

Puget Sound Steelhead Advisory Group (PSSAG) Meeting Notes

June 27, 2018, Noon – 7PM

Embassy Suites, Lynnwood, Washington, 98036

Drafted by Jim Scott

External Messages

- 1) PSSAG is doing great work and establishing a vision for Puget Sound steelhead.
- 2) We have our sleeves rolled up and are working hard to improve steelhead conservation and fisheries.

Agenda Items:

1) Introduction

2) Analysis of Potential New Hatchery Programs in Workgroup Portfolios

- Tolt River Conservation Program and Phase-Out of Reiter Ponds Skamania Program (Gary Marston)
- Stillaguamish Winter Conservation Program (Anja Huff)
- Skykomish Winter Conservation Program (Anja Huff)

3) Discussion of Northern Cascades Portfolio

- Review results from coarse scale assessment of draft portfolios
- Group development of provisional Northern Cascades portfolio

4) Discussion of PSSAG Habitat Recommendations

5) Discussion of Next Steps

- Does the PSSAG wish to document its recommendations? If so, who is our audience, and what do we want the document to look like?
- What are our next steps?
- When should we schedule our next meeting?

6) External Messages

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

7) Public Comment (maximum of 3 minutes per person)

8) Thoughts on Meeting (quick comment limited to a maximum of 30 seconds per person)

Advisors Attending

Jonathan Stumpf

Curt Kraemer

Al Senyohl

Roger Goodan

Mark Spada

David Yamashita

Andy Marks

Gary Butrim

Jamie Glasgow

Curt Wilson

Rob Masonis
Conrad Gowell (representing Rich Simms)

Public Attending

Jesse Salsberry
Nick Chambers

Staff Attending

Jim Scott (facilitator)
Brian Missildine
Anja Huff
Gary Marston
Jenni Whitney

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

- Tolt River Conservation Program and Phase-Out of Reiter Ponds Skamania Program
 - The group reviewed the 3-part proposal introduced at the May 10 meeting:
 - A conservation hatchery program for Tolt River summer steelhead.
 - A transition at Reiter Hatchery from the use of Skamania broodstock to the use of a Tolt-origin broodstock.
 - A transition at Sunset Falls from passing Skamania-origin summer steelhead upstream to passing Tolt-origin summer steelhead upstream.
 - Gary Marston presented responses to PSSAG questions at the last meeting (see handouts for details).
 - PSSAG members discussed the proposal in depth and made the following observations and suggestions (also see notes below regarding different perspectives on the proposal):
 - Tolt conservation program:
 - Benefits are smaller than the risks.
 - Integrated programs are not without risks, but have benefits.
 - Invest in improving the habitat – particularly the amount of spawning gravel.
 - Develop an integrated All-H plan with specific action items.
 - FERC relicensing provides an avenue to secure habitat improvements.
 - Reiter Hatchery Transition
 - Important to maintain summer steelhead fishery.
 - Evaluate separately from Tolt conservation program.
 - SF Skykomish Transition
 - Concerned about ending passage of Skamania-origin summer steelhead.
 - Consider opening fishery above Sunset Falls on Skamania-origin summer steelhead
 - The PSSAG was unable to reach a broadly supported recommendation regarding this proposal. Lacking that, Jim Scott asked the advisors for their thoughts on important

- considerations to inform a WDFW (and comanager) decision on this proposal (or refinements).
- PSSAG members generally supporting the proposal offered the following suggestions
 - It is a difficult situation, but the facts (letter from NOAA) remain the same. We risk completely losing the fishery.
 - The proposal is not ideal.
 - Provides opportunity for fishery in the future.
 - Provides safety net for Tolt summer steelhead.
 - Looking longterm it is important to promote diversity.
 - A good experimental design is needed, including thresholds and time frames.
 - The proposal takes NOAA's position (as stated in letter) into account.
 - The proposal is innovative.
 - Doing the right thing (eliminating Skamania stock) provides leverage for improvements in habitat.
 - Important to provide the full package to NOAA.
 - PSSAG members generally not supporting the proposal suggested the following:
 - The risks do not outweigh the benefits for this ESA-listed population.
 - Mortalities can occur at hatcheries as is evident from the Elwha River
 - The ecosystem is complicated; it is difficult to consider and incorporate all the potential elements and ramifications.
 - The existing Reiter program has successfully provided fisheries.
 - Concerned about small number of redds and pumping these.
 - Need more public engagement regarding the proposal.
 - The proposal will not benefit wild fish.
 - It will be difficult to identify and pump redds.
 - The cost/benefit ratio is higher for habitat improvements than for a hatchery program.
 - HGMP should be reviewed by the HSRG.
 - Hatcheries can be a source of disease for wild fish.
 - Competition with surrounding watersheds will still occur.
 - Hatchery culture results in behavioral modifications.
 - Domestication will occur.
 - Jim concluded this topic by stating that WDFW will carefully review and consider all of the PSSAG comments and suggestions as the comanagers reconsider the proposal.
 - Stillaguamish Winter Steelhead Conservation Program
 - Anja Huff discussed the option to initiate a hatchery conservation program for Stillaguamish winter steelhead. After reviewing the trend in spawners, staff concluded that a conservation hatchery program does not appear necessary at this time (see handout).
 - Jenni Whitney noted that the comanager spawning goal is now 3059, not 1800 as portrayed on the graph.
 - Snohomish/Skykomish Winter Steelhead Conservation Program
 - Anja Huff discussed the option to initiate a hatchery conservation program for Snohomish/Skykomish winter steelhead (see handout).
 - The group discussed the proposal and offered the following initial response and requests for more information:

- Will need to consider competition and other ecological interactions.
- The objective of the program is not clear – conservation, fishing opportunities, or both?
- If the objective is conservation, is there an increase in the number of spawners compared to no program?
- Staff were asked to more fully develop the proposal for the next PSSAG meeting.

Discussion of Northern Cascades Portfolio

- The advisors worked through the Northern Cascades populations under the TRT guidance that the portfolio needed at least 2 Primary summer populations, 5 Primary winter populations, and a geometric mean geometric mean score of at least 2.2.
- The PSSAG provisional decisions resulted in 4 summer Primary populations, 12 Primary winter populations, and a geometric mean score of 2.55.
- Drayton Harbors
 - The group decided that this population should be provisionally designated as Stabilizing.
- Nooksack Winter
 - The group decided that this population should be provisionally designated as Primary with a 150,000 early winter segregated hatchery program.
 - The group agreed on the following fishery/hatchery adaptive management provisions (Provisions):
 - Monitor the performance of the fishery to assure that it is providing the anticipated benefits to the recreational fishery. Contribution rates were low until recent years.
 - Continually look for ways to improve the performance of the hatchery program.
 - Ensure that the fishery directed at returning fish from the early winter hatchery program does not appreciably slow the recovery of early-timed natural-origin steelhead.
 - Support early winter catch-and-keep and native-timed catch-and-release fisheries (subject to conservation constraints discussed by PSSAG on November 16, 2017), monitor results, and modify fisheries as needed.
 - Scale the number of early winter steelhead released to the returns of NOS; perhaps revisit every 5 years.
- South Fork Nooksack Summer
 - The group decided that this population should be provisionally designated as Primary.
- Samish River & Bellingham Bay Tributaries Winter
 - The group decided that this population should be provisionally designated as Primary.
 - The group supported a native-timed catch-and-release fishery subject to the conservation constraints discussed by PSSAG on November 16, 2017.
 - Consider limiting fishery to areas below Highway 99 to provide protection for spawners.
- Skagit Winter, Nookachamps Winter, Sauk Summer/Winter
 - The group decided that these populations should be provisionally designated as Primary.

- See notes of May 10, 2018 for description of fishery and hatchery adaptive management provisions.
- Baker Summer/Winter
 - The group decided that this population should be provisionally designated as Stabilizing.
- Stillaguamish Winter
 - The group decided that this population should be provisionally designated as Primary with a 130,000 early winter segregated hatchery program.
 - The group agreed on the same fishery/hatchery Provisions as described for the Nooksack Winter population.
- Deer Creek Summer
 - The group decided that this population should be provisionally designated as Primary.
- Canyon Creek Summer
 - The group decided that this population should be provisionally designated as Primary.
- Snohomish/Skykomish Winter
 - The group decided that this population should be provisionally designated as Primary with a 167,000 early winter segregated hatchery program.
 - The group agreed on the same fishery/hatchery Provisions as described for the Nooksack Winter population.
 - The group requested additional information regarding a potential winter hatchery conservation program (see notes above).
- Snoqualmie Winter
 - The group decided that this population should be provisionally designated as Primary with a 74,000 early winter segregated hatchery program.
 - The group agreed on the same fishery/hatchery Provisions as described for the Nooksack Winter population.
- Pilchuck Winter
 - The group decided that this population should be provisionally designated as Primary.
 - The group supported a native-timed catch-and-release fishery subject to the conservation constraints discussed by PSSAG on November 16, 2017.
- N.F. Skykomish Summer
 - The group decided that this population should be provisionally designated as Contributing.
 - The PSSAG was unable to reach a broadly supported recommendation regarding a summer steelhead hatchery program (see notes above).
- Tolt Summer
 - The group decided that this population should be provisionally designated as Primary.
 - The PSSAG was unable to reach a broadly supported recommendation regarding a summer steelhead hatchery program (see notes above).

Discussion of PSSAG Habitat Recommendations

- This topic was deferred until the next meeting. Jim Scott asked folks to review the draft document.

Discussion of Next Steps

- The advisors had a preliminary discussion of PSSAG products. Three products were suggested:
 - A PowerPoint presentation that could be used in multiple venues (clubs, legislative hearings, FWC).
 - A short glossy document.
 - A detailed document of recommendations.

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