

APPLICANT RESPONSE TO ISRP COMMENTS

PROJECT 31019 Fish Passage Assessment and Prioritization Program
APPLICANT Washington County Department of Land Use & Transportation
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Applicants Note: ISRP comments in *italicized* print

It should be noted that the assessment and prioritization proposal consists of three components: barrier analysis, habitat value, and transportation factors. As initially proposed, the barrier analysis would be performed via the USFS method; habitat value information would be primarily determined through existing ODFW data and field biologists; transportation issues will be evaluated based on culvert condition, scheduled maintenance and capital improvements as well as project cost to determine the final ranked lists of barriers for removal. The applicant is open to new methods and techniques and is appreciative of the opportunity to further review and modify the proposal to incorporate reviewer comments.

The plan for assessing and prioritizing fish passage barriers makes efficient use of time and information. However, the concept of habitat quality above barriers, which is one of the assessment criteria, needs to be more thoroughly discussed. Applicants should meet with ODFW staff to determine the habitat and fish data that are available and enlist ODFW assistance in assessing habitat quality during the project. Telephone conversations with Cedric Cooney, ODFW's Natural Resources Information Management Program & Oregon StreamNet Project Leader, indicates that the ODFW fish habitat distribution data would be the best data source for the initial habitat value assessments. This information essentially ignores any correctable barriers when evaluating population presence or absence potential. This data is readily available in GIS and datasets through StreamNet in a format that is compatible with Washington County's systems. Mr. Cooney also directed the applicant to ODFW's Aquatic Habitat Inventory Project <http://osu.orst.edu/Dept/ODFW/freshwater/inventory/index.htm>. The project assesses aquatic habitat, conducts fish presence/absence surveys, monitors fish populations, establishes salmonid watershed prioritization, monitors habitat restoration projects, and reconstructs historical salmonid life history. There are surveys of some, but not all, of the streams within the Tualatin Watershed. The majority of surveys are located within the western portion of the watershed in which the initial 5th field HUCs to be assessed are located. The Inventory project has a wealth of reference materials on conducting stream surveys, interpreting data, and report generation. Of additional value is a modified version of the survey methodology focused towards watershed councils, local interested groups, and private citizens. This modification allows non-professionals to gather relevant, accurate data for inclusion into the large database for use by others. This public – private cooperation in data collection and distribution is one of the keystones of the applicants program. Further conversations with Mr. Cooney focused on the collaborative process between the applicant and the agency. Due to increased State workload and decreased budgetary resources, ODFW staff prefer that we use the existing available data for the first assessment of habitat quality, once a prioritized list of barriers is generated, ODFW should be requested to review the smaller list of specific stream reaches for habitat value and fish presence. Upon receipt of their input, barrier rankings are likely to change accordingly. Procedurally this fits well with the distribution and comment phase of the assessments. Initially, the draft list of ranked barriers was to be distributed to the Tualatin River Watershed Council, the Soil and Water Conservation

District, and the Tualatin Riverkeepers for input regarding privately owned barriers; ODFW staff can be easily added to the distribution list.

An additional consideration is whether migratory fish historically could access the area above the culvert. Telephone conversations with Charlie Corrarino, ODFW Fish Passage Coordinator, regarding historic presence or absence of fish species within the watershed, indicate that the limiting factors for migratory fish passage are natural and man made barriers. It is likely, he reported, that migratory fish have been historically present in all the stream reaches that do not have a natural barrier. These natural barriers, predominantly falls, are identified on ODFW's barrier database. This information will be incorporated into the ODFW reviewer comments for the selected high priority barriers. Telephone conversations with Jim Muck, ODFW Fish Biologist indicate a willingness to review the draft high priority barrier list and to assist developing the habitat value ranking criteria for final project list. Of concern to Mr. Muck is the potential for project selection of high priority barriers that have unknown up or downstream barriers. His recommendation is to perform stream walks for the finalists, and if other barriers exist, either remove all the barriers on the specific reach or lower the ranking for the barrier. He also stated a willingness to support additional non-BPA funding requests for small grant dollars that would fund a fish biologist to perform the final habitat assessments and stream walks for high priority barriers.

Indigenous, genetically unique stocks that have been isolated for many years could exist above the barriers. Charlie Corrarino stated that any isolated unique stocks are rare within the watershed, but if they exist, would be above natural barriers. They are willing, during the review and comment phase of the program to attempt to verify the presence or absence of such fish for the high priority barriers. Additionally, Mr. Corrarino mentioned that the recently passed Oregon House Bill 3002 specifically states that barriers shall not be removed that impact those genetically unique stocks.

The proposers should review culvert assessment protocols developed in Washington "Fish Passage Barrier and Surface Water Diversion Screening Assessment and Prioritization Manual (WDFW 2000) and other projects (e.g. project 27022 in the Grand Ronde Subbasin) to see if methods already developed are applicable to the Tualatin. The applicant previously reviewed the WDFW process, which is most impressive, however some of the key attributes and datasets utilized by Washington are not pertinent to the Tualatin Watershed. While both methodologies collect, analyze, and distribute habitat value information, Washington's version cannot be placed in context within the ODFW or Tualatin models. The Washington model is very formula driven and customization may lead to impaired results. It includes factors for species that do not reside within the Tualatin River and requires data input for attributes that are not currently available in the Tualatin Watershed. Additionally, the Washington model does not include any factors for transportation issues other than project cost. As mentioned earlier, a tertiary goal of the proposal is to develop a barrier assessment methodology that can be used by the watershed council, friends groups, and other private landowners. The full site survey methodology is extremely exacting and time-consuming and requires a high level of technical and data analysis skills that may preclude its use by non-professionals.

Review of Project 27022 (Grand Ronde) has led to some exciting possibilities and partnerships. The proposal utilizes the same USFS barrier assessment methodology as the applicant, and they (27022) reached similar conclusions regarding ease, accuracy, and repeatability of data that result from use of this method. Of note is the one-week training seminar provided each year by the Forest Service to train the field technicians contained within the cost share component of the Nez Perce proposal. Telephone conversations with the PI (Jack Yearout, Nez Perce Tribal Fisheries) have resulted in an invitation (pending funding) to participate in this valuable training. Staff training for the applicants is included in the budget (\$2,275.50), utilizing the training opportunity afforded by the USDA/USFS on behalf of the Grand Ronde proposal will result in cost savings as well as develop relationships between the two agencies. The applicants have spoken regarding working collaboratively on database structure, prioritization methodology and, pending funding approval, plan on continuing the collaboration to further reduce proposal cost to the BPA.

Consequently, the response should justify why development of a new handbook is necessary. The applicants' proposal includes development of an inspection protocol handbook for use in the field. In substance, as the applicant is utilizing several different methodologies (barrier, habitat, structural) the handbook is meant to capture the key elements necessary to perform the field surveys and data entry (data entry will be in the field). It is not meant to be inclusive of all the needs of the program, rather as a "hands on" working manual with graphics, pictures, and examples of barriers and techniques. The handbook may be available electronically on field computers rather than as a hard copy, dependent upon file size. One of the benefits of the chosen methodologies is the ability for private landowners and other interested parties to collect information regarding private road stream crossings for inclusion in the database. The hard copy version will be distributed to the local groups, it is optional for the private landowners to forward the gathered data, but they will be better informed regarding activities on their property that may impact fish passage and habitat. This handbook would also be available for use by project 27022 as part of their inspection protocol and could be of value to the recently formed Oregon Fish Passage Technical Advisory Committee.

In summary, the ISRP comments have led the applicant to sources that have added value to the proposal by providing more detailed coordination between the applicant and ODFW. Review of the Nez Perce proposal has resulted in exciting partnership opportunities and the potential to reduce overall program costs to the applicants and BPA. The applicant is appreciative of the insightful review and comments provided by the ISRP and are looking forward to working on this or other future proposals with them.