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October 6, 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: Heather Hendrixson

SUBJECT: Update from Project #1992-026-01, Grande Ronde Model Watershed, an Umbrella project.

BACKGROUND:

Presenter: Jesse Steele, Executive Director, Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW)

Summary: Jesse will provide an update and overview of this project that coordinates watershed planning activities within the Grande Ronde River and Imnaha River subbasins of northeast Oregon and southeast Washington. The watershed activities are focused on habitat protection and restoration and are generally designed to enhance salmon and steelhead and other native fishes, while encouraging and supporting land and water management, economics, and multiple land uses consistent with sound ecosystem management.

Relevance: [Project #1992-026-01, Grande Ronde Model Watershed](#) (GRMW) is one of the seven umbrella¹ habitat projects supported by the Fish and Wildlife Program. The project uses a comprehensive watershed management approach, using structured and science-based decision tools to enhance implementation of on the ground activities, resolve conflicts, and formulate priorities for action.

¹ see page 2 for information regarding the Program's umbrella projects.

Workplan: Fish and Wildlife Division work plan 2026; Program planning & coordination.

Background: The GRMW serves as the primary coordinating entity for natural resource management in the Grande Ronde and Imnaha subbasins, also functioning as the watershed council in the same geography. The GRMW formed in 1992 and was designated Oregon's model watershed by Governor Roberts in response to the Council's call for "locally-based, bottom-up, voluntary" habitat restoration and "comprehensive watershed management" due to declining salmon and steelhead populations. Action agencies, BPA, and BOR, continue to focus funding on the Grande Ronde Basin as directed under the Fish and Wildlife Program and the 2020 Columbia River System Biological Opinion. GRMW provides the strategy for investing those resources. The GRMW Board of Directors represents a wide array of local interests and provides a means for community input into resource management and recovery of salmon and steelhead.

The GRMW program focuses on ecosystem restoration, coordination, and outreach on private and public lands to promote species recovery. The role of the GRMW is to prioritize, select, review, and fund habitat protection and restoration projects to benefit ESA listed salmon and other fishes in the Grande Ronde and Imnaha subbasins.

As a model watershed, the GRMW was designed to serve as an example for the establishment of watershed management partnerships among local residents, state and federal agency staff, and public interest groups concerned with the management of a watershed at a locally-based level to improve coordination, integration, and implementation to effectively protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat, improve water supply and quality, and foster community development within the region.

Umbrella Projects

Umbrella projects are subsets of the habitat projects currently being implemented through the Program. The seven umbrella projects under the Program are unique because of their coordination role in offering a solicitation and review process that can fund local entities to implement habitat projects. The funding, review, and selection process functions like a grant program for the area. The science review that would normally occur through an Independent Science Review Panel (ISRP) review occurs at the local level with ISRP-reviewed criteria and local technical teams. While the processes differ slightly in each area, the umbrella projects are largely defined by their approach to: 1) serve as a coordinating entity among sponsors in a particular sub-region to identify, review, and select projects; 2) use a formal project solicitation process; and 3) allocate and administer Bonneville funds to other entities for implementation.

As part of the Geographic Category Review in 2013, the Council formalized and established a set of principles to guide umbrella habitat projects ([Programmatic Issue B. Evaluate and Improve Umbrella Projects](#), pages 9-11) and in the 2022 Anadromous Fish Habitat and Hatchery Review, there was a Policy Issue (iii.b) directed at umbrella projects (please see pages 18-21 of the [2022 Decision Letter](#)) that confirmed the importance of these projects and the principles, with the exception that the annual report (i.e., principle #6) was no longer required. It was, however, recommended that umbrella projects present an update to the Council biennially on their accomplishments and results. For the GRMW, this last occurred in August 2023.

In preparation for this round of umbrella project presentations, staff prepared a list of questions intended to guide presentations. These include:

1. What's the goal of your program and how do project actions further that goal?
2. Describe how your program is being administered. Has that changed since the last review?
3. Describe how projects and actions are solicited, reviewed, prioritized, and selected for action. Are the criteria working?
4. Provide a list of funded projects since the last presentation to the Council. Include background information on the recipients of funding, project costs, title, location and short project summary, and implementation timeline.
5. Describe how your program fits into larger ecological goals such as improving ecosystem function, species recovery, etc.
6. Describe progress towards meeting your program's objectives. Are you getting what you expect from these projects? What is the process to document outcomes? Where are results being reported?
7. Describe any problems encountered or lessons learned. How are you implementing adaptive management (new techniques, emerging scientific literature, etc.)? Has adaptive management or lessons learned changed your approach?
8. Provide a summary of program costs, including administrative versus implementation costs, and include any cost share partners.

The seven umbrella projects under the Program are listed below.

Project #1992-026-01, Grande Ronde Model Watershed

Project# 2003-011-00, Columbia River Estuary Habitat Restoration

Project # 2007-397-00, John Day Watershed Restoration
Project # 2009-012-00, Willamette Bi-Op Habitat Restoration Project
Project # 2010-001-00, Upper Columbia Programmatic Habitat
Project # 2010-077-00, Tucannon River Programmatic Habitat Project
Project # 2017-005-00, Pacific Lamprey Conservation Initiative

More Info:

- Grande Ronde Model Watershed [website](#)
- [BPA Annual Report 2024](#)
- [Grande Ronde Model Watershed Synthesis, 1992-2016](#)
- Publications
 - [The Grande Ronde Model Watershed: Integrating Science into Restoration Implementation and Adaptive Management](#)
 - [A comparison of methods for estimating juvenile salmon habitat capacity to assist with restoration planning and evaluation](#)