

Trinity River Restoration Program

Joint TMC/TAMWG Meeting

May 15, 2014

Key themes from meeting and facilitator observations

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Overview of the Meeting

On May 15, 2014, two official bodies of the Trinity River Restoration Program (TRRP), the Trinity Management Council (TMC), and the Trinity Adaptive Management Working Group (TAMWG), met to discuss a range of issues related to the TRRP, and how the two bodies interact.

The agenda items for the day evolved from a list of requests, questions and concerns the TAMWG had for the TMC about TRRP efforts. During the joint meeting, the group's discussions did not proceed topic-by-topic, but instead moved around, touching on many topics. The difficulty in addressing and closing discussion on one topic before beginning another was likely due to at least three factors. First, the framing and description of the issues of concern were such that there were many overlapping and inter-related issues, many of which are highly technical, making it difficult to discuss issues one-at-a-time. This complexity is not uncommon for natural resource management and policy questions.

A second factor which may have been an obstacle to concise discussions and decisive outcomes is that there are some fundamental disagreements about what the nature, scope and focus of the TRRP is and should be. With general disagreement about the goals of the program, it is difficult to have productive discussions about specific strategies. Indeed, perspectives on the nature and goals of the TRRP became the common thread throughout the discussions of the day, and some more specific notes on this are included below.

A third factor which may have inhibited open and productive discussions is that different subsets of stakeholders, some of which serve on the TAMWG, have organized additional ad-hoc coalitions and groups which have issued requests to regulatory officials and press releases to media about TRRP efforts. Extant distrust between some of the members of the TAMWG and TMC may have been heightened by the risk of discussions being recast and broadcast publicly to advance specific agendas. In other words, that some are stepping outside of TMC/TAMWG meetings and processes to try to influence decisions, may have diminished the legitimacy and safety of the public forum of the joint TMC/TAMWG meeting as a place to be forthcoming and to engage wholeheartedly in group problem solving.

Despite these challenges, after the meeting, several participants commented that the meeting was an improvement over recent meetings and interactions between some TMC and TAMWG members, as discussions were mostly respectful and some felt that some answers were provided to long-standing questions.

Nonetheless, the group was only able to discuss a portion of the items on the agenda. Even for those items discussed, few action items or specific conclusions resulted from the day's deliberations. Therefore, this summary does not attempt to catalog in detail the discussions of the day, and instead seeks to comment on the tone of the meeting, key themes that arose, and the challenges that may inhibit productive, open discussions between the TAMWG and the TMC.

Key themes from the day

Different goals for the TRRP

There are strong differences of opinion about the goals and desired outcomes of the TRRP. There is broad recognition of the TRRP's formally mandated goal to restore salmon populations to pre-dam levels. Many question whether this goal is achievable. Many question the likelihood returning salmon population to pre-dam levels when 109 miles of the river were available for spawning and habitat, while now only 40 miles of the river remains accessible and useful for salmon spawning and maturation. Though this characterization is frequently cited, it is not completely accurate, as the hatchery is among the strategies of restoring populations above the dam, and the TRRP is focused on the waters below the Lewiston dam. This is illustrative of the confusion around the nature and scope of the program.

Even when TMC/TAMWG members cast TRRP success more generally as improving and expanding salmon habitat, and restoring natural river processes, there are strong disagreements about how the TRRP should focus its efforts. Some, including TRRP program staff, feel that the purview and charge of the TRRP is described quite clearly in the enabling legislation such that TRRP restoration activities are limited to the main-stem of the Trinity River and those areas directly affected by the dam. Others feel very strongly that the only way to achieve greater salmon populations and river health is to address the Trinity watershed more holistically, including restoration/enhancement programs in the tributaries and in the South Fork of the Trinity.

An abstract, graphic depiction of this disconnect was developed in the meeting: two concentric circles, one larger circle in black ink representing the whole of the watershed, and a smaller blue circle representing the scope of the TRRP authority. This characterization may have been useful in a limited way. While there remained notable differences about what the priorities of the TRRP are and should be, TMC and TAMWG members were able to agree that there are many valid and needed strategies to improve the health and the productivity of the Trinity River, that some of these will fall under the purview of the TRRP, and the rest require coordination of the TRRP with the efforts of other agencies, nations (Yurok and Hoopa), advocacy organizations and users.

Different interpretations of program success

Some, especially those relying on direct experience and observation while on-the-river, feel that TRRP programs are not resulting in stronger and larger salmon populations. Instead, some report that well established fishing holes are being disrupted and displaced by gravel introduction, experimental flow regimes and other restoration efforts, and that other places suitable for mature salmon are not developing.

By contrast, those studying the river and the effects of the restoration programs point to data that the system is undergoing intended changes, and that much more time is needed before the full effects and benefits of the restoration efforts will be apparent.

While those in attendance did not reach agreement about the nature of interim and near-term success of restoration efforts, all agreed on the importance of public and stakeholder understanding of why and how the Trinity River is changing, and greater clarity about the goals of the program.

Importance of coordinated public outreach

All acknowledged that the evaluation and criticism of a public program such as the TRRP is a valid pursuit. Some described the risk of critical and/or poorly understood information coming from subsets of the TRRP, resulting in the erosion trust in the program in the eyes of the public or elected officials, which may further inhibit success, and in turn open the program to more criticism. Both TMC and TAMWG members spoke of not wanting to quash criticism and evaluation of the program, but to find ways to avoid this negative feedback loop which could potentially threaten the viability of the whole program.

Participants acknowledged that ideally, and if greater trust develops, the TMC and TAMWG can speak openly and in a coordinated fashion about the successes and challenges of the TRRP. In addition, the participants agreed to the development or re-development of some operating protocols for the TAMWG, including guidance for dealing with disagreement and information requests to the TRRP/TMC.

Need for renewed Operating Protocols

Those in attendance agreed a useful step will be the development of some new Operating Protocols for the TAMWG which describe generally the mission, structure and function of the TAMWG, and more specifically, how to handle requests for information to the TRRP and TMC. Elizabeth Hadley, co-chair of TAMWG, agreed to draft the first set of protocols for group review.

Understanding and addressing public concerns

Group discussion highlighted the importance of general understanding in the public of the TRRP and its restoration programs. It was suggested that existing surveys and information regarding key questions from the public/users be re-circulated so that TMC and TAMWG members may review these themes and work toward coordinated, meaningful responses to key public concerns and questions. Jeff Morris agreed to take the lead on collating and circulating this material.

Agreements in principle

The group affirmed the following agreements in principle

- 1) All members (TMC and TAMWG) want to see the TRRP achieve success (though definitions of success may vary!)
- 2) Everyone has a role in public and stakeholder outreach

And; until more specific protocols are developed, the members agree to:

- 3) Work to identify where there is agreement about TRRP goals and strategies
- 4) Where there is disagreement, work together to seek answers and solutions
- 5) Work together for effective public and stakeholder outreach, avoiding using the media and processes outside the TRRP, for now (until trust improves and/or more specific operating protocols are developed)

Summary:

- Strong differences of opinion about the goals and desired outcomes of the TRRP significantly hinder how the TRRP should move forward with restoration efforts.
 - This leads to misunderstandings of what near-term and long-term successes for the Program.
 - The greatly contributes to the confusion in the public understanding of the TRRP.
- Activities outside the prevue of the TRRP but influence the success of the program require coordination by the TRRP with the efforts of other agencies.

- Greater trust needs to be developed between the TRRP, TAMWG, and TMC so issues can be openly discussed without the fear of using the discussions of challenges within the Program to criticize or undermine the Program.
- Operating protocols for the TAMWG will be developed, including the handling of information requests from the TAMWG.

