Coastal Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan
Umpqua Stratum Stakeholder Team

Meeting Summary

Date: September 17 – 18, 2012
Location: Roseburg, Oregon
Participants: **Stakeholder Team:** Wayne Spicer, Paul Heberling, Mike Brochu, Steve Godin, Joe Ferguson, Greg Haller, Eric Riley, Cameron Krauss, Walt Barton, Kelly Coates, Susan Morgan
Staff: Tim Walters, Laura Jackson, Holly Huchko, Greg Huchko, Ed Bowles, Tom Stahl, Kevin Goodson, Jay Nicholas, Jim Owens, Debbi Farrell
Interested Parties: Joseph Edmonds, Cow Creek Tribe; Scott Keep, DTO; Jeff Dose, Steamboaters; Alan Bunce

Welcome/Introductions/Review of Agenda

Jim Owens, Facilitator, welcomed the group at 1:00 p.m. September 17, 2012 to the Coastal Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan Umpqua Stratum Stakeholder Team meeting. The goal of the meeting was to review the draft ("strawman") portfolio distributed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and recommend a proposed stratum portfolio to ODFW.

Ed Bowles, ODFW Fish Division Administrator, thanked the group for their participation. In the past, the development of management plans has typically taken multiple years. This process is an experiment to compress the planning process through development of a "strawman" proposal for review. The focus is on actions and risks, rather than abundance numbers. One of the goals is to balance conservation with fishing opportunities through management of hatcheries and harvest levels. The Department would also like to identify areas that would be suitable for wild fish emphasis and for harvest opportunities.

The process includes Stakeholder Team recommendations on portfolio objectives, hatchery fish programs, harvest programs, predation, and habitat improvements. Individual stratum team recommendations will then be integrated into a comprehensive coastwide portfolio. That integrated portfolio, along with the identification of any additional recommendations that are needed from the Stakeholder Teams, will be circulated for review to the Stakeholder Teams before a draft Plan is prepared. The format (meetings or e-mail) for receiving feedback on the integrated portfolio is to be determined. It is envisioned that a draft Plan will be completed in January 2013, at which time stratum groups are likely to be reconvened to review the Plan prior to it being distributed for general public comment. The process for review and approval by the Fish and Wildlife Commission will follow, with additional comment opportunities provided as part of that process.

Public comment will be accepted at specific times during stakeholder meetings, when a draft Plan is released to the public, and during the Commission process. There are comment cards available to submit comments in addition to the regular opportunities. The opinion poll is still in the process of being created by Oregon State University.

Decision-Making Basis and Scope

The group discussed the nature of the actions being proposed by ODFW. The "strawman" portfolio is intended as a starting point for discussions to assist in developing management strategies that achieve the goals of decreasing conservation risk and increasing fishing opportunity. Jim Owens reviewed the Operating Assumptions that were initially presented at the orientation sessions and that are to serve as the basis of the Stakeholder Team's recommendations (Draft Portfolio, page 2). He then identified the two over-arching evaluation criteria that should be applied to recommendations:

(1) Are the recommendations responsive to the Operating Assumptions?
(2) Do the recommendations provide a balanced portfolio perspective, at both the stratum and coastwide levels?

The group agreed that the Operating Assumptions were appropriate sideboards for developing recommendations.

Jay Nicholas, Wild Salmon Center, provided historical information on abundance, harvest levels and composition of harvest for coho salmon, fall and spring Chinook salmon and winter steelhead. Coho salmon and fall Chinook salmon are most abundant; fall Chinook salmon harvest levels are higher including a large number of them being wild. Smaller numbers are harvested of wild coho salmon and winter steelhead. The majority of winter steelhead harvested are hatchery fish.

Tom Stahl, ODFW Assistant Conservation and Recovery Program Manager, summarized the Current Status Assessment previously presented at the orientation sessions. The assessment indicates that in this stratum all populations, except the South Umpqua spring Chinook population, are healthy and viable, which does not mean that the populations are at historic levels. The South Umpqua spring Chinook population has persisted but the very low abundances indicate that it is not viable. The species addressed in this plan include fall Chinook salmon, spring/summer Chinook salmon, and chum salmon, winter steelhead, summer steelhead and coastal cutthroat trout. None of these species are currently federally or state listed as threatened or endangered. Coho are listed as threatened and are not addressed in this effort directly because there is an existing conservation plan for them.

Objectives

Discussion of proposed objectives included:

- Coho are missing in the description of the emphasis proposed for each species.
- Are the objectives intended to be prioritized? No.
- Overall, does the strawman represent a net increase in wild fish?
- How often will this experiment be revisited? How will community-based input be solicited?
- Why isn't there more focus on improving healthy fish populations? Reducing risk across the board benefits healthy populations.
- The Plan needs to acknowledge that other improvements are possible to benefit healthy populations.

There was consensus support for the following objectives as guidance for consideration of specific actions:

1. Protect and restore populations of conservation concern.

- Address limiting factors with appropriate actions and identify target threat levels.

2. Protect rare species and life-history strategies (chum, summer and spring Chinook, summer steelhead)
3. Maintain overall hatchery production close to current levels using best management practices and best available science.
4. Identify smaller or less accessible hatchery-based fisheries for shifts to other locations.
5. Protect and emphasize current wild fish fisheries and maintain or improve them into the future.
6. Seek new opportunities for both hatchery and wild fish fisheries.
7. Work within the decision space identified from the current status assessment.
8. Identify and prioritize critical uncertainties, monitoring, and adaptive management practices

Hatchery Fish Programs

Kevin Goodson provided an overview of the current ODFW hatchery fish programs. The various programs are at capacity with staffing and budget constraints. At this point there are no plans to increase total hatchery production. An overview of proposed changes to the current hatchery programs was provided. Any reductions in production are intended to reduce conservation risk by shifting impacts, ideally to improve fisheries at popular and accessible sites.

Steve Godin, representing the Gardiner Reedsport Winchester Bay (GRWB) STEP Group, provided an overview of the GRWB STEP program. The local groups have voiced concerns and submitted comments in support of maintaining the existing hatchery programs

Other comments included:

- It was agreed that the various hatchery programs are vital to local communities. Any changes need to keep in mind the potential economic impacts. The proposed reductions in hatchery releases are intended to lower risks to wild fish.
- Several concerns were raised with the lack of data and the importance of increased monitoring efforts. Concerns were also raised that changes are being proposed without adequate data to support those changes.
- It was agreed that an educational component should be implemented to assist the public's understanding of changes resulting from the Plan.
- Stray rates need to be established for the various hatchery programs.
- The Department is identifying the logistics of the Rock Creek Hatchery counting station. The group would also like to see strategies identified to increase the harvest of hatchery fish released.
- The Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Tribe of Indians would like to see the steelhead telemetry study conducted again. The Tribe would be willing to assist in the study.

<u>Coho</u>
There were no comments on the strawman proposal to maintain the existing South Umpqua River program at its current level.

<u>Fall Chinook</u>
Recommendation:

- The group questioned the need to reduce the GRWB Fall Chinook program and generally agreed (9-1, with the dissenter preferring the proposed Department reduction) to maintain the program at its current level and get more information on straying – revisiting whether

the program should be increased (with added capacity from new improvements in water quality at the STEP hatchery) or decreased when it comes up for STAC review in 5 years.

- Questions were raised regarding the risk from the Calapooya Creek (Middle Umpqua) Fall Chinook program. Since little information is available on the number of strays this 300K program produces, there was general agreement to maintain the program and) to use adaptive management to adjust the program to achieve a stray rate goal (8 supportive, 2 opposed with dissenters preferring a program reduction). Ed Bowles suggested ODFW would be looking at a "low double digits" goal for hatchery strays onto natural spawning grounds.

Spring Chinook

The group discussed the North Umpqua spring Chinook salmon program and the current "black box" area from Winchester Dam to Calf Creek (above which carcass surveys are currently conducted up to Soda Springs Dam) where there are a lot of missing hatchery fish based on Winchester Dam counts, the carcass surveys, catch estimates, and hatchery removals.

Recommendation: There was general agreement to better understand the stray rate and phase in the proposed 42,000 reduction in smolt releases in 3 to 5 years if stray rates are above a yet-to-be-specified rate; adaptive management would be used to potentially stop the phased reduction if the Rock Creek ladder improvements allow for most of the hatchery fish to be removed and a stray rate target to be reached (9 supportive; 1 opposed, with the dissenter preferring that the strawman proposal for a reduction in releases occur immediately).

Winter Steelhead

Recommendation: There was general agreement with the strawman proposal to increase South Umpqua River releases from 120,000 to 150,000 (7 supportive; two opposed, with the dissenters preferring to maintain the current release level). Concern was expressed that this population was getting a double increase in risk with the proposed wild winter steelhead harvest in the mainstem and might contribute to more strays in the North Umpqua. It was also noted that the upper South Umpqua (above the falls) should be characterized as a "wild fish only area".

Summer Steelhead

Recommendation: Consensus to support the strawman proposal for the North Umpqua River program which, while a decrease from 165,000 to 120,000 releases, is not a reduction due to current release levels being close to 120,000 the last several years. Additional information was requested on whether there is a straying issue in this system.

Harvest Management Actions

Kevin Goodson presented the strawman matrix for Retention/Non-Retention designations and associated Retention Schedule for proposed wild fish harvest changes. A sliding scale retention schedule was created to assist in determining retention levels for each Species Management Unit (SMU). A conservation level will also be identified to ensure the viability of populations is not jeopardized by harvest or other impacts. Abundance level thresholds for the sliding scale harvest matrix will be based on past abundance data collected. The abundance for each stratum will be looked at based on the sliding scale, rather than by individual water body. Escapement numbers will be evaluated as the process goes forward and adaptive management will be used to modify if necessary.

Ed Bowles shared that the goal of a wild steelhead harvest is to provide more opportunity. The data available currently shows a healthy population in these areas and it would provide an

opportunity not currently offered. The plan will include the criteria that will be used to close the fisheries if needed. The ultimate goal is to balance conservation with utilization of the resource. The fisheries in this area are a tremendous economic benefit; the proposed fisheries could possibly create opportunity where there isn't any now.

Coho, Fall Chinook, Spring Chinook, and Summer Steelhead

There were no changes proposed in the strawman proposal or by the Stakeholder Team to current Retention and Non-Retention designations for Coho, Fall Chinook, Spring Chinook, and Summer Steelhead.

Winter Steelhead

Several concerns were raised around the harvest of wild winter steelhead. Concerns were also raised about the current situation that requires anglers to release several wild fish prior to catching a hatchery fish.

Recommendation: Based on the concern that allowing a wild fish harvest increases the conservation risk, there was general opposition to the strawman proposal to change the designations from Non-Retention to Retention in Umpqua Bay, Lower Umpqua River and Middle Umpqua River and to the proposed sliding scale harvest of wild winter steelhead in these basins (9 opposed; 1, supportive, with the dissenter supporting the strawman proposal).

In the case of the South Umpqua River, there was concern raised that this population would have an increased risk from harvest and was also being proposed for increased hatchery risk from additional smolt releases.

Based on the assumption that if wild fish were allowed to be retained there would need to be protections on harvest, there was general support for an alternative to the proposed strawman changes in Retention/Non-Retention designations for winter steelhead in the mainstem of Umpqua Bay, Lower Umpqua River and Middle Umpqua River as follows: (7 supportive and 2 opposed, with the dissenters supporting no harvest; *NOTE: one stakeholder indicated a withdrawal of support after the meeting*):

- Harvest rate set at 10% of the expected return to the Umpqua, with a maximum of 2,000 fish
- Maximum size limit of 32 inches
- Limited entry permits required
- The funds collected for entry to be directed back into monitoring programs in the Umpqua

The Department indicated that it would explore this option internally; as a new concept, it will require policy support, possibly statute changes, and exploration of whether technical infrastructure and capacity exist to carry it out.

Cutthroat Trout

Recommendation: Consensus to support the strawman proposal to change the designations from Retention to Non-Retention in the North Umpqua and South Umpqua rivers. It was clarified that the Retention designation in the Lower and Middle Umpqua rivers applies to the tributaries only (the mainstem is designated Non-Retention to protect sea-run cutthroat trout).

Retention Schedule

Recommendation:

- Consensus for the proposed retention schedule for coho (no concerns expressed) and cutthroat trout.
- The steelhead retention schedule was not discussed as there was very little support for the Department's original proposal of retention under a sliding scale with variable bag limits. A limited entry fishery (which has no retention schedule) was further discussed with some support.
- Consensus for a 1/5 (1 day / 5 season) bag limit for fall Chinook salmon in below average return years and a 2/20 (2 day / 20 season) bag limit in above average years.
- No consensus on a 2/10 or 2/20 bag limit for fall Chinook salmon in average years (evenly split vote).
- No consensus for bag limits for wild spring Chinook salmon (evenly split vote on three alternatives: 1) the ODFW proposal, 2) leaving limits as they currently are in the North Umpqua [2/20], and 3) having an average bag limit of 2/5 and a very high bag limit of 2/10), except support for no retention at very low abundance levels.

Mandatory Return of Tags and Guide Logbooks
Recommendation: Consensus to support the mandatory return of harvest cards and modification of the information requested on harvest tags

In response to questions about the approach to coho management, staff indicated that the Department is hoping to get away from the quota system for wild coho fisheries and that implementing some of the changes proposed will assist in obtaining approval for the fisheries from NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration).

Predation Management Actions

Tom Stahl and Laura Jackson, ODFW Umpqua District Fish Biologist, provided an overview of the current and proposed actions relating to predation management. It was noted that ODFW is seeking partners for additional cormorant hazing efforts in the estuary and to assist in gathering avian predator survey data. There was discussion about additional ways to reduce smallmouth bass predation, which also provide a popular fishery.

Recommendation: Consensus to support the strawman proposal with the following clarifications regarding bass predation:
- Explore innovative strategies to reduce non-native prey species such as bass, including methods from other states
- Increase education about bass predation
- Seek additional funding, including for research, to understand and address impacts

Habitat Management Actions

Tom Stahl provided an overview of proposed habitat management actions. The Department does not have regulatory authority over habitat work; rather, it works with a number of other agencies, entities, and individuals on habitat restoration and protection. One of the goals of this Plan will be to provide a "fish perspective" to habitat restoration work by identifying priority 6th-Field HUCs (Hydrologic Unit Code; "6HUCs") to focus efforts that benefit fish rather than identifying site-specific actions or limiting factors (excluding populations that are currently assessed as "non-viable"), which are being determined through other efforts.

The strawman proposes habitat improvement in 20% of the 6HUCs in each population, intended to account for the various uncertainties in future conditions (e.g., due to ocean conditions,

climate change, development, etc). The strawman also proposes a goal that all 6HUCs are at least maintained at their current level of habitat quality. The goal is to improve overall habitat function and quality in some areas without losing function and quality in others.

Ed Bowles explained that ODFW's intent is to support and assist in focusing current and future habitat and restoration work, without replicating work done by others. Stakeholders will be invited to participate on a technical review team that will review and comment on the methods used to characterize and prioritize the 6HUCs. The meeting will likely be held in November.

Comments included:

- Concerns with a lack of an identified outcome or measurement of success. Fish populations should be the measurement of outcomes, rather than percentage increases in habitat.
- Where will limiting factors be identified?
- The improvement targets are simply goals; there is no enforcement mechanism.
- The matrix really doesn't convey any objectives/goals.

Recommendation: Consensus to support the overall goal, with the comment that the Plan needs to address habitat needs and include a clear purpose/scope.

Public Comment

Alan Bunce commented that the Department should not have a bag limit on non-native species and should educate anglers to keep non-natives when they catch them.

Summary and Adjourn

In response to an inquiry from Jim Owens about how well the team's recommendations respond to the Objectives and over-arching evaluation criteria, the majority of members indicated that they were generally comfortable with the deliberation outcomes and feel that their recommendations provide an adequate portfolio perspective. For several members, the group's recommendations amount to excessive risk to wild fish populations.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m. on September 18, 2012.