



## REGIONAL TECHNICAL TEAM MEETING FINAL MARCH MEETING SUMMARY

**Date:** Wednesday, 12 March 2025

**Time:** 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM

**Location:** Webinar

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**Members Present:** Steve Fortney (Gray & Osborne Inc.), Catherine Williard (Chelan PUD), Shelby Fowler (USFWS), Kate Terrell (USFWS), Hans Smith (YN), John Crandall (Confluence Aquatics), Tracy Bowerman (USFWS), Tom Kahler (Douglas PUD), and Tracy Hillman (BioAnalysts Inc., Chair).

**Others Present:** Ryan Niemeyer (UCSRB), Meghan Camp (UCSRB), Ariel Edwards (UCSRB), Kristen Kirkby (Cascade Fisheries), Jeff Jorgensen (NOAA), Mark Ingman (Cascadia CD), Cody Gillin (WDFW), Maddie Eckman (YN), Ameer Bahr (RCO), Mike Kane (CCNRD), Gardner Johnson (Interfluve), Aaron Rosenblum (Cascade Fisheries), and Phillip Klenke (Cascade Fisheries).

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Tracy Hillman reviewed the March RTT meeting agenda, and the agenda was approved by all RTT members present. Tracy Hillman reviewed the February DRAFT meeting notes and all RTT members present approved the notes.

The following action items from the February meeting were reviewed:

- Ryan Niemeyer will post the MaDMC data gaps list without the two proposed data gaps. **Complete.**
- Ryan Niemeyer will share the two proposed new data gaps with the RTT via email, as well as the Tiering criteria, and schedule a discussion during the next RTT meeting. **Complete.**
- Ryan Niemeyer will schedule a Prioritization Work Group (PWG) meeting before the next RTT meeting and share information on the new reach ranks with the PWG members for their review. **Complete.**
- Ryan Niemeyer will share with sponsors the list of reaches with new habitat data but without reach ranks. **Complete.**
- RTT members will let Tracy Hillman know whether they can review SRFB applications this year. **Complete.**
- RTT members will nominate a vice-chair for the RTT. **Ongoing.**
- Ryan Niemeyer will share the USFWS presentation with the RTT. **Complete.**
- The RTT will work to refine the MaDMC data gaps list to include Brook Trout distribution throughout the Upper Columbia. **Complete.**
- The RTT will update the prioritization tool to include Brook Trout and other non-native (exotic) fish species distributions. **Ongoing.**
- Ryan Niemeyer will share the CCNRD PowerPoint presentation with the RTT. **Complete.**

## **RTT & UCSRB Updates**

### **RCO Monitoring Grant Round Update**

Ariel Edwards reported that letters of intent were due on 12 March 2025. Pre-proposals will be posted online for review before 25-26 March. Project presentations will occur on 25 and 26 March at virtual meetings. RTT scoring will occur on the afternoon of 26 March.

**Decisions:**

- **None**

**Action Items:**

- **None**

### **Discuss RTT Member Availability for Scoring**

Currently, only four or five members are available for scoring. A few RTT members are uncertain.

**Decisions:**

- **None**

**Action Items:**

- **None**

### **Identify RTT Vice-Chair**

Tom Kahler was identified as a candidate for the RTT Vice-Chair position; however, he indicated after the meeting that his schedule will not allow him to serve as the Vice-Chair. The RTT will continue to search for a Vice Chair.

**Decisions:**

- **None**

**Action Items:**

- **None**

### **Discuss Reach Assessment for the Upper Methow and Habitat Assessment in the Mainstem**

Kristen Kirkby asked the RTT for input regarding the methodology for reach assessments in the Upper Methow. Cascade Fisheries is planning to repeat the Level II survey, create a hydraulic model, and develop restoration concepts. She asked for input on whether a Level II survey or a complete reach assessment would be the best approach. The discussion included considerations of geomorphic changes due to fires, landslides, and avulsions. If there were major changes since the last survey, then a Level II may not be enough to capture the changes. However, if there have not been major geomorphic changes since then, a Level II is fine. LiDAR data are available and could enhance floodplain access assessments. Hans Smith mentioned that a geomorphologist should review the area before deciding about conducting a Level II survey or a full reach assessment.

Kristen also asked for RTT input on assessing habitat in Rock Island and Wells reservoirs. The goal is to use 2D modeling to look at the potential for habitat enhancement over a range of flows. There was discussion on how the mainstem's contribution to fish production has been overlooked. Tom Kahler

discussed a variety of data the PUD has collected on fish habitat use and suggested that there is little that can be done in terms of habitat enhancement. He also mentioned additional data needs such as data on winter fish distribution and genetics. Catherine Willard mentioned that Chelan PUD is planning a study in October 2025 to track fish rearing behavior and collect genetic samples.

**Decisions:**

- None

**Action Items:**

- None

### **Reach Assessments (White River and Chewuch River)**

Gardner Johnson from Inter-Fluve provided an overview of the White River reach assessment, ahead of his full presentation scheduled for the April RTT meeting. The initial assessment identified 19 potential project sites, with a particular focus on areas near the confluence of the White River and Napeequa River, which they call the “fab five.” When asked about reconnecting the floodplain in the lower White River, Gardner explained that there are three main challenges – it would be expensive, there is heavy recreation use, and there is little bang for the buck in terms of addressing limiting factors.

John Crandall provided an update on the Chewuch River reach assessment, with a full presentation also expected in April. A draft report is in progress, and the team is working with BOR and CTCR to develop restoration alternatives based on geomorphic assessments. The analysis included Level II surveys and bathymetric LiDAR data, and is allowing for a re-evaluation of the REI metrics.

**Decisions:**

- None

**Action Items:**

- None

### **Prioritization Metrics Update and Reach Ranks**

Ryan Niemeyer provided an update regarding the recent Prioritization Work Group (PWG) meeting. He discussed updates to prioritization metrics, focusing on the off-channel/side-channel metric and its integration into the prioritization tool. The new metric categorizes off-channel habitat based on its area relative to the total reach, with thresholds for "Adequate" (>87%), "At Risk" (37-87%), and "Unacceptable" (<37%). A total of 401 reaches now include this metric, with 134 new reaches added and 139 still missing the data, primarily in mainstem areas such as the Okanogan and Upper Chiwawa. The floodplain connectivity metric was also reviewed, with discussions about how to refine the bank modification/levee layer to distinguish between truly constraining infrastructure (e.g., levees) and less impactful features (e.g., riprap along valley walls). Additionally, the PWG considered whether stability metrics such as bank stability and channel migration should be incorporated, ultimately deciding to prioritize floodplain connectivity over stability metrics due to high correlation among these metrics. The PWG also discussed removing the life stage filter and instead recommended creating a Rank 4. This would allow the reaches that have habitat data but few life stages to still be ranked.

The RTT discussed proposed modifications. The inclusion of an off-channel/side-channel metric in the prioritization tool was approved. However, a decision on floodplain connectivity was postponed until updates to the bank modification and levee layer could be incorporated. The RTT also agreed to remove

stability metrics from the tool, recognizing their correlation with floodplain connectivity. The stability metrics require time-series aerial photo analysis, making them challenging to implement at scale.

The RTT discussed removing the life stage filter. While there was general agreement that changes should be tested, RTT members wanted to see the potential effect of removing the filter before voting on final adjustments. Ryan committed to rerunning the prioritization tool with the proposed updates and presenting the results at the next RTT meeting, time permitting.

Ryan asked for approval on the additional reach ranks (64 restoration reaches and 50 protection reaches). Concerns were raised about how updates to reach ranks might impact project sponsors. Reach ranks are relative; therefore, adding new reach ranks might change the ranking of existing reaches. The current ranks do not include the changes that were discussed in this meeting, so Ryan will re-run it and send results by the end of this week to the RTT so they can vote on the approval of additional reach ranks. Tracy Hillman mentioned that the Prioritization Strategy will need to be updated to reflect all of these changes.

#### **Decisions:**

- **The RTT approved off-channel/side channel remote sensing metric inclusion in the prioritization tool.**
- **The RTT approved the removal of the bank stability and vertical stability metrics from the prioritization tool.**

#### **Action Items:**

- **Ryan Niemeyer will update the bank modification and levee layer to distinguish between truly constraining infrastructure (e.g., levees) and less impactful features (e.g., riprap along valley walls).**
- **Ryan Niemeyer will create a draft approach to the removal of the life stage filter and run the tool to evaluate the changes. He will present this at the next RTT meeting.**
- **Ryan Niemeyer will re-run the prioritization tool after removing stability metrics, NorWeST canopy cover, and the not-yet-approved remote sensing floodplain connectivity metric (based on bank modification/levee layer) and send to the RTT by the end of this week for RTT review.**

### **Adding Climate Change to the Prioritization Tool**

Ryan Niemeyer discussed potential methods for integrating climate change considerations into the prioritization framework, using additional funding from the Bonneville Environmental Foundation (BEF). The goal is to explore ways to incorporate climate change projections into habitat prioritization, ensuring that restoration efforts are informed by long-term environmental trends. The project will begin by reviewing how other prioritization efforts have accounted for climate change, identifying relevant data sources, and testing how climate-related information might be integrated into existing prioritization methods.

Tracy Hillman mentioned that climate change effects were included in the AU ranking but not in reach ranking because there was not enough contrast at the reach scale. The RTT supported exploring this topic. It was agreed that further discussion would be needed before making any formal decisions on climate change considerations in the prioritization tool.

**Decisions:**

- **None**

**Action Items:**

- **None**

## **Effects of Riparian Shading of Downstream Reaches**

Ryan Niemeyer discussed assessing the effects of riparian shading on downstream water temperatures. This effort will build on existing research that models how riparian vegetation influences river energy balance and temperature regulation. The project will also consider how factors such as flow direction, azimuth angles, and variability in canopy cover influence temperature outcomes. A key challenge will be determining whether these models can be effectively calibrated using past studies or if additional validation is needed.

Chelan County has done similar work in the Wenatchee and Entiat basins. Given the complexity of the variables associated with riparian restoration, members proposed not including it in the prioritization tool and conducting more detailed analyses on select sites rather than trying to cover the entire Upper Columbia.

The UCSRB will connect with NOAA for additional insights into their work on temperature models and riparian shading for the HARP model.

**Decisions:**

- **None**

**Action Items:**

- **None**

## **Columbia River Tributaries Update**

The RTT reviewed the proposal to add 15 new streams (small tributaries to the Columbia River) to the prioritization network. After a brief discussion, RTT members unanimously approved the addition.

**Decisions:**

- **RTT members approved the addition of 15 streams (smaller tributaries to the Columbia River) to the reach network.**

**Action Items:**

- **None**

## **Brook Trout Discussion**

The RTT discussed how to include Brook Trout and other exotic species in the prioritization tool. The team agreed that exotic species distribution and density is a data gap. Additional data on Brook Trout density, distribution, and interactions with native species are necessary before these considerations can be formally included in the prioritization tool.

**Decisions:**

- **None**

**Action Items:**

- None

**Meeting adjourned at 11:45 pm**