

Meeting 3 Notes

Avian Salmon Predation Work Group (ASPWG)

Meeting Details

Date: Monday, March 17, 2025

Time: 9:00pm to 3:30pm, PST

Agenda ([DFW link](#))

9:00	Call to order
9:20	Public comment
9:30	Draft report outline
10:30	Break
10:45	Discussion: Determining scale of predation and implementing remedies
12:30	Lunch
1:00	Discussion continued
3:00	Closing
3:30	Adjourn

Meeting 3 Action Items

- WDFW will circulate reports/links shared during the meeting.
- WDFW will circulate drafts of a revised report outline and a synthesized list of intervention principles for WG members to review and comment on.

9:10 Call to Order

Jennifer Sepulveda, WDFW Communications Manager and ASPWG Lead Facilitator, welcomed work group (WG) members and invited them to introduce themselves and respond to the prompt, “A year from now, after you’ve delivered the report, you’re really happy; Why? What did you accomplish?” Themes of WG responses are listed below. Jennifer then provided an overview of the meeting’s agenda and objectives.

WG Responses

- Members anticipate having solved perceived problems with effective approaches and having provided a comprehensive set of facts to guide decision-making.
- Contributing to the holistic management of the entire ecosystem and food web, including addressing avian predation and improving salmon management, was identified as a strong potential accomplishment.
- Reflecting shared concerns, fostering collaboration among diverse stakeholders, and strengthening partnerships are key aspirations.
- Members hope to acknowledge the scientific sophistication of salmon management in the Columbia River, consider implications for other regions, and shift towards a holistic watershed approach.
- Securing political will for effective ecosystem management and providing a clear understanding of legal bounds to implement change were important themes.

- Ensuring the report is thoughtful about regional dynamics and the broader picture was noted as a shared goal.
- Identifying knowledge gaps, pulling together the best available science, and highlighting potential management scenarios were all noted as key goals.

9:35 Public Comment

There was one public comment shared at this time. The commenter stated they are grateful for the WG's hard work and concerned about the urgency of salmon recovery. They urged the WG to consider the studies available to them now to encourage action related to avian predation management.

9:40 Report Outline

Shelby Thomas, Ross Strategic, presented an initial draft of the ASPWG report outline. WG members discussed and commented on the overall organization and report content.

11:05 Determining Predation Concern

Jess Stocking, WDFW Marine Coastal Flyway Section Manager, provided a brief overview of the Pacific Flyway Council and its Avian Predation Policy to guide the WG's discussion on whether avian predation reduces juvenile salmonid survival. The [Pacific Flyway Council](#) is an administrative body comprised of 12 Pacific states aimed at fostering cooperation between public agencies for issues related to migratory birds – avian predation of fish is of interest to the Council and is captured in its guidance.

Discussion Themes and Takeaways

- The following question was considered: "What are scientific, cultural, Treaty, and economic elements managers should consider when determining whether or not avian predation impacts juvenile salmonid survival (both wild and hatchery stocks)?"
 - Scientific elements noted by WG members include the importance of scientific data to determine significant avian predation impacts; need for monitoring protocols to track changes in fish and bird populations; understanding predation rates and their impact on adult returns; and considering empirical evidence on the magnitude and scope of impact.
 - Cultural elements mentioned by the WG included recognizing the cultural trajectory and implications of avian predation, as well as considering impacts on treaty rights. It was noted that treaty rights and obligations predate ESA.
 - Economic elements that were noted included the economic implications of avian predation management actions; cost-effectiveness of monitoring and management strategies; and potential impacts on agency funding and resource allocation.
- WG supports all five parts of PFCPS guiding principle 4; they do not have additions at this time.
- Determining whether or not predation is "significant" requires an understanding of predation thresholds with regards to recovery.
 - It was noted that the thresholds are not necessarily known for every stock or watershed, and that a basin-scale approach is needed.

- WG suggests striking “empirical” from 4a and replacing it with “scientific” to better reflect the need for scientific evidence in determining avian predation impacts.
- An example [article](#) was shared that explores the efficacy and ethics of management practices in the case of endangered caribou.
- WG discussed the relative portion of loss associated with avian predation and how it has changed over time, impacting recovery efforts. One member emphasized the importance of understanding the level of predation occurring and how it triggers a response, noting that addressing sources of mortality requires careful consideration beyond emotional reactions.
- The challenges of establishing a gold standard for predation management were discussed. One member noted that while a perfect monitoring plan would provide clear insights, it is often impractical due to high costs and complexity, especially in new habitats. The group emphasized the need for thoughtful scientific approaches, recognizing that delays in action could lead to extinction, as evidenced by the critical status of Snake River steelhead stocks.
- Geographic scope will have an impact on management, with variation between watersheds.
- WG discussed the varying levels of evidence required for different management actions. They noted that local dissuasion or non-lethal tools may require less biological justification and monitoring compared to basin-scale avian population management actions. The group appreciated that 4c and 4d focus on setting clear expectations, highlighting the significant resources spent on research, monitoring, and evaluation in the Columbia River.

12:30 Public Comment and Lunch Break

Before the lunch break, the WG provided another opportunity for public comment. One member noted that hatchery fish are treaty fish, and that adding information about other mortality rates to the report may cause confusion since that data is being determined separately. Questions about fish diet and survival rates highlight that every step of the river journey results in the loss of the strongest fish, with significant mortality observed from smolt to adult stages.

1:15 Responding to Avian Predation

First as individuals and then in small groups, WG members considered the prompt: Once a manager establishes avian predation is a concern, how can they determine an appropriate response? What makes a “good” remedy? They came together to share small group discussion takeaways and refine their overall response. Some large group discussion points are below, and the “good remedy” takeaways are captured in a synthesized list of WG-generated intervention principles the group is developing for inclusion in their final report.

Discussion Points

- Historical avian management plans have led to unintended consequences. It is important for management plans to consider the potential consequences of remedies and the well-being of bird populations, ensuring that actions do not harm the overall ecosystem.
 - Habitat manipulation and hazing strategies were noted as an example, with one WG member pointing out that strategies for hazing can lead to longer feeding times due to increased hunger.

- Regarding the complexities of solutions, one WG member brought up the example of declining double-crested cormorant populations estuary-wide due to Army Corps management on East Sand Island. The decreased avian population did not lead to increased fish survival.
 - Flexibility is crucial in planning and implementing management actions to adapt to changing conditions and new information.
- When management actions are implemented near the areas where entities operate, they tend to be more successful.
- Permits for nest egg removal are issued before considering lethal take of individuals, emphasizing the importance of legal frameworks.
- Ideal solutions should have regional support and clear accountability among entities.
- Cost-benefit analyses should consider both the financial and ecological impacts of management actions.
- The group discussed the need for clear criteria to guide management actions, emphasizing principles and practical steps for implementation. One suggestion was that remedies should align with the Pacific Flyway Council guidance to ensure consistency and effectiveness.
- It was suggested that a section describing current management actions could be included to provide context and clarity for legislators and staff.

Attendees

ASPWG Members, Roles, and Affiliations

- Aaron Brooks, Fisheries Management Specialist, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe
- Bill Sharp, Yakama Nation
- Bryce Devine, Columbia River Commercial Fisherman
- Chris Magel, NOAA Fisheries, West Coast Regional Office
- Clark Watry, Aquatic Invasive Species Program Lead, Nez Perce Tribe
- David Troutt, Natural Resources Director, Nisqually Indian Tribe; Chair, Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Center
- Emma Sands, Harvest Management Biologist, Quileute Tribe
- James Lawonn, Avian Predation Coordinator, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Jennifer Urmston, Migratory Birds and Habitat Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Jessica Stocking, Marine Coastal Flyway Section Manager, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Joy Lee Waltermire, Senior Fish Biologist, Long Live the Kings
- Robert Sudar, Commercial Salmon Fishing Industry
- Ron Garner, President, Puget Sound Anglers
- Sean Tackley, Fish and Policy Program Manager, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Northwestern Division
- Todd Hass, Special Assistant to the Director, Puget Sound Partnership
- Trina Bayard, Interim Executive Director and Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon Washington; Coordinator, Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program Bird Work Group

Project Team and ASPWG Role

- Jennifer Sepulveda, Communications Manager, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife – ASPWG Facilitator
- Nate Pamplin, Director of External Affairs, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife – ASPWG Support
- Shelby Thomas, Ross Strategic - ASPWG Support

Others in attendance

- Allison Anholt
- Butch Smith
- Kate Self