

Priest Rapids Coordinating Committee (PRCC) Conference Call

Microsoft Teams
Tuesday, February 25, 2025
9:00 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.

Conference Call Minutes

PRCC Representatives, Alternates, and Facilitation

Tom Dresser, Rod O'Connor (Alt), Tim Taylor (Alt) GPUD Scott Carlon, Justin Yeager (Alt), NMFS Bill Gale, USFWS Chad Jackson, Andrew Murdoch (Alt), WDFW Kirk Truscott, Casey Baldwin (Alt), CTCR	Keely Murdoch, Brandon Rogers (Alt), YN Tom Lorz, CTUIR Clayton Buck, Wanapum Larissa Rohrbach, Anchor QEA, Facilitator Kristi Geris, Anchor QEA, Technical Support
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Meeting Attendees

Tom Dresser, GPUD Rod O'Connor, GPUD Tim Taylor, GPUD Scott Carlon, NMFS Bill Gale, USFWS Chad Jackson, WDFW Kirk Truscott, CTCR	Dennis Moore, CTCR Keely Murdoch, YN Tom Lorz, CTUIR Pete McHugh, CRITFC (CTUIR) Larissa Rohrbach, Anchor QEA, Facilitator Kristi Geris, Anchor QEA, Technical Support Denny Rohr, DRohr and Associates
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Action Items

- T. Lorz will provide an updated Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) PRCC Representation Designation Letter. *(Note: A letter designating T. Lorz as the CRITFC PRCC Representative and P. McHugh as the PRCC Alternate was distributed on March 17.)*
- L. Rohrbach will work with T. Dresser to identify proposed dates for a PRCC Policy Committee meeting, including a timeline for materials preparation, tentatively in the July to August 2025 time frame. *(This item is ongoing.)*
- Grant PUD will revise Quincy Valley Chamber of Commerce/Tourism Association's (Quincy's) 2025 Northern Pikeminnow Derby proposal, as discussed in the meeting. *(This item is ongoing.)*

- Grant PUD will share with Real Time Research (RTR) the PRCC-reviewed draft language for a new objective to develop a statistically and scientifically sound approach for better understanding population- and origin-specific avian predation rates and will invite RTR for a discussion at the PRCC March 25 meeting.
- K. Truscott will reach out to H. McLellan (Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation [CTCR]) about providing a draft PRCC No Net Impact (NNI) Funds Project Specification Sheet (NNI Funds Spec Sheet) for post-2025 Northern Pike Removal efforts, and any supporting materials, no later than March 15, for a decision at the PRCC March 25 meeting. (*Note: A draft NNI Funds Spec Sheet was distributed on March 17.*)

Review Items

- The draft report, *Calendar Year 2024 Activities Under Priest Rapids Hydroelectric Project License (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission [FERC] No. 2114)*, was distributed to the PRCC by K. Geris on February 27 and is available for a 30-day review with edits and comments due to T. Dresser by March 28.
- RTR's draft 2024 Avian Predation Annual Report and Appendix C were distributed to the PRCC by K. Geris on March 7 and are available for a 30-day review with edit and comments due to T. Dresser no later than April 7.
- The CTCR's draft PRCC NNI Funds Spec Sheet for "Northern Pike Suppression and Monitoring in the Upper Columbia River Above Chief Joseph Dam" was distributed to the PRCC by K. Geris on March 17.

Decisions and Approvals

- B. Gale and S. Carlon volunteered to be the agency spill representatives for the 2025 spill season.

I. Welcome, Announcements, Agenda Review, and Meeting Minutes Approval

L. Rohrbach reviewed the agenda. No additions or changes were requested by PRCC members, and the agenda was approved by all parties in attendance.

The draft January 13 PRCC conference call minutes were distributed by K. Geris on January 24. No edits were received. The draft minutes for approval were distributed on February 19. K. Murdoch provided clarifying edits on page 4. The minutes, as revised, were approved by members who attended that meeting. The CTCR abstained.

The draft January 28 PRCC conference call minutes were distributed by K. Geris on February 11. No edits were received. The only revisions were updates to action items. The revised minutes for approval were distributed on February 19. The minutes were approved by members who attended that meeting. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) abstained via email on February 18.

II. Actions Items Review

Action items from the PRCC January 28 conference call and follow-up discussions were as follows (*Note: Italicized text corresponds to agenda items from the January 28 conference call.*):

- *K. Truscott will verify the CTCR PRCC Policy Committee representation.*
A CTCR PRCC Policy Representation Designation Letter was distributed on February 7.
- *T. Lorz will provide an updated CRITFC PRCC Representation Designation Letter.*
This item is ongoing.
- *L. Rohrbach will work with T. Dresser to identify proposed dates for a PRCC Policy Committee meeting, including a timeline for materials preparation, tentatively in the July to August 2025 time frame.*
This item is ongoing.
- *K. Murdoch will draft language for a new objective to develop a statistically and scientifically sound approach for better understanding population- and origin-specific avian predation rates, for PRCC review, and discussion with RTR at the PRCC February 25 meeting.*
This draft language was distributed to the PRCC on February 18. Inviting RTR to today's meeting was postponed so the PRCC could first review and approve this language. This will be further discussed during today's conference call.
- *Anchor QEA will inform S. Carlon of PRCC's approval of RTR's 2025 Avian Predation Study proposal.*
This follow-up was completed on January 30.
- *Grant PUD will revise Quincy's 2025 Northern Pikeminnow Derby proposal, as discussed in the meeting.*
T. Dresser said this item is ongoing, but he did already share edits with Quincy, and no concerns or questions were expressed.
- *Anchor QEA will circle back with B. Gale and S. Carlon regarding interest in remaining the agency spill representatives for the 2025 spill season.*
B. Gale and S. Carlon volunteered to be the agency spill representatives for the 2025 spill season. P. McHugh asked what this role entails. T. Dresser said Grant PUD and agency spill representatives address minor issues that arise during the spill season and make short-term decisions in lieu of convening the entire PRCC. For example, brief 1- to 2-hour shutdowns of the bypass to repair breaks in the boat restriction zone or a brief shutdown of the spillway to deploy divers for maintenance. Grant PUD would convene the entire PRCC to address any issues requiring a longer outage. K. Murdoch said another key responsibility is reaching consensus on when to start and stop fish spill. T. Dresser agreed and said Grant

PUD monitors the migration and coordinates with agency spill representatives to ensure fish spill is provided and turbines are operated in fish mode for at least 95% of the run. S. Carlon reminded the PRCC that before juvenile bypasses were installed at both dams, Grant PUD spilled a lot during different spring and summer spill regimes, so this formerly required a more active team to make in-season decisions on spill and total dissolved gas management. Now, Grant PUD operates the same spill regime throughout the entire season.

III. RTR 2025 Avian Predation Work

L. Rohrbach recalled that last month, the PRCC approved RTR's 2025 proposal; however, there was concern about Rock Island Dam (RIS) not being a representative sample location as well as interest in using source fish consistent with other modeling efforts in the region (e.g., tagging fish in tributaries) to inform management of specific groups or populations. While RTR is accomplishing the objectives of the work to estimate avian predation rates on the general steelhead population passing through Grant PUD's project area, there is interest in capturing origin-specific information under a sub-objective. K. Murdoch provided draft language for a new sub-objective on February 18, as follows:

- Objective 4. Provide technical assistance to GPUD/PRCC in developing and adaptively managing short- and long-term plans to reduce avian predation on juvenile salmonids.

✓ *Task 4.1: Work with the PRCC to develop a statistical plan which makes use of passive detections at Rocky Reach Dam and the Wenatchee PIT tag barge to inform population and origin specific predation rates*

Deliverables: Research results would be presented in (1) an Annual Report, (2) periodic in season reports, (3) peer-reviewed journal articles, (4) a statistical plan to inform future analyses and tagging efforts and (4) presentations at regional planning meetings and other professional meetings.

L. Rohrbach said the idea is to obtain PRCC approval of this language, then share this proposed sub-objective with RTR and have RTR let the PRCC know what is reasonable and realistic.

K. Murdoch said her hope with this sub-objective is that RTR can provide the PRCC with information on what it would take to get population-specific data to help inform management decisions. The question at this time is, what does the PRCC need to do to pursue this further, and what can RTR do and not do (for instance, are realistic sample sizes achievable based on detection probabilities)? This is not a decision or commitment to do anything differently in the avian predation study at this point. The purpose is to extend the existing database of fish that could be used in analyses.

T. Dresser thanked K. Murdoch for this clarification, because last month he heard this

sub-objective was intended to move away from RIS as a source fish collection location. If this is just asking RTR to consider improvements, Grant PUD is supportive of this. He wants the administrative record to be very clear that this sub-objective does not mean moving away from RIS.

T. Taylor asked whether there will be a more detailed description of what this sub-objective entails to address expectations for a deliverable. What does the PRCC expect to receive? K. Murdoch said she tried to be consistent with the level of detail that is currently in this NNI Funds Spec Sheet, but she can help develop something more detailed if this is preferred. She envisioned this would be an analysis showing what information could be obtained by using passive detections, and RTR would work with the PRCC to develop a plan with methods showing how this would be done, what results are expected for power and precision, and what are the challenges. T. Taylor suggested conveying this to RTR in some form or another. P. McHugh said there should also be an opportunity to run this language by RTR before anything is finalized to make sure everything is understood. T. Dresser agreed and said Grant PUD is supportive of this language as written. Next steps are to share this language with RTR and make sure RTR has a clear idea of what the PRCC is requesting, then RTR needs to revisit the budget and develop a complete package for PRCC consideration.

L. Rohrbach asked for any other suggestions or edits. None were expressed. T. Dresser said he will share today's discussion with RTR, including the PRCC-reviewed draft language for a new sub-objective, and will invite RTR to further discuss this at the PRCC March 25 meeting.

T. Dresser added that he asked RTR about potential impacts to the project from any changes in federal funding. Oregon State University and RTR have a signed contract with Bonneville Power Administration for the 2025 work, and there has been no indication that funding will be retracted or unavailable. K. Truscott asked about U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) funding for the dissuasion effort. T. Dresser said Grant PUD has a meeting with BOR this Thursday, February 27, and plans to ask this same question. He knows U.S. Department of Agriculture services are in a hiring freeze for federal projects as of a couple weeks ago. That could impact Goose Island at the Potholes, N. Potholes, and Banks Lake dissuasion efforts.

IV. 2025-2027 Smolt Survival Study Updates

T. Dresser said he spoke with all PRCC representatives last week, except P. McHugh and T. Lorz, whom he reached via email. Grant PUD needs to defer the survival evaluations due to complications with the helicopter contract. This means yearling Chinook Salmon and steelhead will be studied in 2026, and Sockeye Salmon will be studied in 2027. All survival study release histories dating back to 2003 to 2004 were via

helicopters. This streamlines the fish transport and release process and produces consistent handling timings across test groups.

T. Dresser continued with additional explanation to address questions about what went wrong.

Grant PUD started the internal process back in July 2024, including detailing a scope, addressing safety and legal requirements, and working through the internal approval process up through the Executive Board. This was completed in September 2024. Compiling the bid package took most of October to November 2024, and the final package was posted on December 17, 2024. Grant PUD conducted outreach to potential bidders, including to those who have secured contracts with Grant PUD in the past. Grant PUD provided a heads up that this was coming and that this work is similar as in the past. Due to the holiday season, Grant PUD extended the bid deadline to January 7, 2025. Part of the bid process was a mandatory job walk on January 3, 2025, which gave bidders an opportunity to walk the site and have conversations about specific questions. As a result of the mandatory site walk, Grant PUD issued addenda in an effort to be responsive to all questions expressed. T. Dresser believes Grant PUD went to great lengths to make this bid package amenable to bidders. All three bidders who attended the site walk indicated interest in bidding. Grant PUD convened additional calls with bidders after the site walk. The official bid opening occurred on January 23, 2025, and no bids were received. Re-bidding was considered, but based on the time needed for the entire contracting process, this would mean bringing on a helicopter contract right when the study needed to start.

PRCC representatives also asked about what Grant PUD plans to do for next year. T. Dresser responded that the plan is to put out another bid for helicopter services consistent with past study plans. A lot was learned during this bid process, which will help next time. For example, Grant PUD has now worked through certain nuances in the insurance procurement process and cleaned up outdated equipment requirements in the contracting process. There were firms that wanted to bid but missed the mandatory site walk, so Grant PUD may do additional outreach to avoid this next time.

T. Dresser said, as another thing of note, he heard Grant PUD's equipment needs were competing with U.S. Forest Service needs, so the interest in being ready to respond to regional forest fires impacted bidders. T. Lorz said U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) experienced similar issues.

T. Lorz continued that given that forest fires will continue to be an issue, what is Plan B—truck or boat? T. Dresser agreed Grant PUD will put energy into having a legitimate backup plan for 2026.

R. O'Connor said this year, after all contracts were in place except a helicopter contract, Grant PUD did look hard into a Plan B, including truck and boat releases, both of which impart additional fish handling. He discussed this with Rebecca Buchanan (Buchanan Statistical Services), who said an estimate can be made of how much mortality is likely to occur due to additional handling, and then the sample size would need to be increased accordingly. This has ripple effects. This meant a need for more tags when contracts were already in place. If additional mortality is known up front, this meant possibly reconfiguring the detection arrays to detect this earlier in the study. This would have changed the study design in many ways. Therefore, the best option was to hit pause. Ideally, Grant PUD can get a helicopter contract in place. If there is a need to go to Plan B, there is a lot of work to do to refine this.

P. McHugh said Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) was somewhat planning on incorporating Grant PUD's study fish for their Lower Columbia River study. R. O'Connor said Grant PUD has not yet reached out to PNNL, but he agreed the next step is to reach out to others who may be impacted by this decision. *(Note: R O'Connor confirmed he reached out to Kenneth Ham [PNNL] on February 27.)*

B. Gale understands the preference for a helicopter contract, and he agrees with this determination. However, what are the check-ins to ensure the following: 1) getting ahead of a helicopter contracting plan; and 2) developing a Plan B if it is needed?

T. Dresser said that next month, Grant PUD will be working to get a helicopter contract bid back out. Grant PUD will continue providing monthly updates to the PRCC. By May or June 2025, it will be clearer whether a helicopter contract is realistic or whether a move to Plan B is necessary.

R. O'Connor said Grant PUD is also working toward verifying access to boat launches or locations to drop in and check on gear. The ability to access certain sites has changed since 2017, so Grant PUD is sorting out these logistics now. Grant PUD is also starting to build the logger assemblies. Completing these types of tasks now will help streamline everything in 2026.

V. PRCC Hatchery Subcommittee Update – White River Hatchery Program

L. Rohrbach said the PRCC Hatchery Subcommittee (HSC) is still working on the Expert Panel Reading List (bibliography) for the Expert Panel package. The final Expert Panel package will likely be ready for PRCC review next month. R. O'Connor said the PRCC HSC is convening separate meetings for White River topics to move this process along.

T. Dresser asked K. Murdoch her perspective about the PRCC HSC having a final Expert Panel package ready for PRCC review within a month. K. Murdoch said she hopes so, but there still are a few outstanding draft documents. T. Dresser said he is asking because the

Policy statement of agreement (SOA)¹ specifies deadlines in 2026. Grant PUD is supportive of a time extension, if needed, but this will also need to be approved by the Policy Committee. K. Murdoch believes the PRCC HSC is aware of the timeline, but requesting a time extension has not been considered. If this is an option, she does believe everyone wants a thoughtful Expert Panel process, and if this becomes rushed, this would be a problem.

L. Rohrbach shared excerpts from the Policy SOA, as follows:

White River is not feasible at this time. In order for Grant PUD to meet its Wenatchee spring Chinook salmon mitigation for the period from BY 2013 through BY 2026, the PRCC PC agrees to the following:

7) By 2026, the PRCC HSC will assess the need to restart a White River spring Chinook hatchery supplementation program by assembling all relevant technical information and overseeing an independent scientific review. The independent scientific review will consist of a panel of subject matter experts selected by the PRCC HSC who will address specific critical questions developed by the PRCC HSC. The expert panel will address the critical questions but will not have decision-making authority over the future of the White River spring Chinook program. Prior to initiating the independent scientific review, the PRCC will review and approve the framework and structure of the review. Once the framework and structure of the scientific review is approved by the PRCC, the review should be complete within one year.

K. Murdoch thinks it may be feasible to have an Expert Panel process implemented, completed, and have a recommendation from the panel before the end of 2026. However, she is uncertain how long it may take to get from an Expert Panel recommendation to a PRCC HSC decision. This could be quick, or it could be a lengthy process involving other committees, such as the Policy Committee. T. Dresser said he was thinking the same, and it is helpful to get K. Murdoch's perspective. He is starting to think of what might get in the way of an expedited decision, and when to start having discussions, such as a possible time extension, within the PRCC. The timing of a public outreach process is also a consideration. He also does not want to rush the process.

L. Rohrbach asked whether an SOA extension is something the PRCC would consider. She asked Grant PUD to consider what type of documentation they would need if 2026 deadlines cannot be achieved. She suggested continuing these monthly check-ins to determine the best path forward.

¹ *Priest Rapids Coordinating Committee - Policy Committee Statement of Agreement White River Spring Chinook Mitigation* (Policy Committee SOA 2013-01). Approved by the PRCC Policy Committee on February 8, 2013.

VI. 2024 Fish Passage Operations Report

A. Fish Ladder Inspections

T. Dresser said annual winter maintenance is ongoing at both plants. One ladder at each plant remains in service for Bull Trout passage. Grant PUD is once again contracting with Four Peaks Environmental Science and Data Solutions to provide fish counts during the salmon and steelhead passage season.

B. Fish Spill Updates

No updates were shared.

C. Adult Fish Counts for 2024 (April 15 to November 15)

Adult salmon and steelhead passage is complete for 2024. No updates were shared.

Project	Spring Chinook Salmon (Adult + Jack) ^a	Summer Chinook Salmon (Adult + Jack) ^b	Fall Chinook Salmon ^c	Sockeye Salmon	Coho Salmon	Steelhead
Priest Rapids	15,720	40,766	31,032	699,785	38,653	9,746
Wanapum	16,810	37,622	16,279	697,922	28,281	9,197
Rock Island	15,676	44,621	10,974	728,872	26,395	8,827

Notes:

a: Chinook counted from April 15 to June 13 are considered spring Chinook Salmon.

b: Chinook counted from June 14 to August 13 are considered summer Chinook Salmon.

c: Chinook counted after August 14 are considered fall Chinook Salmon.

UPDATES

VI. Review of Outstanding NNI-Funded Projects

- **Lower Wenatchee Instream Flow Enhancement Project Phase II**

An update was distributed on February 18, as follows: *Per U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service PRCC Habitat Subcommittee Representative Kate Terrell, USACE took 5 months to determine that a 404 Permit was not required. Because of this delay, the sponsor, Trout Unlimited, decided to push most of the work to fall 2025. The sponsor has purchased most of the materials for the project. The sponsor is hoping to install a portion of the project after the snowmelt but before the irrigation season.*

L. Rohrbach noted that the irrigation season in this area starts on April 15.

- **Northern Pike Removal (2022 to 2024)**

K. Truscott said H. McLellan can attend the PRCC March 25 meeting. He will let her know about providing a draft NNI Funds Spec Sheet for post-2025 Northern Pike Removal efforts and any supporting materials no later than March 15 if seeking a decision at the PRCC March 25 meeting to continue funding the work. L. Rohrbach recalled that H. McLellan already provided a robust presentation on post-2025 work during the PRCC December 16, 2024, meeting, so an additional

presentation would not be expected, but being present to answer questions about the proposal would be helpful. *(Note: a draft NNI Funds Spec Sheet was distributed on March 17.)*

- **WDFW PIT-Tag Detection Barge**
Preliminary update in spring 2025 (TBD).
- **2025 Quincy Northern Pikeminnow Derby**
Next update after June 2025.
- **2025 RTR Avian Predation Study**
(Covered above)

VII. Annual Progress and Implementation Report

T. Dresser said a draft annual progress and implementation report will soon be distributed for a PRCC 30-day review. This will be coming from Evelyn Zepeda (Grant PUD). *(Note: The draft report, Calendar Year 2024 Activities Under Priest Rapids Hydroelectric Project License [FERC No. 2114], was distributed to the PRCC by K. Geris on February 27 and is available for a 30-day review with edits and comments due to T. Dresser by March 28.)*

VIII. Subcommittee Updates

K. Geris will continue to forward subcommittee notes and materials to PRCC members and alternates.

- Priest Rapids Fish Forum – met February 5, next meeting March 5.
- Habitat Subcommittee – met February 13, next meeting March 13.
- Fall Chinook Work Group – met October 8, next meeting May 6.
- Hatchery Subcommittee – met February 19 to 20, next meeting March 19 to 20.

IX. SOAs Discussed in 2025

SOA number	Key Words	Last Discussed	Status
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X. Next Meetings

The next PRCC meeting will be on Tuesday, March 25, 2025, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., to be held in-person at the Confluence Technology Center in Wenatchee, Washington. There will be a virtual option. A joint session with the HCP-CC for a Subyearling Chinook Salmon Workshop Recap (Joint Session 4) will be held from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. (schedule TBD).

XI. Subyearling Workshop Recap (Joint Session 3 with HCP-CC)

The PRCC and HCP-CC convened Joint Session 3 to discuss the 2024 Subyearling Chinook Salmon Workshop (see separate joint session minutes).