FINAL

Conference Call Minutes

Aquatic Settlement Work Group

To: Aquatic SWG Parties Date: May 5, 2026

From: Tracy Hillman, Chair, BioAnalysts

Re: Final Minutes of the March 3, 2026, Aquatic SWG Conference Call

The Aquatic Settlement Work Group (SWG) met virtually by Microsoft Teams conference call on Tuesday, March 3, 2026, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. Attendees are listed in Attachment A of these conference call minutes.

Summary of Action Items

1. Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) will share with Douglas PUD the federal projects draft Total Maximum Daily Load Water Quality Attainment Plans (TMDL WQAPs) once these are approved by Ecology and are discoverable (Item I-C).
2. Tracy Hillman will ask the Rocky Reach Fish Forum (RRFF) and Priest Rapids Fish Forum (PRFF) about possibly convening in-person, on the same day as the Aquatic SWG (three sessions in one day), and coordinated with a site tour, sometime this summer while Douglas PUD's Adult Pacific Lamprey Study is underway (Item III-A).
3. The Aquatic SWG meeting on April 7, 2026, will be held virtually by Microsoft Teams conference call (Item III-A).

Summary of Decisions

1. Aquatic SWG representatives present approved the *2026 Aquatic Settlement Agreement and Workgroup Action Plan* (2026 ASA Action Plan), as revised (Item II-A).
2. Aquatic SWG representatives present approved the statement of agreement (SOA), *Wells Reservoir White Sturgeon Supplementation 2027-2029*, as revised (Item II-B).

Agreements

1. There were no agreements discussed during today's conference call.

Review Items

1. The draft Wells Project TMDL WQAP Project List was distributed to the Aquatic SWG by Kristi Geris after the Aquatic SWG conference call on March 3, 2026 (Item II-E).

2. The draft *Annual Report Calendar Year 2025 Activities Under the Aquatic Settlement Agreement* (2025 ASA Annual Report) and appended *2025 Annual Report White Sturgeon Management Plan* (2025 WSMP Annual Report), *2025 Bull Trout Management Plan and Incidental Take Annual Report* (2025 BTMP and ITS Annual Report), *2025 Annual Report Water Quality Management Plan* (2025 WQMP Annual Report) and appended 2025 Water Temperature Annual Report, *Pacific Lamprey Management Plan 2025 Annual Report* (2025 PLMP Annual Report), *Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plan 2025 Annual Report* (2025 ANSMP Annual Report), and *Resident Fish Management Plan 2025 Annual Report* (2025 RFMP Annual Report) were distributed to the Aquatic SWG by Geris on March 4, and are available for a 45-day review, with edits and comments due by April 17. The revised reports for approval were distributed on April 28, 2026 (Item III).

Documents Finalized

1. The final 2026 ASA Action Plan was distributed to the Aquatic SWG by Kristi Geris after the Aquatic SWG conference call on March 3, 2026 (Item II-A).
2. The final SOA, *Wells Reservoir White Sturgeon Supplementation 2027-2029*, was distributed to the Aquatic SWG by Geris after the Aquatic SWG conference call on March 3, 2026 (Item II-B).

I. Welcome

A. Review Agenda (Tracy Hillman)

Tracy Hillman welcomed the Aquatic SWG and reviewed the agenda. Hillman asked for any additions or changes to the agenda. Andrew Gingerich postponed the computer vision fish count topic to next month. Ralph Lampman asked about juvenile lamprey study planning. Mariah Mayfield recalled the decision to remove this topic from the agenda while Douglas PUD develops a draft study plan, and the topic will be added back to the agenda when a draft plan is ready, possibly May 2026.

B. Meeting Minutes Approval (Kristi Geris)

The revised draft February 3 conference call minutes were reviewed. Kristi Geris said no edits or comments were received from Aquatic SWG representatives. Geris added approvals via email, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) filing and distribution of the final *2025 Annual Report Total Dissolved Gas Abatement Plan* (2025 TDG Annual Report) and final *2026 Total Dissolved Gas Abatement Plan* and appended *Wells Bypass Operating Plan* (2026 GAP/BOP). Aquatic SWG representatives present approved the February 3 conference call minutes, as revised. Ecology and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR) abstained because their representatives did not participate in the February 3, 2026, conference call.

C. Review of Action Items (Tracy Hillman)

Action items from the Aquatic SWG conference call on February 3 are as follows. *(Note: The following italicized item numbers correspond to agenda items from the February 3, 2026, conference call)*:

1. *Ecology will share with Douglas PUD the federal projects draft TMDL WQAPs once these are approved by Ecology and are discoverable (Item I-C).*
   This action item will be carried forward.
2. *Aquatic SWG representatives will submit edits and comments on the draft 2025 TDG Annual Report and draft 2026 GAP/BOP to Douglas PUD by February 16 and will submit a vote via email by February 20 (Item II-A and Item II-B).*
   These documents were approved via email on February 18, 2026. This will be further discussed during today's conference call.
3. *Douglas PUD will distribute the draft evaluation criteria and draft list of projects for the Wells Project TMDL WQAP by mid-February for discussion during the Aquatic SWG conference call on March 3, 2026 (Item II-C).*
   This will be discussed during today's conference call.
4. *Aquatic SWG representatives will review the draft 2026 ASA Action Plan for discussion and approval during the Aquatic SWG conference call on March 3, 2026 (Item II-D).*
   This will be discussed during today's conference call.
5. *Aquatic SWG representatives will review the draft SOA* Wells Reservoir White Sturgeon Supplementation 2027-2029 *and Sturgeon Stocking and Harvest Scenarios document and will reach out to Douglas PUD with questions or concerns in order to be ready to approve the SOA during the Aquatic SWG conference call on March 3, 2026 (Item II-F).*
   This will be discussed during today's conference call.

II. Summary of Discussions

A. DECISION: 2026 ASA Action Plan (Andrew Gingerich)

The draft 2026 ASA Action Plan was distributed to the Aquatic SWG by Kristi Geris on January 26. The 30-day review period ended on February 25. Andrew Gingerich recalled that Douglas PUD develops this document each year to help with planning. This is not a FERC requirement; rather, Douglas PUD likes requesting approval of the document to encourage the Aquatic SWG to review this and share any feedback. No comments have been received to date. Discussions were as follows.

<u>E) Pacific Lamprey MP</u>

3. Begin tagging lamprey for passage study July 2026

Ralph Lampman asked what is planned beyond the study. Will extra fish be translocated upstream of Wells Dam? Mariah Mayfield recalled the goal is to trap 200 fish per week, up to 1,000 fish, at Priest Rapids Dam, and any fish not radio-tagged will be passive integrated transponder (PIT) tagged and

released upstream of Rocky Reach Dam. Douglas PUD also contemplated coordinating with the CTCR to translocate some fish upstream if there were extra. Lampman asked whether these fish would receive a PIT tag. Mayfield said yes, but historically these fish have had low detections because fish are released in the tributaries. Douglas PUD can keep in touch on this and work with translocation partners.

5. Update PIT Tag Detection "last seen table" History tables December 2026
Lampman asked whether this table was updated for 2025. Mayfield said yes, and it is included in the draft 2025 PLMP Annual Report, which will be available for Aquatic SWG review shortly. *(Note: This draft report was distributed for review on March 4.)*

8. Ladder salvage during winter maintenance December 2026/January 2026
Lampman said "January 2026" should be "January 2027." This edit was made.

D) Water Quality MP
7. Biological monitoring of resident and salmonid fishes for Gas Bubble Trauma April-August 2026, as needed
Melissa Peterson clarified that Ecology is not requiring gas bubble trauma (GBT) monitoring for resident fish in 2026 and suggested striking "resident and." This edit was made.

B) White Sturgeon MP
8. Rearing of BY2026 juvenile sturgeon for 2026 release July-December 2026
Laura Heironimus said, "for 2026 release" should be "for 2027 release." This edit was made.

Vote
Aquatic SWG representatives present approved the 2026 ASA Action Plan, as revised.

The final action plan was distributed to the Aquatic SWG by Geris after the Aquatic SWG conference call on March 3, 2026.

B. DECISION: White Sturgeon Stocking SOA (Andrew Gingerich)

The draft SOA *Wells Reservoir White Sturgeon Supplementation 2027-2029* and Sturgeon Stocking and Harvest Scenarios document were distributed to the Aquatic SWG by Kristi Geris on January 26. The CTCR provided comments as distributed on February 26, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) provided comments as distributed on February 27, and the Yakama Nation (YN) provided comments as distributed on March 2.

Jason McLellan said his comments were intended to start a conversation about the uncertainty around some of these estimates, the wide confidence intervals, and about whether the proposed stocking

numbers are adequate to meet the harvest objectives identified in the 2018-2022 SOA.[1] Based on conversations with Andrew Gingerich and Laura Heironimus, there is agreement that a benefit of a White Sturgeon supplementation program should be some level of harvest. If these estimates are based on mean values, this probably will result in not stocking enough to support a fishery over the long term. If these are based on lower values, enough fish will definitely not be stocked to support a fishery. If the estimates are based on upper values, this will likely mean stocking more than enough.

Heironimus said her comments incorporated some of the numbers that McLellan proposed. Additionally, the 2018-2022 SOA used modeling data to inform the release numbers, which are explained in the background of that SOA. This SOA once again uses modeling data, and her edits explain what modeling data were used here, consistent with the 2018-2022 SOA. She agrees that harvest is an important part of this, so her edits also include language that mirrors the 2018-2022 SOA regarding harvest. She reviewed Chas Kyger's simulations where he modeled harvesting 100 fish per year for the first 3 years, focused on brood year (BY) 2014 based on a slot size,[2] but this did not appear to reduce this size class to equal numbers of other BYs. Therefore, Heironimus suggested a higher harvest in the first years, maybe 200 fish per year in the first 3 years and then moving down to 100 fish per year with a slot size like The Dalles and John Day (43 to 54 inches) in subsequent years. Lastly, these models use the best available information, and she suggested including language that the models used to inform this SOA can be rerun as more information becomes available to adjust and adaptively manage these stocking and harvest targets.

Mariah Mayfield shared on Microsoft Teams the Wells Sturgeon Population Sandbox application,[3] and the Aquatic SWG discussed the different model simulations suggested in the CTCR's and WDFW's comments. Mayfield asked whether Heironimus is suggesting targeting 200 fish from a specific cohort and then aiming for a size slot. Heironimus suggested aiming for a size slot that is estimated to be mostly BY 2014 fish. She believes using marks would be very difficult to implement for a fishery. Mayfield said BY 2014 fish are marked with a different scute pattern. McLellan said yes, BY 2014 fish are differentially marked, with one mark on the left side and one on the right side. Another consideration, assuming that harvest is shared across Tribal and nontribal fishers, is that the Tribes have the ability to target fish. The CTCR have harvest crews that can selectively harvest based on marks and PIT data.

Mayfield updated the model to stock 650 fish per year[4] at 350 grams per fish and harvesting a size range of 140 to 160 centimeters (cm), which resulted in a minimum harvest of 965 fish and maximum harvest of 1,372 fish per year. McLellan said a concern with using a size slot to target BY 2014 fish is

[1] SOA titled, *Wells Reservoir White Sturgeon Supplementation 2018-2022*, approved by the Aquatic SWG on January 11, 2017, and distributed on January 12, 2017.
[2] Heironimus later wrote in the Microsoft Teams chat: "Chas used 140 to 160 cm for this (or 55 to 63 in)."
[3] Described during the Aquatic SWG conference call on January 6, 2026. Available at: https://dcpud-nr.shinyapps.io/Wells-Sturgeon-Sandbox/.
[4] This stocking number was a suggested option in all three comments (from the CTCR, WDFW, and the YN).

there is size overlap among different age groups, where the fishery wants to target one and not the other. Mayfield appreciates McLellan's suggestion about using a Tribal fishery to have more control over harvest. Heironimus said she can discuss this internally, but when discussed in the past, there were concerns about educating anglers to target certain scute marks. This has been the concern with implementing a mark-selective fishery. WDFW does not expect this to go well based on feedback from harvest managers. McLellan argued that this would not be the first mark-selective fishery. There are wildlife education requirements for certain hunts (e.g., waterfowl and bears), and this would be his pushback.

Mayfield shared on Microsoft Teams the YN's comments, which included more simulations. The Aquatic SWG reviewed these.

Mayfield asked whether Aquatic SWG representatives would be supportive of a 3-year SOA with a stocking target of 650 fish per year, at 350 grams per fish, and uncertainty about harvest. As more data and information about a fishery become available, this can be adjusted. No objections were expressed.

Gingerich thanked the Aquatic SWG for the feedback. He agreed with Heironimus about the importance of including the history as a reminder of what is being evaluated. Gingerich has one additional edit. He explained that to target 350 grams per fish, hatchery staff need to target a larger fish size. On behalf of his hatchery staff, he would like to edit this to a target of "an average of" 350 grams per fish to help with husbandry. No objections were expressed.

Aquatic SWG representatives present approved the SOA *Wells Reservoir White Sturgeon Supplementation 2027-2029*, as revised.

(Note: The final SOA was distributed to the Aquatic SWG by Geris after the Aquatic SWG conference call on March 3, 2026.)

C. BY 2025 Wells White Sturgeon Rearing Update (Mariah Mayfield)

A BY 2025 Wells White Sturgeon Rearing Update (Attachment B) was distributed to the Aquatic SWG by Kristi Geris on February 26, 2026. Mariah Mayfield said there are 786 BY 2025 White Sturgeon on station at Wells Hatchery. There has been no mortality since last month. The Aquatic SWG reviewed the fish sizes, noting that there are still some smaller fish on station.

D. 2026 GAP/BOP Recap (Mariah Mayfield)

Mariah Mayfield said the final 2026 GAP/BOP was submitted to FERC last week (on February 27). This FERC filing record was distributed to the Aquatic SWG by Kristi Geris this morning. She recalled the uncertainty about the Wells Dam bypass operations start date, which ultimately was decided to be April 1 based on Wells Habitat Conservation Plan Coordinating Committee guidance. Tracy Hillman

also noted that the Aquatic SWG approved the 2026 GAP/BOP, recognizing this start date could be April 2 or no earlier than April 1.

Mayfield said Ecology edits to the 2026 GAP/BOP and a clarification document were distributed to the Aquatic SWG on February 20, 2026. Douglas PUD believes these changes are positive, because no GBT has been observed in resident fish in the Wells Dam tailrace. To monitor this, there needs to be high levels of electrofishing to collect the fish, and there were concerns about harming fish more than necessary. Douglas PUD appreciates that Ecology acknowledges this as well and approved this modification to resident fish GBT monitoring.

E. TMDL WQAP Update (Melissa Peterson and Mariah Mayfield)

Melissa Peterson said Ecology has received questions about the evaluation criteria and TMDL WQAP. The evaluation criteria are important because these identify the reasonable and feasible projects for each dam. Ecology is drafting a technical memorandum to address questions received from the PUDs regarding the TMDL WQAP. The Ecology Hydro and TMDL Teams are working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) on the technical aspects of the TMDL, which will be submitted in this memorandum for review. The Ecology Hydro and TMDL Teams and USEPA plan to have further joint discussions with the PUDs, but the first step is drafting this technical memorandum, which will not be finalized until discussing this with each individual PUD. Peterson also plans to share this update with the other fish forums.

Mariah Mayfield said Douglas PUD and Ecology have been working well together to come up with evaluation criteria, but there are still big picture questions (such as how much temperature change is an individual dam responsible for?) and some other thoughts that the TMDL did not contemplate as much. It is known that Grand Coulee will have the biggest impact, so what is the Wells Project reasonably and feasibly responsible for?

Peterson noted that discussions will focus on Tables 6-6 to Table 6-10 in the final Columbia and Lower Snake River TMDL.[5] Peterson wrote in the Microsoft Teams chat: Tables (demonstrating cumulative excesses of dam impacts) start on page 55 of the TMDL.

Mayfield said that to not lose momentum, Douglas PUD wants to move forward with providing the draft Wells Project TMDL WQAP Project List for Aquatic SWG review. It will be difficult to implement a project in the Wells Reservoir to produce a meaningful change in water temperature because Wells is a run-of-river project, but Douglas PUD still wanted to provide a comprehensive list of possibilities. Mayfield reviewed the draft Wells Project TMDL WQAP Project List (Attachment C), which was distributed to the Aquatic SWG by Kristi Geris after today's conference call. Mayfield said there is no

[5] https://www.epa.gov/columbiariver/tmdl-temperature-columbia-and-lower-snake-rivers

time frame for feedback, but she suggested that the Aquatic SWG review this project list for discussion at a future meeting. She will notify the Aquatic SWG before this topic is back on the agenda.

Andrew Gingerich added that one question Douglas PUD is contemplating is how do these mitigation strategies align with relative impact. From Douglas PUD's perspective, the implementation of the TMDL WQAP should honor the relative impact of a project, and the mitigation strategies addressing these impacts should follow suit on scale. The Wells Project is a run-of-river dam and the reservoir does not thermally stratify like some other larger projects. It is worth noting that Douglas PUD is presenting this comprehensive list of all possible projects, but how do these management strategies align with relative impact.

III. Administration

Tracy Hillman reminded the Aquatic SWG that the draft 2025 ASA Annual Report and appended 2025 WSMP Annual Report, 2025 BTMP and ITS Annual Report, 2025 WQMP Annual Report and appended 2025 Water Temperature Annual Report, 2025 PLMP Annual Report, 2025 ANSMP Annual Report, and 2025 RFMP Annual Report will be distributed to the Aquatic SWG on March 4, for a 45-day review, with edits and comments due by April 17. *(Note: Kristi Geris distributed these drafts reports on March 4, 2026, as discussed.)*

A. Upcoming Meetings (Tracy Hillman and Mariah Mayfield)

Mariah Mayfield recalled interest in a fieldtrip paired with an in-person meeting and a suggestion to do this during the adult lamprey study this year. She asked about interest or travel restrictions. Responses were as follows:

- Michael Lucid is interested in seeing the adult lamprey study but is also interested in meeting Aquatic SWG representatives. He is in Wenatchee, so travel is no issue.
- Melissa Peterson is on travel restrictions but has support from her supervisor to make the trip over to Wenatchee.
- Laura Heironimus has limited travel funds and field work to schedule around.
- Jason McLellan has no travel or funding restrictions but has field work to schedule around.
- Ralph Lampman agreed an in-person meeting is a good idea and he is happy to make the trip—it just depends on timing.
- Patrick Verhey has no issues with meeting in person.

Mayfield asked whether the fish forums meet in person. Tracy Hillman said they used to but have not since COVID-19, unless something warrants an in-person meeting. There is always a virtual option because some representatives cannot attend in-person meetings. Mayfield said it is a good point that some members have not even met, and she suggested that one month perhaps all forums meet

in person. Hillman said these could be back-to-back meetings. Verhey suggested convening all three sessions in one day. Heironimus wrote in the Microsoft Teams chat: "The more that's packed into one trip, the easier it'll be for me to justify the travel funds."

Hillman will ask the RRFF and PRFF about possibly convening in person on the same day as the Aquatic SWG (three sessions in one day), and coordinated with a site tour, sometime this summer while Douglas PUD's Adult Pacific Lamprey Study is underway.

Mayfield added that Douglas PUD likes to host tours, so even if an in-person does not work, Aquatic SWG representatives can contact Douglas PUD for a tour anytime.

The Aquatic SWG meetings on April 7, May 5, and June 2, 2026, will be held virtually by Microsoft Teams conference call.

List of Attachments

Attachment A List of Attendees
Attachment B BY 2025 Wells White Sturgeon Rearing Update
Attachment C Draft Wells Project TMDL WQAP Project List

Attachment A – Attendees

Name	Role	Organization
Tracy Hillman	Aquatic SWG Chair	BioAnalysts
Kristi Geris	Administration/Technical Support	Anchor QEA
Andrew Gingerich	Aquatic SWG Technical Representative	Douglas PUD
Mariah Mayfield	Aquatic SWG Technical Support	Douglas PUD
Michael Lucid	Aquatic SWG Technical Representative	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Patrick Verhey	Aquatic SWG Technical Representative	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Laura Heironimus	Aquatic SWG Technical Alternate	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Melissa Peterson	Aquatic SWG Technical Representative	Washington State Department of Ecology
Jason McLellan	Aquatic SWG Technical Representative	Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
Ralph Lampman	Aquatic SWG Technical Representative	Yakama Nation