedback and information from regional scientists and implementers. The meeting will be held at the Douglas PUD Auditorium in East Wenatchee.

**Action Items:**

- **Ryan Niemeyer will reach out to project sponsors to invite them to the HARP meeting on 9 August.**

**CAC-RTT SRFB Scoring and Ranking Debrief**

Tracy Hillman reported that he received feedback from one project sponsor who questioned RTT scores on some of the sponsor's projects. Tracy said he responded to those concerns but realized RTT scores can create confusion, especially scores that change over time on the same project. To that end, Tracy recommended that the RTT follow the approach used by the CACs, and by the RTT several years ago, which is to provide only a ranked list of projects without the associated scores. This would remove any confusion associated with scores. The RTT would continue to provide written comments. John Arterburn supported providing only ranks of projects. Tom Kahler affirmed that we keep the scoring criteria and each individual scores all applications; however, only the ranked list generated from the scoring is shared with the public. Tracy said that is his recommendation. Kate Terrell agreed that the ranked list is beneficial and would remove confusion associated with scores.

Leah Hemberry said both the total scores and standard deviations are important to the CACs. She recommended that the RTT continue to provide scores to the CACs. She added that attending the RTT scoring meetings is extremely useful to the CACs. Listening to RTT discussions helps the CACs better understand the logic behind the scores.

Ryan Niemeyer noted that a more in-depth conversation between the CACs and RTT can happen in the SRFB de-brief meeting later this fall.

**Decision:**

- **The RTT agreed to provide sponsors and the public with a ranked list of projects and written comments. RTT scores will not be shared with the sponsors or the public; they will only be provided to the CACs. The ranked list will be generated using the RTT criteria and scores.**

## **CCNRD Thermal Refuge Design and Approach**

Brian Maloney gave a presentation on the Nason Creek Thermal Refuge Design project. He indicated that the final design for this project scored lower than the preliminary design. He mentioned that with thermal refugia assessments occurring across the region, these types of projects will become more common. Bryan described the existing site conditions and noted that Nason Creek is often 2-3°C warmer than Butcher Creek.

John Arterburn indicated that his main concern with this project is that the benefit is small for the amount of money required. He also stated that the pollution issue has to do with the old bridge abutments and removal of those should be the responsibility of Chelan County. Bryan responded that he is hoping to find funding from a different source to address the bridge abutments.

Tracy Hillman asked whether the County has coordinated with the Yakama Nation given that Butcher Creek is used to acclimate Coho Salmon. Bryan said he has coordinated with Cory Kamphaus with Yakama Nation. The Yakama Nation did not want any actions that would potentially alter the acclimation pond. This project will not affect the acclimation pond. Tracy indicated that any actions that increase the cold-water plume volume or prevent the cold water from mixing with the warmer Nason Creek water would be beneficial. John Arterburn agreed and the goal of the project should be to keep the Butcher Creek water isolated. Because the work would occur just downstream from the acclimation site, Tracy asked whether the water in the treatment site is low in dissolved oxygen (DO). Bryan responded that he did not know whether the water is low in DO. He would try to measure it.