

Meeting Summary: Columbia River Temperature WQMP Local Advisory Group Meeting #1

Feb. 24, 2026 | Virtual Meeting

A summary of the first meeting of the Local Advisory Group convened by DEQ to share information on the Columbia and Lower Snake Rivers Temperature Total Maximum Daily Load. The purpose of the local advisory group is to solicit input and recommendations on DEQ's development of a Water Quality Management Plan to implement the required reductions to excess temperature to the mainstem Columbia River.

The video recording of this meeting is available from DEQ upon request.

Email TemperatureWQMP.Columbia@deq.oregon.gov with your request for the video.

List of attendees

Table 1. List of Local Advisory Group Members present at Meeting #1.

Name	Organization
Paula Calvert	Bonneville Power Administration
Sherrie Duncan	Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
Keri Handaly	Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde
Miles Johnson	Columbia Riverkeeper
Ray Walton	WEST Consultants on behalf of Northwest RiverPartners
Liz Hamilton	Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association
Erick Van Dyke	Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Neil Maunu	Pacific Northwest Waterways Association
Amory Cervarich (on behalf of Dan Turner)	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Todd Maguire	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [Agency Advisory Role]
Robbie O'Donnell	Washington State Department of Ecology
Charles Morrill	Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife

Local Advisory Group Members absent: none.

DEQ staff

Steve Mrazik, David Gruen, Mia Pan, and Trina Mayberry

Agenda

Time	Meeting Action
11:00 a.m.	Welcome
11:05 a.m.	Agenda review; Zoom logistics and ground rules
11:10 a.m.	Local Advisory Group overview
11:20 a.m.	Columbia and Lower Snake Rivers Temperature TMDL Overview (EPA Region 10)
11:50 a.m.	Draft Water Quality Management Plan
12:30 p.m.	Local Advisory Group comments & discussion
1:00 p.m.	Adjourn

Meeting summary

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Mia Pan (DEQ): Mia opened the meeting with introductions of the DEQ team and EPA staff invited to present on the TMDL. She reviewed the meeting logistics and ground rules. She discussed the meeting materials posted on the website prior to the meeting, including the Local Advisory Group charter that describes roles, responsibilities and expectations of LAG members and DEQ staff. She conducted a rollcall of the Local Advisory Group members present at the virtual meeting (Table 1). Mia shared background information on the development of EPA's Total Maximum Daily Load and DEQ's development of the Water Quality Management Plan, including reviewing the geographic scope and anticipated timeline for the public engagement process and finalization of the WQMP. She allowed AG members to ask questions regarding the information presented. No questions were asked. She introduced Todd Maguire from EPA Region 10 to present an overview of the TMDL.

Todd Maguire (EPA Region 10): Todd Maguire is EPA Region 10's Columbia and Snake Rivers Temperature TMDL Technical Lead and Coordinator. Todd reviewed the development of the TMDL and its analyses and findings.

He reviewed the geographic scope and temperature impairments that are addressed by the TMDL. He reviewed the three sources allocated a portion of the 0.3 °C human use allowance: permitted National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permitted point sources, major tributaries, and dams. Todd discussed other sources of heat loading categories considered in the overall analysis and incorporated into the TMDL including increasing air temperatures, cold water releases from Dworshak Dam, agricultural water withdrawals from the Banks Lake project and heat contributed from upstream areas outside the scope of the TMDL in Canada and Idaho.

He described the analysis of the impact from the 15 mainstem dams to be a cumulative effects analysis and stated it was difficult if not impossible to analyze temperature impacts from individual dams based on the TMDL analysis and modeling approach. Todd communicated that all dams upstream of a particular location should consider and analyze different projects and operations that can reduce temperatures to meet the load allocation following a system wide approach.

He went on to provide a brief overview of how the TMDL analyzed the impacts from NPDES permitted dischargers (including allocating a reach-by-reach reserve capacity) and major tributaries. He also discussed EPA's development and incorporation of the Cold Water Refuges plan that identified 12 primary CWR and the Umatilla River to evaluate Oregon's narrative CWR criterion.

Keri Handaly (Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde): Do all temperature TMDLs have an accompanying CWR document or identification of CWR incorporated within the TMDL document?

David Gruen (DEQ): David provided additional context, highlighting the CWR is a narrative criterion specific to Oregon's water quality standards. Oregon's portion of the mainstem Columbia River is covered by the WQS, as well as other waterbodies including the lower Willamette which also has a CWR plan. David offered to chat offline and to connect Keri with DEQ Basin Coordinators.

Charles Morrill (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife): What considerations have been given to the Snake River Hells Canyon reach above Lewiston.

David Gruen (DEQ): Charles, are you directing that question to EPA related to their work on the TMDL itself or are you thinking of that question in relation to DEQ's WQMP?

Charles Morrill (WDFW): Both. I think it has an impact on temperature – so it's a broad, overarching question.

David Gruen (DEQ): In my mind, the WQMP flows from the TMDL. Todd – I will give you space if you want to respond to how the TMDL addresses that question.

Todd Maguire (EPA R10): Todd reviewed the different contributions of heat and the sectors of allowable loading to the river – the 123 point sources, 15 dams, 23 tributaries, and point sources. EPA considered the whole system [of its defined geographic scope] from

Charles Morrill (WDFW): Are staff from the Washington State Department of Ecology on the line? From my perspective, influence from the Hells Canyon reach has been a concern but not currently part of the Water Quality Attainment Plan process [led by Washington Ecology]. So, when you say everything is included it is not clear to me that it is a component going forward.

Todd Maguire (EPA R10): The geographic scope of the Columbia and Snake Rivers Temperature TMDL was the Idaho border. The Hells Canyon reach is upstream of that border, and therefore not included in the scope of this TMDL. It has its own TMDL.

Charles Morrill (WDFW): If it is covered elsewhere, I would hope there is some inclusion where they come together because what flows into Washington and Oregon is influenced by upstream impacts. We work within the scope of the geographic scope identified in the TMDL, but also it is important to understand boundary impacts.

Mia Pan (DEQ): Thank you for that question, Charles. We will have one last question from Robbie before we continue with the rest of our presentation.

Robbie O'Donnell (Washington State Department of Ecology): Charlie, I was going to add context to your question and then maybe pass it over to you, David, because I know the Oregon Snake River TMDL update is in play here.

In terms of the math for the [TMDL dam allocation] tables that Todd shared, the upstream conditions are built into both the baseline scenario and the free-flowing scenario. So, in terms of compliance with the TMDL and meeting the Column H exceedance values, the boundary conditions at the Lewiston Border the upstream [Canadian] Border in Washington are built into the calculation.

David Gruen (DEQ): Thanks, Robbie. The other thing I would say is, as folks have alluded to, DEQ is developing a Snake River Hells Canyon multi-parameter TMDL currently. Temperature will be addressed as part of that effort. I would encourage folks who are interested in understanding what DEQ is planning or doing to develop the TMDL to attain and maintain the temperature standards in the Hells Canyon complex to reach

out to DEQ staff doing that work and to engage in the public participation processes that are either underway or plan to be started very shortly. My point is, the Hells Canyon reach is outside the geographic scope of this TMDL, but it is being covered by a separate, independently developed TMDL by DEQ.

Mia Pan (DEQ): Thanks for clarifying, Robbie and David. And thank you, Todd, for that presentation. I'm going to pass things over to David.

David Gruen (DEQ): David presented an overview DEQ's in-development draft version of the WQMP and the Oregon Administrative Rules that provide DEQ's authority to develop a WQMP to implement a TMDL developed by EPA for Oregon waters.

David shared that DEQ's WQMP will implement the allocated sources of the TMDL – permitted point sources, major tributaries, and dams – and cold water refuges. While climate change is identified as a source of excess heat to the river in the TMDL, it is not assigned a portion of the allowable load allocation.

DEQ plans to implement the NPDES point sources through its water quality permits program. NPDES permits have 5-year timelines and DEQ will incorporate required TMDL wasteload allocations into permits when they are renewed.

David reviewed the six Oregon tributaries identified as one of the 23 major tributaries by EPA: the Umatilla, John Day, Deschutes, Hood, Sandy, and Willamette Rivers. DEQ is in the process of developing or implementing temperature TMDLs in five of those six tributaries. The Deschutes River is impaired for temperature and does not currently have a TMDL. The Deschutes River temperature TMDL is on DEQ's TMDL prioritization list submitted to EPA. DEQ will address temperatures contributions from tributaries through waterbody specific TMDLs with numeric criteria at their respective mouths that are consistent with the TMDL load allocation. The WQMP being developed for the Columbia and Lower Snake Rivers Temperature TMDL will *not* supplant or replace existing/planned tributary TMDL WQMPs.

David described the cumulative load allocation assigned to the 15 mainstem dams within the TMDL's geographic scope. He reviewed the TMDL's modeled range of current impacts from the existence and operation of the dams. In most cases, multiple upstream dams contribute to downstream exceedances in the system. DEQ proposes to name the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as the only designated management agency, due to their operation of the lower Columbia River dams in Oregon waters: McNary, John Day, The Dalles, and Bonneville Dams. David reviewed the required elements of the implementation plans that DMAs must submit to DEQ for approval, including potential management strategies used to achieve the load allocations, a timeline for implementation and schedule for completing measure milestones, and a plan for periodic review and revision. DEQ proposes requiring the implementation plans to detail coordination with upstream dams and the actions taken on a system-wide basis to achieve the cumulative dam allocation.

Ray Walton (Northwest RiverPartners): It seems that many of the proposed mitigation strategies are not viable. Has there been any effort to filter the list to those that may provide reasonable improvements?

David Gruen (DEQ): It is a good question – I think it is a strong statement that many of the proposed mitigation strategies are not viable. I think there is a lot of work to be done to make a more comprehensive quality system-wide water quality modeling approach to fully evaluate these different strategies. Some of them may not work – the list is intended to be illustrative. It is intended to provide an understanding and general concept of the source of actions or structural improvements that might be taken to address load allocations. DEQ will be looking to work closely with USACE and others in the region to evaluate potential effectiveness and feasibility of implementing some of these actions.

Sherrie Duncan (Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation): How does the work being done for the Water Quality Attainment Plan process get included into or inform DEQ's work?

David Gruen (DEQ): That's a great question. The WQAP is run by Washington Ecology. It is linked to the issuance of NPDES permits for point source discharges from the mainstem dams. I understand the WQAP process lays out a 10-year schedule to attain the dam nonpoint source load allocations. There are some existing processes being run by the federal dam agencies to solicit input from regional groups. We anticipate the WQAP plans will provide an initial evaluation of potential strategies and help us understand on a dam-by-dam level, what might be viable. The [four] lower Columbia River dam projects WQAPs are due in the middle of March [2026] – so we still haven't seen the final plans. But we expect the processes will help us identify and prioritize strategies for consideration and what might be done across the system to effectively reduce excess

thermal contribution of heat from the dams. David invited Thomas Starkey-Owens from WA Ecology to share his thoughts.

Thomas Starkey-Owens (WA Ecology): Thanks for the opportunity to speak. David, I agree with the way you laid things out. We invited David and other DEQ staff into the WQAP process intentionally with the understanding that both states are in similar situations. As David stated, I would expect that parts of the attainment plans, especially for the lower four dams, could be used [to inform] these large TMDL implementation processes.

Mia Pan (DEQ): Great, thanks for that clarification, Thomas. Last, we'll go to Keri who's got her [virtual] hand up.

Keri Handaly (CTGR): I'm not a fish biologist, but I used to work for local government, and we had a temperature TMDL plan. So, I have a different experience from this, and I understand how complicated it is to try and do some of the BMPs and that DEQ says it may take decades [to attain WQS].

It's my understanding that fish are very sensitive to temperature as a pollutant. From the Tribe's perspective, the concern is that if these temperatures are not predicted to be reached for decades, potentially – are salmon going to be able to survive long enough. That is why I asked a question about the cold water refuges. I'm wondering if we can identify areas where salmon are, if we have studies on where the areas are of lethal effects to prioritize actions. How much is the actual fish data driving prioritization other than a broad equitable approach?

David Gruen (DEQ): Thanks, Keri. There is a lot there – I'm going to try to cover everything. You talked about how DEQ anticipates it could take years or decades to fully achieve the numeric and narrative WQS. And you point to the potential risk to fish in those intervening years due to the elevated water temperatures above the numeric criteria established for migration corridors. That is a valid concern.

Our hope is that we will show measurable improvements and there will be an adaptive management process. It is a big river basin, and it can take time for the results of the cumulative actions taken across the entire basin to drive measurable improvements in temperature – but that is our goal. The water quality standards are established to be protective of aquatic health in salmon spawning and migration corridors.

I note your point about CWR and the relationship between the CWR and the 20-degree Celsius migration corridor numeric standard. That is a nice segue. I am going to cover CWR momentarily, but I want to say the intention of the narrative CWR criterion is not intended to allow for higher elevated temperatures above the 20-degree Celsius criterion. The CWR narrative standard is intended to work in conjunction with the 20 degree Celsius 7-day average daily maximum temperature.

Mia Pan (DEQ): Charles, I see you have your hand up. David, I think we will want to go through the remainder of your slides and then in about 10 minutes we should have time to continue questions and answers.

David Gruen (DEQ): David provided information on the narrative CWR criterion, EPA's Columbia River Cold Water Refuges Plan, and the incorporation into the TMDL of temperature, flow, and refuge volume targets for the 12 primary refuges and the Umatilla River from the Cold Water Refuges Plan. The six primary cold water refuges that enter the Columbia in Oregon waters are: Sandy River, Tanner and Eagle Creeks, Hood River, Deschutes River, and the Umatilla River. The Sandy and Umatilla have temperature TMDLs; Tanner and Eagle Creek are not impaired for temperature and don't require a TMDL. The Deschutes River does not have a temperature TMDL, but it is on DEQ's prioritization list for TMDL development.

Mia Pan (DEQ): Mia shared information on the next Local Advisory Group meeting scheduled for March 31, 2026, and re-iterated the planned timeline to release a draft version of the WQMPT for public comment in the spring or early summer and have the document finalized via DEQ Director Order in late summer or early fall. Mia requested LAG members submit written comments on the materials shared at the meeting by March 3, 2026.

Keri Handaly (CTGR): What sort of prompts does DEQ have related to the questions it is thinking of asking us? Is it limited to the slides presented or is the entire document eligible for comments? Because obviously it is in progress and there are parts that don't have information filled out.

David Gruen (DEQ): We are soliciting input on the whole document. The intent of the slides was to focus on DEQ's overarching strategies for addressing each of the allocated sources in the TMDL. As you note, [the WQMP document] is a working draft – there are places where we don't have all the information yet. We expect to provide additional details for the advisory group and others as we move forward. Anything within the scope of the WQMP is open for comment.

Charles Morrill (WDFW): I've been a participant in the [Department of Ecology's] WQAP process. I'm a fisheries biologist for the State of Washington and a hydro specialist for the Columbia River Division. Many of the proposed dam management strategies have been identified in the WQAP process and I wanted to share it is a collaborative effort between agencies in Oregon and Washington. And there's another component of this that's ongoing from the fishery management perspective. Many of these actions are of importance in the federal forum to achieve reduced temperatures for both adult passage and downstream [juvenile] passage. Cross communication is an important part of this process. I want to express my appreciation for Oregon's efforts here and acknowledge for those who have not been involved there is a broad importance of this [work] regionally across all stakeholders, including Tribes.

Mia Pan (DEQ): Prior to inviting Neil Maunu to speak, Mia addressed a light-hearted question posted in the chat related to the inclusion of CWR temperature and volume targets in metric units but flows in US-customary units.

Neil Maunu (Pacific Northwest Waterways Association): David, to clarify on Dworshak Dam – you mentioned the dam [and its cold water releases] was considered as part of this TMDL and part of the WQMP. But previously, you had said the Hells Canyon complex was not because it stopped at the Oregon border. Is Dworshak included or not?

David Gruen (DEQ): It's a good question. Sorry for the confusion. It relates to the modeling domain [Dworshak is included in the]. Todd, you can jump in to address this. My understanding is the [RBM10] modeling domain included releases from Dworshak because of its impact on the lower Snake River. But the difference is between the modeling domain and the geographic scope of the TMDL.

Neil Maunu (PNWA): You are going to have to break down what modeling domain means for me. I don't know what it means. I think it was Todd earlier who was clear we were talking about Washington here – so nothing in Idaho's counting.

Todd Maguire (EPA R10): AS I pointed out previously, the Idaho border is the boundary condition for the Snake River. Dworshak is on the Clearwater River in Idaho, and as David indicated, the cold water release from Dworshak were incorporated and considered in the modeling analysis that was completed as part of the TMDL. The reason the temperatures coming out of the Hells Canyon complex weren't considered was because there is a separate TMDL covering those assessment units.

Neil Maunu (PNWA): Ok. Thank you. I think we should be clear when we're talking about borders and boundaries – but thank you for the clarification. This is helpful.

Mia Pan (DEQ): All right, I see that Miles Johnson, you had your hand up next.

Miles Johnson (Columbia Riverkeeper): I do. I feel like maybe Robbie was going to respond there. If so, I'll let you go, Robbie.

Robbie O'Donnell (Washington Ecology): Thanks, Miles. The Hells Canyon complex isn't represented in the model boundary of the RBM10 model that was used in the TMDL. Those boundary temperatures are still included at Lewison – so it is not like those temperatures are blocked off. They included as part of the boundary conditions. The Dworshak releases are just included within the model boundary and domain, if that makes sense, Neil.

Neil Maunu (PNWA): Yeah, that's helpful. So basically, when you are looking it, the [boundary condition temperatures] are coming from this way down the Snake, and from down the Clearwater.

Mia Pan (DEQ): Go ahead, Miles.

Miles Johnson (Columbia Riverkeeper): Thanks, Mia. I appreciate all the work that has gone into this. I agree with some of the comments that the turn-around time is a little quick, but we'll work to get feedback to DEQ. By way of introduction, my name is Miles Johnson. Columbia Riverkeeper is one of the organizations that would

up having to litigate to get a Columbia River temperature TMDL several years ago. I want to express a lot of appreciation to EPA, DEQ, and Ecology for carrying this work forward.

I think other people have made the point, and it is a correct point, that addressing water temperature is the focus of other federal processes, whether that be the [Columbia River Technical Management Team] or the [National Wildlife Federation et al. v. National Marine Fisheries Service et al. [case number: 3:01-cv-00640-SI]] litigation. I just say all of that is good and fine, but it has not resulted in meaningful progress on temperature for salmon and steelhead in the last 20 or 30 years, even though its been obvious that we have a huge problem with temperature in the Columbia and lower Snake River.

I want to highlight the importance of this process, relying on the Clean Water Act and the water quality standards of Oregon and Washington, and using these processes to look at what we haven't done yet, which is look comprehensively at what could be done with the management of the hydro system to reduce temperatures. I appreciate the focus in today's presentation on looking at coordinated efforts beyond just what is going on, for example, in The Dalles [Dam] pool, to meet WQS.

David Gruen (DEQ): Thanks, Miles. I want to jump about the short deadline for written comments. I recognize it is a short turn-around and I recognize folks are busy. The March 3, 2026, deadline is caused by the fact that DEQ posts presentation slides and updated draft documents to its website two weeks in advance of the meeting. Our next scheduled meeting is March 31, which means we must get those slides out in the middle of March.

I will accept comments at any time from advisory group members. If they are sent too late, we may not have time to review and incorporate, as appropriate, potential changes. We will be accepting comments going forward from now through the end of the local advisory group process. We will consider all the comments we get and may incorporate changes into the draft WQMP that will put out for formal public comment. And at that time, all members of the public will have an opportunity to submit formal comments on the draft plan. DEQ plans to provide a formal response to comments with the final WQMP.

Mia Pan (DEQ): Ok do we have any more comments or questions from the advisory group members at this time? There was one comment in the chat from a non-advisory group member. It was from Pete [McHugh] from [Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission] that says "given that upstream dams may at times have a bigger influence on local temperatures and exceedances than the lower river dams themselves, is there a way to formally include upstream dam owners in this process? For example, something along the lines of a designated management agency? Or will this be coordinated through WQMPs for upstream TMDLs?"

David Gruen (DEQ): Yeah, that is a great question, Pete. We will consider that. I don't have an answer for you. The draft document that we put out for comment tries to get at that systemwide cumulative impacts by requiring the DMA to provide and describe the coordination they've made with those upstream dams to address temperature contributions from reaches that are outside of Oregon's waters directly but that might still contribute a portion of the excess thermal load that causes the temperature exceedance in the lower river.

I'll note that the WQMP is a term of art for Oregon, and it is based on Oregon administrative rules. DEQ is developing one WQMP to implement the Columbia and Lower Snake Rivers Temperature TMDL in its waters. To your point, Pete, there is work on the Snake River to address temperatures in the Hells Canyon reach – those separate TMDLs will have their own WQMPs. But we're not planning on developing another WQMP in addition to this one for the specific temperature impairments on the mainstem Columbia River.

Mia Pan (DEQ): All right, folks. Well, I am not seeing any more hands or questions or comments in the chat. As David mentioned, feel free to send him an email or check out the project web page that's been posted in the chat to get some more information. Our next local advisory group meeting will be on March 31, 2026, and then we'll enter a formal public comment period later this spring or early summer. If you have any further questions, feel free to reach out to David. Thanks, everyone!

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