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November 10, 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: **Council Members**

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

SUBJECT: **Implementation of 2026 Fish and Wildlife Program- Predator Management and Program Integrity**

BACKGROUND:

Presenter: Fish and Wildlife Division Staff

Summary: Following the adoption of an amended Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program in June, staff began working with the Council's Fish and Wildlife Committee in July to discuss next steps and implementation. In September, staff provided a detailed list of implementation tasks identified in the 2026 Program along with appropriate tools for each of the identified tasks. Staff also provided a list of six potential near-term tasks for Fish and Wildlife Committee members' consideration. In October, Council members expressed general support for staff to start with these near-term tasks. In November, staff will provide some review on two of the six tasks- Predator Management and Program Integrity. Staff look forward to feedback from the Committee members through the ensuing discussion.

Relevance: The 2026 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program was adopted by the Council on June 16, 2026.

Background: The Council adopted its final 2026 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program in June. A prepublication version is available on the Council's website pending completion and adoption of the Findings and Response to Recommendations, anticipated in late 2026.
To review, first, a reminder that the Council does not implement much of the Program on its own. We rely on federal agencies such as Bonneville, the Corps, and the Bureau of Reclamation implementing the Program through the standards of the Northwest Power Act. This requires working with many federal, tribal and state entities and others. We look for and create opportunities to bring the influence of the Fish and Wildlife Program into federal decision-making, also advancing policy discussions and supporting best available science.

From prior discussions regarding the Fish and Wildlife Division Work Plan, you will recall there are ongoing tasks the staff does on behalf of the Council and the Northwest Power Act. These include:

- Project Review and Recommendation (including follow-up and Step reviews, tracking project implementation and description of ongoing activities in Part Six of the 2026 Program)
- Assessing and reporting on Program Performance (including reporting on goals, objectives, indicators, implementation, and description of activities in Part Seven of the 2026 Program)
- Coordination and collaboration with external entities (tracking and participating in various meetings, etc.) about the Fish and Wildlife Program, the Council and the Northwest Power Act.

To these basic responsibilities we add new tasks identified in the 2026 Fish and Wildlife Program that have a nexus with Council work. Over the last few Fish and Wildlife Committee Meetings, staff have provided a detailed list of implementation tasks identified in the 2026 Program, identified appropriate tools for each of the tasks, and suggested first and future steps for the tools, timing, and likely participants. Staff also have provided a short list of six potential near-term tasks for Fish and Wildlife Committee members' consideration. In October, Council members expressed general support for staff starting with these near-term tasks.

For the November Committee meeting, staff will provide updates on two of the six near-term tasks: Predator Management and Program Integrity. The discussion on predator management will begin with a broad review of the strategy and the multiple predator species covered under the strategy and then focus specifically on walleye predation. Next, members of the ISAB will discuss ecological and environmental regime changes in the basin. This will include highlighting results from some of their recent reports and support for the adaptive management strategy in the Comparative Survival Study (CSS), which now includes a metric for walleye predation. Finally, the Council will hear about two emerging opportunities related to walleye management.

- The second discussion topic is Program Integrity (Part 6. Provisions for Program implementation). Staff have developed a brief overview of the key concepts underpinning what it means to "preserve Program integrity." There are several areas the Council could choose to further engage on this topic. The discussion will focus on describing the elements of preserving Program integrity, some of the tools and ways the Council coordinates around each element, and some of the challenges that exist. Members and staff are encouraged to review Part Six of the 2026 Fish and Wildlife Program, focusing on pages 160 - 166.

    As a reminder, the following tasks were identified as ready for near-term implementation or further discussion ("additional topics"):

    1. 2026 Program Priority: Preserve Program integrity – ongoing coordination with Bonneville on annual project funding and long-term O&M/ Asset Management; improved communication; emphasis on inflation adjustments (includes tasks in Part Six: Implementation)
    2. 2026 Program Priority: Preserve Program integrity – Corps infrastructure list and funding; Federal agencies and non-federal project operators have responsibility for infrastructure assets that integrate with or support activities implemented under the Council's Program (includes tasks in Part Six: Implementation: Shared Responsibility)
    3. 2026 Program Priority: predator management – workgroup, etc.
    4. Wildlife settlement agreement progress – annual report
    5. Update critical uncertainties/ research plan – ISAB assignment
    6. Objective S2 (SAR targets) – status update on data needs by 2027

    Additional topics to discuss:

    1. State of the Science review on summer hydro operations
    2. Whole of Government as a tool

More info:

- Members and staff are encouraged to review Part Six of the 2026 Fish and Wildlife Program, focusing on pages 160 - 166.
- October 2026 Council meeting, Fish and Wildlife Committee Memo (Brief synopsis of proposed tasks for near-term implementation and the full set of tasks attached)
- September 2026 Council meeting, Fish and Wildlife Committee Memo (Attachment A includes a proposed short list of tasks for near-term implementation and Attachment B includes a comprehensive list of other new and ongoing tasks for implementation)
- July 2026 Council meeting, Fish and Wildlife Committee Memo (Includes the list of tasks, detail on the available tools, and information on workgroup structures)
- January 2024 Council presentation: Overview of Project #1990-077-00, Development of Systemwide Predator Control
- Comparative Survival Study (CSS) 2026 Draft Annual Report
- ISAB Review of the Comparative Survival Study (CSS) 2026 Draft Annual Report