

Columbia River Regional Forum
System Configuration Team Meeting
June 26, 2025
FINAL Official Notes

Representatives of Corps, ODFW, WDFW, BPA, NOAA, and others participated in today's SCT hybrid meeting facilitated by Trevor Conder and hosted via Microsoft Teams.

Draft and final SCT notes are available on the COE's TMT website under the FPOM link. For copies of documents discussed, contact Trevor Conder at Trever.Conder@noaa.gov. See the final page of these minutes for the list of attendees of today's meeting.

1. May 2025 Minutes

- Approved

2. Corps Staffing Changes – *Ida Royer, Corps*

- With DRP and VERA some people have left the Corps
 - Jon Rerecich (retired)
 - Nathan McClane (retired)
 - Scott Felding (retired)
 - Brad (passed)
- The Fish Passage Team for the Portland District has been dissolved.
- The four bios have been split between the Columbia and the Willamette.
- There are now more regional teams, and these have been absorbed into groups with supervisors who are not fish biologists.
- Two Columbia Bios will be Jacob McDonald and Dave Trachtenbarg and also Chuck and Ryan with Walla Walla.
 - Royer expects it to be more of regional team versus Portland District and Walla Walla.
- If there is an issue or concern on the Columbia, reach out to the Bios directly or contact Royer and she could direct the conversation as needed.
- They are adapting with less people.

3. FY25 Budget Update – *Ida Royer, Corps*

- Final FY25 Workplan was received May 16.
- Funding Numbers:
 - CRFM: \$39 M
 - Carry-in from FY24: \$27.6 M
 - Total FY25 Funding: \$63.5M
- On the spreadsheet Royer added columns for the Original FY25 PBud, the FY25 Final Workplan, and FY25 Budget (where they have distributed the funds and included the carry-in).
- Actively moving projects to end of year and when you get to the end of the year it is mostly labor and there is a little bit of push/pull among projects because some will charge more and some will charge less. They could be small changes and tweaks to the final numbers.
- Only remaining action as far as non-labor is the PIT Trawl Economy Act Order.
 - The Corps is actively working on that right now.
 - They are waiting on the proposal from NOAA and then they will start the routing.

Conder said he was getting into detail that he saw. He said he had a question that popped up in his head because of the Presidential Memo and the lack of uncertainty around future operations. He asked about the FY25 Performance Spill Testing dollars, which was a line item of \$5M. He asked if that was going to work that had occurred this year already, or if that was expected to go to work that would be done next year.

Royer said that was for this year work. They had awarded it very early in the fiscal year.

4. FY26 Budget Update – *Ida Royer, Corps*

- FY26 PBud came out
 - Total: \$30.05M
 - Willamette: \$18.05M
 - CRS: \$12M
 - Columbia typically includes Lamprey.

- Spreadsheet:
 - Do not have project specific breakouts.
 - How it was proportioned in the PBud.
 - Once there are more specifics Royer will be able to provide those.
- Original Capability
 - Royer included the original capability of \$144M for both Columbia and Willamette Rivers and Lamprey on the sheet.
 - This was the number submitted a year and half ago and is now outdated.
 - Now the Corps has less staff and there were things that they were not able to fund in FY25, less on the Columbia but more so on the Willamette.
 - If the capability came back, the Corps would likely not be able to execute it.
 - Definition of capability is the amount of funding you can execute in a year.
 - Royer will be working with the Project Managers and the team to come up with a new number and they will then be vetting that vertically and resharing.
 - This was a caveat for what the Corps was originally planning.

Erick Van Dyke, ODFW, asked if the region should interpret that difference as staffing shortages and things like that. He asked what exactly had fallen off. He asked if it were literally projects that were planned.

Royer said that there were some actions, specifically in the Willamette, because of the reduced funding for FY25, the Corps was not able to execute, and the schedules got shifted. When they shift to the right you have to relook at what you are able to do the next year. Some contracts the Corps would not be ready to advertise and so there is a reshuffling. And then, yes, there is also the not having staff and that will have an impact specifically in Walla Walla. They are already having conversations about what they can and cannot do. She said that it is both things.

Van Dyke asked in all the documents that the region has, if they were able to track the difference with the documents that had been shared so far or would they need to go somewhere else to figure that out.

Stranz said no, and the only number that is publicly available is the \$144M. Royer said she was given permission to share it as long as she caveated it heavily

because they will have to update it. She said there was no way for the public to specifically track what the new number would be. She said it is really more an internal process.

Van Dyke said he was trying to share with policy folks the details of how this is allocated, what remains and what has been lost. He asked if that was available in the documents that they have in hand. He said if not, if it were something that was going to be provided.

Royer said once she has an updated capability of FY26 she could share. She said as we start to delve into repercussions of staffing losses and stuff, she could share that more freely. As far as the Columbia specifically, we were able to do a lot of the work so she expects the impacts for the Columbia to be less but they are still figuring it out.

Van Dyke said any help that Royer could provide them later to help them understand how this change is, where their allocation is, how they have been changed, is going to be helpful.

Conder asked Royer about FY26. He said there was \$12M for the CRS. He asked if there were items that have to be funded and are mandatory. He asked how much of the \$12M that would take up. He asked what would be left to prioritize. He said that he knew that there were some higher priority items in there for some folks. He gave examples, Ladder Cooling and MCN wires would be some of those, he said that other folks may have different ones. He asked how the region could understand and help the Corps prioritize those items.

Royer said she did have the SCT ranking sheet. In the spreadsheet she sent out it does have the rankings that the group has provided. She said she does look at that, and they look at it as an agency when they are funding limited to see what the priorities are. She said if you look at that sheet and you feel like your rankings do not adequately reflect to date where you feel the priorities are, it is a living document, and we can update that.

Conder said that his difficulty was that those rankings were for a different amount of money, and so with this lower amount of money, is that really the best process for that. He said it was almost like we need a more simplified process. He said he would take a look at it and see what, from his agency's perspective, would be their priorities. He said he just felt like there is more of a need to distinguish a four from a five or a three from a five given that we only have this limited amount of funding.

Royer said yeah, and she thought that once we received that project specific PBud, it might help the discussion as well.

Charles Morrill, WDFW, asked if Royer was looking at the rankings on the FY25. He said we have not ranked the FY26 yet.

Royer said yes.

Morrill said Conder's point merits consideration because if we are funding limited there may be some people, or groups and agencies, who would reconsider how they rank things.

Royer said they could go through the process of ranking FY26 next month if folks were interested in doing that and having that kind of touchpoint.

Conder asked if that sounded like a good idea to anyone else. He said that it did to him.

Tom Lorz, Umatilla/CRITFC, said they beat him to his suggestion. He said given the new funding level we should probably do a double check on our scores and make sure everyone is happy with them. He said he was going to be changing his. He said he loved the estuary and all, but actually getting something done versus itemizing some predator/prey stuff and some nice to know information is going to drop to one for him and getting cooling water structures is going to be a much higher priority. He said we are going to need to be much more nuanced given our constraints on funding.

Morrill asked the group their opinion of avian predation at MCN over cooling water towers. He asked if there were any thoughts from anyone willing to share about where those two would fall out in the rankings.

Lorz said right now they are about equal for him. He said a lot of it would depend on what we get for results. He said you get a 1000 gulls a day for one day at MCN and you are having 100 or more a day, that tells him that we are having some problems there. It is going to be a tough thing. He said he would probably try and split the baby and say we pick our favorite cooling water structures and see if we can get those done parallel with the avian wires.

Morrill thanked Lorz. He said that another thing is how quickly we can get one or the other or both done.

Lorz said that is a question that we should bring up in FFDRWG.

Morrill agreed.

Conder said SCT would plan to have ranking prioritization and FY26 discussion at next month's SCT meeting (July meeting). He asked the group to think about that and however they wanted to characterize that and let him know in the meantime.

Lorz said that Royer cannot share FY27 with SCT, but the region was going to go back and start talking about FY27 because why not. He said that he was assuming that the Corps was going to use FY26 as their baseline. He asked if that was a misread or not. He said they could use it as a baseline but then they would need to go in and take a look at their capabilities and how able the Corps was going to spend the money. He asked if he could tell his policy folks that FY26 is a starting point for where the Corps was going to be modifying and working from there.

Royer said that she thought so. She said again, she thought that number would come down just because of staffing and other things.

Lorz said that he figured there was going to be, because the Corps loathes overspend so he understands. He said that he just needs to say like that it is not a horrible number, and it is going to be modified because of XYZ but that is not an unreasonable starting place.

Morrill said Lorz' comments are spot on and he said that he was sure that he spoke for everyone that they have a lot of empathy for the Corps and what they are going through. The fact that they are down from six to four and a lot of uncertainty going ahead. He told Royer thank you for doing the best she can in keeping the region informed. He said that they ask tough questions and put her in some tough spots, but they appreciate all that Royer does for them and all that she tries to do, thank you.

Royer said that she appreciated that, it is a team for sure, especially these days.

Conder said it was tough times for all, and he appreciated all that the region has been trying to do here to make it work.

Lorz said that it is unfortunate that it has gone from an 11-person team to now we are playing at three-handed down. He said that it would be little fun for a while.

Next meeting: July 17, 2025

Agenda Topics:

- FY26 Ranking Discussion
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