

FINAL – Terrestrial Resource Technical Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
September 14, 2016
Noxon Emergency Services Building
10:00 a.m. (MST)

Attendees

Designated TRTAC Representatives

Avista Corp. – Nate Hall

Bull River Watershed Council – Kathy Ferguson

Elk Creek Watershed Council – Judy Hutchins

Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) – Kathy Cousins

Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) – Craig Jones

Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks (MFWP) – Bruce Sterling

Noxon-Cabinet Shoreline Coalition (NCSC) – Rick Robinson

Sanders County Commissioner – Tony Cox

U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Cabinet Ranger District – Les Raynor (arrived at 10:40 a.m.)

Other Attendees

Avista Corp. – Lisa Vollertsen and Eric Oldenburg; Avista Grant Writer – Ruth Watkins and Susan Drumheller; Jop’s Shop – Gene Jopling; Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks – Dave Bennetts; Pinnacle Research – Kim Bergstrom

Welcome

Nate Hall welcomed those in attendance and invited participants to introduce themselves. The purpose of today's meeting is to update the group on the progress of the PM&E's and identify any issues for the upcoming Management Committee (MC) meeting on September 27th. There were no additions or revisions to the proposed agenda.

FERC Annual Report

Avista’s FERC Annual Report format was discussed at the March MC meeting and informal discussions with FERC occurred to make the document more user friendly and focus on compliance. Hall provided the group with a brief overview of the revised working template, which will be discussed at the September MC meeting. The original report format requires massive amounts of time effort to produce and contains duplicative information from programmatic reports. Kathy Cousins understands that approach but suggest that even though not everyone reads the report, it might be useful in the future to provide a historical narrative in one location. Hall explained that the new format has a reference section where specific reports can be found. Rick Robinson asked if programmatic reports available online. Hall replied no, contact Hall, Eric Oldenburg, or Lisa Vollertsen if you are interested in a specific report. Kathy Cousins prefers to receive reports on CD and printed hard copies.

Appendix G: Implementation of the Land Use Management Plan (LUMP)

Hall provided background information on the plan and explained that the primary purpose is to manage Avista owned lands within the Clark Fork Project consistent with the Land Use Management Plan and FERC License.

Administration

Avista continues to implement the Private Recreation Permit Program, with 205 private permits issued this year, and address issues related to ownership/and trespass on Avista property.

Hall provided an update related to the abandoned railroad property from Noxon Rapids Dam to Triangle Pond. In late 2014, FERC ruled to accept the status of these lands as being lands of the United States. Hall will continue to work with the USFS to determine future management of these lands.

Avista has not received a formal request from Hecla Mining for an easement to place a discharge pipe associated with the proposed Rock Creek Mine.

Pesticide/Herbicide Plan

Hall reviewed the progress with the herbicide and pesticide program including the treatment for Eurasian water milfoil (EWM). Funding was provided to Sanders County Aquatic Invasive Plants Task Force (Task Force) to assist with controlling EWM and Curly Leaf Pondweed in Noxon and Cabinet Gorge reservoirs. The overall goal of the project is to control the spread of EWM through a multi-pronged management approach with the use of herbicides, bottom barriers, boat check stations, and educational public outreach. This project is a cost-share among appendices B, G, and H, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, NCSC, and in-kind support from Sanders County Task Force, and Montana State University (MSU).

There were unique challenges in controlling EWM in 2015, when environmental conditions (i.e., low flows and high water temperature) were ideal for rapid, early growth of all aquatic plant species, including EWM. Due to these conditions, areas of EWM that were previously reduced to maintenance levels in Noxon Reservoir saw significant re-growth. Therefore, focus shifted and the planned approach of aggressive treatment on Cabinet Gorge Reservoir was redirected to treatments on Noxon Reservoir to avoid losing the progress that had been made over the past six years. Dr. Getsinger (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) provides technical guidance to the Task Force on herbicide applications. The Task Force is in the process of developing a long-term maintenance control plan.

Kim Bergstrom explained that last year hybridized (native and non-native) plants were discovered in Noxon Reservoir. Hybridized EWM plants are more resistant to herbicides and have a fast reproductive rate. The Task Force is working with Dr. Ryan Thum (geneticist from MSU) to research the hybrid plants and effectiveness of herbicides. The cost for herbicide treatment is approximately \$1,000 per acre. In 2016, pre-treatment surveys of Noxon Reservoir were completed and a public meeting was held in July. In 2016, 199 acres in Noxon Reservoir were treated. Post-treatment monitoring is scheduled for October 5. If you are interested in attending contact Paul Kusnierz, Nate Hall, or Ruth Watkins. The herbicide treatment is effective at targeting EWM and does not appear to impact native vegetation. The ultimate goal of the herbicide treatment is to reduce EWM to a point where only periodic maintenance treatments will be needed.

The LUMP 5-year review and update was postponed due to personnel changes and the update currently occurring on the RRMP. The land use subgroup will take a close look at permit fees and evaluate if an increase is needed.

Cousins asked if the LUMP and Recreation Resource Management Plan (RRMP) would be available for review. Hall will add Cousins to the LUMP and RRMP subgroup distribution list for these reports.

The LUMP subgroup will meet later today to review and discuss six new dock proposals and NCSC request for transferrable annual dock permits upon sale of property with an existing permit.

Hutchins asked if a management plan was developed for the 28-acre property adjacent to Big Eddy. Hall replied that next year the recreation subgroup will focus on developing overdue management plans for recently acquired properties.

Enforcement

Avista continues to have a productive working relationship with MFWP, IDFG, and other law enforcement agencies. Hall noted block management and the bi-annual recreation rule is currently used to provide MFWP conservation officers authority to address violations on Avista property.

Appendix H: Implementation of the Recreation Resource Management Plan

The RRMP provides guidance for ongoing management of existing and future recreation areas, including a number of undeveloped sites. Within the RRMP there is a facility development component, under which Hall works with many different groups on various projects.

Kim Bergstrom provided a PowerPoint presentation on revisions to the RRMP. This is the first update to the RRMP since originally developed during relicensing in 1999. The updated plan will be a companion document to the RRMP, and will serve as a guiding document for recreation site and resource management. A subgroup (Avista, MFWP, and USFS) participated in document review and updates, site tours, and discussions. The plan will include accomplishments over the past 15 years, an assessment of recreation site conditions and program effectiveness, and improvements for the next 15 years.

Overall, there are 57 recreation sites (developed and dispersed) associated with Avista's project area, which receive 100,000 group visits each summer. Visitors are mainly participating in water-based activities such as fishing and swimming.

The adaptive management protocol adopted in the RRMP, which utilizes Limits of Acceptable Change and Recreation Opportunity Spectrum concepts as tools to monitor and manage use, is difficult to implement on a regular and meaningful basis. Under the RRMP update the concepts of ROS and LAC are still central to the program, but tailored to the specific setting and needs of the Clark Fork Project.

The subgroup is developing an online reporting form, where managers can login to review and enter site-specific information. This information will then be used to identify site specific management needs. Bruce Sterling asked if photos could be uploaded and saved to the each site. Bergstrom is unsure and will look into this.

A draft of the RRMP update will be provided to the TRTAC for 30-day review and a final updated plan will be provided to the MC in March 2017.

Ruth Watkins suggested adding grant funding information for those projects that are identified in the plan. Bergstrom will add grant information to the plan.

Watkins asked if an ADA compliance study planned in conjunction with the plan revision. Dave Bennetts noted that USFS and MFWP sites that claim to be ADA compliant need to be. Bergstrom will add an ADA compliance study to the list of improvements. Hall thanked Bergstrom for the presentation and the list of accomplishments over the past 15 years is impressive.

Hall reviewed components of the 2016 Recreation Resources Facility Development Plan.

Thompson Falls State Park host site will be moved to a more appropriate location, as well as the addition of a second site. Other projects include trail improvements around the pond, universally accessible fishing pier and picnic shelter, and relocating restroom facilities.

A designated swimming area was established at the Trout Creek Recreation Area to minimize watercraft and swimmer conflicts.

Work on the Heron boat ramp to address trail erosion to the dock is on hold. Contractors might utilize the site during the Heron Bridge construction project. Tony Cox stated the Heron Bridge project is scheduled to be completed in late spring/early summer 2017. Afterwards, road paving will begin for Highway 200 from the Idaho/Montana boarder to junction Highway 56, as well as potentially the paving the back road from Heron to Clark Fork. Hall noted paving needs to be addressed for several recreation site access roads adjacent to Highway 200. Cox will provide the paving contact information to Les Raynor and Hall.

Picnic shelter was installed at the lower Noxon Rapids Dam viewpoint.

Vent tubes covers will be installed for all vault toilets to prevent entrapment of birds. Raynor will provide the company contact information to Hall.

Addressed annual needs at 2 Rivers RV Park (i.e., bear proof dumpsters through November). Overall the goal is to have the park be revenue neutral.

Operation and Maintenance

Continue providing low cost leases or permits to the community or civic groups providing recreation opportunities (i.e., Thompson Falls Golf Course).

Assist USFS and MFWP with the cost of operation and maintenance of sites under their management.

Interpretation and Education

Continue developing content to install standardized signage at all recreation sites.

Appendix I: Aesthetics Management Plan

Hall noted the goal of this PM&E is to help maintain the rural and rustic character of the Avista owned shorelines. While no specific activity occurred under this PM&E, it is used to help guide the implementation of other programs and to preserve the aesthetic qualities of the project area. Vegetation will be thinned in the fall to restore the view from the upper Noxon Rapids Dam viewpoint.

Appendix J: Wildlife, Botanical and Wetland Management Plan

Hall explained the Wildlife, Botanical and Wetland Management Plan was developed after relicensing to capture the background of terrestrial PM&Es. The plan is used to help guide implementation of the terrestrial PM&Es. Hall reviewed the land acquisitions spreadsheet which illustrates all habitat protection acquisitions that were accomplished through the Clark Fork Settlement Agreement, including those where CFSAs provided match funding through appendices A, B, H, and K. Over the past 16 years approximately 89,000 acres have been protected in both Montana and Idaho.

As previously discussed at the January TRTAC meeting and approved at the March MC meeting appendices N1-N3 were removed from the list of ongoing Clark Fork Settlement Agreement PM&Es; with the understanding that Avista will continue to informally monitor bald eagles, peregrine falcons, and common loon activity as part of other field duties and report observations to the TRTAC at their annual January meeting as part of Appendix J.

Hall stated that on Cabinet Gorge Reservoir four out of six bald eagle nest sites were active. Adult peregrine falcons were present at the Rock Island cliff nesting site. There has been no evidence of common loon nesting behavior on the reservoirs.

Appendix K: Wildlife Habitat Acquisition, Enhancement, and Management Program

Hall noted that funds are set aside for the long-term maintenance of Bull River properties (gates, signage, weed control, etc.). Continue working with MFWP to characterize springs, wetlands and potential enhancements on the Bull River WMA. Hall is working with MFWP and Ken Stephens to create a forestry management plan for the Bull River WMA.

In August, the MC approved a consent mail for the Twin Creek acquisition (cost-share between appendices A and K). Hall continues to work with Kaniksu Land Trust (KLT) and the private landowner on details and the acquisition is hoped to be completed by October.

Hall continues to work with KLT and a private landowner to purchase 75 acres near Heron, MT that contains a large wetland complex. Kaniksu Land Trust secured a NAWCA grant to fund a portion of the purchase price. This acquisition is anticipated to close this fall.

Hall continues to work with KLT, NRCS, and a private landowner to purchase a conservation easement on a 300 acre parcel along the Pack River.

A subgroup continues to work on developing a timber treatment plan for Avista-owned property on Trestle Creek (375 acres). Timber harvest in the Trestle Creek drainage is challenging, and the goal is to work on a plan in the fall with a work product to the TRTAC by the end of the year.

The MC recently approved a consent mail to provide funding to address erosion on the Clark Fork Delta. Cousins stated that work will begin next week and includes planting 2,000 willows and strategically placing rock along the shoreline to minimize erosion.

Appendix L: Black Cottonwood Protection and Enhancement

Hall explained that one purpose of this program is to protect existing stands of black cottonwoods through the implementation of the LUMP. Hall continues to monitor the Herford and Noxon sloughs, as well as a temporary enclosure fence at the Herford Slough site. The enclosure is working well, with good recruitment of black cottonwood occurring.

Appendix M: Wetlands Protection and Enhancement Program

Ducks Unlimited was hired in 2014 to collect baseline information and develop an early stage wetland enhancement plan for the Bull River wetland enhancement project. This effort was completed and a proposal was developed to increase habitat diversity by creating depressions with the spoils placed around the depressions to form low mounds. In 2015, field crews gathered additional water temperature and fisheries data for the site. Hall will continue to discuss this project with MFWP to see if additional data needs to be gathered or if another opportunity should be explored.

Appendix P: Forest Habitat Protection and Enhancement

The purpose of this measure is to provide for the protection and enhancement of specific forest habitat parcels of Avista project land along the reservoirs. Any revenue generated from timber sales is directed back into this PM&E.

The MFWP Block Management Program was provided for public access on three parcels in 2015. Public access to the Wood Duck property is open year-round and administered through a sign-in box at the access point.

Hutchins will contact Hall to discuss a culturally sensitive plant species that she found.

Appendix Q: Reservoir Island Protection

Hall stated there is no funding associated with this PM&E, and that the uses occurring on Avista owned islands are appropriate.

Appendix S: Erosion Fund and Shoreline Stabilization Guidelines

Hall commented that the goal of this PM&E is to address erosion that is or has the potential to impact critical resources along the reservoirs. Work efforts this year are focused on addressing erosion concerns identified by the CRMG; and utilized Findlay Engineering to help design potential solutions.

Project scoping and permitting was initiated in 2014 to address erosion at the Laundry Site and permitting was completed this spring. The site will be planted in the fall with woody vegetation along the bank and placement of large root wad structures.

A surveyor will be hired to design possible erosion control measures at the Finley Flats boat ramp as part of a larger project to evaluate and redesign the parking area. This project was delayed due to personnel changes.

Hall will contact a private landowner in the Vermilion Point area this fall to provide technical assistance for an erosion project adjacent to Avista property.

Grant Writer Update

Watkins provided an update on 2016 grant funding, with a total of \$224,000 received. Grant funding was secured for a variety of projects including the 75 acre wetland complex purchase near Heron, MT, Thompson Falls State Park trail, Bull River boat ramp and swim dock, and Sanders County EWM herbicide projects. Watkins is in the process of phasing into retirement and is training Drumheller to be the new grant writer. Contact Watkins and Drumheller for assistance with project proposals.

Next Meeting

Hall stated that the group needed to select a date for a January meeting to review the draft 2017 Annual Implementation Plans. The WRTAC meeting is scheduled for January 17, 2017, so the TRTAC meeting is scheduled for January 18, 2017. The MC meeting is scheduled for September 27, 2016 and Idaho tours on September 28, 2016. Hall thanked everyone for attending and the meeting was adjourned at 12:40 p.m.



Memorandum

Noxon Natural Resource Field Office

PO Box 1469, Noxon, MT 59853

406-847-1281

Date: September 1, 2016

TO: TRTAC members

FROM: Nate Hall, Clark Fork Terrestrial Program Leader, Avista Corp. 

SUBJECT: September 14, 2016 TRTAC meeting

Hope everyone is having a great summer! This is a reminder that our annual late-summer TRTAC meeting is on September 14th at the Noxon Emergency Services Building. The purpose of the meeting is to provide an update of PM&E activities, identify potential projects to be included in the 2017 Annual Implementation Plans and identify any issues for the Management Committee meeting on September 27th.

We will also have Kim Bergstrom join us to give an overview of the draft update to the Recreation Resource Management Plan.

Tentative agenda is as follows:

Mountain Standard Time

10:00 a.m.	Introductions, Agenda changes/additions
10:10 – 12:00	Update on all terrestrial related PM&Es
12:00 – 12:30	Lunch (provided)
12:30 - ?	Complete updates of PM&E activities, and provide opportunities for tours of projects and/or subgroup meetings if desired.

Please contact me if you have any specific issues that you would like discuss at the meeting, or if you have any other questions (nate.hall@avistacorp.com or 406-847-1281). I look forward to seeing you on the 14th.