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March 3, 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: Patty O'Toole, Fish and Wildlife Division Director

SUBJECT: Fish and Wildlife Division update

BACKGROUND:

Presenter: Patty O'Toole

Summary: Staff will review highlights of the division work plan for 2026 and note primary tasks and alert Council members to important upcoming decisions and tasks for 2026.

Relevance: Early each year the division reviews the work plan and tailors the tasks and timelines for the current year and key Council functions.

Background:

At the March Council meeting, staff will review highlights of the Fish and Wildlife Division Workplan for 2026. The work of the staff is generally organized into three major areas: 1) Fish and Wildlife Program planning and policy; 2) Fish and Wildlife Program implementation and project reviews; and 3) Program performance. There is some overlap between these three areas.

Staff expects the work to complete the amendments to the 2014/2020 Program will continue through mid-2026.

Specific tasks include wrapping up the comment period on the Draft 2026 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program, reviewing and summarizing the comments, working through the comments with Council members and incorporating comments as directed by the members and developing a final program the members will consider for adoption. This work will be one of the two primary focus areas of the staff through the first half of 2026.

The other primary work area for 2026 is executing the current project review cycle. Per the Northwest Power Act, the Council is to review projects and make recommendations to Bonneville for funding. The Council will hear an update on the current project review process (Fish and Wildlife Lands projects) at the March meeting. Work will continue in 2026 to plan the next review of direct-funded mitigation projects. The Council is implementing a new approach to the process for reviewing projects that have had prior review and Council recommendation. This updated approach aims to streamline the review process, and still yield value for the program, rate payers and project sponsors.

The staff also anticipates *new* projects coming into the Program through agreements between Bonneville and sponsors that will require a more comprehensive review, and staff will continue to track implementation of previous Council review recommendations.

Other important activities that will occur in 2026 include the continued implementation of the Council's Asset Management Strategic Plan, review of the fall chinook Lower Snake River Compensation Program by the ISRP (a reimbursable program), and ongoing updating and maintaining information used for assessing program performance. There are many other detailed tasks and work groups the staff engages in on a regular basis, as time allows.

Once the Fish and Wildlife Program is adopted, the division will need to work with Council members to develop an implementation or action plan for implementing the new 2026 Program. Staff will discuss ideas for this with the Council in March.

The Fish and Wildlife division currently is staffed with five professional staff and a director that will perform in the bulk of this work, with the support of an administrative assistant. The division also houses and supports the Independent Science Manager who works side by side with staff on organizing and planning project and science reviews, and reports to the science panel executive boards.

Northwest Power and Conservation Council

Fish and Wildlife Division update
March 11, 2026



Northwest **Power** and
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Brief update on current division work plan, planning for what's next

- Division work plan basics
 - Why
 - Drivers
- Major tasks for 2026
- Need to update work plan later in 2026

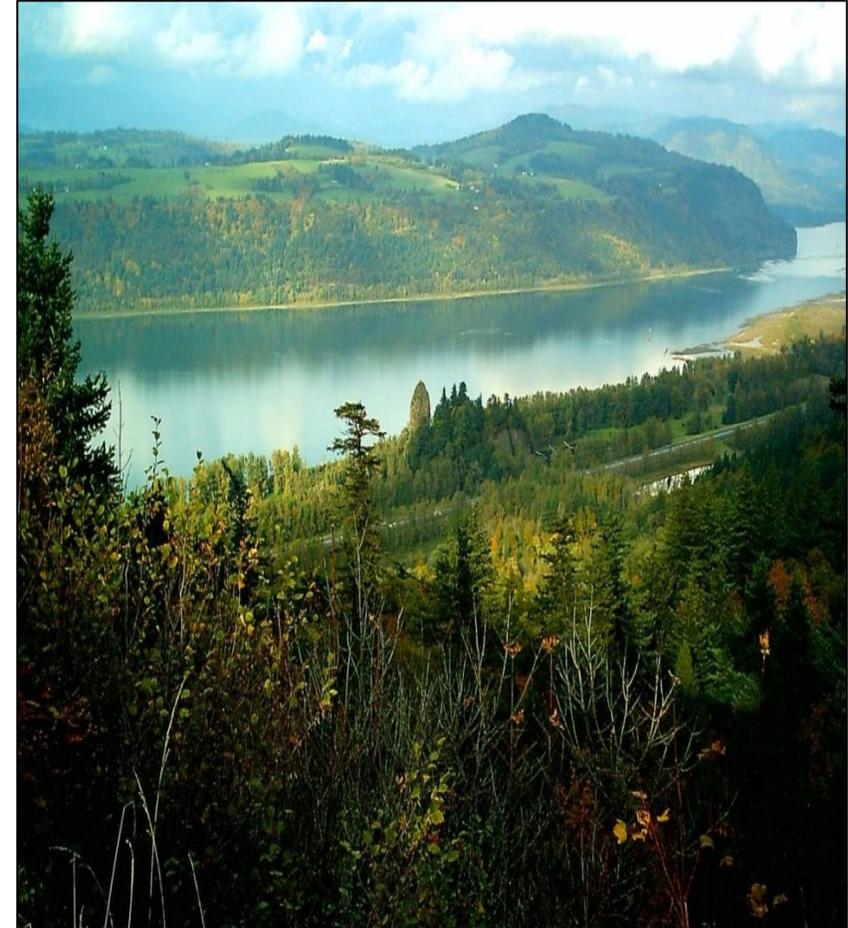
Fish and Wildlife Division

- Why a work plan?
 - Provides discipline and clarity, opportunity to talk about priorities
 - Identify deliverables and Council decisions – improve planning
- History
 - Planning and program development ('80s-'90s)
 - Implementation ('00-10s)
 - Performance (last 5-10 years)



Driver: Northwest Power Act

- **Develop and periodically amend a Program to protect, mitigate and enhance** the fish and wildlife affected by the hydrosystem, including related spawning grounds and habitat, of the Columbia River and its tributaries...

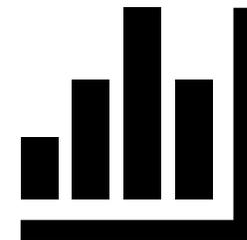


Driver: Northwest Power Act 1996 amendment

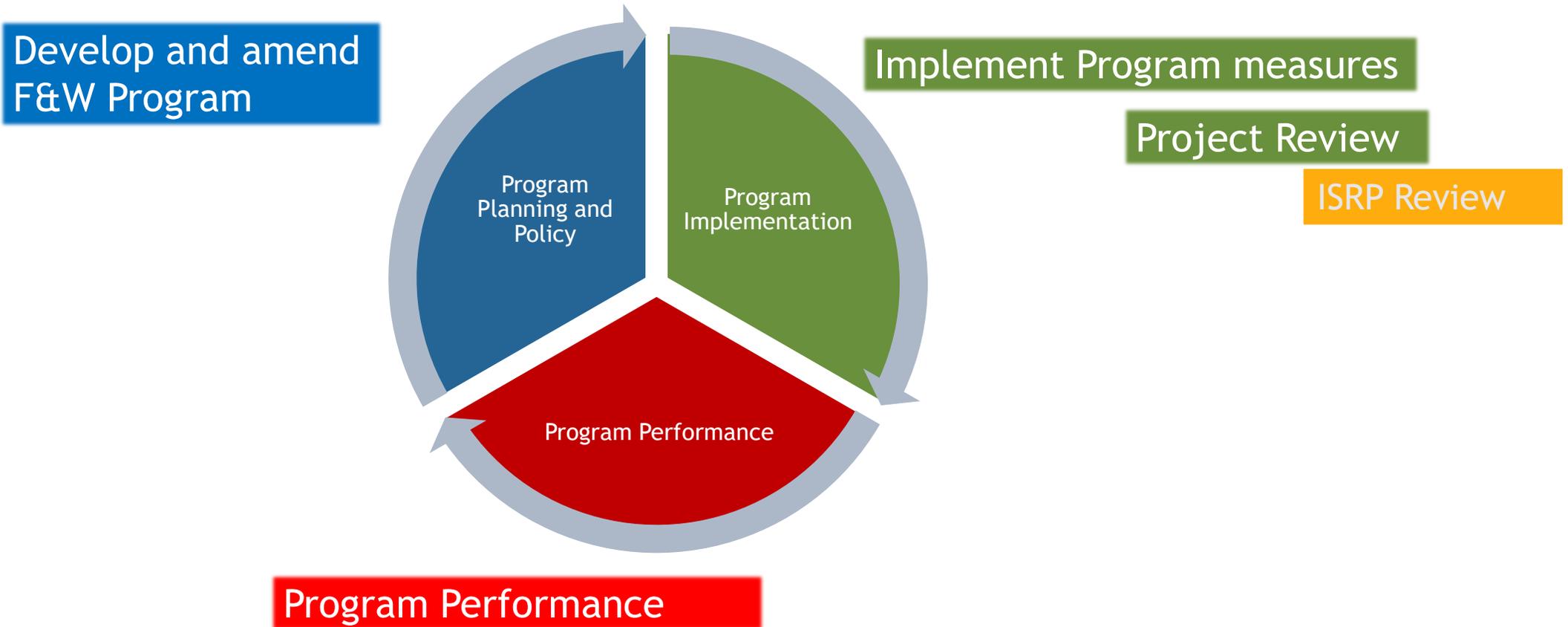
- Added a Council role in project review
- Establish Independent Scientific Review Panel – review projects proposed to implement F&W Program
- Calls for public and Council review after ISRP report
- Council review: consider ocean conditions; projects include cost-effective measures to meet objectives
- Council project recommendations to Bonneville – if Council differs with ISRP, must explain in writing

Driver: Northwest Power Act, Fish and Wildlife Program

- **Northwest Power Act**
 - effectiveness/performance
- **2014/2020 Fish and Wildlife Program**
 - implementation, performance
- **Council direction 2018**
 - performance



Northwest Power and Conservation Council Fish and Wildlife Division

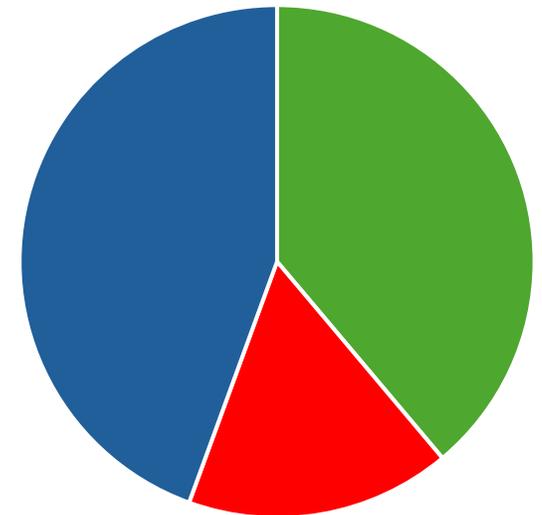


2026 Division tasks pre-adoption of Program

Two major work plan elements are the focus of early 2026

- Complete work to adopt a final Fish and Wildlife Program, Findings and Response to Recommendations
- Continue to review projects
- Other tasks carry on as well as time allows

- Policy and planning
- Implementation
- Performance



Work plan excerpts (examples only)

busy

Program Planning and Policy

Task	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
A. <u>Program amendment general tasks for 2025</u>												
1. Organize and hold public hearings												
2. Organize and hold consultations on draft												
3. Staff work to prepare for managing comments on draft												
4. Review comments and record												
5. Summarize comments on draft												
6. Draft final amendments												
7. Organize decision process and materials to adopt 2026 Fish and Wildlife Program												
8. Support legal and public affairs divisions to develop findings and response to recommendations												

A few examples

Program Implementation / Project Review

Task	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
A. Direct Program project review (ongoing projects)												
1. Continuation and completion of Lands Review												
1- Sponsors submit review materials												
2- Staff review and submit to ISRP												
3- Staff review, recommendations development, coordination with ISRP/Sponsors as needed												
4- Public Comment												
5- Council Decision												
6- Communicate Council recommendations to Bonneville and others												
2. Preparation work for next review group (ongoing projects)												
Task	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1- Internal coordination to decide set of projects to review and schedule for all remaining ongoing projects												
2- Develop draft targeted questions and guidance template for projects identified for next review (need all staff coordination)												
3- Coordination and communication with Bonneville and ISRP to outline plan												

2026 Division tasks post-adoption of Program

- Project review tasks continue, planning for next set of projects for review
- Program Performance tasks
- Program amendment  Program implementation
 - Based on final Program, develop strategy or plan for implementation or
 - Identify tasks
 - Identify timeframes
 - Identify resources needed
 - Update work plan for the division accordingly, prioritize tasks for remainder of 2026

