



## Independent Scientific Review Panel

for the Northwest Power & Conservation Council  
851 SW 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 1100  
Portland, Oregon 97204  
[www.nwcouncil.org/fw/isrp](http://www.nwcouncil.org/fw/isrp)

**Memorandum (ISRP 2015-4)**

**April 16, 2015**

**To:** Phil Rockefeller, Chair, Northwest Power and Conservation Council

**From:** Greg Ruggione, ISRP Chair

**Subject:** Follow-up review of project #2000-031-00, Enhance Habitat in the North Fork John Day River

### **Background**

At the Northwest Power and Conservation's February 24, 2015 request, the ISRP reviewed a response from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) to the ISRP's April 2014 review of a revised proposal ([ISRP 2014-3](#)) for Project #2000-031-00, *Enhance Habitat in the North Fork John Day River*. The proposal was revised in 2014 to address the Council's recommendation and the ISRP's qualifications from the Geographic Review ([ISRP 2013-11](#); August 15, 2013) which asked the project proponent to develop a strategic framework to guide the restoration project. The ISRP provided six specific issues for the proponent to address in developing the strategic plan. The proponent's 2015 response and the ISRP's review are organized by these six issues.

This project's purpose is to protect, enhance, and restore functional floodplain, channel, and watershed processes to provide sustainable and healthy habitat and water quality for aquatic species in the North Fork John Day River subbasin.

### **Recommendation**

#### **Meets Scientific Review Criteria (Qualified)**

The ISRP was greatly pleased to see significant progress in development of a strategic framework for the CTUIR North Fork John Day Project (NFJD). Restoration is a complex business, both ecologically and socially. The proponent recognizes this and has crafted a strategic framework that may work well in their situation. Social components, at the core of the strategic framework, acknowledge the daunting challenges for meeting on-the-ground

restoration actions while maintaining the effectiveness of those actions. A particularly positive note is the effort to coordinate and utilize a strategic approach for restoration on public lands.

The proponent provides forthright and comprehensive responses to the six qualifications. While there has been significant progress in responding to the previous ISRP Qualifications, additional clarifications are needed for Qualification 2 (major findings and lessons learned from past projects), Qualification 4 (roles and responsibilities of various entities), and Qualification 6 (data management). Responses to the Qualifications detailed below should be incorporated into the project's annual progress reports to BPA. The ISRP will review this documentation as part of the next Council/ISRP review process (i.e., the next version of the Geographic Review). The ISRP is confident that the project is on the right path, and the proponent should move forward with activities while the qualifications are being addressed.

### **Qualifications:**

1. **Lessons Learned:** The proponent is requested to provide a more comprehensive summary of lessons learned. This documentation should be provided in annual project reports to BPA.
2. **Roles and Responsibilities:** Given the scope and complexity of the NFJD project, additional emphasis on coordination is likely to reduce project costs and to make the best use of the wide array of skills available to the project—both within the subbasin and from the region. It would be particularly useful to have a written, initial framework that identifies broad roles and responsibilities among key partners and players. It could start by addressing the CTUIR organization, with a focus on Natural Resources, and then progress through discussions/agreements with key partners. These discussions should be useful for the long term success of the project. Documentation does not need to be detailed but should be sufficient to capture major agreements and responsibilities among participants. It should be included in the next annual progress report to BPA.
3. **Data Management:** The primary concern is how data will be managed during the 2-3 years while development of the CTUIR data management system is being completed. Additionally, it does not appear that there are contingency plans to deal with possible delays in full implementation of the data management system. Does the completion of the data management system by 2018 mean that temporal analyses cannot occur before then? Is there a priority list for bringing modules on line? These are important concerns from the perspective of program effectiveness. A written response to these concerns should be included as part of the project's next annual report to BPA.

While several of the responses to the previous qualifications continue to raise concerns with the ISRP (e.g., removal of monitoring from the NFJD program by BPA, a lack of monitoring and analyses prior to 2007, no reference sites), the responses were forthright—and that is greatly

appreciated. It seems that little can be done by the NFJD program to rectify prior oversights, nor to ameliorate the monitoring constraints. The focus should be on the future, and this research team appears to have the necessary components in place to move forward in a positive manner.

## **Comments on CTUIR response to the ISRP's Six Qualifications from 2014 Review**

### **1. 2014 Review: Provide a report that clearly describes future Project monitoring and evaluation actions, and provide a time line for integration with CHaMP and ISEMP and other ongoing monitoring and evaluation programs.**

The proponent provides a satisfactory response to this qualification. Nevertheless, it is particularly troubling—but not unexpected—that the proponent feels *“There has been conflicting direction from BPA and ISRP with respect to data collection and the purpose of monitoring efforts.”* The ISRP will be reviewing the progress of ISEMP, CHaMP, AEM, and the regional approach to habitat RM&E beginning in May 2015. This review will include discussion of what level of local M&E might be needed to determine if local actions are meeting their quantitative objectives. The ISRP suggests that the project proponent stay informed of the ISEMP, CHaMP, and AEM progress reports and the subsequent ISRP review and Council recommendations.

With respect to the NFJD program, the response that monitoring will occur under BPA's AEM program seems reasonable. Although it is fair to ask how monitoring will occur, the large number of monitoring programs and their various stages of ongoing development make it a full time job to adapt monitoring to changes and advances in the various programs. The NFJD approach to *“continue to work with BPA and the CTUIR biomonitoring project [funded by BPA], CHaMP and ISEMP projects to guide restoration...”* seems like a realistic and defensible approach.

It remains less clear which approach will be used for future compliance and implementation monitoring for the project. For instance, on page 3 the proponent states: *“Monitoring for all restoration actions not brought into the AEM process has and will continue to occur through project implementation and compliance monitoring under BPA contracting protocols including their Pisces program. This does not preclude the potential use of project implementation and compliance monitoring data for RM&E monitoring such as topographic survey data, cross sections and longitudinal profiles, and sediment data in RM&E efforts when appropriate. However, this information will be analyzed and reported on under the Bio-monitoring Project.”* Later, on page 6 where the proponent discusses implementation and compliance monitoring: *“Several prominent factors hinder our analysis including; 1) a lack of monitoring data prior to 2007 after most of the existing conservation agreements were in place and implemented, 2) a lack of pre-implementation data in response to the previous comment and landowner or cooperators demand/need to implement as soon as possible, and 3) the duration of implementation or monitoring.”* The juxtaposition of these statements was confusing to the

ISRP as to future strategies for monitoring and analyses. Is there a clear path forward that will be effective?

Given the stated limitations for past compliance, implementation, and effectiveness monitoring to assess project performance, it appears that a revised, more formalized program is needed. If the program is revised, it should include a summary of adjustments that have been incorporated to respond to past limitations. This summary would enhance the ability to identify major findings and lessons learned from a wider variety of treatment types and provide additional insights into effectiveness of various treatments given specific site conditions. This type of information is particularly important in long-term projects for maintaining continuity when changes in personnel occur. Realizing that this is a “work in progress,” an update on the M&E program should be provided in the annual report to BPA for evaluation in the next major project review by the ISRP.

**2. 2014 Review: Provide a report that summarizes the results of past project and major findings from implementation and effectiveness monitoring of completed projects (with appropriate statistical analyses).**

The ISRP felt that the proponent’s response was an honest and objective assessment of progress in some areas. It was quite complete and insightful in some aspects but lacking in others. The response was an interesting description of lessons learned for two general areas (project prioritization and vegetation planting) from the implementation of two projects, Lower Snipe Creek and Lower Camas Creek. The discussion was comprehensive and demonstrates critical review and application of new tools and approaches for continuing project activities.

However, for a project that has been active for more than a decade, assessment of a wider range of implementations and outcomes from a broader range of project types and elements would have been more in line with the ISRP request. A broader assessment would also likely be more useful for personnel in the long term, especially as new personnel join the NFJD project. Even in the absence of statistical analyses, it seems that many lessons have been learned and that adjustments have been made in areas such as project location, design, implementation/contract administration and post project maintenance. A more comprehensive summary of lessons learned could be organized around operational project components (scoping, planning and design, implementation/contracting and administration and post project modification/maintenance) and treatment types (fencing, riparian planting, noxious weed eradication, bank stabilization, and so forth). Discussion items could be formatted into a quick summary lay out and complemented with maps and photos. Such a summary would serve as a living record and should be maintained for all multi-year projects.

The ISRP appreciates that the timeframe and natural, inter-annual variations make assessment of progress difficult to interpret (e.g., temperature changes in Lower Camas Creek). Nevertheless, while statistical analyses are not provided, it is unclear if adequate data are

available in specific instances for a rigorous analysis. A list of instances where data are available would be useful. That said, the response indicated that the onsite biologists are engaged and knowledgeable of what is occurring, at least as indicated by their observations and assessments of probable causes of success or lack of it. For example, they seem to understand why plantings have been largely unsuccessful; hopefully they can use this knowledge moving forward.

**3. 2014 Review: Provide a report that clearly articulates the strategy for restoration activities in the four priority Watersheds (Geographic Areas – GA’s).**

**In developing the strategy, the sponsors should consider:**

- **focusing efforts in high priority areas**
- **using integrated, larger scale projects to increase chances of creating restoration impacts big enough to measure their collective effectiveness**
- **additional narrowing of geographic focus of work (e.g., using 1-2 sub-watersheds within the current group of 4 priority watersheds)**
- **incorporating priority protection and passive restoration actions on public lands**
- **the importance of controlling non-native fish and vegetative species in achieving restoration goals and appropriate actions needed**
- **a phased restoration approach which emphasizes habitat reconnection as a dominant early activity (as suggested in the 2013 ISRP report)**
- **description of specific measures to ensure relevant RM&E efforts outside this project are well-coordinated with project activities listed in this proposal, and**
- **discussion of specific measures to enhance technical capacity of the project including possible formation of a science advisory group or technical support team and other approaches to enlist the collaboration of specialists to aid in project implementation and evaluation.**

The proponent has provided a satisfactory response to this qualification. The Riverine Ecosystem Planning Approach appears to be a good framework—as long as the social aspects, which are required to make it work, are effective.

Coordination of the operational strategy with that used for watershed-scale restoration on public lands is a sound approach. It employs designated, high priority areas (priority watersheds) with an emphasis on restoring and expanding ecologically connected or contiguous project locations in focal sub-watersheds. Given that nearly 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the subbasin is in public ownership and the fact that much of the best remaining habitat is on these lands, a coordinated approach for protection and restoration is a sound investment and more likely to provide integrated and sustainable results at a watershed scale.

It is encouraging to see efforts being made to develop broader community interest and ownership in the restoration of the NFJD. A good example of this is described on page 17, *“The NFJD Project has continued outreach and education efforts to local landowners and where possible implement restoration actions adjacent to treated USFS properties with the intent of*

*extending and connecting treated reaches further downstream.*” It is also positive that these outreach efforts are leading to landowner participation in identification and development of projects. Completion of this assessment is scheduled for 2016, and the ISRP would be interested to learn the general results of this promising effort in the next major project review.

One area of the CTUIR strategic approach, for which the ISRP would like more clarification, is the establishment of relative priorities for treatment of public versus private land. On page 19, it states that, *“Private lands are the primary focus of the NFJD Projects efforts”* and that *“While acknowledging the progress that has been made on private lands since 2000 the NFJD Project may have to consider minimizing its efforts in these areas if landowner cooperation does not continue to improve. Should this occur, a greater emphasis would be placed upon public lands.”* This seems to contradict previous statements that restoration would be focused on stronghold areas on public land and then be expanded to downstream private land to further enlarge/connect the total restored area.

There is documentation and discussion regarding protection and passive restoration actions on public lands (Consideration 4). Efforts have focused on working with Forest Service personnel and permit holders to improve grazing practices and to participate in the review of planning documents and project plans on a variety of resource management activities. A major omission, however, is the potential for CTUIR involvement in Forest Plan revision on National Forests in the NFJD. This revision is currently ongoing and offers a major opportunity to influence land management. Opportunities include influencing land allocations important for fish and aquatic habitat (e.g., Key Watersheds: fish and water emphasis areas), influencing actions on Aquatic and Riparian Management areas, and influencing proposed management direction for a variety of resource activities including forest, watershed, and aquatic habitat restoration. The revised Plan will guide management for the next 10-15 years. Participation in the Plan revision process is likely a primary role for CTUIR Resource Department personnel; however, input from NFJD project personnel would be beneficial.

For Consideration 6 (a phased restoration approach emphasizing habitat reconnection), it seems that the ISRP’s intention was not clearly communicated (p. 21). The ISRP description of a phased approach for restoration refers to a sequence that (1) emphasizes protecting and removing threats to fully-functioning watershed/aquatic habitat areas, (2) provides for reconnection of habitat areas, and (3) restores other adjacent sites in a way that expands the effective, contiguous area of fully-functioning watershed/habitat areas. Fortunately, it appears that these three elements have been generally incorporated into the proponent’s approach for watershed-scale restoration.

There is ample discussion regarding the availability of CTUIR technical skills and other measures taken to enhance technical capacity for project activities (Item 3.8, p. 21). Although a formal, technical advisory group has not been formed, other approaches have been used to broaden the scope of expertise available. An interdisciplinary team and technical expertise from other groups and agencies (NFJDWC, SWCD’s, NRCS, and others) are being used to review designs, permits, and grant applications. Additionally, it is noted that other cooperator resources

include, but are not limited to, BPA's Program Engineer, NFJWC staff, ODFW staff, UNF and WNF staff engineers and permitting specialists, grazing managers, fisheries and wildlife biologists, and hydrologists. It seems that the next logical step would be to capture the impressive array of expertise into a more formal advisory group. This would help to ensure consistent use and most efficient application of relatively scarce resources.

**4. Provide a more complete discussion and definition of responsibilities and roles of various entities involved in North Fork John Day restoration, including the CTUIR Department of Natural Resources.**

The proponent's response summarizes some of the possibilities for mobilizing technical expertise needed for the project but falls short of actually indicating which linkages, if any, are in place and which are not. It is hoped that the BPA planning meeting, mentioned in the response, will result in effective linkages being established. While staffing resumes in the appendix are helpful, the proponent has not identified responsibilities and roles in the project organization or operational activities (i.e., a matrix of which person is response for each activity). It appears that there has been some improvement in defining some roles and responsibilities within CTUIR Natural Resources, particularly around monitoring and data management, and a general increase in coordination among the many restoration and management entities. As noted in the response (p. 22): *"A formal method of identifying specific priority restoration actions and project support for cooperative actions between cooperators and the NFJD Project has yet to be developed or adopted..."* Also, *"differing capacities allow for a natural division of labor while not precluding any cooperator from participating in all discussions pertinent to a single or multiple planning or implementation efforts."* Finally, the proponent offers (p. 22): *"Cooperators within the NFJD have made significant progress in developing relationships and defining mechanisms required for cooperative actions as well as securing staff or contractors with the appropriate technical background to provide technical support in undertaking proposed action."*

**5. Provide expected outputs/accomplishments for Deliverables 1, 2, 3, and 4.**

The proponent has provided a satisfactory response to this qualification. Regarding development of outputs for Deliverables 1 through 4, the proponent provides some additional details regarding specific planned activities and outputs. The proponent, however, continues to maintain that it is not possible or reasonable to be more specific or quantitative regarding these items. The ISRP continues to advise that it is possible to improve the descriptions of expected outputs and that the improved accountability is important for a variety of reasons, especially given the relatively large share of project funding involved.

**6. Provide information on data management that is responsive to the previous ISRP requests.**

*It is reassuring to learn that “The GIS/IT Program is taking a systematic approach to working with each project within the Dept. of Natural Resources at CTUIR. Through these working groups, standardized protocols for data collection, QA/QC protocols, and summarizing and reporting of information have been or will be created. .... Modules will be completed one at a time and while a date for final completion of data sets and related protocols have not been identified by the GIS/IT Department, CTUIR expects to have the entire system on line before the end of 2018. Completed data sets, such as the water temperature, will be available to the public as each is brought online.”*

In general, the discussion regarding data management is responsive to the ISRP request. The ISRP notes that “efforts are underway through CTUIR Information Technology and on-site data coordinator to standardize and improve data storage and documentation practices” (p. 21) and that a data coordinator has been hired recently. There is a six part data management strategy and the full system will be on line in 2018.

The ISRP requests clarification on the term “completed” in reference to data sets. By a “completed data set” do the proponents mean the end of acquisition as well as the establishment of the data on the web server?