

5/21 AM Stakeholder Board Meeting Notes

The following session transcripts from the May 21, Stakeholder Board meeting were captured by the Group Solutions facilitation team.

Presentation From Stan Cook, Alabama DNR

The Heflin gauge is located on the Big Tallapoosa. The gauge is being used to mimic natural events and the Big Tallapoosa better reflects a larger scale drainage

Is the assumption that the Little Tallapoosa will be affected in the same way? Both could be affected by political decisions. Yes

Would the tech committee need to report to stakeholders on changes?

Stan's recommendation is for a scientific review team...any recommendations for modifications to the plan would likely be open to public comment. We would expect discussion among interested stakeholder teams prior to any changes being made

How does DNR's proposal mesh with the Adaptive Management proposal?

The Technical committee proposed in the Auburn meeting could be one and the same. Alabama River Keepers are 99% in support of ALDNR's proposal. The general structure is OK.

What did we create at Auburn?

An Adaptive Management Council

How do the two dovetail?

Stan's concept of the council is to bring all stakeholders together to assist regulatory agencies with the decisions that must be made. DNR's Technical Committee/Science Review Team could be one of potentially many review teams. There may be other ways of tackling this review process.

Has APC developed a response to the proposal yet?

It was only received last week. A lot of detailed evaluation will be required before a complete response can be made. Setting flows based on the

Questions from Willard/APC

What does mimicking the Heflin gauge mean? is this minimum flow for the day, or is this the desired flow you would like to see all day?

- We'd pick a base flow (continuous minimum) for a 24 hour period
- If flow is 250 cfs, what you want is a min flow of 250 cfs, but generation of 13-15000 cfs would be imposed on top of that
- This is not trying to achieve a flow that includes generation...a base flow that APC would generate on top of for 24 hours
- Retaining Structures: in order for APC to achieve the potential range of flows and provide them as minimum flows, the physical restraints of Harris for turbine discharge are close to 65000 cfs for most days. Heflin gauge may be 2500 cfs. To achieve this, APC has to size a reregulation structure that would enable this flow. No permanent structures below Crooked Creek and no structures below Cornhouse Creek. To evaluate this, APC will

need to resurvey the river to determine if the range can be achieved. This process will take several months to complete.

- Managing within a 5% variance for river flows is pretty tight

Lake levels should not be impacted by conservation flows...how do you want to measure this....as average elevation over a period of time?

- The lake always falls below the rule curve every year...how will this be judged?
- This is a great question that will require input of more than just biologists
- APC needs a metric established. Some average/yardstick must be agreed to.
- Flushing flows have to be defined in terms of magnitude and duration.
- 16,000 cfs...is that a flushing flow?
- *We need agreed-to definitions on this term*
- A 2-week window in April/May for spawning opportunity needs to be identified

Do you want to achieve a flow at Heflin during this 2-week period?

- The Base flow could be changing
- The base flow should mimic Heflin gauge
- There should be no peaking operations unless there was a flood or high water event

October flows: are these intended as all day?

- Not necessarily...just daylight hours. 450 cfs would be during daylight hours

Why October?

- Float fishing on Tallapoosa used to be great during these months
- 450 cfs was based on prior successful float trips

This would not have to be an all-day flow (APC)?

- No...DNR would be flexible on start/stop times
- Daylight-only hours during Oct weekends could be evaluated
- Baseflow, not a picking situation

How closely does 450 mimic base flow?

- It's slightly higher (probably 350 cfs)
- Would 2 weeks in Sept and 2 weeks in Oct be possible?
- This could be flexible—Do it when the fish are biting ☺

How far does APC own the land below the dam?

- Not far...less than a mile

How many private landowners are involved?

- Not a lot...6 below Crooked Creek

Monitoring: “those components of the plan that are within the respective agency’s mission” are there any that don’t fall inside?

- We don't know...it was inserted purely as a protective statement

Who'll design the monitoring plan?

- The technical group
- The hardest part is determining how much can be done

APC will require a minimum of 60 days to complete the survey data to accommodate the requests. Detailed survey data does not include storage capacity behind structures.

- The profile of Harris dam shows tremendous variability across the bottom of the river. Cross-sections need to be measured downstream..will need new profile data on the bottom channel profile downstream in order to state storage capacity.
- It's crucial to have this knowledge to size geotubes at .1 of a mile increments
- Survey crews won't go out there right now under high water conditions!
- Geotubes don't have a great deal of flexibility in controlling flows; the plan as stated requires *many* different flows at different times/seasons
- Cornhouse Creek is preferred as a nursery for recovery of the river
- Rereg dams seem to be less preferable; hard structures with little flexibility seems less desirable for ADNR.

APC will examine and advise what can be done within the confines of practical operation. APC will also advise of what would be required to mimic the flows outside the parameters

- The closer Stan can get to mimicking natural flows the happier he'll be.
- The problems won't be greatest at low/high water; will be in between
- During high water events all bets are off-- there isn't any choice....water has to flow.

What happens if GA sends us less than the mandated flows? There will be zero that can be done about it politically.

- Wherever the gauge is located will be monitored...we propose to the Heflin gauge.
- If the water solutions being pursued in GA materialize there are big concerns that flows will be cut and render our flow discussions moot
- *As external events come at us we'll need to be able to react and respond*
- We don't know how much water will be coming down the river from GA
- The current license requires 45cfs at Wadley; currently being met

How would this plan work in the event of extreme drought like we experienced last summer?

- Same; the Heflin gauge would register a drought condition and flows would be duplicated there.
- The issue of compliance monitoring would need to be addressed.
- Tying the flows to what is coming in is a good idea from a biological perspective
- The Heflin gauge does not include inflows from Crooked Creek or other inflows

AL RC would like to see some statement of minimum flows downstream from the dam addressed. Would like to see additional research done and presented on maintaining flow rates.

- If flows at Heflin are mimicked, some additional minimum flow below the dam would be good too. Brad thinks some continuous minimum flow will be necessary
- The study of bringing 2 units online at the same time, 2 unit peaking will continue to be an issue. The inability to ramp these units is problematic...they have to be spun up rapidly because of cavitation.
- Monitoring crews would have erosion as part of the plan. Assuming something can be agreed to, they would monitor if erosion continues to be a problem. Thermal pollution would be monitored too.

- The impacts of 2-unit peaking (erosion and rapidly fluctuating water levels) Keith are the biggest concerns for the Middle Tallapoosa group.

Summary Notes

- We have some parameters and some flexibility on addressing them
- There are constraints for all partner groups; we agree to operate within them
- The flooding issue is shared by the Corps and APC
- Stan's proposal was an effort on the parties involved to flex in certain areas they hadn't in the past. The proposal is not a take it or leave it approach. AL DNR is open to hybrid approaches and counterproposals from Alabama Power.
- APC will offer up a review of what is achievable within the existing constraints

Round II

- Article 2 section 1 may require wordsmithing: act on behalf of your membership
- The dramatic proposal note: what about the petition to lower the lake level? This guy has a constitutional right to express his opinion, but it isn't a topic for the Board. Include them in if they have a legitimate interest, but avoid them if they are 1-issue and have no willingness to compromise.
- Neutral science is different from the technical advisory council outlined by Stan. We need some closure on distinguishing between the Harris TAG and Stan's proposal. Some delineation is needed.
- Stan's scientific group would monitor to be certain the plan's reflection of flows are measured correctly and effectively.
- Stan doesn't care for neutral science on the TAG. He'd prefer the group to make choices who should sit on the TAG and would prefer the group to make choices. Drop the neutral science references on this slide in Article 8. Develop the plan and send it out for peer review.
- Technical monitoring group would be separate from the TAG.
- DL: let both TAGs operate independently? Why not?
- Stan/Ralph don't want to back up...we have a plan in place, but the 2 technical teams may be able to work jointly as questions are answered and the Stakeholder Board continues to work together.
- If APC gives the plan a green light for review, the TAG could assume responsibility for technical review. If this group accepts it we could move forward under this assumption. TAG: advise; Stan's Group: Decisions

Governance Discussion

- A 15-member Board means 8 for a meeting; 9 for a decision. Round up for decisions. Some are unclear on this. We need more than ½ of membership. 10 unanimous would be a decision.
- Stan's group will be outside the AM charter for now. For now, we're open to working with the models and the baseline. If ALDNR's effort are successful and remains alive, they may eventually be merged.
- Willard: at a minimum this group should have every opportunity to continue to be informed about Stans' proposal progress. Stan's team can begin building models for the team to react to.
- **The Plan**
 - **We continue**
 - **Stan's team continues**
 - **We eventually merge**
- **Should we invite the press to meetings?**

The more publicity we generate for this endeavor the better off we'll be. Should we issue press releases on our progress? One alternative might be issuing a statement of agreement that gets shared *after* our meetings. 3-4 sentences of agreement could be released regularly.
- **Potential Missing Stakeholders**

Katie contacted each of the teams listed in the AU meeting.
OWR was invited to play; couldn't.
AL BASS Federation is currently spread too thin to participate
Park Service will join the process in the future.
- **Willard moves to ratify the Charter as presented. Seconded. Passed unanimously**
- Ralph expressed concerns about the Service signing off without review. He'll need some time for internal review, but expects no problems. Strictly a protocol issue. The Charter has been sent out for review at USFWS.

Points of Agreement/Disagreement

Agrees

- We face many unknowns and “don’t knows”
- Strike “also” from RL Harris provides
- There are levels of uncertainty regarding various solutions and needs to be addressed as part of the adaptive management process
- Operations of RL Harris continue to negatively affect aquatic and terrestrial organisms
- RL Harris provides substantial economic benefits
- The level of impact diminishes downstream
- Flows need to be changed
- The results of changes to the operations of the dam need to be monitored

Disagrees

- Flows need to be increased
- 2 unit peaking without ramping should not be acceptable

Circulate a beginning wording piece to reflect the issues we’re working on and the issues to be ratified.

Next Meeting Discussion

Our Next Meeting Schedule and the hot issues that will drive it:

- One option is to turn the modelers loose. Another is waiting until the data and analysis APC is doing is complete. DNR has put a flow proposal in place. The Harris team has not put one in play yet.
- Willard: It would be beneficial for County Commissioners to see the Adaptive Management model and review piece by piece so they can understand how the model works. More stakeholder involvement would be beneficial and could help fill in any potential blind spots
- There are 3 potential scenarios for the existing model. Consider stepping back and reworking the proposal that is on the table.
- The next meeting should include a discussion of the current state of the model. We have one from Stan. Let’s do a gap analysis, make some choices on our likes and dislikes. Then the question becomes one of bridging key differences.

- **Present the model as-is for next meeting to whatever degree the discussion can be refined.** We should identify gaps and assess how adequate the model is. Get it underway.
- The model is not a constraint for presentation. Can we include the gauge criteria and make some inferences? Adding this would be useful.

Proposed Agenda

- Next meeting on 6/12?

Poll membership to see if a daytime meeting would be OK. How early can we start?
Location? Alex City: Central AL Community College Classroom: 5:00

- **Review the model (including available gauge modeling data)**
- **Status Report by Member on what's going on**
- **Establish points of agreement/disagreement**