



Final Report

Summary of Trinity River Restoration Program Interviews



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FINAL REPORT

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2.0 Introduction

Headwaters Corporation was contracted by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to complete the seven tasks identified in the Trinity River Restoration Program Refinements Solicitation (#R17PS00533). As described in the Solicitation, the scope of this work is to review the goals and mandates of the Trinity River Flow Evaluation Study (TRFE) and Record of Decision (ROD), identify refinements to Trinity River Restoration Program (TRRP or Program) management and functions that will better serve those goals and mandates, and assist the Department of the Interior (DOI) in implementing the refinements. Specific tasks include:

- Tasks 1-2** Review of Key TRRP Documents
- Task 3** TRRP Interviews
- Task 4** Summarize Strengths/Weaknesses of TRRP Organizational Structure
- Task 5** Present Strengths & Weaknesses Document to Coordination Team and Develop Actionable Recommendations for Program Refinements
- Task 6** Facilitate Discussion Among the Trinity Management Council (TMC), Trinity Adaptive Management Working Group (TAMWG), and TRRP on Actionable Items/Power Point Presentation/Final Report
- Task 7** Remain Available to Assist with Oversight & Implementation of Recommendations

This report to the TRRP is the deliverable for Task 3 and summarizes responses from our interviews of the Trinity Management Council (TMC) and other TRRP participants and partners. The purpose of Task 3 was to conduct approximately 25 face-to-face or phone interviews of individuals involved with the TRRP to gain an understanding of known obstacles, as well as conduct a health assessment of components and sub-components of both governance and adaptive management in the TRRP in accordance with implementing our Adaptive Management Program Evaluation Framework (AMPEF).

Methodology

We administered a set of written interview questions (see **Appendix A**) to 56 individuals associated with the TRRP utilizing an anonymous online survey with Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, Provo, UT, 2017). Of the 56 individuals that received the anonymous online survey, 40 individuals recorded unique responses equating to a 71% response rate. Following distribution of the online survey, Chad Smith and Bridget Barron of Headwaters Corporation conducted 31 face-to-face interviews in the Trinity River basin between September 18-27, 2017 (NOTE: one of those face-to-face interviews was conducted earlier in September). In addition, Chad Smith conducted four phone interviews the week of October 9, 2017. The face-to-face and phone interviews were used to clarify responses to the online survey, ask additional questions, and explore issues raised during the interviews themselves.

All written, face-to-face, and phone interview responses were catalogued by Headwaters but will remain anonymous and will not be delivered to the TRRP, the Bureau of Reclamation, or any other TRRP entity. At the request of the Bureau of Reclamation, the list of interviewees will also remain anonymous. All responses were evaluated for common themes and issues, interesting outliers, and other information that provided the Headwaters team with greater breadth and depth of understanding of the TRRP and its structure and function.

3.0 Summary of TRRP Interview Results

Key Messages from the Interviews

This section is presented in a Question/Answer format as a summarization tool. We did not necessarily ask all these questions directly, but the questions concisely summarize key messages and themes that emerged from written, face-to-face, and phone interview responses. This report is not a summary of every question asked during the interviews. Rather, this report is a summary of common threads (and some key outliers) that arose during the interviews and that the Headwaters Team believes are most informative and important for the TRRP Refinements process. This is the second “investigative” phase of the TRRP Refinements work (the first being document review in Tasks 1-2) so all the information collected during the interviews will be used by the Headwaters Team to complete remaining tasks and ultimately develop actionable recommendations for TRRP Refinements. The questions below are presented in no particular order.

Q: What is the TRRP goal?

A: In general, there was a wide range of answers offered for this seemingly basic foundational question. While the word “fish” was used frequently, answers diverged from there. A small number of interviewees brought up the specific escapement numbers in the EIS/EIR as the centerpiece of the TRRP goal, but generally the “fish goal” (as these numbers were frequently referred to) was noted as being outdated and neither realistic nor achievable. There seemed to be consensus that if the Program were to re-focus on fish escapement numbers for the Trinity River, numeric goals should be revised. Several interviewees discussed the goal in the context of restoring fish populations to pre-dam levels, but also cautioned that pre-dam fish population estimates were either non-existent or unreliable. Some interviewees said another aspect of the goal is to increase harvest but noted the competition between trying to increase adult escapement while also trying to increase harvest. Several interviewees pointed to the goal statement drafted in the Integrated Assessment Plan (IAP) as being the best overall statement of a TRRP goal, but all were quick to state that the IAP and its goal statement have never been formally adopted by the TMC. Interviewees did point to the difficulty of reaching a fish population-based goal when salmon migrate and are influenced by harvest, ocean conditions, climate change, and a host of other factors outside the control of the TRRP. In these cases, interviewees focused on in-river conditions as a more achievable goal and several also suggested broadening the TRRP goal to be more inclusive of river form and function and include a wider range of riverine species.

Q: What does the history of the TRRP tell us about its function today?

A: The general response from interviewees is that the TRRP was built based on the scientific aspects of the Flow Evaluation Study, which itself was modeled on the Glen Canyon Adaptive Management Program. As pointed out by several interviewees, the focus in both cases was on the scientific aspects and not on the organizational or governance aspects. Several interviewees detailed how the Flow Evaluation Study came to be, how the Hoopa Valley Tribe was added as a key part of the study team, and how the process was driven largely by a small number of key people in Washington, DC at the highest levels of the Interior and Justice Departments (and including the Washington, DC-based attorney for the Hoopa Valley Tribe). Based on interviewee responses, it appears the Record of Decision (ROD) for the TRRP was one of the last items signed by Secretary Babbitt before the change of Administration and once that change happened all connections between the TRRP and upper-level decision-makers in DC was lost. Key points raised in the interviews:

- After the ROD was signed, the TRRP was “kicked down” into lower levels of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) which had not been highly involved in development of the Flow Evaluation Study or the ROD. At that point, the TRRP became more focused on habitat restoration projects and

95 less focused on flow management. That has manifested itself today in a focus of TRRP action and
 96 money on increasingly large construction projects, with little attention paid to more process-based
 97 restoration through the application of flow. This issue has been exacerbated by ambiguities in the ROD
 98 and the Implementation Plan.

- 99 • The organizational structure contained in the Implementation Plan, and which the TRRP operates under
 100 now, was quickly cobbled together based on the organizational structure of the Glen Canyon Adaptive
 101 Management Program. Interviewees involved in this effort stated this structure was thrown into the
 102 Implementation Plan quickly without much thought as to its application in or modification for the
 103 TRRP.
- 104 • Some interviewees said the science side of the Program was built on the early principles of Adaptive
 105 Environmental Assessment and Management (AEAM) which tends to focus more on modeling and
 106 heavy technical aspects. AEAM was the foundation of adaptive management (AM) which today tends
 107 to have a broader connotation in large-scale programs like the TRRP.
- 108 • *Editorial Comment* – there was a strong emphasis on the part of several interviewees as to the influence
 109 of the Glen Canyon Adaptive Management Program and a desire to return to something more like that
 110 program in terms of structure and function. From the perspectives of full implementation of true
 111 adaptive management and a working governance structure, that program is not widely considered a
 112 success. See the article titled [“Collaborative Planning and Adaptive Management in Glen Canyon: A
 113 Cautionary Tale”](#) and several other articles with the same theme.

114
 115 **Q: What is the overall health of the TRRP?**

116 A: In many cases, interviewees described the TRRP as “a jobs program” for program partners. This
 117 description focused on the TRRP being more about money for program partners and associated projects
 118 (monitoring, research, and implementation) and less about a focus on restoration of fish populations.
 119 Interviewees noted this as a “lost opportunity” given that the TRRP is widely viewed as having “everything
 120 it needs” – ample budget, controllable water, and experienced staff – to be a leader among large-scale river
 121 restoration programs. However, there is an acknowledgement that the TRRP has not been a model program
 122 in the past and is currently a long way from being a model program. Some reasons stated in the interviews:
 123

- 124 • The culture of the overall TRRP was described as “a meeting culture” not a “doing culture”.
- 125 • TRRP leadership was frequently described as “lacking”.
- 126 • The lack of a strategic plan and common vision for the TRRP is viewed as a significant impediment to
 127 progress on the goals and objectives.
- 128 • The TRRP is viewed as lacking transparency. Issues are decided behind closed doors, quid pro quo
 129 deals are struck between partners, and any negative or unexpected outcomes regarding construction
 130 projects or monitoring are suppressed.
- 131 • Staff turnover at the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is viewed as a
 132 significant issue that contributes to the lack of a consistent vision/mission of the TRRP.

133
 134 **Q: How well does the Trinity Management Council (TMC) function?**

135 A: Most interviewees described the TMC as either being ineffective at decision-making or, at a
 136 minimum, uncertain as to its role in the TRRP decision-making process. The lack of clarity about the TMC’s
 137 ability or authority to make decisions on behalf of the TRRP and what those decisions are were cited by
 138 most interviewees as a central problem within the TRRP. Key aspects of this issue stated in interviews
 139 include:
 140

- 141 • Interviewees noted struggles for power and control on the TMC. The Department of Interior (DOI)
 142 agencies were described as the co-leads of the TRRP but with Reclamation viewed as having the power
 143 as a function of controlling the majority of the funding.

- 144 • Several interviewees noted confusion over the Hoopa Valley Tribe signing the ROD and whether that
145 made the Tribe a TRRP co-lead or simply meant they agreed to the ROD.
- 146 • Most interviewees said that when new members join the TMC there is little to no formal orientation.
147 Members are expected to educate themselves about the TRRP and the TMC and are frequently not
148 given documents that provide a history of the TRRP.
- 149 • Several interviewees noted that the TMC seems to make technical decisions on TRRP implementation
150 and evaluation based on the budget and not on program science.
- 151 • Interviewees with knowledge of the early history of the TRRP said the initial design for the TMC was
152 to have Regional Directors and similar higher-level administrative managers sit on the TMC. However,
153 over time responsibility for participating in the TMC has gradually been delegated down to more junior
154 agency/partner staff.
- 155 • Many interviewees said the requirement of a supermajority for TMC voting is a major impediment to
156 moving forward on issues such as the budget, bylaws, and addition of new TMC members.
- 157 • The culture of the TMC is viewed as one that rewards “bad behavior” of its members.
- 158 • Leadership on TMC is viewed as weak, likely stemming from a lack of awareness of and agreement on
159 what the TRRP is doing and where it is going
- 160 • The TMC was generally noted by interviewees as being resistant to change and unable/unwilling to
161 implement the recommendations of previous TRRP reviews (TMC Subcommittee Report, CDR
162 Situation Assessment, etc.).
- 163 • Some interviewees believe the TMC should operate as a Board of Directors for the TRRP, but there is
164 a sense that TMC partners are too conflicted to fulfill that role.
- 165 • While not shared widely in the interviews, there was an opinion offered that the TMC does not really
166 make decisions for the TRRP but only makes recommendations to the DOI, and ultimately Reclamation
167 makes the decisions for the TRRP.
- 168 • Several interviewees stated an observation that the TMC does not listen to the Trinity River Adaptive
169 Management Working Group (TAMWG)¹ or consider their input important, and the TMC only gives
170 the appearance of taking public comment and input.

171

172 **Q: What is the overall health of the TRRP organization and funding structures?**

173 A: Interviewees were mixed in their opinions about what is working, what is not working, and what
174 could be done to improve TRRP structure and function. Notable responses include:

175

- 176 • Interviewees indicated there is limited TRRP identity. People identify themselves as working for their
177 specific agency/entity and not for the TRRP. There is little sense of team or collaborative spirit within
178 the program.
- 179 • Several interviewees pointed to a lack of continuity in leadership as a problem for the TRRP. There is
180 no consistent TRRP vision/plan so each new agency head brings their own interests and focus to the
181 program, some of which frequently are not consistent with the TRRP goal.
- 182 • Several interviewees stated that all TRRP partners should have higher level administrators at the table,
183 i.e., DOI Regional Directors, Tribal Chairs, Directors of State Agencies. Others would like to see the
184 TMC just approve (or recommend) the annual budget and that would be the extent of the involvement.
185 Still others would like to see the TMC terminated since decisions are subject to change by the federal
186 agencies, during the Tribal Government-to-Government process, or through direct lobbying in
187 Washington, DC.
- 188 • Several interviewees brought up the idea of independent implementation for the TRRP, though different
189 options were discussed. One set of interviewees mentioned the example of the Platte River Recovery
190 Implementation Program where a private consulting firm provides the Executive Director and program
191 staff. Another set of interviewees referred to the Glen Canyon Adaptive Management Program and its

¹ In November 2017, the Department of Interior ordered the TAMWG to be "administratively inactive".

192 model of involvement of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) as the scientific arm of the program.
 193 Some interviewees felt that some form of independent implementation is a necessity, but others are
 194 convinced that it would either never be allowed or, if attempted, would never work.

- 195 • Regarding the role of the federal agencies in staffing the TRRP, some interviewees focused on staff in
 196 the Weaverville office as being the unit that should be transferred to an independent entity, like the
 197 USGS or a private contractor. Another option would be to continue to house TRRP staff from different
 198 agencies/entities but that the Executive Director (ED) should have direct supervisory authority over all
 199 TRRP staff housed at that office. There was no clear model described that was viewed as a way to
 200 overcome seeming internal difficulty in the relationship between Reclamation TRRP staff and Service
 201 TRRP staff.
- 202 • Several interviewees discussed the current structure of the TRRP with multiple design teams as opposed
 203 to a single, unified program staff charged with implementation.
- 204 • The concept of “base funding” was mentioned by several interviewees. This was mentioned as a
 205 possible tool to help get over budget conflicts related to “legacy” projects versus “adaptive
 206 management” projects, and to provide financial security for some of the agencies/entities that is not
 207 tied to a specific monitoring or research activity.

208 **Q: How does the TRRP handle the issue of “conflict of interest”?**

209
 210 A: This was a significant concern noted by nearly all interviewees. Interviewees stated that TMC
 211 members are voting on budgets that benefit their agencies/entities in staffing, construction projects, and
 212 monitoring and see this as a significant conflict of interest. The concept of base funding (mentioned above)
 213 was noted as one possible remedy, but there was significant concern raised by multiple interviewees that
 214 this conflict of interest in the budget, how money is allocated to projects, and how decisions are made about
 215 this allocation is a potential fatal flaw for the TRRP.

216
 217 **Q: Has the TRRP ever been audited?**

218 A: A significant number of interviewees believed that an audit of the TRRP should be done to
 219 account for how the money has been spent and the results of those expenditures. It was apparent this issue
 220 was raised not in the sense of financial malfeasance, but rather as means to increase transparency about
 221 TRRP spending and associated results. Several interviewees stated that nobody at the state or federal level
 222 is asking the TRRP to show results against goals or milestones, or to account for how federal dollars have
 223 been spent over many years. Many interviewees wanted more transparency regarding the amount of funds
 224 that go to agency/entity salaries versus how much TRRP funding goes to restoration construction projects,
 225 overall implementation, and program science.

226
 227 **Q: What is the relationship between the TRRP partners?**

228 A: Several interviewees viewed the DOI agencies (Reclamation and Service) as having a great deal
 229 of animosity towards each other and not working together effectively. The Memorandum of Understanding
 230 (MOU) between Reclamation and the Service expired over a year ago and a revision has not been signed
 231 by either agency. Some interviewees felt finalizing this MOU was critical because it outlines how the
 232 Executive Director, Science Coordinator, and Implementation Branch Chief will work together as a staff
 233 leadership team for the TRRP. Many interviewees described a feeling of distrust of the Tribes by other
 234 TRRP partners. Interviewees viewed the two Tribes are as not getting along which translates into difficulties
 235 at the TMC level.

236 **Q: What is the public perception of the TRRP?**

237 A: There was a clear consensus among interviewees that the public perception of the TRRP is poor.
238 Explanations included:

- 239
- 240 • A lack of information about results being provided to the public, damage caused by projects to private
241 lands, and lack of local jobs resulting from TRRP.
 - 242 • Several interviewees noted the public’s unrealistic expectations for river restoration. When the TRRP
243 builds a restoration project, the public expects a fish increase the next year. When that does not happen,
244 the public is critical of the TRRP.
 - 245 • Several interviewees commented that the TRRP had done a “poor job” with outreach to private
246 landowners in the past.

247

248 **Q: What is the TRRP’s view of adaptive management?**

249 A: While interviewees generally agreed that adaptive management is supposed to be part of the
250 TRRP, there was no agreement as to how (or if) the TRRP defines adaptive management and whether the
251 TRRP is implementing adaptive management at all (or whether it wants to, or whether it can). In general,
252 there was no clarity among interviewees as to what questions the TRRP is trying to answer, what hypotheses
253 are to be “tested” through program implementation, how to synthesize information to make it useful for
254 decision-makers, and how (or if) decision-makers on the TMC would even use such information. TRRP
255 science is viewed by many as being a lower priority in the budget than construction projects. Many
256 interviewees described science (or adaptive management) as receiving what is left over in the budget after
257 construction projects are funded. The TRRP was described as data rich but information poor. For example,
258 there is a belief that the TRRP is creating more habitat for fish and producing more juvenile fish, but there
259 are no reports showing these results and making these connections.

260

261 Generally, there was agreement among the interviewees that the TRRP is not operating under an
262 agreed-to Adaptive Management Plan. Some interviewees pointed to the IAP as being the best example of
263 an adaptive management guidance document for the TRRP, but there was a general consensus among
264 interviewees that the IAP is not being used in that way. Several interviewees described the IAP as an
265 “everything and the kitchen sink” document that does not prioritize objectives, thus making it too unwieldy
266 to be useful. Other interviewees called it a “wish list” that would be helpful if funding were unlimited to
267 implement the numerous objectives/projects. Some interviewees did say they used the IAP to cite objectives
268 in writing project proposals because it is so broad that most any project can be justified.

269

270 **Q: What is the role of independent science in the TRRP?**

271 A: Most interviewees said that the Science Advisory Board (SAB) is underutilized in the TRRP.
272 There is a belief that the TRRP is not getting its money’s worth out of the SAB and that there is not enough
273 interaction between the SAB and the TMC. Several interviewees said this may stem from a lack of clarity
274 about who is in charge of the SAB and how their annual work plan is developed and administered. Some
275 interviewees noted that SAB members are currently being used on an individual basis for certain TRRP
276 agencies or entities instead of providing overarching programmatic reviews for the TMC. Several
277 interviewees noted the SAB is supposed to have five members but that has apparently dwindled down to
278 three members as of 2017.

279 **4.0 Next Steps**

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Our team will now move to Task 4 of the TRRP Refinements work and evaluate and summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the TRRP organizational structure. Knowledge gained thus far through document review and interviews will point us toward aspects of the TRRP that most need to be evaluated.

Items identified as red flags or areas of concern during the interviews and discussed in this report will remain as priorities to investigate and address during completion of the remaining tasks. Our expectation is that these items will remain on our list of possible recommended refinements and will not be directly addressed by the TRRP until the end of the first year of our TRRP Refinements work.

289 **Appendix A – TRRP Written Interview Questions**

290

291 Identification

292 **Q1** First Name

293

294 **Q2** Last Name

295

296 **Q3** Organization

297

298 **Q4** Role in the TRRP

299

300 End of Block

301

302 Goals and Objectives

303 **Q5** What is your interpretation of the goal of the TRRP? Is progress toward this goal being tracked, and if
304 so, how?

305

306 **Q6** What are the objectives of the TRRP?

307

308 End of Block

309

310 Governance Component - Legitimacy

311 **Q7** Why is there not a single foundational Program document?

312

313 End of Block

314

315 Governance Component - Structure and Capacity

316 **Q8** Is the TMC empowered to make all Program decisions? Does it operate by consensus?

317

318 **Q9** Describe the relationship as you understand it between the TMC, TAMWG, Program operations staff,
319 Program science staff, and SAB.

320

321 **Q10** Are any key stakeholders currently not at the "TRRP table"? Why are they not engaged fully now?

322

323 End of Block

324

325 Governance Component - Decision-Making Process

326 **Q11** Is there agreement among the TMC on the goal and objectives? Why or why not?

327

328 **Q12** How do you define success for the TRRP? How is that success measured?

329

330 **Q13** Is there regular, clear communication of scientific and technical information to the TMC? Does it
331 pertain to Program decisions?

332

333 End of Block

334 Adaptive Management Component - Assess

335 **Q14** How does the TRRP define adaptive management (AM)?

336

337 **Q15** What critical decisions does the TMC need to make in the next 5-10 years? What key questions
338 (uncertainties) do you have related to these decisions? What information do you need to help you answer
339 those questions and make those decisions?

340

341 **Q16** Is there a common understanding of key Program hypotheses – what you don't know but want to
342 learn?

343

344 **Q17** Has the Integrated Assessment Plan been officially adopted within the TRRP? How does it relate to
345 the Program's foundational documents?

346

347 End of Block

348

349 Adaptive Management Component - Design

350 **Q18** How do the fish population numbers identified in the EIS/EIR, and the flow and sediment
351 augmentation volumes in the ROD and Implementation Plan relate to Program decision-making? What
352 flexibility is there in terms of implementing management actions related to these metrics?

353

354 End of Block

355

356 Adaptive Management Component - Monitor

357 **Q19** Is Program monitoring structured to provide information on the key decision-maker questions?

358

359 End of Block

360

361 Adaptive Management Component - Evaluate

362 **Q20** Does the TRRP engage in data synthesis – essentially, telling the “story” of AM?

363

364 End of Block

365

366 Adaptive Management Component - Adjust

367 **Q21** Is there a specific process for using TRRP science information to help make decisions?

368

369 End of Block

370

371 Overall

372 **Q22** What are your biggest concerns about the TRRP, and what do you think can be done about them?

373

374 **Q23** What else do you think we need to know, or that you want to tell us, that we did not cover?