Meeting Summary

TRRP Interdisciplinary Team Meeting

April 9, 2025

Meeting Time: 14:00 – 17:00
Location: Virtual
Organizer: Eric Peterson
Note Taker: Transcript to DOI ChatGPT (processed by Peterson)

Agenda Overview

- The meeting focused on discussing the Flow Evaluation Study and establishing a path forward regarding hypotheses and prioritization of topics.

Participants

Peterson, Eric (TRRP-USBR) / Tonina, Daniele (SAB) / Rogers, Oliver W (TRRP-USBR) / Scott McBain (ARS-HVT) / Wallin, Ty (USFWS) / Justin Alvarez (HVT) / Lindke, Ken (CDFW) / Patrick Flynn (TRRP-TC) / John Hayes (SAB) / Nissen, Bradley (USFWS) / Laskodi, Chris (TRRP-YT) / Lee, James (TRRP-USBR) / Fausch, Kurt (SAB) / Morgan, Trevor (CDWR)

Summary

- The study aims to evaluate the impacts of newly approved winter variable flows over a three-year period, also referred to as environmental or functional flows.

- Emphasis on adaptive management and the need to assess management uncertainties and develop hypotheses early in the process.

- Scott expressed concerns about the potential for the project to become unwieldy and emphasized the need for a concise and focused document.

- The importance of not being constrained by existing funding during the hypothesis generation phase was highlighted.

    - Discussions on potential additional resources to support data collection were encouraged.

- Eric proposed prioritizing hypotheses based on:

    - - Importance to juvenile fish production.
    - - Practicality of obtaining statistical results within three years.

- - The nature of data (empirical vs. modeling).

- Ty emphasized the need to avoid overly limiting the study to juvenile fish, suggesting that while focusing on this life stage is practical, the long-term goals for adult fish production should not be overlooked.

- Eric noted the necessity of evaluating the outcomes after the initial three years to provide insights into the results achieved thus far.

- Justin suggested that while focusing on juveniles, it would be beneficial to also consider Jack returns as a way to frame the study, minimizing ocean influences and allowing for quicker results.

- Ken discussed the availability of existing data and models that could be leveraged for the study, emphasizing the importance of utilizing already established monitoring projects.

- The group discussed the challenges of obtaining statistically valid results within a three-year timeframe. Ken argued that while statistical significance is important, the focus should also be on documenting relevant metrics, regardless of statistical outcomes.

- John highlighted the importance of managing expectations regarding the results after three years, suggesting that clear communication about the limitations of the results is crucial for stakeholders.

- The group debated the criteria for prioritization, focusing on the importance of topics to fish production, the nature of data (empirical vs. modeling), and whether the topics are already being monitored.

- There was a consensus that while prioritization is necessary, it should not limit the exploration of important topics.

- The discussion included differentiating between primary effects (e.g., fish production) and secondary effects (e.g., geomorphology, frog production). The group agreed that while fish production is the primary goal, other ecological factors should also be considered.

- The need for a synthesis report after the three-year evaluation was mentioned, which would compile data across various topics to derive meaningful conclusions.

- Justin suggested that a productive early step would be to assign individuals to review the winter flow report and the Environmental Assessment (EA) to extract potential hypotheses. This would clarify the discussion around what can be feasibly evaluated.

- Eric mentioned that the winter flow report contains expected outcomes, which are already included in the draft outline shared with the group. He expressed uncertainty about the need for further detailed extraction from the documents.

- Scott expressed frustration with the convoluted process and emphasized the need for efficiency in managing the collective time constraints. He proposed that a smaller group could brainstorm and develop hypothesis prioritization criteria, which could streamline the process.

- There was a consensus on the importance of forming a core group of individuals responsible for driving the project forward. This group should encompass a range of expertise to ensure comprehensive coverage of the necessary topics.

- Patrick highlighted the necessity of having a project manager to oversee the process and keep it on track. He suggested that this role should be filled by someone who can engage with the broader group while also managing the core team effectively.

- The discussion included the need for clear prioritization criteria that would guide the selection of hypotheses. Scott noted that considerations should include whether the hypothesized responses can be measured and the feasibility of detecting differences.

- It was emphasized that the core group should engage with those who initially advocated for the project, ensuring their interests and insights are incorporated into the process.

- Ken reiterated the importance of focusing on the main effects of the environmental flows, suggesting that the group should prioritize these over secondary effects initially.

- The group agreed to identify a smaller, focused team to take the lead on developing the hypotheses and prioritization criteria. This team would also reach out to the IDT and workgroups as needed to gather input and ensure alignment with broader goals.

- Ken shared his experience with how work groups and projects have typically progressed over the years, emphasizing the need for a structured approach to ensure productivity.

- Eric suggested that Ken take the lead of the smaller group, given his long involvement in the topic and interest in seeing it through.

- Ken volunteered to be part of the core group responsible for developing the study plan, although he noted that his availability would be limited for the next month.

- Eric indicated that while there wasn't a specific deadline, he anticipated that a formal study plan could be completed within the next six months. This plan would outline the data collection and expectations for the upcoming environmental flows.

- Eric stressed the importance of having a structured plan in place before the next winter flows, to avoid developing the plan while already implementing the flows.

- The group discussed the benefits of forming a smaller subgroup from the IDT to facilitate more efficient work. Ken agreed that he could take a leadership role in this effort.

- Ken emphasized that while not everyone may want to participate at this level of effort, the subgroup should be open to including a diverse range of expertise from program partners to ensure comprehensive coverage of necessary topics.

- The discussion highlighted the need to streamline the process by focusing on a smaller group that can efficiently manage the workload, while still engaging with the broader IDT and workgroups as needed.

- Ken suggested reaching out to lead representatives from each agency to gather input and expertise for the subgroup. He planned to compile a list of necessary subject expertise to ensure comprehensive coverage. Tentative list of expertise sent to chat:

- riparian ecology/plants
- fish biology
- fluvial geomorphology
- hydrology
- herpetology

- The group discussed the importance of having a study plan ready by the end of the water year (September) to present to the TMC before any votes on winter flows. Ken emphasized that the plan does not need to be overly detailed but should outline monitoring strategies.

- There was a discussion about the agreement regarding winter flows, with James noting that the TMC's role in future votes might need clarification. The group acknowledged the necessity of demonstrating a solid plan to the TMC before seeking approval for continued winter flows.

- The conversation included uncertainty about whether the agreement allows for multiple winter flows. Ken and James agreed that further clarification on this point is needed.

- Ken indicated he would begin reaching out to finalize the list of potential members for the subgroup upon his return from leave on the 21st. He planned to collaborate with Eric to ensure all relevant agencies are included.

Attachments

Content of 2 slides that Eric organized during the meeting:

Topic Prioritization

- Rank on gradients
    - Importance to central question of fish production
        - Main effects (as described in EA)
    - Empirical data versus modeling
        - Purely monitored data
        - Comparing monitored versus modeled
        - Purely modeling analysis (the 3 years of flows have little relevance)
    - Already being monitored?
- Practicality of statistical result with 3 years
    - Can we even measure, depending on the hydrology we get? (e.g. Trib delta routing)
    - Or just likelihood of directional change?
    - Bayesian?
    - Is a statistical result really part of prioritization? Need to document either way.
        - Meaningful versus statistical (committing to statistical may be high risk)
    - This is more 'expectation' than 'prioritization'… manage expectations

Path Forward

- IDT subgroup forming to lead path forward – Ken pulling group together and leading
    - Composition:
        - Stream ecology
        - fish biology

        - fluvial geomorphology
        - Hydrology/temperature
        - Herpetology
        - Human impacts? Eric to discuss possibilities with BOR folks
- Timeline: study plan / strategy by end of water year 2025