

General Focus Group Process, to be adapted for Interviews

In each of the 12 focus groups, about 10 participants will provide oral and written feedback based on descriptive materials (e.g., pictures and written descriptions of the salmon and sea run trout of the Elwha River) presented to them in a series of handouts. The use of handouts helps gather individual views on specific issues before a group discussion on a topic. The focus group moderators will lead a discussion based on the orally presented materials and handouts and ask participants to describe their responses and to provide additional clarification of key issues. During the focus group process, the Team will:

- ▶ Assess participant's knowledge of anadromous fish, dams and dam removal impacts, ecosystem restoration, and related topics.
- ▶ Discover issues of potential importance that may have been overlooked in background research,
- ▶ Learn how facts and concepts can be most clearly presented, both through language and graphics,
- ▶ Explore the alternative approaches to incorporating uncertainty about specific information into the analysis, and
- ▶ Explore potential valuation approaches and payment vehicles to determine whether people understand and correctly interpret draft valuation questions.

Between each focus group, we will refine the draft survey materials to improve respondents' understanding and interpretation to ensure valid survey responses. The focus group format and questions will evolve between focus groups since each one builds upon information learned in the previous one. For the first focus groups, we anticipate having an initial set of open-ended questions about the topics listed below. These questions will help the Team understand what existing knowledge people have of the dam removal and restoration activities and what information we need to provide. In general focus group discussion topics will include:

- ▶ Perception of natural resource or environmental problems.
- ▶ Knowledge of issues related to anadromous fish, dam impacts, and dam removal issues in the region.
- ▶ Knowledge of the Elwha River and its water and fishery resources.
- ▶ Knowledge and perceptions of the various proposed Elwha River restoration activities.
- ▶ Relative preference for alternative proposed restoration actions.

Some of the specific types of questions that may be used to assess participant's background knowledge of the dam removal include:

- ▶ Please write down anything that you have heard or read about the removal of the Elwha and Glines Canyon dams.
- ▶ Please write down anything you have heard or read about proposed restoration activities around the Elwha River.

Once we collect information on participants' baseline knowledge in the initial focus groups, we can begin to craft descriptive language about the dam removal and restoration activities to present to participants in the next focus groups. At this stage we will begin to explore how participants react to the specific words we use in the focus group handouts and the overall presentation of information. We would make sure that all participants interpret descriptive materials and questions in the same way when we discuss the details of the restoration options. There are a lot of technical terms that we will likely have to simplify for participants. For example, we have found in the past that people may have a difficult time defining a floodplain. We may have to use words other than floodplain to convey the same concept or meaning. Examples of questions the moderators might ask in an open-ended format are below.

- ▶ In your own words, how would you define the word floodplain?
- ▶ When you hear the word floodplain, what do you think of?
- ▶ (After some discussion) Can you describe what I am talking about in your own words?

During this stage, we will also explore the best way to present information, particularly the science, to participants. Some people prefer to see information summarized in tables; others prefer a graph. We will experiment with different types of presentations to see which one fits best for this particular topic.

A further refinement to the survey language involves clearly incorporating scientific uncertainty into the descriptions of ecological endpoints. For example, scientists expect salmon to return to the Elwha River after the dams are removed, but there is uncertainty regarding both how soon this will occur and how big the population will be. This information must be communicated in the policy scenarios in order to ensure the survey is scientifically valid. We anticipate exploring the most effective way to communicate the concepts of ranges, probabilities, and averages by presenting the same information using different language, and asking follow-up questions to determine how well participants understood the information. Examples of questions the moderators might ask are below:

- ▶ In your own words, how soon do scientists expect salmon to return to the Elwha River?
- ▶ How many salmon do scientists expect will return to the Elwha River?

- ▶ Is this a sure thing, or might the results be different than the prediction from scientists?

Finally, the survey will ask respondents to choose between alternative potential restoration scenarios that cost different amounts of money. We will use the focus groups to determine the most appropriate way to present the cost the restoration activities. We will present these choices using different payment methods, such as higher taxes or higher electricity prices, to determine the most appropriate method for this project. The moderators would then follow up with questions such as:

- ▶ Is there anything that concerns you regarding how these activities would be paid for?
- ▶ Would you be more or less willing to pay for these activities if it were paid for in a different way?

As with the earliest, more general questions, these will be refined as the focus groups progress, based on previous participants' responses during this phase of the research.

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Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average two hours per focus group and one hour per interview, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other suggestions for reducing this burden to Peter Edwards, NOAA NMFS, 301-427-8608.

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