

**Columbia River Regional Forum
System Configuration Team Meeting
February 20, 2025
FINAL Official Notes**

Representatives of USACE, WDFW, BPA, NOAA, and others participated in today's SCT hybrid meeting facilitated by Trevor Conder and hosted via Google Meets.

Draft and final SCT notes are available on the COE's TMT website under the [FPOM link](#). For copies of documents discussed, contact Bonnie Hossack at Bonnie.Hossack@noaa.gov. See the final page of these minutes for the list of attendees of today's meeting.

1. Introductions

Trevor Conder introduced himself as the new facilitator for the SCT meetings. Conder took over for Blane Bellerud when Bellerud retired in December 2024.

Conder shared that as SCT transitions to more in-office meeting there will be a need for more in-person meeting locations. Two locations were proposed:

- CRITFC's Conference Rooms
- Corps' Fireside Chat Room

Conder also proposed a quarterly meeting location at locations outside of the Portland Metro area.

Lorz said that every Third Thursday it will conflict with CRITFC's Commission Meeting. They would be using the upstairs conference room. They do a lot of offsite Commission Meetings in the Summer so those dates would typically be unaffected.

Conder said that SCT would plan to use the Fireside Chat Room as a base and SCT will shift as necessary.

➤ *from Kate Self NPCC to everyone: 9:07 AM*

The Council is happy to host as an alternate anytime that the Council is not in session (second Tues/Weds of each month) and the large room is open as well

➤ *from Ida Royer to everyone: 9:09 AM*

Tom, let me know when the CRITFC space is available, and we can use that space. I will make a standing reservation for the Fireside room today and will cancel as needed.

➤ *from Tom Lorz to everyone: 9:10 AM*

ok sounds good we are getting the commission schedule for this year later this week or next and will send out.

Conder said that SCT should become more frequent with meetings and more frequent with the meeting minutes.

- Having three to four months between meeting is not something that Conder would like to continue.
- He would like to have even short check-in meetings even when there is not something that SCT proactively is concerned about. He would also like to review minutes at each of these meetings for consistency.
- He understands that the political environment may make these meetings more difficult.

Jonathan Ebel, IDFG, voiced a concern about having SCT any more frequently than once a month. He said that information is not frequently available.

Conder said that he did not intend to hold SCT more than once a month but even with a Continuing Resolution (CR) it is likely that SCT can find something that is useful to discuss.

Ebel asked Ida Royer, Corps, how soon in advance did she know that SCT does not have new information available.

Royer said that the budget cycle is very slow and currently it is working abnormally. Typically, when the President's Budget (PBud) is released is when they are able to look at what is available for budgets in the next year. This is typically done in February before the coming fiscal year (FY). This Pbud amount also assumes that a budget is passed. Budgets the last few years have not been passing until February and the current CR is into March. It is possible that we will be in a CR all of 2025. Royer said that it is unlikely for the Pbud to be available before April/May this year. This gives Royer less time to react as she does not want to get ahead of the administration.

Royer also reminded SCT that she works on a three-year budget cycle. She is currently working on FY27 by gathering the lists of projects. She is unable to share this information yet because she cannot appear pre-decisional. She is also waiting on FY26 Pbud and executing FY25. She finally got approval last week on her proposed FY25 re-allocations.

Conder said that it may be important for SCT to meet even if there are not any changes in the budget because there are still things to discuss about prioritizing and planning. Both Conder and Ebel said that there should be discussions by SCT about potential needs into FY27/28.

Tom Lorz, Umatilla/CRITFC said that SCT would meet every month to deal with changes or when things slipped to know about budgetary needs into the future. He said that it was also to reevaluate priorities, prioritization comes up and it is shown that there were failures and SCT

would figure out a way to deal with it. He said that there was more flexibility with the budget in the past, but he does not think that there is the same amount of flexibility now because there is less money. Lorz shared that without knowing what is in FY26 and FY27, it is difficult to know how much he can take to DC for lobbying.

Tom Iverson, Yakama Nation Fisheries, said that if the Corps is operating on a three-year budget SCT should be operating on a three-year budget. He said that we should be tracking FY25 decisions, building FY26 and prioritizing, and building an FY27 table. He said that he was concerned that Royer was submitting FY27 without any input from SCT. He said that even if we do not know what we want for FY27, but SCT should at least be able to provide a conceptual layout. He said with things like the McNary hoists, there should be a placeholder in the budget with a schedule that makes sense for the fish.

Iverson also said that SCT should look to see if what has been implemented is working. He said that the Corps has a Fish Asset Plan, SCT should be tracking the Fish Asset Plan as well. He said that it frustrates him that the region does not have any say in the Corps O&M budget capabilities and there are failures and there is a billion-dollar backlog. He said that we are not taking a holistic look at how the implementations are going. Part of watching FY25 should also include watching the Fish Asset Plan. He said that he would like to balance between the CRFM and Columbia River O&M budgets so that the region can be weighing in or influencing the Corps' expression of capabilities. So that the region can have detailed lists and needs that they can take to Congressionals to help explain why the Corps' capabilities need to be set at the level that they are being set at so that we do not go backwards.

Royer explained that the Corps is having ongoing discussions about how much Royer can share. She suggested that for more information engaging at the Division level may be more helpful. She said sharing specific budget numbers can give the appearance of being ahead of the Administration, right now sharing FY26 information created discomfort.

There was discussion about the SCT mission statement and what service SCT provided, looking only at the approved budget or comprehensive planning. They asked if they could have ten-year plans or a broad look at proposed projects to get a better feel for the future. Royer said that she would ask. SCT want the capability to work alongside the Corps on some of the planning, not necessarily knowing the numbers for the proposed budget additions.

Conder said that SCT provides transparency to the Corps' funding, it allows the region to see what the Corps is funding and how much they are funding. It also allows the region to prioritize and interject in certain topics. As things are brought up at SCT meetings they sometimes get traction allowing for a higher discussion of needs.

There was a discussion about what forums are the best to bring up these concerns. FPOM is the best forum for O&M.

Chris Peery and Nick Bertrand chair that forum.

FFDRWG is the best location for design/construction topics leading to SCT.

The group talked about future planning. They said that there is no need for budget numbers, just a potential project list. Royer said that she was told not to share FY26, because of the budgetary number. She said that she would ask about the project name list.

2. FY25 Budget Update

Royer reminded the group that the budget has not passed.

Current PBud: \$72.5M

Carry-in from FY24: \$27M

CRFM includes the Willamette, Lamprey, and the Columbia.

Any significant money movement needs approval leaving less flexibility in the program.

Continuing Resolution funding is limited to last year's PBud: \$66.67M

\$8.5M less available but it should not affect project execution right now

Columbia portion: \$40M

- Line 3: PIT Trawl
 - Fully funded
- Line 4: Avian Island PIT detection
 - Scanning PIT is funded
 - Research and synthesis are not funded this year
- Line 5: Fish Assets
 - Researching what items from the Fish Asset list is appropriate to fund with CRFM.
 - CRFM is a construction general account and there are requirements for projects to be funded as CRFM. It needs to be a betterment or an improvement not a patch.

SCT regional representatives asked for clarification about the CRFM projects. One question was how things that are not related to construction, like evaluation or monitoring, fit with CRFM. Royer said that CRFM has Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) authorizations to do research, the research typically needs to support future construction efforts and often fish passage operations. Steven Sipe, Corps, said that each asset scoping has to have discussion on how to categorize the work.

Conder said that as a fish manager it is difficult to understand what portion constitutes an improvement. Royer said that 75% of the unit needs to be replaced and Sipe said that it has to be justifiable enough to prove to a third party.

Royer reminded SCT that she does not know what is in the FY26 PBud. She said that she wanted everyone to be thoughtful if they think bringing something to CRFM is a winning strategy. She might question it until we see what the PBud amount is.

- Line 6: Spill Evaluation
 - Under way
- Line 7: CRSO
 - Old EIS effort
 - Contract dispute that was elevated and mediated.
 - There is a final number to close out.
 - Carry in.
- Line 8: CRS
 - Tied to supplemental EIS.
 - No final budget estimates.
 - Told to hold a certain number for this effort.

Lorz asked about CRFM paying for the CRT work. Royer said that it is not for the CRT, it is for the compliance effort. Royer said that she did not make the decision. It is because of CRT, RCBA, and a host of other things. Conder said that there are changes to the 2020 Proposed Action that was consulted on, so they need to assess how to proceed with consultation as it relates to NEPA and others.

Ebel asked if there is another bucket of money contributing to the EIS given that the RCBA is one part of it. He said that he disagrees that it should be funded by CRFM. He said that the Columbia River Treaty is a whole different ball game. He asked if something associated with the Treaty is contributing something to the EIS effort or if this is completely coming off the back of the Fish Passage infrastructure.

Royer said she would have to check.

Lorz said if SCT has to cover CRT and CRFM it will be a bitter pill for the Tribes especially considering what came out of the CRT. He said that their input seemed to be not well received and now they are also going to get a chunk of CRFM taken to support the CRT. He said that there will be some consternation.

Royer said that she would look into it.

Iverson said that they are hoping to get from the SEIS some actual replacement studies and integration of Tribal impacts. He said that this is a broad ranging supplemental environmental impact statement, it is not just based on the Clumber Treaty, but all the new information that came out since the 2020 EIS. It includes a lot of information that the Tribes do want to input into the updates EIS. It is not just black and white as a supplemental for the Columbia River Treaty. This was part of the RCBA.

Lorz said that he understood but he needs to see some bookends on how it will be done. Some more detail would be appreciated.

Ebel said that with the changes associated with the CRT, it would have required consultation anyway.

- Line 11: Estuary
 - Planning studies
 - Moving out.
- Line 12: B2F2E
 - Close out
 - \$78k returned to CRFM
- Line 13: Post Construction Evaluation
 - Coordination ongoing by Jon Rerecich (USACE).
- Line 15: Serpentine of B2
 - Awarded last fiscal year
 - Contract cost came in under what was estimated
 - Resulted in carryout
- Line 16: TDA AWS
 - Continuing design
 - Originally budget for construction but it will not happen this FY
 - Did not budget for construction in FY26, if opportunity arises will reallocate funds, if not move to FY27
- Line 17, 21, 28, 29: Cooling Projects
 - Awarded AE for design for EDR end of FY24
 - Continuing design effort
- Line 18: John Day Mitigation
 - Planning study – Year 2
- Line 19: John Day Fish Turbine Pumps
 - Fish Asset moved to CRFM
 - First year to move projects from O&M to CRFM
 - Two projects at JDA (short and long term)
 - Short term project is not CRFM – well underway
 - Long term solution CRFM, EDR, high priority

- Line 22: MCN Avian Deterrents
 - Budgeted for FY25 construction
 - Aggressive schedule and not likely to make it.
 - Number is vague
 - In DDR phase.
- Line 23: MCN PIT Detection
 - Continuing design
- Line 24: Spillway modeling
 - Royer budgets for line item every year to maintain the model and to continue any evaluations required while the spillway is having issues.
- Line 25: MCN Fish Pumps
 - Fish Asset moved to CRFM
 - Number one priority for Walla Walla District
 - Underway and just getting started.
- Line 26: South Fish Ladder and Collection Channel Rehab
 - Fish Asset moved
 - Starting EDR
- Line 27: IHR Turbine Passage Survival
 - Closing out balloon tag study
- Line 30: LMN Adult Channel and North Entrance Diffusor Grating
 - Fish Asset moved
 - Starting EDR effort
- Line 31: LGS Adult Ladder Temperature Mitigation
 - Sluice
 - Finding a means for fish to egress out of ladder chimney
- Line 32: LGR Turn Pool Gate
 - Complete construction
 - Automating hoist system and improving fish egress.
- Line XX: LGR Juvenile Bypass

- Project is done
- Carry in available for other things.

Royer said that the intent is if you are budgeting for something, if you start it, you continue budgeting for it to completion. This will give SCT a sense of what is being thought of for FY26. They are still working through the fish asset list and that is a process, it is pretty new.

Conder asked about closing out the balloon tag. His understanding was that we were planning on releasing active tags into the compliment of the three units. He said that he was then wondering if that was a future year.

Chuck Barnes, Corps, said that he had the first meeting to re-kick the effort off with some of the researchers to think of some ideas of what an active tag study would look at for overall survival at IHR. He said that we are not going to have Unit 1, the current date for RTS is March 2026, so the soonest the survival study could start is 2027. He said that they are exploring using CRFM when the turbine is ready and there is a design and cost estimate. He believes that they can do it more efficiently than originally planned.

Lorz requested that he wanted to be included in future planning once Barnes has more concrete plans in place.

3. Schedule FY25 Ranking

The SCT group discussed whether to rank the FY25 sheet. They decided to score them and send preliminary scores to Conder. If there are questions about the topics they can be discussed at the next meeting. They thought it would be useful in case things go awry. Royer said that it is fully funded so it is unlikely that there will be a concern. FY26 will be more necessary once it is available to be scored.

4. Discuss Preliminary FY26 Budget Planning

Royer still has no feel for a date of the FY26 PBud release. She is still waiting. She does not think that we will get it before March and it likely will be delayed further.

Check Back Topics

- Royer will check back to see if she can share anything about the outyear project list.
- There is no way she would be able to share the budget.
- Royer will also find information about any additional funding sources for the Supplemental EIS

Next Agenda Topics

- Scores for FY25
- Royer will speak to the FY26 questions about the Project List
- Royer will speak to the questions about additional funding sources for EIS

Next meeting: March 20, 2025 (Hybrid)

Walla Walla District – PIT Tag Workshop (break away meeting room)

Today's Attendees:

| Name | Affiliation |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Trevor Conder | <i>NOAA</i> |
| Ida Royer | <i>Corps</i> |
| Chris Magel | <i>NOAA</i> |
| Christine Peterson | <i>BPA</i> |
| Chuck Barnes | <i>Corps</i> |
| Tom Lorz | <i>Umatilla/CRITFC</i> |
| Jonathan Ebel | <i>IDFG</i> |
| Kate Self | <i>NPCC</i> |
| Steven Sipe | <i>Corps</i> |
| Ben Hausmann | <i>BPA</i> |
| Tom Iverson | <i>Yakama Nation Fisheries</i> |
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| Andrea Ausmus | <i>BPA Notetaker</i> |

Minutes by Andrea Ausmus, CorSource Technology Group LLC, Contractor for Bonneville, amausmus@bpa.gov (503-230-4439).

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