FINAL

Meeting Minutes

Lewis River Aquatic Technical Subgroup

To: Lewis River Aquatic Technical Subgroup Date: January 21, 2024

From: Larissa Rohrbach, ATS Coordinator, Anchor QEA

Re: Final Minutes of the December 19, 2024, Lewis River Aquatic Technical Subgroup Meeting

The Lewis River Aquatic Technical Subgroup (ATS) meeting was held virtually on December 19, 2024, on Microsoft Teams, from 9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Attendees are listed in Section IV of these meeting minutes.

Action Item Summary

I. Welcome (Lesko)

- Larissa Rohrbach (Anchor QEA) will distribute the late-winter steelhead abundance and composition monitoring study plan for 2025 to the ATS for review.

A. Review Agenda (Rohrbach; 10 min)

Larissa Rohrbach reviewed the agenda. The agenda item *Lewis River Bull Trout Recovery Team Update* (III-A) was added to the Recurring Updates (III) section. The ATS welcomed Chris Kopak (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife [WDFW]) as a new member of the group. Kopak is a research fisheries biologist that will oversee Chinook Salmon life-cycle monitoring in the lower Lewis River Basin.

II. Draft 2025 Annual Operating Plan (Rohrbach; 1 hour)

A. Major Updates and Comments

The Draft 2025 Annual Operating Plan (AOP) was distributed for review on December 17, 2024. Committee members may access the working document on the PacifiCorp Lewis H&S Plan Support SharePoint site. The ATS Resources folder on SharePoint contains three subfolders for members to access documents relating to the Hatchery and Supplementation (H&S) Plan, the AOP, and ATS meeting minutes.

The draft 2025 AOP encompasses edits made during 2024 and 2025 because an AOP was not finalized in 2024. The 2025 AOP on SharePoint contains the main body of the document, appendices,

and strategies. Appendix B is a compilation of all objectives and strategies that are a part of the AOP, the corresponding key questions, and data collected.

Major updates were discussed at today's meeting, as follows:

- The Executive Summary of the draft 2025 AOP highlights the substantive updates to the document.
- Strategy A: Adult Abundance and Composition contains all three Hatchery and Supplementation species: spring Chinook Salmon, Coho Salmon, and steelhead. The late-winter steelhead mark-recapture model, specifically the change to field methods piloted last year for tagging fish, have been reviewed and finalized in the 2025 AOP.
- Updates to Strategy G: Genetics Monitoring are complete, and all attachments are included within the document on SharePoint.
- An Excel version of Strategy J: Adult Sample Collection Checklist can be accessed on SharePoint. Erik Lesko verified that the table reflected genetic samples to be collected this year. Comments from Kale Bentley (WDFW) and Levi Pienovi (PacifiCorp) were made in late 2023 regarding increased sampling at certain locations; these have been addressed, and corresponding edits have been incorporated into the working version of the document.
- Placeholders for adjusting the target number of fish to transport upstream, specifically Coho Salmon, have been included. Chris Karchesky (PacifiCorp) noted that the target numbers given in the current H&S Plan are based on an earlier model run of the upper basin capacity estimated by Ecosystem Diagnosis and Treatment (EDT) model, and the updated model run resulting from collective group agreement in the EDT process. These revised numbers actually serve as the current transport targets, but discussion continues whether in some years additional Coho Salmon should be transported to test the actual habitat capacity, as suggested by U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) scientists implementing an Integrated Population Model (IPM) for the basin.

Bentley noted that the Coho Salmon IPM is pertinent to several the AOP topics. Bentley provided an external review of USGS's Lewis River Coho Salmon IPM report. This report discusses the information presented by John Plumb and Russell Perry at the May 23, 2024, ATS meeting. Karchesky confirmed that Bentley's review has been received and is under review by Plumb and Perry. PacifiCorp's 2025 Annual Report will include the final report that USGS pulled together from the 2024 analysis. PacifiCorp has renewed the contract with USGS and will continue to provide Plumb and Perry with annual data from juveniles and adults for future model run. For instance, 2024 adults transported will be included along with data from the spring 2025 outmigrants.

Bentley asked whether collection efficiency (CE) at Swift Dam will be used in 2025 to estimate juvenile outmigration. Karchesky replied that all CE work is outlined in Objective 2 of the *Aquatic*

Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for the Lewis River. A new structure was constructed at the entrance of the Swift Reservoir floating surface collector facility, and CE was tested in spring 2024. A presentation on the preliminary results of the CE study will be given to the ACC or the Fish Passage Subgroup in January 2025. Larissa Rohrbach said the Aquatic Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (AMEP) and H&S Plan will be useful in informing how monitoring and evaluation objectives align across the Lewis River Basin. Karchesky said that the most recent version of the H&S Plan and the AMEP are available on the PacifiCorp website, however, they may be added to the ATS's SharePoint site as well.

Larissa Rohrbach encouraged members to review the draft 2025 AOP and provide comments in the working document on SharePoint. ATS members will complete their review by January 17, 2025. Comments will be extracted into a comment response matrix. Members may work out of downloaded versions and edits can be merged if there are difficulties accessing the working document on SharePoint.

III. Recurring Updates

A. Lewis River Bull Trout Recovery Team Update (Lesko; 15 min)

Erik Lesko reminded the committee that the Lewis River Aquatic Technical Subgroup Charter (ATS Charter) was approved by the ACC at their November 14, 2024, meeting. The approval of the ATS Charter solidifies the structure of the ATS and provides clarity on the functions of this subcommittee as a recommending body to the ACC.

Recently, the ACC hosted two emergency sessions related to the impacts of Coho Salmon upstream transport to Swift Reservoir on Bull Trout populations, with a focus on redd superimposition. The Utilities were tasked with drafting a 2024 Decision Document for the *2024 and 2025 Adult Coho Supplementation Targets – Upstream of Swift Dam* outlining the management decisions, Merwin Trap operations, and number of Coho Salmon transported upstream within the last 2 months. The 2024 Decision Document was presented to the ACC at the December 6, 2024, emergency session and additionally included action items that will be used to inform and develop a 2025 Decision Document. The 2025 Decision Document will include a monitoring plan that outlines monitoring protocols and alternate release sites for Coho Salmon to be implemented in fall 2025. The 2024 Decision Document is currently under ACC review and is anticipated to be discussed at the January 2025 meeting.

The Lewis River Bull Trout Recovery Team (LRBTRT) held a meeting earlier this week. Jeremiah Doyle (PacifiCorp) provided the ATS with updates from the meeting. Discussion focused on the LRBTRT's role, whether it be to remain a semi-autonomous subgroup or become an official subgroup of the ACC. The group consensus was to stay semi-autonomous while recognizing the value of

collaboration between the ACC and its subgroups and LRBTRT. A study plan is being developed to monitor interactions moving forward. The LRBTRT will attend future ATS meetings that involve Bull Trout/Coho Salmon interactions and will only provide input on agenda items specific to this topic. Josua Holowatz (WDFW) noted the importance of timely engagement with the LRBTRT. Improving communication and maintaining transparency within the LRBTRT, the ATS, and the ACC is important to fostering a collaborative work environment and discouraging species bias.

Kale Bentley asked for clarification on the official role of the LRBTRT. If the LRBTRT is not an official subgroup of the ACC, how is the group different from conservation anglers or outside organizations that want to be involved in fisheries work in the Lewis River Basin? There is overlap between several ATS members and the LRBTRT, which may result in duplicative discussions and discrepancies between conversations.

Lesko said it will be important to integrate the LRBTRT into ATS discussions to minimize duplicative conversations and discrepancies between meetings. There are no members of the public in the LRBTRT, and many representatives from the ACC and ATS are representatives in the group as well. The ATS is more flexible than ACC regarding meeting attendance. Interested parties (e.g., contractors and members of the public) may attend ATS meetings and provide input, while the ACC does not allow for outside attendance. The ATS will function as a conduit for discussion between the LRBTRT and ACC.

Doyle said that PacifiCorp's consultations with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on Bull Trout management are based on the 2006 biological opinion (BiOp) and the *Lewis River Hydroelectric Projects Settlement Agreement* (SA). Before the formation of the LRBTRT, PacifiCorp would discuss and receive approval for Bull Trout management practices from USFWS. The LRBTRT was formed 15 years ago and is composed of representatives from organizations including WDFW, USFWS, the Utilities, Cowlitz PUD, USGS, and the U.S. Forest Service. Bentley noted that the BiOp pertaining to Bull Trout management has been referenced more frequently in the last few meetings than in past years. The SA was implemented in 2004 and predates the BiOp. The SA contains a section specific to Bull Trout monitoring in general. Bentley said that he is not opposed to the operation of a Bull Trout-specific subgroup, however, it may be more efficient to have management discussions within the ATS. Doyle responded that Bull Trout have a specific BiOp and are protected under the Endangered Species Act, thus warranting a specific group tailored to facilitate actions moving forward. Lesko added that Bull Trout management is captured in the AMEP in accordance with Section 9 of the SA.

Lesko stated that there are two options for integrating the LRBTRT into ATS discussion at the January meeting: a time slot may be designated to discuss a framework for managing Bull Trout/Coho Salmon interactions, or a separate meeting may be held. The ATS will plan to begin incorporating the

LRBTRT into agenda topic-specific discussions beginning in January 2025. Assuming ACC approval of the 2024 Decision Document, ATS meetings may need to be extended to accommodate for added discussion.

Larissa Rohrbach asked whether it would make sense to begin addressing LRBTRT topics in the early months of 2025 or whether these discussions should be placed on hold. Lesko said that the ACC views this topic as an urgent priority and that the challenges related to managing Bull Trout/Coho Salmon interactions must be addressed promptly.

B. Genetics Monitoring Plan Implementation (Lesko; 15 min)

Lesko stated that PacifiCorp's primary contractor, Stantec, is developing a scope of work for sampling species such as juvenile steelhead throughout the lower Lewis River Basin as well as upstream of Yale Dam and Swift Dam. This scope of work will be incorporated into the Genetics Monitoring Plan in the and Strategy G of the AOP. The scope of work is anticipated to be completed in early 2025 and will be shared with the ATS upon its completion.

Bentley asked when a schedule for implementing the Genetics Monitoring Plan will be available to the ATS. Lesko replied that information will be tentatively shared at the February, 2025 ATS meeting.

C. Steelhead Adult Abundance and Composition Monitoring (Lesko; 15 min)

Lesko reminded the ATS of the adult late-winter steelhead mark-recapture study presented by Mount Hood Environmental (MHE) at the August 22, 2024, ATS meeting. PacificCorp met with MHE and USGS to discuss lessons learned in 2024 from the study. Rohrbach will distribute the study plan for steelhead abundance and composition monitoring in 2025 following the meeting. Doyle said the only substantive change made to the study plan is that several sample sites have been excluded from future monitoring efforts. The original study plan included 11 sample sites ranging from Merwin Dam to the end of Eagle Island. The revised study plan excluded the four sites of lowest collection yield that accounted for 10% of the total catch. The time used at those sample sites will be allocated to the other seven sites and will use the same amount of sampling effort during the day.

Lesko noted that the study plan will be included in the AOP updates (Strategy A) and can be distributed to the ATS separately for review. Rohrbach said it will be important to ensure that the map of sampling locations included in Strategy A is updated to reflect this change.

Bentley inquired about the capacity for the ATS to provide feedback to the updated study plan if sampling is set to commence in several months. Lesko responded that a contract has already been made; however, comments on the study plan can be made in the AOP. Bentley stated that it seems abnormal to share a scope of work and ask for ATS feedback when a contract is already in place. Any

modifications would therefore require a change order. Bentley emphasized the importance of allowing sufficient time review documents before they are finalized. Lesko acknowledged that the review process was limited due to time constraints and noted that change orders are common and feasible to conduct if needed.

D. Coho Salmon Transition Implementation – Next Steps (Lesko; 15 min)

Lesko provided an update to discussions surrounding the Coho Salmon Transition Plan. PacifiCorp's funding obligations and the method for how capital investments are paid will be discussed at the January 8, 2025, ACC meeting. Lesko will distribute information outlining PacifiCorp's position on the subject prior to the ACC meeting.

Lesko shared questions that PacifiCorp's' consultants provided upon review of the Coho Salmon Transition Plan. The first was to ask what the urgency of implementing the Coho Salmon Transition Plan is. There are currently low levels of natural-origin returns in the Lewis River Basin. Transport of fish upstream of Swift Dam currently allows for the natural environment to drive integration though natural patterns of selection. The second question was what purpose is of maintaining a segregated program when it is known that the proportion of hatchery-origin spawners is greater than zero. Thus, it is not possible to keep the segregated isolated from the integrated program because a portion of segregated Coho Salmon will spawn naturally downstream of Merwin. PacifiCorp must justify the benefits of the Coho Salmon Transition Plan to species recovery as well as how the plan supports the reintroduction outcome goal outlined in the SA. The Utilities' position is that there is additional funding obligation in the SA beyond what is described in Section 8.7 to modify or upgrade existing infrastructure for the program.

Bentley stated that all information pertaining to this program is in the Coho Salmon Transition Plan approved by the ACC. This should be discussed at the ACC level if there is a need to reapprove and revise the Coho Salmon Transition Plan. Lesko agreed and clarified that this update is to provide context to PacifiCorp's internal discussions. If the challenges with funding are not resolved, alternatives that do not require capital investment may be explored. Lesko does not have updates on Hatchery and Genetic Monitoring Plan work.

E. Hatchery Practices and Pathology (Hatchery and Fish Health Staff; 20 min)

Kevin Young (WDFW) said Coho Salmon spawning was completed at Lewis River Hatchery in the week of December 8, 2024. There are no present concerns for fish health at Lewis River Hatchery. Jesse Cody (WDFW) said signs of external pathology were identified in spring Chinook Salmon that were transported to Lewis River Hatchery. Fish were promptly treated, and the issue was resolved. Spring Chinook Salmon were ponded in preparation for marking operations in early spring.

Steelhead spawning is finished at Merwin Hatchery. Late-winter steelhead have been marked and tagged (fish in the stepping-stone program were adipose clipped) and placed in the rearing ponds.

There is a vacant Hatchery Specialist II position at Merwin Hatchery.

Young said WDFW is developing late-winter steelhead collection curves in preparation for stepping-stone and conservation program broodstock collection commencing February 1, 2025. Targets for spring Chinook Salmon broodstock collection are available and were updated with data from the 2024 collection curves. WDFW has set dates for adding the updated collection curves to the 2025 AOP. Rohrbach said the steelhead collection curves will be able to be added to the AOP when they are available, and collection curves for other species will be available in the spring. The process for updating collection curves has been added in footnotes of the AOP.

IV. ATS Administration

A. ATS Priorities – Status and Next Steps (Lesko; 15 min)

Erik Lesko presented the updated tracking table in the ATS Workplan. The ATS Workplan details a task priority timeline for the next 90 days as follows:

- Lesko described the steps agreed to on a formalized approach to data collection, sharing, and resolution in 2025. Lesko is working with hatchery staff to communicate when raw data files are needed rather than data summaries when writing the Annual Operations Report. A formalized approach to data sharing is not planned. Strategy J of the AOP aims to formalize the responsibility of data collection to support monitoring and evaluation activities. Lesko will formalize a list of which data will be requested and how data will be translated into reports.
- Lesko noted that Bull Trout/Coho Salmon interactions will be added as a major ATS priority to address in 2025.

The next meeting will be held on January 23, 2025.

V. List of Attendees

Name	Affiliation
Lincoln Baxter	Anchor QEA
Caitlin Burd	Anchor QEA
Larissa Rohrbach	Anchor QEA
Amanda Farrar	Cowlitz PUD
Amelia Johnson	LCFRB
Jesse Cody	PacifiCorp
Jeremiah Doyle	PacifiCorp
Mark Ferraiolo	PacifiCorp
Chris Karchesky	PacifiCorp
Erik Lesko	PacifiCorp
Jonathan Stumpf	Trout Unlimited
Jeff Garnett	USFWS
Kale Bentley	WDFW
Josua Holowatz	WDFW
Christopher Kopack	WDFW
Kevin Young	WDFW
Keely Murdoch	Yakama Nation