



REGIONAL TECHNICAL TEAM MEETING FINAL JANUARY MEETING SUMMARY

Date: Wednesday, 10 January 2024

Time: 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Location: Webinar

Members Present: Catherine Willard (Chelan PUD), Tom Kahler (Douglass PUD), John Arterburn (Colville Tribe), John Crandall (MSRF), Amanda Barg (WDFW), Brandon Rogers (Yakama Nation, co-chair), Steve Fortney (Gray & Osborne Inc.), Tracy Bowerman (USFWS), Shelby Fowler (USFWS), Kate Terrell (USFWS), Joe Lange (NRCS), Justin Yeager (NOAA), and Tracy Hillman (BioAnalysts, Chairperson).

Others Present: Ryan Niemeyer (UCSRB), Ariel Edwards (UCSRB), Mark Ingman (Cascadia CD), Christina Barrineau (CCNRD), Aaron Rosenblum (Cascade Fisheries), Lisa Foster (Trout Unlimited), Phillip Klenke (Cascade Fisheries), Jason Lundgren (Cascade Fisheries), Jeff Jorgensen (NOAA), and Brian Fisher (MSRF)

Tracy Hillman reviewed the January RTT meeting agenda, and the agenda was approved by all RTT members present. Tracy Hillman reviewed the December draft meeting notes and all RTT members present approved the notes.

RTT & UCSRB Updates

2023 SRFB Grant Round De-brief Meeting

UCSRB staff provided a review of the de-brief meeting that occurred on Monday at 4:30 pm. Staff indicated that the process guide was updated to reflect the fact that the RTT will no longer share scores on SRFB applications. Another discussion item during the de-brief meeting was the amount a sponsor can request during the grant round. The question was raised about a regional cap on total funds requested for a single project. The group agreed that this would not be proposed at this time for our region, but it is a topic the Implementation Team should discuss.

2024 SRFB Grant Round

UCSRB staff reviewed the SRFB 2024 grant round schedule with the RTT. The kick-off meeting is almost finalized but needs to be verified with Ameer Bahr. The final schedule will be sent out by UCSRB staff next week. The field tours will be on 6-9 May. The hope is to complete all tours before 9 May because the Tributary Committees meet on 9 May. If any changes are made to the current version of the schedule, Ariel Edwards will let everyone know of the changes.

UCSRB Science Conference

UCSRB staff shared that early bird registration ends today, 10 January. The conference will be on 24-25 January. If individuals are interested in volunteering, please contact Gabby Vermeire (gabby.vermeire@ucsr.org), program assistant at UCSRB.

Scoring of Hypothetical Riparian Projects

In response to many questions raised about how riparian projects may get scored, the RTT walked through several scenarios of potential riparian projects. The goal of this discussion was to give the RTT time to work through some potential issues and hear from sponsors to talk through specific scenarios with the RTT. The eligible, in-stream work types listed in the Riparian Appendix and the circumstances under which these in-stream work types are eligible for funding were reviewed. One member asked who is going to determine the eligibility of a project for riparian funding. UCSRB staff responded that the RCO/SRFB review panel will ultimately decide eligibility, but that occurs after scoring. Another member suggested that there should be UCSRB screening for eligibility before projects reach RTT for scoring. UCSRB staff agreed and will establish a screening process.

The question came up of what annual high-flow return interval does the RTT want to see to justify floodplain reconnection or for raising the water table through in-stream work. One member noted that by definition, riparian zones must be inundated frequently. The RTT has used the 10-year flood interval to define riparian zones; however, riparian projects outside this 10-year flood interval could be eligible provided the sponsor clearly describes how the proposed project would benefit fish (e.g., sediment/toxicant filtration). Another member described how it is not always straightforward determining what surfaces were connected and what surfaces we want to reconnect/restore. The point was made that there is a need to understand how the floodplain surfaces have changed overtime to determine what areas are best to restore. It is not often straightforward, because knowing historical conditions prior to human perturbations can be challenging. A >10-year flood interval may be preferred in some cases. Therefore, the extent of riparian areas may need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Scenario 1: In-stream restoration with minor riparian planting.

The first scenario that was explored is a restoration project in an incised channel. The proposed approach is to add large wood in the channel and develop side channels across the floodplain. There would be limited riparian vegetation restoration work. UCSRB staff specifically highlighted whether there are additional data sponsors could provide to justify this to RTT. RTT members noted that understanding the historical valley bottom and the capacity for restoration is important. One RTT member noted the importance of describing the valley bottom landforms and the physical properties of these landforms in relation to the stream (i.e., use hydrologic models or flow intervals if possible). Another RTT member highlighted the importance of showing the connection between the proposed riparian restoration and fish benefits. Because these are RCO funds, all proposed riparian projects will be evaluated based on benefits to fish, so it is important to show the linkage between the proposed project and limiting factors. Another RTT member noted that it is likely that there will be projects proposed in incised reaches. For these projects, three things would be helpful for scoring: (1) a description of the level of incision, (2) an explanation of how the instream work will repair the incision and reconnect the floodplain with the stream, and (3) the plan for riparian restoration. Multiple RTT members touched on the importance of water as a limiting factor for riparian success. Specifically, these individuals highlighted the importance of considering how a project can affect the current water-table depth to improve riparian success, and how valley processes will influence this.

Scenario 2: Riparian planting in incised area with proposed 5-year, post-implementation irrigation.

Several RTT members expressed the need for some level of adaptive management included in these projects, including irrigation of plants after planting. Examples from the Methow River basin demonstrate how most riparian plantings are associated with other treatments (e.g., in-stream

enhancements), and that nearly every project will require post-implementation irrigation for at least 3 or 5 years. In some cases, without irrigation, riparian plantings will fail, especially in more arid regions. One RTT member warned that there is a balance between too much water, which causes the roots to grow horizontally rather than vertically, and not enough water. The goal is to make sure roots of riparian vegetation can access groundwater. In addition, projects can fail due to streambank erosion. Having information on erosion rates would be helpful to inform planting success. One RTT member mentioned that if project sponsors do not feel they have the expertise to evaluate and present their projects, they should reach out to the RTT for conversations and guidance. The RTT is here to help the sponsors implement the best projects possible.

Scenario 3: Acquisition of incised riparian areas that require restoration.

This scenario would be evaluated as a restoration project, not a protection project. As such, the sponsor would need to indicate how they will reconnect the floodplain with surface water or how they intend to elevate the water table.

Scenario 4: Site stewardship on a previously failed riparian project.

The RTT affirmed that this would be site-specific. The proposal would have to identify how the failures from the past will be rectified and how they intend to adaptively manage the project.

Discussion

One sponsor noted that there is a lot of riparian funding currently available, and most sponsors have limited capacity to write proposals and implement projects. Therefore, there may not be a lot of funding requests from the SRFB this year. Another sponsor asked how the RTT will score a stewardship-only project vs an active restoration or acquisition project. RTT members responded that improving the riparian habitat of a previously implemented project would be an appropriate project. The sponsor would need to demonstrate why stewardship would be necessary (e.g., without stewardship, the vegetation will die and biological benefits will decrease) and how ongoing stewardship will benefit fish. The sponsor asked whether a stewardship proposal would be perceived as equivalent to a restoration project. The RTT chair stated that, depending on the current condition of the site, the project would be evaluated as a protection project. In this case, stewardship is needed to maintain a properly functioning riparia. Without stewardship or maintenance, the site will degrade and there would be a reduction in biological benefit.

The RTT chair reiterated that this grant round will be a work in process and the sponsors and RTT need to work through issues together. Thus, it is important for sponsors to reach out to RTT members if they have questions or need guidance. One member commented that the highest priority is to “protect the best and restore the rest.” Thus, sponsors should seriously consider protection projects. It is often easier and cheaper to protect properly functioning riparian habitat than it is to restore it.

Decision:

- **None**

Action:

- **UCSRB staff will establish a screening process for riparian projects to verify eligibility for riparian funding.**

Lower Methow (Miller Hole Restoration) Project Final Design Update

Brian Fisher, Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation (MSRF), described the final design of the Lower Methow project. This project is currently funded for design and plans are underway for construction. There are multiple project goals including the removal of existing barriers in the floodplain and enhancing side-channel reconnection. Historically, at this site, there was a channel-spanning dam that existed for a decade in the early 1900s. Currently, the channel has levees to confine flows. MSRF divided the project into two sites: Site 1 (downstream) and Site 2 (upstream). The goals at Site 1 are to remove the current levee and cut inlets to allow for side-channel flow. Once the levee is removed, the 2-year flow will inundate the floodplain. In addition, they plan to relocate multiple domestic and agricultural wells; the relocation of the wells is unknown at this time. At Site 2, design focuses on removing anthropogenic features and allowing 2-year flows to reconnect existing wetlands. MSRF also developed a more robust downstream connection to reduce the likelihood of fish stranding.

There were several questions from RTT members. One member asked about side-channels intercepting groundwater. Brian stated that the lower portion of the Site 1 side-channel will be connected to groundwater. Another member, referring to Site 1, asked why they proposed to use the furthest southwest side channel versus the existing side channel that is slightly northeast. Brian responded that it was based on sustainability. MSRF was looking at removing the levee and creating several inlets for side channels. Also, the main side-channel will be designed to capture the energy and water without trapping too much sediment. There was a follow-up question about adding BDAs despite concerns about capturing sediment. Brian indicated that BDAs will be located downstream below the point where sediment will plug the side channel inlets. A member asked why that specific side-channel was chosen for connection. Brian said it was selected because of its alignment with the mainstem. There was an additional question about beaver activity on the floodplain. Brian mentioned he has observed evidence of beavers on the floodplain.

Following the meeting, RTT members scored the design project and provided comments to the sponsor.

Decision:

- None

Action:

- None

Counting Large Wood

John Crandall led a discussion and presented slides on large wood. John mentioned that while conducting the Lower Chewuch Reach Assessment, his team has had discussions about wood counts. John highlighted that currently, wood counting is an important part of reach assessments and level 2 surveys. However, wood function, which is not directly part of assessments, is more important than wood counts. John shared that wood counting becomes problematic following restoration because many large pieces are added to engineered log jams. Some of those pieces are buried in banks. In addition, several of the wood pieces in jams are not considered large pieces (too short) but have important benefits to fish and habitat diversity. He added that it can be very difficult to count the number of pieces of large wood in engineered log jams, especially buried pieces. Finally, the target number of wood pieces for a reach may be achieved with a couple of engineered log jams, even though the rest of the reach is lacking wood.

Based on these observations, John asked:

- Is the current approach incorporating wood in the most appropriate or useful way?
- What other attributes in addition to wood counts could be considered (e.g., count the number of jams, channel forms, pieces engaged at low flows, orientation, etc.)?
- How should wood pieces in engineered log jams be counted (e.g., based on engineer designs, pieces engaged at low flows, etc.)?

One RTT member echoed the need to identify a better method for quantifying wood and log jams. The individual wood count is a generic metric that does not necessarily reflect the effects of wood on channel structure/morphology (e.g., scour pools, substrate sorting, etc.). John indicated that scour pools within riffles are not counted in assessments. One sponsor shared that funding sources, permitting, and liability often drive the types of wood projects that can be implemented. These often override the needs of the stream (“the tail wags the dog”). This sponsor also mentioned potentially inviting some project engineers to discuss different approaches for including large wood in restoration projects.

One member asked whether models have been developed to estimate reference wood conditions for different stream domains (e.g., source/recruitment, transport, and storage domains). These models have been developed for sediment and in some cases for wood, but it does not appear they are available for the Upper Columbia. Some reaches will always be lacking in wood because of their process domain and existing natural and anthropogenic constraints. Thus, a universal wood count target does not apply everywhere. Unless a reference (target number) can be established for different process domains and constraints, the member recommended removing wood counts from assessments and focusing on estimating the effects of wood on habitat conditions in streams (e.g., pools, cover, diversity, etc.). Depending on the process domain, wood would be considered a potential tool for restoring limiting habitat conditions within streams. It may be useful to have researchers who study natural wood regimes to present to the RTT (e.g., Ellen Wohl, Tim Beechie, etc.).

It was noted that there will be some presentations on wood during the upcoming Science Conference.

Decision:

- **None**

Action Item:

- **RTT members will identify potential experts who study natural wood regimes and consider asking them to present their findings to the RTT.**
- **The RTT will continue to discuss this topic during upcoming meetings.**

The RTT meeting was adjourned at 12:00 pm.