

Columbia River Policy Advisory Group

September 9, 2020

ONLINE MEETING

*Note: Powerpoint presentations from this meeting are available on the OCR website:
<https://www.ezview.wa.gov/?alias=1962&pageid=37050>*

Welcome/Introductions

The meeting began at 9:00 a.m. Facilitator Neil Aaland reviewed a couple of pointers for the online meeting. He noted that Cynthia Carlstad would take over meeting facilitation starting with her 9:45 am item. He explained that the System Operation Review item was scheduled due to interest from PAG members; OCR is not looking for input here as they are not involved in it. Cynthia read off the rollcall of who has logged in for the meeting.

Update: Department of Ecology Advisory Group on Water Trust, Banking, and Transfers – Report to Legislators

Neil introduced presenter Carrie Sessions with Ecology. Carrie has presented on this topic to the PAG a couple of times. She showed a presentation (available at the OCR website). Ecology is not doing a formal report to the Legislature but will prepare an update report. The idea behind the Advisory Group was to increase Ecology's understanding of the issues. There are four primary areas of investigation:

- Downstream, out-of-basin transfers
- Transparency in water right sales
- Trust Water Program
- Water banking

They are looking to use incentives to keep water rather than regulatory approaches. Regarding transparency, notice requirements are good but need improvement.

Questions and comments:

- How far can you go with water rights since they are a property right and might be subject to takings provisions? [They are not doing rulemaking on that; they did check with attorneys and not subject to takings because it is voluntary]

Discussion: Conversations with PAG Members

Cynthia Carlstad took over meeting facilitation and presented this topic. She noted we are at a transition point with facilitation, and transitions are good opportunities for reflection. She asked Tom and Melissa to share their thoughts about the PAG. Tom said the PAG was instrumental in helping define the program. They are now moving in the direction of a watershed approach – Yakima basin, Icicle, Walla Walla. It might be a good time to re-consider PAG membership.

Melissa said the PAG has added a lot of value. Early on there were many meaty policy topics. Over time this has diminished with a maturing program. It has still been useful to get PAG perspectives on technical and project issues.

Cynthia will be reaching out to members with a series of questions (see her presentation on the OCR website). Michael Garrity said the PAG remains valuable. He likes the coordination function around such topics as the Columbia River Treaty. He noted temperature is becoming an increasingly significant issue.

Public Comment

Cynthia noted that Amelia Marchand discussed some changes in the chat page regarding Colville Tribe environmental staff. Amelia is now the Program Director, taking over when Gary Passmore retired. Tom Tebb said he will call Amelia to discuss PAG involvement.

David Ortman asked if the PAG would be weighing in on the temperature problems mentioned earlier. Cynthia thinks that would be an informational topic; Tom said they could bring the topic up to the Executive Committee for possible review. Tom also indicated we could invite the public to weigh in after each topic, after PAG members have had their input.

Break (10 minutes)

Discussion: Columbia River System Operation Review – FEIS and Process Summary

Liz Klumpp, BPA, introduced this topic. She introduced the federal agency staff who will make the presentation (see combined presentation on the OCR website).

Birgit Kohler with BPA has spent four years as the power lead. They planned to issue the Record of Decision (ROD) by September 30. The ROD is the actual decision on the adopted alternative. There was a 45-day comment period and they received over 58,000 total comments. 55,000 were form letters, but 3,000 were unique comments. She reviewed a list of public comment bullets.

Key findings regarding power:

- Preferred alternative increases costs by 2.7% (upward pressure on wholesale power rate)
- Removing the dams resulted in doubling the risk of power blackouts to the region
- With carbon reduction goals, replacing power from the dams would be even harder

Jason Sweet, BPA, discussed the fisheries piece. Key findings include that the preferred alternative is not likely to jeopardize continued existence of 13 species being considered, and the proposed action will not result “in the destruction or adverse modification of the designated critical habitat of these species.”

Eric Rothwell, Bureau of Reclamation, discussed water quality. He reviewed the measures that drive water quality results across multiple alternatives, these measures include fish passage, modified summer draft of Dworshak, and McNary flow target.

Questions and comments included:

- BJ Kieffer asked what power generation looks like with a later fall refill {Birgit will follow up on this}
- Ilene Le Vee asked whether small nuclear plants were considered as replacement [Birgit said they were not on the list of *primary* resources to consider from the NW Power and Conservation Council. They could be considered in the future especially regarding coal plant retirement.]
- Sandra from CTUIR asked about the increased need for tribal fishers to haul nets and clean them. [Eric said he cannot really speak to that specifically; he gave a description of the CRSO analysis of temperature and specifically that the lower river temperatures did not change significantly under any alternative.]
- Michael Garrity said the state family worked with the Governor’s office on providing comments; they appreciated the mid term benefits from the flexible spill alternative. The state hopes a larger regional discussion develops leading to stronger responses

Office of Columbia River (OCR) Updates

Melissa noted a detailed presentation was made to the PAG in June, and the budget submittal to OFM followed largely what was discussed. It calls for \$40 million for OCR, \$42 million for Yakima, and \$4.2 million (a slight reduction from the June \$5 million number) for Yakima water enhancement. Budget reduction exercises are expected, probably 15-20%. Regarding legislation, Tom said there is no pending legislation for OCR.

Next was a presentation on the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the Snake/Columbia system. Kelly Ferron, Ben Rau, and Melissa Gildersleeve from Ecology presented this. Kelly will be writing the implementation plan. The Columbia and Snake rivers do not meet water temperature standards. EPA published their TMDL in May of this year, and a public comment period was over the summer. She reviewed Ecology’s comments to EPA (posted on OCR website). They are waiting to see how EPA responds to comments and how to work with federal dams.

Questions and comments:

- Have you identified process for stakeholder engagement? [Not yet; trying to identify current forums and how to include Oregon]
- Any information on a tribal “guarantee for involvement”? [not yet; intent is to work with fish manager partners on longer term agreements]

Final thoughts/wrap-up

Cynthia will be reaching out to all PAG members. She noted that anyone can share their thoughts on the role of the PAG. The next meeting is on December 8 and will be online. Included in topics will be the Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force. Tom thanked all of today’s speakers.

The meeting adjourned at 11:45 pm.

Attendees:

CRPAG members and alternates:

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| Ron Anderson, Yakima Co Comm | Wendy McDermott, American Rivers |
| Jon Culp, Conservation Comm | Lisa Pelly, Trout Unlimited |
| Jerome Delvin, Benton Co Comm | Phil Rigdon, Yakama Nation |
| Christi Davis Kernan, BOR | Sandra Sampson, CTUIR |
| Doug Englund, Chelan County | Mike Schwisow, Columbia Basin |
| Michael Garrity, WDFW | Development League |
| Scott Hutsell, Lincoln Co Comm | Craig Simpson, ECBID |
| BJ Kieffer, Spokane Tribe | Mark Stedman, Lincoln Co Comm |
| Liz Klumpp, BPA | Richard Stevens, Grant Co Comm |
| Amelia Marchand, Colville Tribe | Jeremy Weber, ACOE |
| Wes McCart, Stevens Co Comm | |

Others logged in for the meeting¹:

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| Neil Aaland, Facilitator | Jeff Dengel, WDFW |
| Cynthia Carlstad, OCR Facilitator | Melissa Downes, OCR/Ecology |

¹ Note on attendance: some participants were not identified by their name, so we do not list those here. At the peak we had around 64 people participating

Carrie Sessions, Ecology
Tom Tebb, OCR/Ecology
Tim Poppleton, Ecology
Kelly Ferron, Ecology Water Quality
Program
Ben Rau, Ecology Water Quality Program
Melissa Gildersleeve, Ecology Water
Quality Program
Birgit Koehler, BPA
Jason Sweet, BPA
Eric Rothwell, BOR
Benjamin Tindall, WSFB
Carolyn Chad, BOR
Carrie Mauss
Chris Marx
Chris Voigt

Dan Haller, Aspect Consulting
Danny Rohr
David Ortman
Debbie Carlson, BPA
Elaine Packard
Graeme Lee Rowland
Ilene Le Vee, Landowner
Jeff Dengel, WDFW
Kristina Ribellia
Larry Mattson
Paul Jewell, WSAC
Stacy Lee King
Stuart Crane, YN
Theodore Knight, Spokane Tribe