

Puget Sound Steelhead Advisory Group (PSSAG) Meeting Notes

May 10, 2018, Noon – 7PM

Embassy Suites, Lynnwood, Washington, 98036

Drafted by Cole Caldwell and James Scott

External Messages

- PSSAG is working together and finding a path forward.

Agenda Items discussed at the meeting:

1) Introduction

2) Analysis of Potential New Hatchery Programs in Workgroup Portfolios (Gary Marston)

- Stillaguamish Winter Conservation Program
- Skykomish Winter Conservation Program
- Replacement of Reiter Ponds Skamania Program

3) Discussion of Skagit River as Component of Northern Cascades Portfolio

4) External Messages

- What are the 3-5 messages regarding this meeting that we want to provide to other interested stakeholder?

5) Public Comment

Advisors Attending

Jonathan Stumpf

Curt Kraemer

Al Senyohl

Roger Goodan

Mark Spada

Derek Day

David Yamashita

Andy Marks

Gary Butrim

Jamie Glasgow

Curt Wilson

Rich Simms

Public Attending

Conrad Gowell

Staff Attending

Jim Scott (Facilitator), Cole Caldwell (co-facilitator)

Anja Huff

Gary Marston

Jenni Whitney

Brett Barkdull

Ed Eleazer

Notes from the meeting per agenda item:

Introduction

- Jim distributed the agenda and provided PSSAG members with multiple handouts.

Analysis of Potential New Hatchery Programs in Workgroup Portfolios (Gary Marston)

- Stillaguamish Winter Conservation Program (analysis on-going; presentation delayed until next meeting)
- Skykomish Winter Conservation Program (analysis on-going; presentation delayed until next meeting)
- Tolt River Conservation Program and Phase-Out of Reiter Ponds Skamania Program
 - Gary Marston presented information on a proposed approach (see handouts for details) details.
 - The proposed Tolt River Conservation Program is based on the approach used by Barry Berejikian in Hood Canal.
 - The ecological impacts may need to be assessed throughout the transition and particularly after 8 years.
 - The Tolt fish **are** regarded and defined as an in-basin stock, not an out-of-basin stock.
 - PSSAG members had the following comments and concerns:
 - Multiple advisory group members expressed a strong interest in maintaining the summer steelhead fishery.
 - Proposed program might result in “mining” (i.e., a net loss in spawners) the Tolt summer steelhead population
 - PSSAG members had the following suggestions for improving the proposal:
 - Consider a net pen in the Tolt reservoir as an acclimation site.
 - How the proposal is framed will be important:
 - Why switch broodstock – a locally adapted stock will have higher productivity
 - Emphasize transition and maintaining fishery during the transition
 - Might be beneficial to only use eggs from the later-timed spawners in the South Fork Tolt River as these are more likely representative of the historical population.
 - During the transition period, consider doing either the Skamania program or local broodstock program at Wallace Hatchery to keep the broodstocks separate.
 - Monitoring of the program would be essential, including the ecological interactions.
 - PSSAG members had the following requests for additional information:
 - What is the basis for the 5% stray rate of returning adults to the Tolt for juveniles released from the Tokul Creek Hatchery?
 - Limited spawning areas exist in the South Fork Tolt River for summer steelhead. Would super imposition be a concern?
 - Would competition between the juveniles from the conservation hatchery program and the natural-origin spawners be a concern?
 - More details and justification will be needed for the transition strategy.

Discussion of Skagit River as Component of Northern Cascades Portfolio

- Jim reviewed and presented the objectives that PSSAG has created and reviewed the ground rules.
- Curt Kraemer presented some ideas about how to move forward on the Skagit River in a manner that all advisors could support.
 - He initiated his proposal by noting that the PSSAG has an opportunity to do some great things. These include providing a vision for the future of the Puget Sound steelhead, addressing habitat, and updating the Statewide Steelhead Management Plan.

- But the PSSAG is challenged by two big issues:
 - Consideration of a wild broodstock (integrated) hatchery program
 - Consideration of a wild steelhead gene bank (WSGB) on the Sauk River or for the entire Skagit Basin.
- To address these issues and promote a compromise, Curt recommended:
 - For the next 5 years, experiment, monitor the steelhead response, and see how much fishing opportunity will be provided without a wild broodstock hatchery program.
 - Establish the Sauk as a wild steelhead gene bank.
 - For the next 5 years, suspend consideration of :
 - Designation of the entire Skagit Basin as a WSGB
 - Initiation of a wild broodstock hatchery program.
- Recognizing the value of the PSSAG speaking as one voice, and that there would be significant “give” by all, the advisors supported this proposal with the following suggestions for further improvements:
 - Define more clearly an adaptive framework with the PSSAG meeting each year to review the performance of the fishery and Skagit steelhead. Information that would inform the discussion would include:
 - Runsize, spawners, and other Viable Salmonid Population attributes – has the status of the population improved, degraded, or stayed about the same? In reviewing this information, recognize that the drought and Blob are likely to have a detrimental effect on steelhead returns in 2018 and 2019.
 - Recreational fishing season – was a full recreational season provided with a catch and release fishery?
 - Status of habitat – has the habitat been maintained, improved, or degraded?
 - Refine fishing season specifics (including gear, location, and timing) based on what we learn monitoring the fishery. We know a little more after the 2018 fishery, but should know quite a bit more after the 2019 and 2020 fisheries.
- Advisors had the following suggestions for reducing concerns with WSGBs.
 - WSGBs should be repackaged and renamed as Wild Steelhead Management Zones
 - Many recreational fishers believe that the designation of a WSGB means that fishing will be prohibited. We must clearly and frequently state that a WSGB designation does not affect the allowable fisheries. Allowable fishing rates will still be controlled by the ESA-limits.
 - Some recreational fishers are concerned that designation of a WSGB means that salmon hatchery production will be prohibited. We must clearly and frequently state that salmon hatchery production is unaffected.
 - Education of the hearts and minds of recreational anglers will be fundamental to building support.

External Messages

- PSSAG and people are coming together and finding a path forward.