September 25, 2026 BTWG Meeting Notes

Yakima Bull Trout Working Group · 1:00 to 4:00 PM (ended about 3:15) · Hybrid meeting at 1200 Chesterly Drive, Suite 280, Yakima, and on Zoom

Time	Topic	Presenter(s)
5 min	Welcome and Introduction	All
20 min	Updates and Announcements: field season update and calendar; flume and Three Queens Fire update; SF Tieton Bridge update; bull trout signage; Cold Creek update; Reclamation/WDFW contract update	All
10 min	BTWG staffing changes	Alex Conley
25 min	Gold Creek construction update	KCT
10 min	Break	
15 min	Interim Passage at Keechelus Discussion	Todd N.
20 min	ScCS: 2026 report out; 2027 (or 2028) proposals	ScCS attendees
20 min	BTAP updates	Alex Conley
5 min	November 17 date and agenda topics	Olivia T.

Welcome and Introduction

Olivia Tyrnauer (MCF), and Alex C. ran the meeting. Zoom transcription was used for notes.

Virtual Attendees: Bob and Sue Mecklenburg (Gold Creek landowners), Kelsey Martin Harbick (KCT), Joel Hubble (Yakima Basin Joint Board consultant), Todd Newsome (Yakama Nation), Sarah Ehmer (Yakima County), Erin Eaton (TU), and Katy Pfannenstein (USFWS).

In-Room Attendees: Dominic Singh (USFWS), Connor Cunningham (USFWS), Mel Babik (KCT), Mitch Long (KCT), Alex Conley (YBFWRB), Cheyne Mayer (YBFWRB), Olivia Tyrnauer (MCF), Scott Kline (WDFW), William Meyer (WDFW), Trevor Hutton (WDFW), Aimee Taylor (WDFW), Pat Monk (Reclamation), Shawna Warehime (Ecology), Emma Meyer (USFWS), and Gary Torretta (USFS).

Updates and Announcements

- **Field season and redd surveys.** Aimee reported that fish rescue ended early because of the Three Queens Fire closure, so the Kachess River rescue was less thorough than usual. Redd surveys are a little more than halfway done. So far:
    - South Fork Tieton counts are below average.
    - North Fork Tieton counts are above average, possibly because fish are being moved over the dam from other populations.
    - Ahtanum is above average for a second year.
    - Deep Creek and Indian Creek are about average.
- **Indian Creek.** The new fish passage flume is working, but a reach just upstream has dewatered, so no fish have spawned in the upper reach. More than 100 redds have been counted below the flume.
- **Survey calendar.** The Upper Basin surveys, especially Gold Creek, still have open slots. Bull Trout Task Force staffing drops to Olivia alone on October 6, so sign-ups are especially needed. https://www.canva.com/design/DAG6ld9MJ3k/S_Ow6LTfV9ggj8Fg55rWvg/edit
- **Temperature loggers.** Olivia is collecting loggers during redd surveys. The plan for uploading the data to Ecology is still being worked out but will happen.
- **Three Queens Fire and fire closures.** Bull trout monitoring crews are cleared to enter the closure, including Kachess and Box Canyon. Scott noted the permit doesn't list locations, so give Jeff Nelson (USFS) a heads-up before going in. Mitch (KCT) said Gold Creek construction continued through the fire with burn waivers and coordination with the incident teams, and the barricade has moved back to the Gold Creek turnoff.
- **Kachess post-fire conditions.** Connor and Emma Meyer walked to the lowest Kachess River structure and found it in good shape, with only light charring on one upright. Logs placed in the old side channel on the right side of the island burned.
- **Box Canyon flume.** Josh (WDFW) is targeting October 5–9 to install the flume. The task force planned to snorkel the upper falls area on Monday to look for adult bull trout.
- **Box Canyon conditions.** Scott Kline reported that Box Canyon was dewatered for about 70–90 feet near the mouth, the same place as last year, and no adults were seen. Long stretches above the canyon have lost the wood placed in 2019. Scott plans to repeat the wood count next year, and KCT is interested in adding wood.
- **Easton facility.** Todd Newsome said Easton is under construction, and permitting to operate it under the current permit is starting. A reintroduction permit will follow, and that's where this group will come back in. The goal is to have fish in the facility by the end of next summer, using coho if no bull trout are available.
- **SF Tieton Bridge.** Sarah Ehmer said the contractor plans to remobilize around October 13 after a construction suspension. Test holes dug on September 9 all found rock, which should allow shorter walls and less fill.
- **Bull trout signage.** The task force has installed 8 large permanent signs and distributed 26 small ones in bull trout-bearing streams. One large sign was sawed off at the post and stolen(*North Fork Tieton road access*). Next, Olivia plans to place smaller signs at kiosks along the Naches and Yakima mainstems. The project will continue next season.
- **Cold Creek.** Erin Eaton (TU) said a technical working group met about two weeks ago to review two alternatives: a bridge and a bottomless arch culvert. The group is leaning toward the

culvert. Engineers are waiting on comments from State Parks before starting conceptual designs.

- **Reclamation contracts.** Pat Monk said Reclamation has three bull trout contracts, mostly funded through ESA:
    - USFWS, for trap and haul at Clear Creek and elsewhere, is expected to be renewed without issues.
    - WDFW, for reservoir monitoring and Box Canyon Creek work, was renewed for five years and is fully funded! Alex Lopez led this effort.
    - Yakama Nation, for rescue-rearing and Easton facility staff, is a new five-year contract signed the day before the meeting. Work starts October 1.

  Todd thanked Pat and his team, noting the contract came within about 24 hours of not being funded. Pat added that reservoir storage going into winter is better than last year but still below average.
- **Gold Creek drain.** Erin said TU, KCT, and the landowners will hold a kickoff meeting on Monday the 7th to firm up goals and begin the search for engineers. Erin will send her written scope and the meeting agenda beforehand.

BTWG Staffing Changes

Alex Conley announced that Aimee now works for WDFW but is still involved with the group and is covering part of her former role. Olivia is filling in to support the work group in the meantime (funding for this support ends January 1st, 2027). She is finishing her second official season with the Bull Trout Task Force and plans to return next season, shifting to part-time work in the interim.

Moving forward, YBFWRB is looking to hire a recovery coordinator, and a position description should go out in the next few weeks. Alex asked members to share it with strong candidates: the role needs technical skills, knowledge of the basin (or the ability to learn it quickly), and the ability to work well with many partners. Olivia will continue through the end of the MCF's agreement, possibly longer depending on the hiring timeline. Whether temperature data work stays with MCF or moves elsewhere will depend on the new hire's skill set for next season (2027).

Gold Creek Construction Update

Mitch and Mel (KCT) reported that Phase 1 in-stream work and planting are nearly complete. More than 7,000 fish, including 5 bull trout, were removed from Gold Creek Pond. About 200,000 cubic yards of fill have been placed, and roughly 630,000 more are needed. At Helly's Pond, groundwater stayed above grade all summer, which is the result the project hopes to repeat across Gold Creek Pond.

Next steps: KLB will keep filling the pond next year. Filling must stop if bull trout re-enter or turbidity exceeds 5–10 NTU above background, so KCT is working on water management, a 401 certification from Ecology, and a project-specific Biological Opinion. A Streamflow decision on $12.8 million for Phase 2 is expected in early October, and two $3 million WaterSMART applications are pending.

Interim Passage at Keechelus Discussion

The group discussed an experimental fish trap (Whooshh) at the Keechelus Dam outlet to collect fish and allow people to carry them over the dam until permanent passage exists. Todd Newsome presented

the idea on behalf of Craig Haskell (USFWS), who has been leading the effort, and shared images from a site visit with Scott, Alex, engineer Ryan Skirbeck, and a Yakama Nation engineer.

Concept. Todd shared early ideas, not a finished design. One option is an adjustable aluminum trap on the outlet wall, where a pump-driven attraction flow draws fish over a false weir into a live box. The trap would need safe walkway access and would be checked at least every other day. Fish would be moved by tote and truck to the reservoir. Reclamation has agreed to provide power. One open question is what to do with coho and other salmonids that enter the trap.

Discussion.

- **Water levels.** Joel and others suggested rails, a sliding mount like the one on the Sunnyside boom, or a float, to keep a half-foot drop at the entrance as water levels change. Wave action is a concern.
- **Cost.** There is no firm estimate yet. An early figure ($25k) for the trap alone was called optimistic, and the full installed project could likely reach six figures. The project lead is to be determined.
- **Capacity and funding.** Pat noted Reclamation has reduced staff, so partners should bring their own engineers and electricians. Alex said Ecology contingency funds may run out soon, and Reclamation is the expected primary funder.

Next steps. Whooshh is refining the design and cost estimate. A subgroup may form after field season. Send ideas to Craig, Todd, or Scott. The topic is on the November 17 agenda.

ScCS

2026 report out

Alex Conley, Scott Kline, and Emma Meyer attended this year's meeting in Alberta, between Calgary and Banff. Alex gave the presentation on the Yakima's collaborative approach that Aimee had originally been scheduled to give. It was well received: Alberta is just starting to organize more collaboratively, beyond the province's fish agency.

- **Whirling disease.** Alex's main takeaway was whirling disease, which has recently spread in Alberta. Its effects on bull trout and cutthroat are unclear. It was found in the Hood River and in Walla Walla some years ago, He recommended careful gear cleaning.
- **Range expansion.** Scott described an Alberta project expanding bull trout above roughly 30-foot falls. Because of whirling disease, they will stock hatchery-raised juveniles instead of adults. It parallels ideas for Box Canyon, and Scott will follow its results.
- **Kootenay Lake.** Bull trout numbers there are so high they are crashing the kokanee, so bull trout are being culled to rebuild kokanee. The trade-off between many mid-size fish and fewer large ones prompted interesting discussion.
- **Other findings** echoed Yakima work. More roads and less tree cover meant fewer bull trout. When biologists identified fish in hand as hybrids, genetic testing showed they were right only about half the time, similar to what was found with the Clear Lake fish.
- **Captive population.** Emma noted extensive lab work on captive bull trout, including transport effects. Todd may want to connect with these researchers about Easton. The captive population

is held at a federal facility in Winnipeg. The names mentioned were "John Pope" (University of Calgary) and a federal Fisheries scientist named Neil (*names are uncertain; Scott and Alex will confirm them for Todd*).

Hosting a future ScCS in the Yakima Basin

There was broad support for the Yakima hosting the ScCS again, most likely in 2027. The group last hosted in 2015 at Camp Dudley, with field trips from Gold Creek to the Ahtanum.

- **Field trip draws.** Possible showcases include KCT's Box Canyon work, Kachess wood placement, Gold Creek, the Easton facility if it's running, SF Tieton, and passage at the dams. Craig suggested a large group field project that sends about 30 people to 15 sites, such as surveys, habitat work, or brook trout electrofishing and removal (if permitted). Night snorkeling could be an optional add-on. MCF could also provide some tours of sites, along with BTTF support in the field.
- **Planning roles.** The work could be split among a food and venue lead, a registration and finance lead, a field trip lead, and a presentations lead. Scott offered to cover the AFS Western Native Fishes Committee piece and help plan the field work. The Recovery Board's board agreed to act as the fiscal agent again, handling payments and Eventbrite registration.
- **Timing.** Options ranged from late August to October. August has worked well recently because many people have September fieldwork.
- **Venues.** Camp Dudley, Camp Koinonia (faith-based; alcohol policy unknown), Silver Ridge, and the Teanaway were suggested.
- **Budget.** Questions remain about meal costs, registration fees, uncertain attendance, and swag.
- **Representation.** Craig suggested including someone from the Yakama Nation and someone from Reclamation as well (missing from the meeting).

Aimee (as the AFS representative) will tell Elliot the Yakima is interested in hosting. A small planning group (Scott, Craig, Aimee, Alex, William, and others interested) will meet in early November and report back on November 17. The announcement will go to the whole group.

BTAP Updates

Alex Conley said BTAP work slowed with the staff turnover, but the remaining chapters are back on track:

- **Cle Elum chapter.** Aimee got this chapter about two-thirds done. It will go out for review ahead of a workshop the morning before the November 17 (Tuesday) meeting, where the group will work to finalize it. No one objected to the workshop timing, so it will be added to the calendar invite.
- **Upper Yakima reintroduction chapter.** Olivia and Alex will frame this chapter. A preliminary draft will come in November, with the aim of finishing it in January. These are the last two sets of populations.
- **General cleanup.** The tech is now set up to embed the actions database and WDFW graphs in Yakipedia. Other cleanup includes updating the maps and the overview and introduction pages. This will happen in pieces over the next six months, some of it after the recovery coordinator is hired.

Alex noted that every word of the BTAP was written by people in the room, not AI or contractors.

Late update: Rattlesnake Creek redds. After one survey pass, only about 6 redds have been counted. Spawning gravel is scarce in the lower and middle index reaches. The channel is incised and widened, with mostly boulders and large cobble after the December floods. Large burned trees have formed big log jams downstream, some of them up on the floodplain. No passage problems were seen, and fish were observed up to Little Wildcat. The usual dry reach below McNeil Creek is dry again. The second pass is next week.

Action Items

- Sign up for redd season surveys https://www.canva.com/design/DAG6ld9MJ3k/S_Ow6LTfV9ggj8Fg55rWvg/edit
- Crews entering the Three Queens Fire closure to notify Jeff Nelson (USFS) of their dates in advance.
- Scott Kline and KCT to set up a separate Box Canyon meeting (wood count, wood supplementation, passage above Peekaboo, possible juvenile relocation). An update can go on the November 17 agenda.
- Craig Haskell and Todd Newsome to refine the interim Keechelus trap design and budget, and identify a project lead and funding. Update on November 17.
- Aimee to contact Elliot about the Yakima hosting the ScCS.
- ScCS planning group to meet in early November and report back on November 17.
- Alex and Olivia to circulate the draft Cle Elum BTAP chapter before the November 17 morning workshop.

November 17 Meeting and Agenda Topics

The next meeting is Tuesday, November 17, preceded by a morning BTAP workshop. Possible agenda topics:

- ScCS hosting follow-up and the planning group report
- Box Canyon wood count and project update? (Scott + Mel)
- Interim fish passage at Keechelus update (Todd + Craig)
- Cle Elum BTAP chapter, plus preliminary Upper Yakima reintroduction ideas

Members can send other agenda items to Olivia.