Draft Wildlife Advisory Committee
June 11, 2015
Meeting Minutes

Attendee: Peter Paquet, Kelly Singer, Chris Wheaton, Mark Fritsch, Paul Dahmer, Norm Merz, Robert.Stephens, Bob Austin, Aren Eddingsaas, Matthew Berger, Scot Soults, Loreen Kronemen, Tom O'Neil, Carl Scheeler, Greg Servheen,

Discussion: The Committee unanimously approved the minutes from the May Meeting. The minutes are posted on the WAC website (http://www.nwcouncil.org/fw/wac/).

Operational and Secondary Losses

Discussion: There was a lengthy discussion of the document circulated by the chair outlining draft options for addressing operational losses and there pros and cons. (See attachment 1).

Members raised a number of issues and concerns, particularly regarding the option on agreements. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes still have outstanding HU and are working on acquisitions. Questions were raised about agreements to do HEPs. There was a discussion of the need for "flow chart" for outlining the expectations from agreements. Members Serveheen and Scheeler agreed to develop a draft (Attachment 2) for discussion.

The Chair stated that it was important to get comments on the draft document, particularly on the pros and cons, as well as any other alternatives.

Attachment I

Operational Losses Prioritization Draft
Wildlife Advisory Committee
6/5/15

Introduction
Fish & Wildlife Program Direction
The Council's 2014 Fish and Wildlife Program provides following direction on dealing with wildlife operational losses:

(a) *Mitigation agreements should be considered to settle operational losses in lieu of precise assessments of impacts.*
(b) *The need for new methods to assess operational losses that incorporate the results of ongoing pilot projects. This could include technical testing and evaluation of operational loss models and methodologies, or other alternative habitat evaluation methods.*

The following describes several approaches for addressing the impacts of hydro systems operations on wildlife populations.

Technical Approach

Issues

Timing

Transferability

Flathead Test Results

(c) 1 year bird data

Ability to use in other hydrologic systems

Other systems with bird data/hydrological data

ID potential projects

Can we use CHAP approach or combined with Kooteani Pilot??

Side by side comparison with IBI

How do you translate to mitigation?

Currently working on how to do it

Land ownership issues

Relationship to fish mitigation

Offsite mitigation

Look at the entire system?

RFP to characterize the hydrosystem

Pros

This approach would provide a technical and scientific basis assessing wildlife operational losses. It could follow several different paths, from carrying out detailed assessments at the subbasin level, modeled on the Kootenai River Project or focus on developing a more landscape level basinwide approach.

These types of assessments would provide a quantitative basis for hydrosystem responsibility for wildlife operational losses.

This approach is also consistent with the 2014 Fish and Wildlife Program that calls on: The need for new methods to assess operational losses that incorporate the results of ongoing pilot projects that have explored how best to fulfill that specific need. This could include technical testing and evaluation of operational loss models and methodologies, or other alternative habitat evaluation methods.

Cons

This approach will require both technical support and funding to develop the technical tools required to meet either the subbasin or regional approach. There are likely to be substantial costs in addressing the issues tied to this approach

Development of the necessary technical tools and funding for implementation could take a number of years and carrying out the technical studies will add a number of years to that timeframe further delaying and increasing mitigation necessary for hydro related wildlife operational losses.

Agreements

Issues

Timing

Financial Availability

Relationship to fish mitigation

Flexibility

Lack of Assessment

Pros

Under this approach, Bonneville and the regions fish and wildlife agencies and tribes would negotiate agreements to provide mitigation for the remaining wildlife losses, including wildlife operational losses. These agreements would similar to agreements currently in the Willamette Basin and Southern Idaho.

Agreements are often less costly than other approaches in that they require a lesser amount of technical assessment but rely on the expertise of the fish and wildlife managers.
Agreements can provide greater management and implementation flexibility for wildlife managers as well as assured funding under terms of the agreement.
This approach is also consistent with the Council's 2014 Fish and Wildlife Program: Mitigation agreements should be considered to settle operational losses in lieu of precise assessments of impacts.

Cons

Lack of formal assessment of the operational impacts means that the losses are not formally quantified but are based on the estimates from wildlife managers. Some managers have expressed concern over negotiating agreements without some estimate of impact of the hydro operation to wildlife.
Financing multiple agreements in a timely manner could be difficult to include in the Bonneville Fish and Wildlife Program budget. This has the potential to delay mitigation some areas.

Combination

Issues

Timing
Financial Availability
Relationship to fish mitigation
Flexibility
Look at the entire system?
RFP to characterize the hydrosystem
How do you translate to mitigation?

Pros

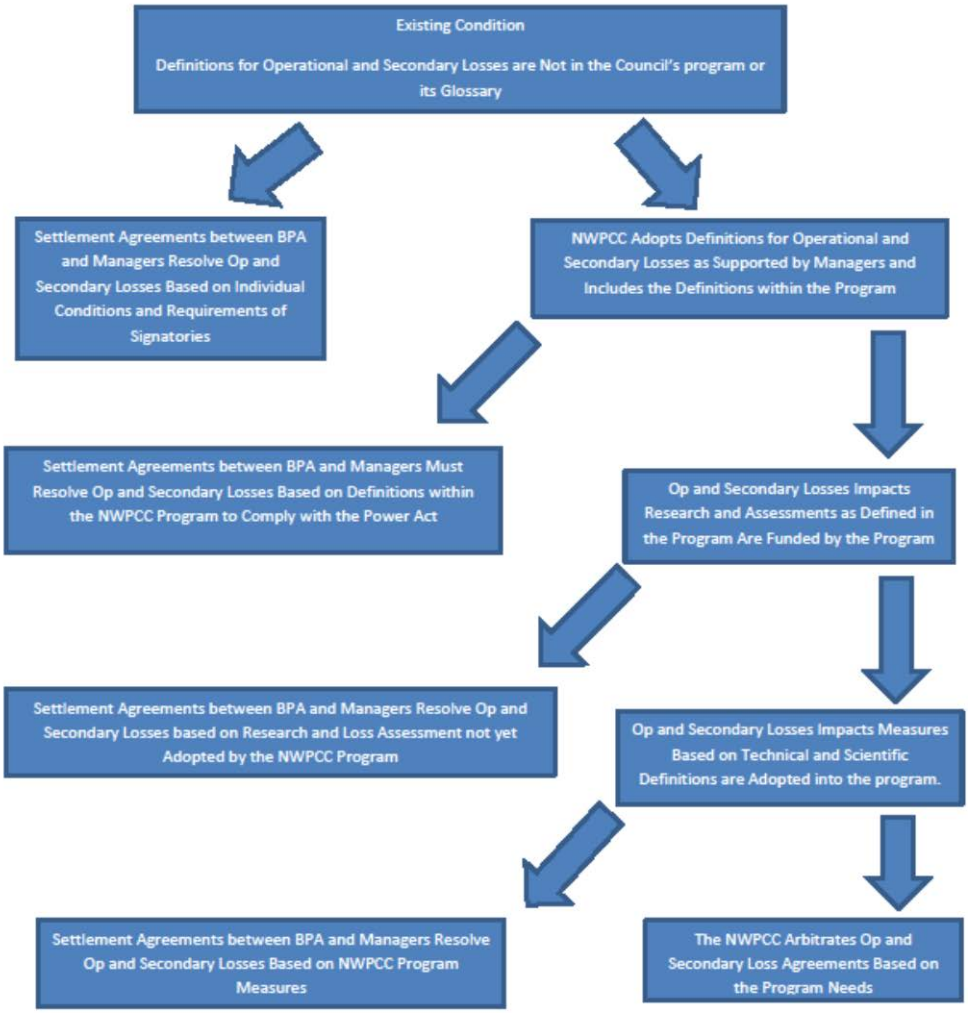
This approach would combine agreements with a modified technical approach to provide a landscape level characterization of the operational impacts of the hydro system which could then provide the basis for negotiating the operational portion of wildlife agreements.
This approach would appear to be consistent with the Council's 2014 Fish and Wildlife Program which stresses the use of agreements while at the same time recognizing the need for new methods for assessing wildlife operational losses as described in the Introduction.

Cons

1. This approach will require both technical support and funding to develop the high level, basin-wide assessment process required to meet either the regional approach. There are likely to be substantial costs in addressing the issues tied to this approach but likely would be less than required by technical approach.

Attachment II

The decision tree outlines a process with decision points by which the Region's Wildlife Managers, in partnership with the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and the Northwest Power and Conservation Council could move to resolve BPA's wildlife mitigation obligations for operational and secondary impacts from the construction and operation of the Federal Columbia River Hydropower system. The process is adaptive, permitting decision makers' opportunity to balance the desire for a more complete technical foundation for reaching settlements, with the financial and ecological costs associated with technical analysis and the subsequent delay in meeting BPA's mitigation obligations. Inherent in the process is the assumption that it is in BPA and the rate payer's interest to implement mitigation measures sooner than later, spending funds on actions directly offsetting impacts to wildlife rather than on analysis to more definitively quantify BPA's obligations. In the interest of achieving this more timely mitigation, the Wildlife Managers should not be expected to shoulder an unreasonable risk of under estimating the nature and magnitude of the impacts. Settlement agreements should reflect a conservative approach in the interest of the resources. Where agreement on this balance of risk vs cost cannot be reached, additional resources and time will be spent on technical analysis to substantiate future settlement agreements. Along with balancing the risk to the signatories with the additional cost and continued annualization of impacts, consideration may be given to the value of resolution of other outstanding issues under a settlement agreement (ESA, Fisheries issues, etc.) and the political and situational calculus of settlement vs not.


Existing Condition
Definitions for Operational and Secondary Losses are Not in the Council's program or its Glossary
Settlement Agreements between BPA and Managers Resolve Op and Secondary Losses Based on Individual Conditions and Requirements of Signatories
NWPCC Adopts Definitions for Operational and Secondary Losses as Supported by Managers and Includes the Definitions within the Program
Settlement Agreements between BPA and Managers Must Resolve Op and Secondary Losses Based on Definitions within the NWPCC Program to Comply with the Power Act
Op and Secondary Losses Impacts Research and Assessments as Defined in the Program Are Funded by the Program
Settlement Agreements between BPA and Managers Resolve Op and Secondary Losses based on Research and Loss Assessment not yet Adopted by the NWPCC Program
Op and Secondary Losses Impacts Measures Based on Technical and Scientific Definitions are Adopted into the program.
Settlement Agreements between BPA and Managers Resolve Op and Secondary Losses Based on NWPCC Program Measures
The NWPCC Arbitrates Op and Secondary Loss Agreements Based on the Program Needs