

May 4, 2022 Yakima Bull Trout Work Group Meeting

Attendees:

Alex Conley and Kayla Gallentine (YBFWRB), Zac Zacavish (MCFEG), John Reeves (Friends of Lake Kachess), Russ Byington, Shuba Pandit, Andrew Matala, Shawna Warehime and Todd Newsome (YN), Paul James (CWU), Mitch Long, Melissa Speeg (KCT), Steve Caromile, Marc Divens, Scott Kline, Anthony Fritts, William Meyer, Perry Harvester (WDFW), Richard Visser (BOR), Michael Callahan (ECY), Aime Taylor (CWU), Craig Haskell, Jason Romine, Michael Humling (USFWS), Gary Torretta (USFS).

Updates and announcements

Craig Haskell stated that they are contracting with Stantech for design of the mobile fish collector; there will be a 35% design meeting, which will focus on how to reduce the overall size in order to keep it mobile. The 90% design should be ready early June; let Craig know if you want him to send them to you. The goal is to construct this fall/winter and have ready for operation in 2023.

Alex Conley updated the group on comments received on the map on natural passage barriers and noted that RFPs for several large grant programs including the America the Beautiful Challenge should be out in the near future.

Aimee Taylor noted that she would be defending her thesis on May 18th from 2-5 pm at CWU; her research is on using acoustic telemetry to track bull trout behavior in Lake Kachess.

Jason Romine noted that he will be starting a new position with Fish and Wildlife in May, but will be covering his current duties through the fiscal year; he will then supervise and backfill his current position. The Yakima USFWS office is also hiring two new GS-7/9 positions (permanent) to get away from seasonal hiring. Jason also noted that Connor Cunningham would be starting as a Field Tech next week.

Mitchell Long noted that the US Forest Service has completed NEPA and approved moving forward with the Kachess River Instream Project. Bidding for construction will open this summer when conditions are similar to the planned construction window, and construction will begin next field season.

Zac Zacavish noted that this year's Bull Trout Task Force team is fully hired and will start work in the field in mid-June.

Marc Divens noted that WDFW is hiring two seasonal tech 2 position to conduct creel surveys from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

William Meyer updated the group on work on a bull trout habitat patch model for the Yakima Basin. WDFW GIS specialists in Olympia are compiling data layers.

Scott Kline noted that he would share an initial draft calendar for 2022 bull trout field work by the end of May.

Peekaboo Falls Proposal Development

Scott Kline gave a presentation on the proposal to introduce Bull trout above Peekaboo Falls in Box Canyon Creek. Habitat above the falls is colder than below and could provide some resiliency to the Box Canyon population in the face of climate change and help mitigate the loss of 20% juvenile habitat when

the reservoir inundated the lowest section of the Creek. Providing volitional fish passage would be ideal, but likely expensive. There has been discussion of conducting a trap and haul pilot study to test the concept, but there are concerns about the potential impact on the downstream spawning population and the potential vulnerability of transported adults due to the high levels of recreational use above the falls. The USFWS and the Yakama Nation started developing a model to estimate resilience of the current population to removal/transport of fish. The model needs additional data and will be worked on later this year.

The next step for getting volitional passage is to get a design quality elevational survey of the falls. Scott has talked to KRD, WDFW, and Kittitas county to do a survey – but none have the resources available. He received a proposal from engineering firm for \$23,200 for Peekaboo Falls and \$19,800 for Bomber Falls, but note that WDFW does not currently have funding for this project.

The group discussed issues related to the high level of recreational use in and along Box Canyon Creek upstream of Peekaboo Falls and ways to address dispersed camping and poaching impacts. The group noted that Tom Matthews, a previous USFS hydrologist, had done some good work to identify possible solutions that should be reviewed. Mitch Long offered to organize a meeting to talk to the Cle Elum District Ranger about the issue; he committed to working with Scott Kline, William Myer and Michael Humling to organize the meeting and asked others interested in participating to email him.

YBIP 10-year Plan for Bull Trout

Richard Visser updated the group on the development of a 10-year Plan for Yakima Basin Integrated Plan investments in steelhead and bull trout recovery. The steelhead section is nearing completion, and Richard and Craig Haskell will shift focus to drafting the bull trout section. The goal is to provide guidance to YBIP habitat subcommittee and other YBIP committees on key investments in bull trout recovery. Richard noted that he hoped the Bull Trout Working Group could review the document and recommend any edits or additions; he will provide the draft document to Alex so that it can be reviewed at the next Bull Trout Work Group meeting (planned for late June). Richard noted that he also hoped to work with partners to update the accompanying Bull Trout Enhancement Plan.

Yakima Nation Bull Trout Project update

Todd Newsome gave an update on funding and planning for the Easton Bull Trout Research Hatchery facility; they have secured \$700k for planning. They are currently working to finalize the contract with Reclamation for that funding, investigating water rights and working to secure another \$1.9 m in funding. NEPA review will be completed as part of the overall reintroduction and supplementation program NEPA review in the summer of 2022.

Fish in the LaSalle Hatchery are doing well, with only two fish lost. They are still eating krill but are now shifting to a Chinook/rainbow fry feed regime. They are planning to tag and release the fish in late June and will schedule a meeting to plan releases. Work group members offered to help with the releases. Jason Romine noted that last year, acoustically tagged fish survived best when released later in the season. Scott Kline expressed interest in taking an acoustic tag detector out to go to Kachess and Gold Creek to locate the tagged fish.

2023-25 YBIP Bull Trout Funding Recommendations

Alex reviewed the process by which the Bull Trout Work Group has provided funding recommendations to the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan Habitat Subcommittee, which in turn sends them to the YBIP and Department of Ecology leadership for inclusion in Ecology's YBIP funding requests. The group has played this role over four biennia, and through that, has helped shape major investments in bull trout recovery.

The group reviewed the status of the 2021-2023 recommendations, and noted that the priority project, the south Fork Tieton Bridge Replacement, is now fully funded, and likely does not require additional funding in the future.

Mitch Long detailed the next steps for restoration work in Gold Creek and the Kachess River, noting that the top priority for the biennium is completion of the Kachess Instream Restoration Project and, if the opportunity arises, supporting acquisition of key parcels along Gold Creek. Any funding not needed for those efforts (which will depend on whether other grant proposals are funded and landowner interest) would go to bring the Gold Creek Instream Restoration project toward construction. The group expressed support for this order of priority and emphasized that this is the primary on-the-ground restoration action to be funded in 2023- 2025.

The Yakima Nation presented its request to add another biologist to its Bull Trout program, with half the funding from Reclamation, and the other half from Department of Ecology funds. The group discussed when and how this funding would begin, and when there would be certainty on Reclamation funding.

WDFW expressed hope that they can move staff currently paid for with YBIP funds to general WDFW operating funds, but asked that funding be retained in the case that this effort does not succeed. The group agreed to present two sets of recommendations- one with the WDFW request, and one without.

Zac detailed the status of the Bull Trout Task Force and the basis for the slight increase requested (to cover fuel and wage increases).

Alex noted the different levels of Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board support to the Bull Trout Working Group feasible under \$60k, \$75k and greater funding levels.

Alex walked the group through the draft funding recommendation table, and the group recommended specific funding levels based on the preceding discussion; the group then reviewed the narrative of the 21-23 recommendations and proposed specific updates. Alex committed to compiling the tables and changes, sending the draft 2023-2025 document out for email review, and to presenting the draft document to the Habitat Subcommittee to request additional review. Members committed to reviewing the document and emailing any recommendations for changes.

Next Meeting

The group agreed to convene a meeting in late June/early July, with a primary focus of reviewing and providing feedback on the draft YBIP 10-year plan for bull trout.