

Columbia River Regional Forum
System Configuration Team Meeting
April 17, 2025
FNAL 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 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. March 2025 Minutes – Trevor Conder, NOAA

- Approved

2. Review Agenda

- One of the topics discussed at the last meeting was the CRS NEPA funding line item.
 - Question of whether there is full capability in this FY to cover the line item.
 - If unable to express full capability and use up the funding what happens to it, can it be prioritized to other projects. Does it go to other districts or does it get pushed to next FY.

3. FY25 Budget Update – Ida Royer, Corps

- Royer said that she is currently waiting for the final Work Plan.
- March 14: Yearlong continuing resolution (CR) was passed.
 - Sets budget levels for the year.
 - Certain amount for the General Construction account.
 - CRFM is under the General Construction account.
 - Final Work Plan is moving through the different Administration levels.
- April 30: Have heard we may get the final budget by the end of APR.

- It is known that there is a cap on available funding.
- No intel on what the final numbers may be.

4. FY26 Budget Update – Ida Royer, Corps

- Royer said close to follow the final budget they would see the FY26 President's Budget (PBud).
 - This would be helpful in making decisions to know what to expect for FY26.
- Ranking are going to be very important once CRFM gets the final budget.
- The Corps is happy to share information once they have it.
 - Royer could send out an email as soon as she finds out what the PBud number is.
- At next SCT meeting SCT should plan to have a frank discussion about where CRFM is at and talk about priorities.
 - There should be a lot of budget movement between this SCT meeting and next.

Tom Lorz, Umatilla/CRITFC, said that they were having separate budgetary talks in another group, those had faded away. He asked if the Corps somewhere close to where they could put in for capabilities in FY26 or would that be next meeting. He asked if CRFM would be able to see the capabilities or if it is still a long way off.

Royer said she thought that once we have the PBud we can talk more openly about that.

Lorz asked if she was thinking that there would be a PBud by next meeting.

Royer said that she was hoping.

Lorz asked how certain.

Royer was not certain at all. She had heard more positive rumblings about it than she had in the past.

Conder asked if they were positive rumblings about the PBud coming out or the amount of the PBud.

Royer said positive about the PBud coming out.

Conder said that he had heard negative rumblings about the amount.

Lorz said he as well. He said in talking with their lobbyists he had been asked a couple of times which number should be thrown at Congress. He said that the lobbyists are going to Washington and telling people an amount for what they think the region would need. Without seeing the Corps' capability Lorz is having to throw darts at the wall and hope. He said that he had been telling them the number last year from the 2025 budget is probably a good place to start. He said that he did not need the Corps to give positive feedback but that he was just giving them information about what they are telling people back in Congress. Lorz said that they have also been reminding them about the billion-dollar backlog that nothing had been done about is still there. He asked about the success in moving things from the O&M budget to the CRFM budget (which Lorz applauded the Corps in doing). He asked if the CRFM budget goes sideways what it means for those projects.

Royer asked if he meant that CRFM funding goes south.

Lorz said as if we go back to the good old days of \$3M a year. He said that there would be no way for us to do the John Day pumps, which was like the highest thing on the nonroutine maintenance. He asked about it now being on CRFM, if it meant that we would be able to transition to O&M. Not that O&M has any better chance, but at least it has the potential to maintain some level of budget. He said that he was trying to figure out what the region's game plan should be if things go terribly awry.

Royer said that once a project moves to the CRFM account from the O&M account it cannot be moved back. She said that this is something that she has tried to be very clear with everyone about. She said that we cannot chase money. Accountants and financial officers do not want us chasing money, so they need to establish what the rulebook is; if they feel like a project is appropriate for CRFM and bring it into the program and fund it, it is incredibly difficult to then move it back to the O&M account. She said that she does not see that happening. She said that there are two parts to the John Day fish pump project. There is the short-term which is O&M and then there is a longer-term design effort which is CRFM. She said that she wanted to clarify that piece. She said that if we are funding limited, that and the other projects would need to be discussed about how much funding is available and where the cut line would be within the priority lists.

Lorz said that he concurred. He said that we do not want these things bouncing back and forth but he said that we are in a brave new world of somewhere we have not seen before. If CRFM goes back to the glory days of \$3M a year that is

quite a significant change that he did not think anyone had. He caveated saying that CRFM had just done it four years ago. He said historically that would be a significant change to CRFM and he was hoping that the Corps would take that into consideration given the importance of some of the things on the CRFM list. Since we thought that CRFM should be somewhat stable and unfortunately that is proving to maybe not be the case.

Royer said that she is anxious to see the FY26 PBud.

5. CRS NEPA Funding – Ida Royer, Corps

- Conder asked the Corps to speak to the likelihood to complete that in FY25 and if not what the strategies could be for that funding line.
- Royer gave a status update from her perspective.
- She had been working with the PM to understand the capability of the CRS NEPA project.
 - The PM does hope to issue a number of contracts this year for that work and are currently in the process of developing that estimate.
 - Once that is established, they will be able to have their discussion.
 - Tied to that is what the final work plan number is.
- If the estimate for the project comes in low and CRFM has other program needs we would move the funding to fund those other efforts.
- Royer is still waiting for a couple of pieces of information.
 - Better cost estimate for the NEPA effort for CRFM
 - Final Budget

Lorz asked to be reminded if the Corps' calendar year budget was done in October.

Royer said that September 30 was the last day of the fiscal year.

Lorz said that he was looking at six months and we keep seeing delays on the ESI and CRSO. They keep getting pushed out. He said that he was wondering at what point the Corps_?. He said that he did not see the current leadership pushing this and given the changes at NOAA and all the other places. He said that he was struggling to think of how the Corps was going to get anything done by the end of the year. He asked if there was going to be a cut point where we can say we have got opportunities to still spend the money in the region and take advantage of that.

He said that at some point we just will not be able to spend it because it will be too late, and we cannot put the money in a project. He asked if we were looking at a realistic timeframe and recognizing that we can only spend *X* amount of that and instead put the money into projects where we could at least be able to get something done.

Royer said that PM was hoping to have the IGE, or the Government estimate hopefully by the end of April. She said that she would have a better feel at that point. She said that they are still planning on soliciting those contracts in the next couple of weeks. The process is moving. She said as far as the Administration, she had not heard. Until we get told no to the plan is to continue. She reminded SCT that this was environmental compliance, so it is an ESA requirement. She said that she had a hard time not seeing the Corps not pursuing this effort, barring some really big mandate that comes down. She said that at the next SCT she can provide an update of where they are at on that project.

Conder said that the big question for him is that potentially unfunded line items could be pushed to other districts. He said in the past CRFM would have kind of kept it in the system and had priorities for other project and potentially bolster up other projects or add other projects that would have been unfunded had it not been for that one item getting canceled and now we can fund it. He said that is the bigger uncertainty to him. He said that this is a big dollar value and if it gets cut what is the likelihood that it goes to another district or to the Willamette. He asked if the Fish Managers (FM) should be working on trying to stress priorities for the projects so that there is some comfort in knowing that if it does get cut to some degree to a large degree then it will go to some CRFM CRS project. He asked if that made sense.

Royer said that she thought so. She said that once they get the final budget, that is the budget, and they will execute the budget. She said at that point there is not a risk that money will move around. That decision will be made with the work plan. She said what CRFM gets in the Work Plan is what they keep. Then it is just a matter of, depending on what the number is, what the priorities are within the program.

Hesse requested that the topic be kept as a routine check-in.

6. Willamette Forum Questions

Tom Iverson, Yakama Nation, asked about the portion that goes into the Willamette. He asked if there was a project list for the Willamette and if SCT ever reviews them.

Royer said no.

Iverson said that it is part of CRFM but SCT does not get a chance to even look at the projects.

Royer said the Corps has a separate stakeholder forum for the Willamette and if they allowed representatives on the Columbia to litigate the Willamette it would be likely that the Columbia representatives would all like the funding to go to the Columbia and they are not familiar with some of the priorities there. She said generally speaking as a Program Manager she works with the agency to determine what the split out will be and then they work within that number for each different region.

Iverson said that he understood that, but he was interested in looking at the priorities that are being funded in the Willamette. He asked how Yakama Nation would be able to get onto that stakeholder group.

Royer asked Iverson to email her and she could run that through her channels. She said that she did not know who decides that, she had never been asked that before but requested that Iverson send her an email stating his interest and she would run it to ground.

Lorz asked if the Willamette had a similar spreadsheet as what CRS generates.

Royer said that they also have a spreadsheet.

Lorz asked if that was something that could be shared with the group so that the representatives could see. He asked if that would be a problem. He said that she would be able to share CRS' spreadsheet with them because the Willamette is probably dying to know what we do in the Columbia.

Royer said that she would ask. She said that she would be able to share it but CRS representatives would not be able to provide input.

Lorz said that he understood. He did not think that Iverson wanted it more than for an informational standpoint. He asked Iverson if he was wrong.

Iverson said that he wanted to understand the process in the Willamette. He said that he did not understand why they would not be allowed to input once the Yakama Nation was part of the work group. He said that he would like to understand who was a stakeholder in the work group. He asked if it were not the fish and wildlife managers on the work group.

Royer said that it was but for example there is a different NMFS representative, and a different USFWS representative, and the Grand Ronde is a Tribal partner there, so it is different people.

Iverson said that he understood that. He said that Yakama Nation would like to look into getting into that stakeholder group so he would send Royer an email.

Ebel said that he was curious about what criteria does the Corps apply to allocate the proportion they choose to do between the Columbia and the Willamette.

Royer said that they look at the needs of the programs. She said that it was part of her job to balance the needs across the everything and the priorities, and the legal requirements. She said that she does that analysis and then recommends how the funding gets split. She said that they also receive input from the vertical tam, and sometimes the Administration has direction that they apply. She said that it is a few factors.

7. FY25 Ranking

- Line 11: Estuary Habitat Studies
 - Funded and awarded
 - Moved forward under the assumption it was fully funded.

NOAA gave this a **4**.

Umatilla/CRITFC had it at a **2**.

IDFG gave this a 1 and 3, averaging to **3**.

- Line 12: Bonneville Powerhouse 2 Fish Guidance Efficiency
 - Completed and in closeout.
 - Couple thousand to closeout.
 - Mandatory to closeout.
- Line 13: BON Powerhouse 2 post-construction evaluation
 - Corps ranked **1** because they planning on not pursuing the study in 2025 due to concerns that they would confound the spill evaluation due to the flows required.
 - The Corps ranked low for 2025 study.
- Line 14: Bonneville PIT Detection

- Prototype that the Corps is trying to put in the Ice and Trash Sluiceway.
 - They want to try to get this done this year
- There might be issues with contracts due to the current federal climate and some of the executive orders.
 - At risk, waiting to hear more.
- Corps ranked pretty high because they would like to get this completed.

Christine Peterson, BPA, said that she would try to keep Royer updated if BPA hears anything from NOAA. She said that they were the ones who had to put in the purchase order for the antenna and the shield, which is going to end up being a 6000-pound structure. She said that the order was initiated but it was halted or canceled. NOAA was unable to pay to purchase the structure due to the current situation with the Department of Commerce. She said that they have no idea on the timeline for how long this new rule, which affects the whole Department of Commerce for initiating new contracts (or even signing a no cost time extension). She said that this could be dropped in the next couple of weeks then we could be back on schedule, but we do not know. She said that we have no idea what is going to happen, but she will keep Royer updated as soon as she hears anything on that.

- Line 15: BON Serpentine Weir Modifications
 - Constructed past winter.
 - This will require a little funding to do the as-builts and the operations manual.
 - The Corps considers this mandatory to complete contract.
- Line 16: The Dalles East Fish Ladder Emergency Auxiliary Water Supply
 - Debris system
 - Corps ranked higher because it has direct survival benefits.
 - Royer said that she had heard that it needed to be completed before the fish units go out.
 - There is a timeline even though the fish unit outages are being pushed to the right.

Lorz said that they are also submitting comments to Doctor Checks on the initial plans that the Corps has. He said that they have a few concerns there, but he thought that the latest was 2032/33 for the turbines. He said that is why Umatilla gave it a 3. He said that this has to be in before the Corps takes the turbines out,

but given the fact that we have potentially seven years before the turbines are taken out, Umatilla thought that in a tight budget type year it could be delayed. He said that it is not that he does not think it needs to be done, it has to be, but given timeframes, he did not think it was going to take the Corps seven years to build this. He said all they were doing is putting an Atlas Polar with a rotating brush on it. He said that he is skeptical that this is the best location for that kind of setup but that is what the Corps had chosen so he was going to send some comments that maybe are not awesomely supportive of that concept, but he had some ideas of maybe how to make it work.

Conder said a thing about that is that if the Corps does not do it in a FY where we have funding there may not be funding for a few more years to do it. He asked if SCT was okay with pausing the project for that extended length of time.

Lorz said that it comes down to what the final budget is. He said that if it comes down to what we could lose. _ once we get the final number for this year. He said that he thought this would be just design, he did not think that this was construction.

Royer said that it was not construction this year.

Lorz said that they could do a design build if they had to. He said that we could go back to just putting the old rake and normal system and they would not even need a design for that. He said that he was saying that if we got funding this is on the list but if things get super tight this one could get pushed for a year or so.

Conder said that he just did not know what the future was going to look like and he would rather try to get it done now so we know that we can get it done.

Lorz said that he also wanted to make sure that what they actually do makes sense. He said the rotating brush had never been done anywhere. He said that he wanted to make sure that we are at least going to make sure that we put something there that is going to last for two years. He said that he did not want to, just because of concerns of money. He said that he did not want to put something that is going to be an absolute nightmare for them to work and is not going to work because it is going to have to work for two years, because for two years we are going to be taking out fish units. He is concerned because something like this is something that we have never done anywhere else. He said that he did not think that this is the best idea of putting something unique and untested in a situation in the East Ladder of TDA. He said that the Corps will make the call, and he was going to send comments and hope that some of those comments are worth listening to.

Conder said that they have been making the comments for about two years and the Corps just seem dedicated to this path.

- Line 17: JDA Ladder Cooling
 - In the EDR phase.
 - The Corps ranked all ladder cooling projects a **4**.
 - They thought they were important but not quite to the same level as some of the other projects.

Conder said that from NOAA's perspective they feel that ladder cooling is important because there are some years that there is a direct survival tie in with some of the issues that we are seeing with adult passage. He said that it is clearly described in the proposed action in the BiOp. So, NOAA still considers it a high priority.

Ebel said that IDFG scored it a **3** because in a limited funding environment they would prioritize LMN over JDA. He said that it is because there can be very clear blockages at LMN during the ladder differentials.

Conder asked if the ladder cooling projects are in design right now.

Royer confirmed. She said that they are in the Alternative Development stage, and they have an AE Contract for that.

Conder said that it was his understanding that they are going to group a lot of these together. He said that it is interesting that they are all kind of separated on the spreadsheet. He asked if it was the strategy to group, at least the Snake River ones and the Columbia River ones together.

Royer said that the Corps did group all of the EDRs when they issued the AE contract for efficiency. She said that it did bring the price down a little bit. She said right now in the EDR phase they are grouped. She said that once we hit the next phase there would not be a guarantee that would be the case. She said that a decision would have to be made about if we contracted it out. She said that it then goes to how much funding is available. She said that she thought that it made sense to rank the ladder cooling projects separately because we would be entering the DDR phase towards the end of this fiscal year.

Conder and Ebel both said that it made sense to them.

Ebel asked if when there is a description that says continued design if that, or the length of time, or the prioritization influence the timing or prioritization of the next step for each one of the cooling structures.

Royer said not really, if they are funded limited and they cannot do anything it would be the same as any project. She said that if we are in a position where we have to shelve a project, we want to do it in a smart way and find a good pause point. Sometimes that can play in when you stop or how much money to allocate so you stop at a good point. She said that it does not really change the overall schedule needed to complete.

Ebel asked if you could prioritize the design of, for example, LMN over IHR and JDA and finish that design, then it becomes construction ready.

Royer said yes, the farther you get along in the design phase the closer you get to construction.

Ebel said that he was just trying to make sure that he understood, and he would be sticking with his ranking of **3**.

- Line 18: John Day Mitigation Report
 - An alternative analysis to look at where the places are that we could raise additional fish for this program.
 - Corps ranked this **3**.

Iverson was curious why this is in CRFM and not in the Corps' hatchery funding budget.

Royer said that decision was made a long time ago at Division level.

Ebel said that IDFG ranked this as a **2**. He said that it is interesting, Iverson brought up a good point. Whatever decision was made in the past it is difficult to prioritize a hatchery mitigation program against fish passage infrastructure. He said that while it all is Columbia River fish mitigation, those are really apples and oranges. He said that if we were to put that against hatchery infrastructure funding across the Basin Idaho would prioritize a different area.

Iverson said that he could not agree more, it makes no sense to be in this program. He said that he thinks that it is a ridiculous obfuscation of their obligation, and we are ranking it here because JDA mitigation is a long, long, long deferred obligation that the federal government has not provided, and we are going to support it in whatever form it is in. Iverson said that he agreed with Ebel that it should not be here.

Lorz warned to be careful what you ask for, because if it goes to the hatchery he was not sure that there would be money for that. He said that the reason it was placed in CRFM was because of its long arduous history starting back in the

1990s. He said there is a reason why it has been here that long and unfortunately the JDA mitigation has not moved forward as some would have hoped it would. They had thought that they were getting closer, but it has since been derailed a little bit and is back on the rails. He said that he was just saying to be careful, it is now really tight everywhere and if they do not like it here you are not going to get that money.

Ebel said that he is speaking from a logical perspective. He said that it is not fully clear to him if those discussions and where the JDA mitigation came from, and the impacts of JDA also influence the fisheries in Idaho. He said that he was not suggesting that it be roped into the Mitchell Act or compete against the LSRSCP. He said that it was more that if we are going to look at it __. He asked if the downriver folks pursued putting this in the Water Resource Development Act. He asked what other avenues had those entities that are seeking or receiving through this mitigation , what other avenues had they explored. He said that this is not a topic for SCT, but this is a topic that has bugged him for years.

- Line 19: John Day Fish Turbine Pumps U1 & U2
 - Corps ranked **5** – high priority project.
 - Design a long-term solution
 - Trying to accelerate the design process as much as possible
- Line 21: MCN Adult Ladder (south) Cooling Structure
 - Corps ranked **4**
- Line 22: MCN Avian Deterrence
 - Looking at options of placement of wires in MCN tailrace.

Royer was asked if the average score showed a 5 when there were 4s and 5s. She said that it was rounding up. She edited the spreadsheet to show the decimal.

- Line 23: MCN PIT Detection Improvements
 - Corps ranked this high.

Conder said that NOAA would rank as a **5**.

- Line 24: MCN Spillway Modeling
 - The Corps constructed the model and already had one trip this year.
 - Corps ranked a little lower.

Ebel asked if the Corps is going to use the lack of modeling certain scenarios to not implement those then he ranks this as a **5**. He said that this was in the context

of exploring more alternatives or at least what he thinks are largely logical alternatives to what is being done currently. He said long story short, if the Corps needs to get the sufficient modeling done to allow the Corps to have the comfort level to open Bay 18, and if that requires an ERDC run then he thinks that is a high priority.

Morrill ranked this as **5**. He said that he thinks it is critical to have the additional runs. He said that Ryan was carrying that message to ERDC.

- Line 25: MCN Fish Pump System Upgrade

- Corps ranked as **5**

Ebel said that IDFG ranked this as **4**.

- Line 26: MCN South Fish Ladder and Collection Channel Rehab

- Corps ranked this high because this is tied to the fish pump project.
- Pump discharge into channel so there are valves and other components that relate to the fish pump.

- Line 27: Ice Harbor Turbine Passage Survival Program

- Balloon tag testing – completed.
- Mandatory to close out.

- Line 28: IHR Adult Ladder (north) Cooling Structure

Ebel said that IDFG ranked this as a **3**.

- Line 29: LMN Adult Ladder (south) Cooling Structure

Ebel said that IDFG ranked as a **5**. He said that he is ranking it this way because the blockage associated with ladder temperature differentials at LMN is visually apparent. He said that anything we can do to address this as soon as possible should be done.

Conder said that from NOAA's perspective, he thinks they are visibly apparent at LMN, JDA, and MCN in some years during some periods of those years. He said that is why NOAA ranked them as 5s on all of them. He said that he does agree that there are certain ones that are a priority and would not disagree with the way that Idaho is setting up those priorities. But NOAA is not willing to drop their ranks from a **5** to prioritize. Conder said that he would prefer a separate form for that.

Iverson asked if that was something they would do once we have an official FY25 budget.

Conder said that it seemed reasonable, that the region could do that in another forum at any time.

Iverson said that he agreed. He said that he ranked all the ladder temperature projects as **5s**. He said that he also thought that there are priorities there too and he would agree that if we had funding and had to choose that the region could prioritize among them.

Morrill said given the discussion he would like to change WDFW ranks to **5** for all three projects.

- Line 30: LMN Adult Channel and North Entrance Diffuser Grating
 - Fish Asset Project.
- Line 31: Little Goose Adult Ladder Temperature Mitigation - Fish egress project
 - Completed.
 - Mandatory for closing out.
- Line 32: Lower Granite Turn Pool Gate
 - Corps ranked this high because they are midstride in trying to get it constructed.

Ebel said that IDFG ranked this as a **3**. He said that he would have to ask with in FFDRWG if any modifications to the design or consideration of IDFG's presentation on walleye had influenced the trajectory of that project. He said that he would put that in the other forum.

Royer asked if Chuck Barnes, Corps, had been noting that for the FFDRWG.

Barnes said that he was tracking that.

- Line 33: Lower Granite Shad Deterrence

Ebel said that IDFG ranked this as **2**. He said that he was not sure if characterizing this as a direct passage benefit is accurate. He said that it was helpful to project staff, yes, passage benefit, questionable.

Conder said NOAA would rank it as a **3**. He said that it is something that NOAA would like to get to help with the trap issue there. He said that he did not know if it had been empirically identified as a passage issue. He said conceptually you could see it being problematic during some periods, but it has not really been empirically identified. Conder said that he thought it was something worth getting to at some point, but it is definitely lower in priority.

Morrill said that he did not know what WDFW had an **M**, he asked for it to be changed as a **3**.

Next meeting: May 16, 2025 (In-Person)

Agenda Topics:

- CRS NEPA Funding (ongoing)

Today's Attendees:

Name	Affiliation
Trevor Conder	NOAA
Ida Royer	Corps
Ben Hausmann	BPA
Chuck Barnes	Corps
Christine Peterson	BPA
Kelsey Swieca	NOAA
Tom Iverson	Yakama Nation
Chris Magel	NOAA
Tom Lorz	Umatilla/CRITFC
Jay Hesse	Nez Perce
Jonathan Ebel	IDFG
Kate Self	NPCC
Ryan Ashcraft	
Ian Chane	Corps
Steve	
Charles Morrill	WDFW
Carolina Andes	BPA
Andrea Ausmus	BPA Notetaker

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