

DRAFT (12/6/05) Prepared by Irma Lagomarsino

Trinity Budget Process Meeting, November 1, 2005

Participants: Irma Lagomarsino (NMFS), Tom Wesloh (CA Trout), Arnold Whitridge (TAMWAG), Doug Schleusner (TRRP), Nick Hytrick (FWS), Dave Hillemeier (Yurok Tribe)

On November 1, 2005, Irma chaired a meeting in Arcata to explore the preparation of an annual budget development process associated with funding for the Trinity River Restoration Program. All members of the Trinity Management Council (or their representatives) and the chairman of the TAMWAG were invited to participate (see above for list of participants). The following is a brief summary of our meeting and recommendations from the group.

At the Trinity Management Council's meeting in Weitchpec on September 21, 2005, the TMC agreed to establish a small group to develop a budget process to ensure that the annual program of work is consistent with and, clearly linked to, TRRP program goals and objectives. The budget development process has been too lengthy and arduous at times, due in part to the lack of an agreed-upon conceptual basis for the TRRP program of work, lack of understanding and agreement on the Executive Director's discretionary budget authority, and lack of a process to efficiently respond to changing budget scenarios (e.g., more or less funding available than expected). For these reasons, the TMC established a group to improve our budget development process for FY07 and beyond. Irma Lagomarsino agreed to chair this group and present the results at the December 7 TAMAG meeting and the December 13-14 TMC meeting.

We began our November 1 meeting with a review FY06 budget process and identified aspects of the process that were positive and those that were not-as-positive:

Positive Features

- Annual FY06 spending plan developed quickly (i.e., within about 2 months)
- "General consensus" on the outcome
- Approved by September 2005
- \$Zero-based budget planning appeared helpful
- Established relative priorities first (e.g., 50/30/20=RIG/TMAG/Admin); thus "needs driven" spending plan
- More transparent and inclusive process
- Detailed project descriptions were helpful for reviewers

Not-as-positive Features

- Disconnect between the "B" Team and some TMC members
- Decision to assign \$285K to subcommittee for reconciliation was inefficient because it held-up the budget approval process for 3 months
- Conflict of interest of TMC members or representatives at budget meetings can preclude TMC consensus approval (i.e., voting members are also funding recipients)

- Lack of scientific framework and compete RFP process with independent panels inhibits TRRP's ability to identify and fund top science projects with the most rigorous methodology
- Lack of explicit multi-year TMAG contracts and grants

Nick Hytrick (FWS) presented a model utilized by the Department of Interior to prioritize and evaluate grant and contract proposals monitoring and restoration projects in Alaska. Briefly, the program utilizes a Federal Subsistence Board and Regional Advisory Councils (establishing regional program priorities), and technical committees to review proposals. The process begins with an identification of the types of projects to be funded and a call for pre-proposals (concise narratives of the work to be conducted with budgets). Pre-proposals are reviewed by a technical review committee (8-10 members) and ranked using agreed-upon ranking criteria. Also, the tech committee might provide technical comments to improve the project. At this stage, projects may get advanced or rejected. If advanced, project applicants are requested to prepare a full-blown "investigative plan" which includes specific analytic methodologies (e.g. biometrics). Tech committee reviews investigative plan and recommends either: (1) fund (could be for 3 years); (2) fund with modifications; or (3) not fund. A key feature of the program is that projects that are submitted cooperatively (jointly) from multi-stakeholder groups, receive extra ranking points. This aspect of the program helps to encourage project collaboration among various agencies, co-managers and stakeholders, to leverage their existing expertise and resources to maximize project efficiencies, ensure mutually-agreed upon methodologies and promote collaborative conservation.

The group then began a discussion of what it believes to be some of the key features for an effective and efficient future budget development process. Our group strongly believes that establishment of a scientific framework for the TRRP is fundamental to the Program's ability to recognize and support high priority, scientifically-sound projects. In advance of an established TRRP scientific framework, our group recommends:

For the FY07 Budget Development Process

- TAMWAG should strive to complete its budget recommendations and TMC should strive to approve the entire budget before July or within a few weeks following the June meetings
- TMC should consider encouraging multi-year agreements as a way to eliminate the inability to initiate contracts during periods when the federal budget is subject to continuing resolutions
- TMC should consider moving its April meeting to March to partially "free-up" TRRP staff time to work on annual budget development
- Basic budget priorities (50/30/20) are still appropriate for FY07 budget process

Future Budgets

- Adopt a scientific framework for the TRRP
- TMAG prepare a list of program priorities, including subcommittees and tiering approach
- SAB reviews TMAG priorities

- Rank criteria should be developed and utilized
- Request for Proposals should be issued with a call for pre-proposals
- ERP reviews the Statement of Work (i.e., the responses to the RFPs)
- TMC should consider in the future the benefits of issuing RFPs for the entire TMAG program of work.