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# Northwest Power and Conservation Council

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August 5, 2025

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Council Members

**FROM:** Jennifer Light, Director of Power Planning

**SUBJECT:** Proposed Changing Hydro Operations Scenario

## BACKGROUND:

**Presenters:** Jennifer Light, Dor Hirsh Bar Gai, Kate Self, John Shurts

**Summary:** The Power Division has proposed including a scenario in the Ninth Power Plan that explores the power system implications of changing hydro operations. This scenario is intended to provide information to inform the Ninth Power Plan by exploring how resource needs change with uncertainty in future hydro operations. Additionally, it is expected to inform the Council's Fish and Wildlife Program amendment process. Staff have developed a suite of proposed sensitivities to include in this scenario. These include:

- **Current Operations:** Sensitivity to reflect operations for 2026 and beyond to inform needs and provide a basis of comparison against other sensitivities. Staff propose to model spill operations as defined by the preferred alternative in the 2020 Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement (CRSO EIS); unless the Action Agencies provide alternate information on planned operations for 2026 by the end of August.
  - **Additional Alternate Operations:** Staff also propose a potential additional sensitivity that reflects the operations as defined by the 2023 Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement. This would be included given the uncertainty around future operations.

- **Limited Daily Flexibility:** Sensitivity to reflect power system implications of limiting the daily flexibility (changes in daily elevations and outflows).
- **Recommended Operations for Minimum Operating Pool (MOP) and Spill:** Sensitivity to analyze the power system impacts of the MOP and spill operations recommended by several entities. This would provide a piece of information to inform the Fish and Wildlife Program amendment process.

These proposed sensitivities have been informed by recommendations and comments on recommendations into the Fish and Wildlife Program amendment process, 2021 Power Plan analysis, and other considerations. At the August Council meeting, staff are seeking a head nod from members on this proposed scope.

**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.

**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 below for links to those materials). After discussions with the Council and consideration of the recommendations and comments on the recommendations

into the Fish and Wildlife Program amendment process, staff prepared the final proposed scope for the Changing Hydro Operations Scenario.

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 [June 2025](#), staff presented early thinking on a range of potential options for power system analysis, based on the recommendations received in the Fish and Wildlife Program amendment process.

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 with the full set of recommendations, and comments on the recommendations, on the amendment of the Council's Fish and Wildlife. The staff briefed the members on those recommendations at the [June 2025](#) meeting and on the comments on the recommendations at the [July 2025](#) meeting.