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Minutes of Meeting:

April 13, 2004

9:30 AM to 4:00 PM
Airport Inn
Port Hardy

Present : Doug McCorquodale, Sandie McLaurin, Rick Routledge, Michael Rough, David Stevenson, Gary Taccogna, Bruce Burrows, Jonathan Hepples

Review and confirmation of Agenda

The agenda was introduced by the Chair, David Stevenson. It was agreed to change the agenda in order to accommodate Bruce Burrow's late arrival.

Agenda items and Discussion

1. **Enhancement & Assessment Discussion Paper**

Sandie presented a discussion paper on enhancement and assessment decision rules developed by the DFO staff. Decision Rule #1 states that there is no intervention if a) escapement to each basin is at 50% of the management target and b) escapement to each stock within the basin is at 30% or more of what its historic % contribution to the LRP would be.

Decision Rule 2 states that there would be specific stock intervention in 2004 if the escapement to each basin is between LRP and 50% of management escapement target and only with the individual stocks that are at or below 30% of LRP level

There was some discussion of the management targets for both Long Lake and Owikeno Lake. It was pointed out that the management target for Owikeno sockeye was 435,000 not 200,000.

Decision rule #3 states that standard intervention would be triggered when LRP escapement levels are not met but levels above captive brood triggers. Each of these rules was discussed. Discussion focused on the Snootli hatchery capacity to handle an increased egg take and its rearing capacity. Capacity could be increased by doubling up on the number of females per tray. Jonathan expressed some concern that we might lose some genetic integrity if we go to full capacity at Snootli. Gary suggested that we should not use individual stocks to trigger a captive brood intervention but use a composite stock assessment.

There was some discussion on the need to assess effectiveness of the egg take strategy by a mark recapture program in the Inziana , the Ambock, (Qvapx)_ and the Neechanz. Jonathan suggested the establishment of a broomstick fence at the mouth of the Genesee Creek to facilitate the counting of returning fish. The location of the fence was discussed and the need to electrify it to discourage bears and the costs. If money were to come from the RSSEPS budget then this project

would have to be approved by the general membership. Russ has indicated that he would prefer to stay with the same level of egg take as last year's program. Jonathan said that there were two main concerns; one is it to make sure that the fish populations don't get too low, and the second was to assess the effectiveness of these interventions.
Gary suggested that we should not increase the egg take without knowing the results of previous years interventions so we should stay with last years program in terms of number of eggs taken. DFO budget cuts mean that there will be fewer resources available to do the egg take. The priority is to assess the effect of previous year's interventions. The budget for Stock Assessment for areas 7 - 10 has been cut by 70%. As a result there will be no monitoring of indicator stocks on the Central Coast. AFS budgets are also being reduced this year. The PST funds are not released or identified yet, however they are reducing programs if they have no First Nations interest, no commercial interest and no international interest.
There was further discussion of the Decision Rules for Enhancement and the capacity of the Snootli Hatchery. The Limited Reference Point or LRP is arrived at by calculating the habitat capacity and the rearing capacity of the system plus historic escapement data. The DFO is still waiting for the Wild Salmon Policy to be finalized. There was some discussion on the probability of error calculations at 20% and at 50%. This was explained and it is understood that there will never be a lot of precision when it comes to estimates of fish numbers. As a result there is a preference for using the lower of the two probability numbers in determining the number of otolith samples required for a good assessment. The analysis of each otolith costs $8. An increased dead pitch to recover more otoliths would require more funds for the crew estimated to be about $7,000.

There was further discussion on what the impacts of a reduced DFO budget would be on this year's field activities. If the priority is to assess the results of previous egg takes then there will be less money available for this years egg take.
Rick suggested that you would get a better quality indicator by assessing a larger number of creeks. The assessment effort will of course depend on the run size. What is important is to get the numbers that hatchery fish contribute to the whole escapement. It will be necessary to get 800 to 1000 otoliths out of the whole system.
Action: Sandie will put together an assessment proposal for consideration by the whole of the RSSEPS membership.

There was a general discussion on the logistics of assessing more creeks rather than focusing on just a few. The proposal will be to do a complete assessment of the Inziana and as much of the rest of the system as possible.

2. **The Terms of Reference for the TAC**.
The Terms of Reference for the Technical Advisory Committee have been previously circulated and amended. All members present at the meeting signed off on the terms of reference.

3. **Hydro Acoustic Enumeration of the Wannock River**
Jonathan informed us the George Cronkite has been directed by the DFO to focus his attention on the Fraser River and consequently George will not be available to operate the hydro-acoustic system on the Wannock this year. George feels that the program can go operational this year that is it would no longer be considered as an experiment. George would be available to help set it up. There is an opportunity for either the Wuikinuxv or the RSEEPS t o take over the ownership and operation of the equipment. There was some discussion on the merits of the hydro-acoustic system as an enumeration tool. Jonathan reported that George had analyzed all previous data and had worked out a system to deal with the fish that hold or mill in the river. George has agreed to meet with the RSSEPS members to answer any questions on the project. The cost to purchase the equipment is around $150,000 also there would need to be some training so that the data could be collected and interpreted correctly. The Wuikinuxv provided a staff person last year who may be available for more training. The data analysis can be done by someone else.
Jonathan pointed out that the project should go through PSARC in order to get their approval on the quality of the data collected so that it will have some scientific validity. Stream walks would still be necessary each year to augment the data collected by the hydro acoustic. The data provided by the hydro acoustic can be a valuable fisheries management tool. The data collected can by used as an index not as a valid abundance count. We need an explanation of the big discrepancy between George's numbers and the estimates from the stream walks. Gary pointed out that the only program that survived the DFO budget cuts is the sockeye program. The vessel sounding program will still be necessary to determine species composition but may be eliminated if the hydro acoustic proves to be reliable. There are two issues to consider: how effective is the Hydro acoustic as an early indicator of escapement numbers and would it not be better to complete the 3 year project in order to get a god assessment of the method. George believes it can be set up and operated this year with his help.
Action: Arrange for George to meet with the full RSSEPS memberships as soon as possible.

4. **Feasibility Study for A hatchery at Oweekeno**

Bruce reported that had conferred with Brian Riddell and Al Wood on the feasibility of a hatchery at Oweekeno. The cost of a feasibility study may be as much as $50,000. Bruce asked the question: if fishing pressures increase on a mixed enhanced/wild stock it can damage the wild stocks but with Wannock chinook the fishing pressure can be controlled so would enhanced stocks not act as a buffer to the wild stocks?
If Wannock chinook are species of concern would enhanced stock in fact protect the wild stocks? If enhanced fish are held in lake pens, they would not compete with the wild fry for food. Bruce wants to answer the question would a hatchery be good or bad for Wannock Chinook.

There was a general discussion on the hatchery issue. Wannock chinook are already enhanced at the Snootli hatchery , and some are marked. It might be better to starts with an assessment of how these enhanced fish presently interact with the wild stocks. We should see what results we get from the mark recapture this year. There is a need for more funding to increase the dead pitch count for this year. The AFS portion which was budgeted at $20,000 will not be available this year.
There was some discussion about what percentage of Wannock chinook are caught in other fisheries like Hakai Pass. Sandie has data on tags collected over the years which she will provide. Bruce also expressed some concern about Wannock chum and their recent decline and the state of the gravel in the Spring Pool.

5. **Other projects for 2004**
The project to examine the effect of removing the large woody debris from the Machmell flats has been approved. A detailed proposal is being prepared by the DFO. Bruce reported on a Community Mapping Workshop that he took. It would be a good thing to do mapping of Wannock estuary for example. Further discussion followed on the 2004 projects. The PSF like to see their financial contribution leverage other money.

The project to review the escapement data was discussed. The proposal was to focus on the critical habitat issue and try to determine the freshwater carrying capacity of the system. It should go out as an RFP
Action: Doug will do the terms of reference for this one.

The limnology study was discussed. Water samples are usually taken during the summer. The plankton composition is analyzed to determine the level of nutrients available in the lake. Wuikinuxv crew could do this. It is done at night because that is when the plankton rise to the surface.
All the projects should be presented at the next meeting of the RSSEPS and then project leads should be identified. The Long Lake chinook study needs more detail.
Action: Jonathan, Doug and Gary will to the Terms of References for this one.
The Docee Fence project was discussed. Doug asked for $10,000 from the RSSEPS to pay for 2 GNN members to do further training on the fence. Likewise, the dead pitch on the Inziana and the Amback Creeks was further discussed. It will need 2 additional people for 10 days. Doug suggested that the RSSEPS contribute $25,000 to this increased dead pitch project.
Action Sandie will do the budget for this project.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00. A meeting of the full RSSEPS will be convened on Wednesday April 21 in Vancouver.
Minutes recorded by David Stevenson