

Annotated Agenda
MAFAC Meeting - Portland, Oregon
April 25, 2016

1. Title of Discussion: **New Task Force for Columbia Basin Partnership**

2. Presenter: Barry Thom, Deputy Regional Administrator
NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region

3. Objective/Purpose (Informational and Action)

The purpose of this discussion is to seek MAFAC's approval to establish a Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force. The Task Force would be a formal collaborative process to establish long-term goals for Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead that involves both regional sovereigns and stakeholders.

4. Background/Synopsis:

Over the next five years, NOAA Fisheries will be making a number of significant fishery management decisions in the Columbia River basin regarding the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and recovery of listed species. These decisions must consider the broad suite of regional interests, including tribal treaty and trust responsibilities, sustainable fisheries, and other federal obligations for salmon and steelhead and the water resources in the Basin. It is our goal that these decisions reflect regional views regarding salmon and steelhead recovery in the Basin. To begin exploring those views NOAA Fisheries commissioned two neutral, university-based institutions – the Oregon Consensus Program at Portland State University and the William D. Ruckelshaus Center at the University of Washington – to gather the views of Columbia Basin states, tribes, federal agencies, and stakeholders regarding long-term salmon recovery strategies. The Columbia Basin Situation Assessment Report (Assessment Report) captures the range of their perspectives.

The many voices reflected in the Assessment Report express considerable support for addressing the complexities of salmon recovery in a more coherent, integrated, and efficient way. Many participants expressed desire for bold leadership while noting an absence of common goals for salmon and steelhead among various management entities, as reflected in the existence of multiple federal, state, and tribal recovery and management plans.

The purpose of the Columbia Basin Partnership (Partnership) is to lead a science-based, results-driven, transparent, and publicly-embraced partnership to establish integrated goals for listed and non-listed Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead that integrate long-term conservation and harvest/fishing goals, and regional and local efforts. The scope of this effort covers:

- All ESA-listed and non-listed salmon and steelhead in the Columbia Basin, above and below Bonneville Dam;
- Ocean, main stem, and tributary fisheries that harvest Columbia Basin stocks – commercial, recreational, and tribal;
- Multiple scales (Basin-wide, species, and major population group);
- All impacts across salmon and steelhead life-cycle; and
- Consideration of ecological conditions and current and future habitat capacity.

NOAA Fisheries envisions this process to generate quantitative, adult return goals at the species, stock, major populations group, and population levels for both listed and unlisted

stocks. The goals would address both conservation and harvest/fishing aspirations, hatchery mitigation goals and others. The process would also consider habitat capacity and climate change.

In addition to enhanced engagement and understanding among members, the outcome of shared goals will be a concise, common definition of success. Numerical adult return goals would allow a means to measure progress and a clear way to maintain public support for regional efforts.

While this regional collaboration would not result in any regulatory decisions or commit any party to a set of activities, it is our sincere hope that the prospect of a common, long-term set of goals for salmon and steelhead would inspire our many partners to integrate efforts and seek efficient ways to achieve these common goals.

We have support of regional sovereigns for advancing this effort and met with representatives from the four Northwest States and regional Tribes in December, 2015. Over 35 stakeholders have expressed an interest in participating. We envision a Partnership to involve between 25-35 people, depending on Tribal representation, and to include:

- Representatives from each of the four Northwest States;
- Representatives from each of the regional tribes, which would mostly occur through inter-tribal organizations; and
- Two representatives from each of the following interests: NGO/Environmental groups, agriculture, utilities, river users, commercial fishing, recreational fishing and local recovery groups.

5. Options Considered

Given the role that stakeholders would play in developing long-term salmon and steelhead goals, we have explored various process options for stakeholder engagement that would comply with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). Those options have included:

- Using the FACA exemption under ESA section 4 for recovery planning,
- Chartering a new FACA committee for the effort,
- Using a third party to convene and lead the effort, and
- Establishing a task force under the existing NOAA Fisheries Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee.

6. Preferred Recommendation

We have determined that establishment of the Task Force is our best option at this time because it allows us to establish the Partnership in a timely manner, allows for active stakeholder engagement and input, and it allows for the possible establishment of a FACA chartered group in the future if it is deemed necessary.

We hope to establish the MAFAC Task Force in time to begin work on creating long-term goals in late summer/early fall 2016. We envision the Partnership to meet quarterly, with potential workgroups meeting more frequently to address specific topics as appropriate.

In the meantime, we plan to host an initial series of informational workshops for interested participants late spring/early summer 2016 to provide a common, working knowledge on current Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead issues.