

April 18, 2016 Bull Trout Working Group Minutes

Meeting held from 1-4:30pm at the YBFWRB Office:

Attendees: Ashton Bunce (CWU), Joel Hubble (USBR), Eric Anderson (WDFW), David Child (YBFWRB), Scott Kline (WDFW), Cindy Raekes (USFWS), Jeff Krupka (USFWS), Jeff Trammell (YN), Jeff Thomas (USFWS), David Fast (YN), John Easterbrooks (WDFW), Mitch Long (KCT), Richard Visser (USFWS), Cassandra Weekes (MCFEG), Judy Neibauer (USFWS), Alex Conley (YBFWRB), Gary Torretta (USFS), Jason Dunham (USGS), Joe Benjamin (USGS), Joel Freudenthal (Yakima County); on the phone: Anthony Fritts (WDFW), Gabe Temple (WDFW).

1. Bull Trout Action Plan (BTAP) update

Alex Conley updated the group on the BTAP update process. A BTAP work session for the Ahtanum section was held before the Bull Trout Working Group meeting to review the proposed 2016 Ahtanum action updates. All feedback needs to be sent to Cassandra by the end of April. A revised final draft will be sent out in Mid-May; final comments will be incorporated by the end of May and we will approve the 2016 Ahtanum update at the June Bull Trout Working Group meeting. The Bull Trout Working Group agreed to update the Gold Creek section next.

2. Bureau of Reclamation project updates

Joel Hubble updated the group on Reclamation projects. The Integrated Plan project list is moving – it's time to begin looking at Box Canyon Creek final design contract to pursue a roughened channel design alternative and supporting work. The Box Canyon timeline depends on funding. Clear Lake passage is also a high priority, Reclamation will convene a workgroup to review designs. The goal is to define alternative in FY 2016.

A revised draft EIS for the Kachess Drought Relief Pumping Plant is anticipated out for public comment by the end of the year. There is information gathering still to be done. There was discussion about possible new Kachess Narrows alternatives that may move into the EIS.

Jeff Krupka with USFWS updated the group on the Current Operations Bi-Op for Reclamation's Yakima Project. USFWS came up with 22 project elements that were identified based on decision points. The target date for the draft biological opinion is in August.

3. Bull Trout Task Force update

Cassandra Weekes updated the group on the 2016 Bull Trout Task Force schedule. The crew will work from June 24 through mid-October. June through August will be focused on dispersed outreach, campground presentations, recreation dam removal, signage maintenance, temperature logger downloads, and other assistance as needed. September and October will be focused on redd surveys and other research and monitoring needs.

The Kachess Narrows, Box Canyon Creek, Kachess River, Gold Creek and Deep Creek will be monitored for low flow and dewatering. Campground presentations will be held in the Upper Yakima on a bi-weekly basis. Lake Easton will be added as an outreach and signage location.

4. Clear Creek Dam Transport Project

Jeff Thomas updated the group on the bull trout transport project planned at Clear Creek Dam. Jeff and crew will be hook-and-lining bull trout below the dam one day a week for three consecutive weeks in July. Bull trout encountered will be transported around the dam and released into Clear Lake. New bull trout encountered will be fin clipped for genetic sampling and PIT tagged. The plan is to continue the transport project for two years and then evaluate success based on data collected at the PIT tag arrays. Jeff also noted the Clear Creek Dam Fish Passage Assessment final report is out.

5. Upper Yakima Monitoring update

Scott Kline updated the group on the status of the Upper Yakima Monitoring Proposal. There may be an opportunity to present to the Integrated Plan Habitat Subcommittee at their next meeting. Alex Conley and Richard Visser will follow up with Jeff Tayer. There's support and interest from the Bull Trout Working Group in the "easy" field work for this summer (i.e. snorkeling, eDNA). We will discuss monitoring needs at the June Bull Trout Working Group meeting.

6. Population Management

Richard Visser gave an update about a bull trout meeting that was held with WDFW, USFWS and YN to discuss translocation and supplementation. Populations were identified for translocation, supplementation was more difficult. Key issues discussed at the meeting were donor population considerations, hatchery conditions, population genetics, current vs. future habitat conditions, habitat suitability, etc.

A good part of the meeting discussion was on current and future habitat suitability. We need to understand future habitat before proceeding. Do we do something internally or rely on a model like Dunham is working on? What's the best type of assessment? Would the Bull Trout Working Group develop a white paper on this? Next steps still need to be determined.

7. Decision Support Model

Jason Dunham and Joe Benjamin presented about the Bull Trout Vulnerability Assessment and Decision Support Model they've been working on. The Vulnerability Assessment was published last fall; it maps suitable habitat, attribute patches and migratory habitat, and model persistence. The Vulnerability Assessment does not capture local threats, such as the presence of non-natives, small barriers, diversions, etc. That information goes into the local assessment.

Joe gave an overview of the Structured Decision Making Process and Decision Support Model. The model can integrate a lot of different data, such as empirical data, expert opinion, literature, other model simulations, etc. Additional funding is needed before facilitated technical and stakeholder groups are convened. Next steps are to hold a small to identify fundamental objectives and write those up as a one page summary for review by possible funders. Judy Neibauer with USFWS offered to organize meeting. After objectives are identified by the technical team, a stakeholder meeting with the bull trout MOU signatories will be held. Jeff Tayer will arrange the stakeholder meeting. If funded, the final product (draft report, model, database) is expected out in 18-24 months.

For more information on the Rangewide Climate Vulnerability Assessment for bull trout, visit: <https://nccwsc.usgs.gov/webinar/442>.