

**SUMMARY OF
COMPACT IMPLEMENTATION TECHNICAL TEAM (CITT) MEETING**

May 9, 2024

1:00pm-3:00pm
(Remote) Zoom Meeting

In Attendance (Quorum Established)

Nick Belcourt, Flathead Indian Irrigation project (FIIP)
David Lake, Irrigator Representative
Casey Ryan, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)
Maya Rao, MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
Daniel Lozar, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)

Call to Order

Chair Maya Rao called the meeting to order at 1:07 PM. A quorum was established.

Approve Agenda

CITT members were given an opportunity to review the draft agenda for the meeting. Casey Ryan proposed to amend the agenda by adding a “Water Year Type 101” presentation by Maya Rao under item 3. Motion by Casey to approve the agenda with the “Water Year Type 101” addition. Second by Dan. Amended agenda approved by 5 of 5 members.

Informational Updates

Irrigator Updates

Dave provided an update from the irrigators. He mentioned a recent rain event and that crop growth has been a bit slower than normal.

CSKT Updates

Casey provided updates provided updates from CSKT. He noted that the USGS gage at Mission Creek above Mission Reservoir has been disabled on CSKT’s water data website. The USGS recently moved the gage, and they are currently developing a new rating curve. The gage will be back online when the rating curve is completed, which is anticipated to be next week. The CSKT gage at Post Creek above McDonald Reservoir has also recently been moved and is currently offline. When the new rating curve is developed the gage will be back online. CSKT hydrographers measured a flow of 57 cfs at Post Creek above McDonald Reservoir this afternoon (5/09).

Casey noted that CSKT has been working with FIIP staff to help become familiar with all of the features of CSKT’s water data website. Casey urged CITT members to fill out the questionnaire from MSU Extension about the irrigator efficiency specialist position.

BIA Updates

Dan provided updates from BIA. FIIP recently hosted the 2026 Financial Program Planning Session for the BIA’s three Northwest Region irrigation projects. Dan reported that it was a successful meeting. Dan continues to work with FIIP and is making an effort to interface with FIIP more in person.

DNRC Updates

Maya provided updates from DNRC. She also noted that she inadvertently went out of turn in the proposed update order. She has been exploring options for the administration of the off-season stock water mitigation funds within DNRC. Maya mentioned DNRC's focus on attending more irrigator meetings and engaging more with FIIP.

FIIP Updates

Nick provided updates from FIIP. Current Reservoir volumes are as follows: Pablo 60%, Tabor St. Mary's 29%, Mission 46%, Lower Crow 71%, McDonald 24%, Ninepipes 22%, Kickinghorse 36% Hubbard 27%, Little Bitterroot 40%, Lower Jocko 14%, Upper Jocko (Black Lake) 37%, Twin/Turtle 24%, Lower Dry Fork 19%, Upper Dry Fork, 40%.

Nick noted that FIIP started implementing incremental MEFs starting on May 1. Nick also reported that the Flathead Pumping Plant has been started for the irrigation season with Pump #3 coming online yesterday (5/08) and Pump #1 coming online earlier today (5/09). FIIP recently met with irrigators in the Camas area to discuss start up dates. Currently, water is being transferred from the Little Bitterroot and Hubbard to the Lower Dry Fork Reservoir. FIIP is waiting until the Lower Dry Fork has refilled more to start discharging, but there is no definitive start-up date for the Camas/Hot Spring area.

Current weather forecasts predict higher temperatures and FIIP anticipates runoff starting early next week. Nick noted that operators are prepared to capture as much water as possible and will work through the weekend if needed.

FIIP recently hired a new office admin clerk named Brenda. Nick mentioned that there are currently three FIIP positions that are currently posted on USA Jobs: lands clerk, engineering tech, and irrigation systems operator. The Jocko and North Divisions are fully staffed. The South Division is currently understaffed. Three maintenance employees will be temporarily assigned to the South Division. Three employees were hired through CSKT to staff the South Division.

Maintenance in the Jocko Division is almost completed to be ready for startup. FIIP is completing maintenance on structure into Pablo A Canal is almost ready for startup with FIIP completing maintenance on one structure into Pablo A. There are currently no water orders on the Pablo A Canal, but FIIP expects orders to start next week. Water is running in Moiese and Jocko but deliveries in both areas will be decreased due to recent precipitation.

Water Management Coordination

Water Year 101

Maya gave a Water Year 101 presentation on CITT's water year type categorization. The presentation included a description of the static terms used in the water year classification. She stated that water year classifications, found in Appendix 3.7 of the Compact, were determined based on modeled natural flows at the mouths of major streams for the 1983-2002 period. A Wet Year is categorized as less than a 20% chance of exceedance, a Dry Year has greater than an 80% chance of exceedance, and a Normal Year is between the 20% and 80% exceedance thresholds. She noted that a year can feel drier or wetter than normal without being extreme enough to meet the statistical threshold for a Wet or Dry Water Year categorization; thus, it would be classified as a Normal Year by CITT. Maya also reviewed the data sources used in the water year categorization process.

Refine Projection of Water Supply

Brian Hogenson presented a water supply outlook for May to inform CITT's refinement of the 2024 water year projection. Brian noted that the St. Ignatius AgriMet station recorded 1.35 inches of precipitation from May 1-5. NOAA's 6-10 day forecast (May 14-18) indicated above normal temperatures and average precipitation. NOAA's forecast for May indicated normal temperature and precipitation, and the three-month outlook (May-July) indicated a medium likelihood of above-average temperatures, and a slight likelihood of below average precipitation for the Flathead Basin.

The NRCS median snow water equivalent (SWE) data indicate a 74% median SWE for the Flathead Basin as of May 6, and 78% of median as of May 8 due to recent snow. The SWE projection plot for the Flathead Basin shows that there is just over 15 inches (in) of SWE and the basin is trending well below the median. The Moss Peak station is trending upward after recent snowfall and has around 32 in SWE but is also below the median. The North Fork Jocko station is trending around the minimum. Brian highlighted that current SWE is about 27 in, compared to 43 in at this time last year.

Brian discussed NRCS's May-July forecast. Since CITT's water year categorization is for the April-July time period, he added the May-July forecast to the observed April precipitation. The combined May-July forecast with observed April flows had percent of medians of 54% at Mill Creek, 60% at South Fork Jocko, 75% at Hellroaring, 78% at South Crow, and 80% at Mission Creek. Brian noted that for all gaging sites the 50% exceedance level fell in the dry end of the Normal Year category, except Mill Creek which fell in the Dry Year category.

After the presentation, Maya asked about the methodology of adding measured April flows to the NRCS forecast for May-July to develop the May water supply outlook. Brian stated that including the measured flows from April increases forecast precision. Another benefit of this method is that its results are for the April-July period making them directly comparable to the April forecast, and the water year thresholds listed in Appendix 3.7.

Updated Water Year Categorization

Maya provided context on CITT's categorization of water year type. This determination is called for in Appendix 3.5 and the recommended procedure is described in Appendix 3.7. Maya stated that in April CITT categorized the Little Bitterroot Area as Dry, the Mission Area as Normal, and the Jocko Area as Normal.

CITT discussed that water year type categorization will affect RDAs and instream flows (MEFs and TIFs) in the future and emphasized the importance of understanding those impacts. Maya clarified that regardless of water year categorization, incremental MEFs (set at the April 10 meeting) will remain in effect for the 2024 irrigation season.

CITT members discussed water year categorization in the Little Bitterroot Area. Casey noted that since the April meeting, forecasted flows have decreased in the Little Bitterroot Area, and suggested that CITT keep Little Bitterroot in the Dry category. It was also noted that in the Little Bitterroot Area, MEFs and RDAs remain the same in a Dry and a Normal Year. After discussion, CITT members agreed to keep the Little Bitterroot in the Dry Year category.

CITT members discussed whether to keep the Mission Area in the Normal category or change it to Dry. It was noted that RDAs do change significantly in the Mission Area based on water year type. Nick noted that regardless of CITT's water year categorization, FIIP's ability to capture water is heavily influenced by the timing of runoff. After discussion, CITT agreed to keep the Mission Area in the Normal Year category and noted that the Mission Area was at the dry end of a Normal Year.

Dave asked about the impact of a Dry vs Normal Year categorization on RDAs in the Jocko Area. Casey stated that in a Dry Year, RDAs in the Jocko Area would decrease overall by 8%, largely influenced by a decrease in the Tabor Feeder Canal RDA Administrative Area. This would limit FIIP's ability to move water from the Jocko north to the Mission Area. However, some downstream Jocko RDA Administrative Areas would receive small increases in RDA allocations during Dry Years.

Dan pointed out that the SWE at the North Fork Jocko site was at the third percentile of the historic data, causing him to lean towards a Dry Year categorization. Nick noted that it took FIIP operators significantly less time than normal plow up to Placid Diversion, indicating low snowpack in the Jocko Area. Casey mentioned that climatic forecast is not an input to NRCS's M4 model, but that warmer temperatures were expected in the 6-10 days forecast. CITT members had additional discussion including talking about SNOTEL data and the impact of water year categorization on FIIP's water management decisions in the future.

Dave made a motion to categorize the Little Bitterroot as Dry, the Mission as Normal, and the Jocko as Dry. Second by Nick. Motion approved by 5 of 5 members.

Discuss Next Steps and Schedule

The CITT discussed next steps. The CITT discussed the date of the next CITT meeting and the CITT meeting schedule.

Public Comment

The CITT did not receive any public comment.

End Meeting

Motion by Casey to end the meeting. Second by Dave. Approved by 5 of 5 members. Meeting adjourned at 2:58 pm.

Next Meeting

The next CITT meeting is scheduled for May 15, 2024 at 1 pm at Mission Valley Power.