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June 3, 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: Jennifer Light, Director of Power Planning

SUBJECT: Scoping the Changing Hydro Operations Scenario

BACKGROUND:

Presenters: Jennifer Light, Dor Hirsh Bar Gai, John Ollis, John Shurts, Kate Self and Patty O'Toole

Summary: The Power Division has proposed including a scenario in the Ninth Power Plan that explores power system implications of changing hydro operations. The purpose of this work session is to discuss potential sensitivity options that the Council could explore in this scenario. Staff seek to gather initial member questions and feedback around these proposed options, which will help inform a final proposed scope for consideration at the Council's July meeting in Portland.

Relevance: The Council is actively working through the amendment process for its Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program and the development of its Ninth Power Plan. Key to both processes is understanding of the region's current hydropower system operations and exploring considerations for changes to these operations. For the power plan, the Changing Hydro Operations Scenario is the place in which the power division will explore the power system implications of both current and potentially different operations.

Workplan: B. Development of Ninth Power Plan

Background: Hydro system operations provide an important nexus point between the Council's fish and wildlife and power planning responsibilities. On the fish and wildlife side, the Council must develop a program that protects, mitigates and enhances the fish and wildlife impacted by the operation of hydro projects on the Columbia River and its tributaries. This program builds upon the recommendations (and the comments on the recommendations) from the Federal and region's state fish and wildlife agencies, Tribes, and others. Both historically and today, these recommendations have included proposed operational changes to the hydro system for the benefit of fish in the Columbia River System.

On the power planning side, the Council must develop a power plan that puts forward a scheme for developing new resources to reduce or meet the Administrator's obligations. This includes the Administrator's obligations to implement the Council's fish and wildlife program; essentially recognizing that there may be changes to operations for fish and wildlife that would require the acquisition of new resources.

Staff anticipated that hydro operations for fish and wildlife would be a key issue to be addressed in the upcoming amendment process and have been working to create space to assess this issue through both its power planning and program amendment activities. Staff have been preparing the Council for this work through briefings and other discussions throughout the past year and a half (see [More info](#) for links to those materials). At the June meeting, staff want to continue the conversation with more of a focus on the proposed Changing Hydro Operations Scenario to be explored in the Ninth Power Plan.

Staff will come prepared with a suite of potential options for analytical questions to be explored through sensitivities. These proposed options will include:

- Analysis of current operations
- Analysis of operations guided by recommendations into the Council's fish and wildlife program amendment process. These recommendations primarily focus on changes to operations that will reduce water transit times through the lower Snake and lower Columbia rivers. Staff will discuss a range of potential options that could be explored to address this space.
- Analysis of operations where the hydro system has more or less daily and weekly ramping flexibility. The Council's 2021 Power Plan identified daily ramping of the hydro system as a potential issue to explore further, and several entities recommended the Council's focus on limiting this ramping in both the upcoming program and power plan processes. Staff will discuss potential options of both limiting and expanding this flexibility.
- Other options that explore combinations of the above.

More info: In [May 2025](#), staff started the discussion around hydrosystem operations and exploring the intersection between the Council's program and power plan on this topic.

In [March 2025](#), power staff presented on the “needs assessment” for the Power Plan, which will be a primary focus when analyzing the impacts of possible changes in hydrosystem operations on the region’s power supply

The Fish and Wildlife Division has provided multiple briefings on the measures included in the Council’s Fish and Wildlife Program and assessments of the actual implementation of the operations:

- An [October 2023](#) presentation on the implementation of hydrosystem
- The [September 2024](#) presentation on the hydrosystem categorical assessment
- The [January 2025](#) documentation for the “Fish and Wildlife Program Performance Assessment, 1980-2022: Hydrosystem Category”
- A [January 2025](#) presentation on hydrosystem operations with a focus on the sources for operations in decisions on Program measures and elsewhere

Finally, the Fish and Wildlife Division have provided the members the full set of recommendations on the amendment of the Council’s Fish and Wildlife Program and will be briefing the Council on those recommendations, with a specific focus on the hydro operations recommendations, earlier in the day at this June meeting.