

NorthWestern Energy Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project (No. 1869)

Annual Thompson Falls Technical Advisory Committee Meeting

NorthWestern Energy

1903 S Russell St, Missoula, MT 59801

December 7, 2022, 10:00am – 2:00pm

1. 10:00 Welcome

- Jon Hanson, NorthWestern Energy, facilitated the meeting. A list of attendees is provided at the end of the meeting summary. PowerPoint presentations provided today are attached.

2. Introductions

- Review of Agenda
- A quorum is present with a voting member present from FWP, CSKT, FWS, and NorthWestern Energy.

3. Relicensing Schedule Review

2023 will be a busy year. The major milestone deadlines were presented, see attached powerpoint for details.

4. Review 2022 Activities - See powerpoint for more details

- 2022 Fish Ladder Operations
 - 2026 Fish total, 688 native, 407 salmonids. 2 Bull Trout
 - It was a more 'normal' year in 2022 in terms of temperature and flow, but the river reached 20°C relatively early and there was a fairly long period over 23°C
 - Over 35,000 fish have been collected since the ladder was built.
 - PIT tag data indicates that passage through lower ladder pools about 69%
 - Time to start talking about strategies to improve passage in lower ladder
- PIT Tag Antenna Arrays
 - Thompson River PIT tag array – detected 144 PIT tagged fish, 137 of those had a history of passing the ladder
 - One brown trout passed the ladder in 2017, was detected in 2022. Other fish with long histories. Some pass multiple times
 - Prospect Creek PIT Tag array –
 - 39 fish detected, 12 fish had a ladder history
 - Westslope cutthroat salvaged from intermittent section near mouth moved upstream rapidly after release in perennial section
 - Fishtrap Creek, W FK Thompson River –
 - Difficult to keep these arrays operational
 - 6 ladder fish detected in 2022
- Fisheries Surveys

5. Baseline Fisheries 2022

- Discussion about value of spring electrofishing – conditions vary so widely from year to year, the data is of limited value
- Fall Electrofishing in CFR above the islands and Paradise to Plains
- Fall Gillnetting in Reservoir – do we need this many nets?

6. 2023 Ladder Operations

- No changes from 2022.

7. 2022 TDG Monitoring and Results (NorthWestern - Jordan)

- Gate testing in 2022, experimenting with different radial gate openings
- Only gates 3 and 4, when opened together, made a bump in TDG of about 3.5%
- This is not the preferred gate opening for NorthWestern, so will be generally avoided

8. Water Quality Monitoring

- Lead – above water quality standards at Birdland Bay Bridge
- NorthWestern did additional sampling in the fall 2020
- Not detecting Lead below old powerhouse, but at Birdland bay bridge
- October 2020 – sampled below the old powerhouse, new powerhouse, mouth of Prospect creek, below Hwy 200 bridge, Thompson Falls state park, in addition to other samples.
 - Detection of lead was only at Birdland Bay Bridge (nowhere else)
 - Not sure what's going on at the site.
 - Not coming from Reservoir, Powerhouses, or Prospect Creek

9. 2022 Project Progress Reports

- **Upper Thompson River Connectivity Project (FWP)**

Jason Blakney – Budget was \$170,000. This project is still fund raising. Purpose is for conservation easement on Green Diamond lands in Thompson River drainage. If the project isn't executed, the money will come back to NorthWestern.

- **Contingency/Emergency Fund (NorthWestern)**

Jon Hanson – budget was \$10,000. Not expended

- **Downstream Transport Study**

Budget was \$15,000, spent \$6,942. Mostly for staff to check the weirs. Avista contributed assistance and materials for the weirs and fish transport. Only 2 bull trout collected in West Fork Thompson River, none from Fishtrap Creek.

Trapping is very difficult because fish move during fall rains, when high flow and leaf litter. In 2023 will focus on electrofishing in Fishtrap Creek. USFWS may be able to provide additional support, also the FS may be able to contribute staff.

- **Big Rock Creek Barrier Design**

Jason Blakley – Budget was \$34,000, spent \$9,679. Hired a consultant to do a feasibility study. Selected a site for the barrier. Collected additional fish data in 2022, found bull trout further upstream than had been detected previously. Very challenging access, lots of deadfall.

10. 2023 Proposals

- **Thompson River Conservation Easement Phase 2**

Request \$100,000.

Jason Blakley, FWP, presented proposal, will go towards funding conservation easement on 48,011 acres in Thompson River drainage. Total cost of project is \$17 MM. Many important bull trout streams in project area.

Request approved, 4 votes yes, 0 votes no.

- **Thompson River Road Consolidation Coordination**

Request \$5,000.

Christine Brissett, TU, presented proposal. Funds would be used to pay staff to initiate a review of the issues and stakeholder concerns with consolidating the dual road system in the lower Thompson River drainage.

Request approved, 3 votes yes, 1 vote no (MFWP). MFWP stated that they support the project, but they do not support using this particular funding source for the project because the project won't be of sufficient benefit to bull trout.

Two projects total \$105,000 approved by the TAC.

11. Adjourn 2:30 PM

Meeting Attendees:

Name	Affiliation
Andy Welch	NWE
Grant Grisak*	NWE
Jordan Tollefson	NWE
Jon Hanson	NWE
Mary Gail Sullivan	NWE
Craig Barfoot	CSKT
Ladd Knotek	MFWP
Harvey Carlsmith	MFWP
Jason Blakney	MFWP
Abigail Madigan	MFWP
Trevor Watson*	MFWP
Eric Oldenberg	Avista
Josh Schulze	USFS - Lolo
Christine Brissette	TU
Kevin Aceituno*	USFWS
Ginger Gillin	GEI

*Participated online