



**Priest Rapids Fish Forum  
 Conference Call**

**Thursday, 26 March 2020  
 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.**

**Call-In Number: 1-800-977-8002, Bridge: 6958211**

**FINAL MINUTES**

**PRFF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Steve Lewis, USFWS <sup>1</sup>	Patrick Verhey, Laura Heironimus, WDFW
Ralph Lampman, YN	Breean Zimmerman, WDOE
Pat Wyena, Wanapum	Aaron Jackson, Carl Merkle, CTUIR
Kirk Truscott, Jason McLellan, CCT	Keith Hatch, BIA
Mike Clement, Chris Mott, Grant PUD	Tom Skiles, CRITFC/CTUIR
Tracy Hillman, Facilitator	Erin Harris, Grant PUD

**ATTENDEES**

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RD Nelle, USFWS	Donella Miller, YN
Mike Clement, Grant PUD	Patrick Verhey, WDFW
Tom Skiles, CRITFC/CTUIR	Ralph Lampman, YN
Chris Mott, Grant PUD	Jason McLellan, CCT
Erin Harris, Grant PUD	Laura Heironimus WDFW
Tracy Hillman, Facilitator	

**Action Items:**

- Members will continue to work on the draft white sturgeon autoploidy guidance document, which will be distributed to the PRFF before the 6 May meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Lewis was unable to participate on the call but approved decision items following the meeting.

- I. **Welcome and Introductions** - Tracy Hillman welcomed everyone to the call and participants introduced themselves.
- II. **Agenda Review** – Members reviewed and approved the agenda with no additions.
- III. **Approve March Meeting Notes** – Draft March Meeting Notes were reviewed and approved with edits.
  - A. **Review Action Items from March Meeting**
    - 1. Laura Heironimus will send the ODFW 2018 adult white sturgeon tagging report to the PRFF. **Complete.**
    - 2. Tracy Hillman will send the draft white sturgeon autoploidy guidance document to members for editing and input. Edits and additions are due back to Tracy by Friday, 27 March. **Complete. Members are still working on the draft guidance document.**
    - 3. Mike Clement will send to Tracy Hillman possible dates for a fishway tour. **Postponed to a later date because of COVID-19.**
    - 4. Mike Clement will send the final 2019 Bull Trout M&E Plan Annual report to Tracy Hillman, who will then distribute it to the PRFF. **Complete.**

IV. **White Sturgeon Management Plan**

- A. **Update on Juvenile Rearing** – Donella Miller said the juvenile sturgeon at the Yakama Nation Sturgeon Hatchery are doing well. She noted they are holding additional fish from each family group to ensure the target release number can be achieved.

**Juvenile Marking, Tagging, and Screening** – Chris Mott reported that delivery of the Coulter Counter, which is used to test sturgeon for spontaneous autoploidy (SA), is delayed indefinitely because of manufacturing issues in Malaysia associated with COVID-19. As a result, it is unlikely Grant PUD will be able to acquire the Coulter Counter in time to screen juveniles on station at the Yakama Nation Sturgeon Hatchery this spring. Chris Mott and Donella Miller recommended the PRFF agree to move forward with tagging and releasing the one maternal group that tested negative for SA. Recall that there are five maternal groups rearing at the hatchery and four of the five groups tested positive for low levels of SA. Given that the PRFF agreed unanimously earlier this year to release only 8N fish into the project area, and the fact that fish within the four maternal groups with low levels of SA cannot be tested this spring (other possible testing facilities are currently closed because of COVID-19), the release of the one maternal group appears to be the only reasonable option at this time. Laura Heironimus asked how many of the one maternal group that tested negative for SA were screened. Mike Clement said 100 fish were tested (two separate samples of 50 fish each) and no fish within this group tested positive for SA. Tracy Hillman asked members present if they agree to mark, tag, and release only those juvenile sturgeon within the one maternal group that tested negative for SA. The number released into the project area will follow the current Priest Rapids Project White Sturgeon Stocking Program for Population Rebuilding, Mitigation, and Enhancement SOA. All members present agreed to the release of the one maternal group that tested negative for SA this spring. Donella said she will work with Grant PUD on the marking, tagging, and release of these fish.

Chris and Donella recommended that the remaining four family groups remain on station for an indefinite period of time. The fate of these fish will be linked directly to restrictions associated with COVID-19 and rearing/holding limitations at the Yakama Nation Sturgeon Hatchery. If CDC guidance and policy-level decisions do not allow for the collection of broodstock this year, juveniles within the four maternal groups that remain on station will be

screened (once the Coulter Counter arrives), marked, tagged, and released this year or next year in the event broodstock cannot be collected. If crews are allowed to fish for broodstock and are successful collecting broodstock, the juveniles within the four maternal groups may be destroyed because of limitations at the hatchery. That is, juveniles and adult broodstock cannot be held safely at the same time at the hatchery because of rearing/holding limitations. If broodstock cannot be collected, Donella said there will be enough room at the hatchery to hold juveniles from the four maternal groups until they are released this year or next. She said if the fish are held until next year, there would need to be an adjustment on the number released because two-year-old fish have a higher survival rate than one-year-old fish. Tom Skiles asked if the release of the one maternal group will free up enough space for holding broodstock. Donella said no, because it would only provide enough space for two adults. Laura asked if the fish could be released this summer or fall. Mike indicated that fish released during the fall may have a lower survival rate. Jason McLellan noted that age-0 fish may have a lower survival rate when released during the fall; however, older fish released during the fall may have a higher survival rate. He indicated that survival was most likely related to size at release, but there could be regional differences. Chris said at this time, we cannot predict what will happen; however, Grant PUD is planning to collect broodstock this year unless told otherwise. Tracy asked members present if they agree to hold on station the four maternal groups that have a low level of SA until the PRFF knows whether or not broodstock can be collected this year. All members present agreed to hold the fish on station at the Yakama Nation Sturgeon Hatchery.

- B. **Update on 2020 Broodstock Collection** – Chris Mott reported that Grant PUD is planning to collect broodstock this year unless CDC guidance and policy-level decisions preclude broodstock collection this year. Laura Heironimus said WDFW would be supportive of not collecting broodstock this year if the COVID-19 social distancing is still in effect (safety first). Grant PUD has applied for the collection permits. Broodstock collection is scheduled to begin around 25 May depending on river temperature. The PRFF will discuss this further during their May meeting.
- C. **Guidance Document on Sturgeon Autopolyploidy (SA)** – Tracy Hillman reported that he received some edits from Chelan PUD on the SA guidance document. He has incorporated those into the guidance document. Tracy said he worked with Chris Mott on identifying sample sizes for initial screening. In general, sample sizes are lower for initial screening of natural-origin larvae than they are for hatchery-origin larvae. The reason for this is because there is a lower incidence of SA in natural-origin fish than in hatchery-origin fish. Tracy said he reached out to Jason McLellan, Chad Jackson, and Laura Heironimus about completing their sections of the guidance document. Given the current situation with COVID-19, they have not yet had time to complete their sections. They will work on those over the next 2-3 weeks. Tracy hopes to have the draft report available for review before the May meeting.
- D. **Other White Sturgeon Items** – None.

- V. **Next Meeting:** The next meeting of the PRFF will be on Wednesday, 6 May 2020 at the Grant PUD Natural Resources Office in Wenatchee.