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December 6, 2022

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: Leslie Bach

SUBJECT: Briefing on the Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program

BACKGROUND:

Presenter: Femke Freiberg, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Matthew Schwartz, Bonneville Power Administration

Summary: Femke and Matthew will provide an overview of the Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program (CBWTP), including background on the program and a description of how it is implemented. They will also highlight the accomplishments of the program over its 20-year history.

Relevance: The CBWTP is a Council-supported project that has been identified as a core measure in every Fish and Wildlife Program since the 1990's. It was most recently described as a General Measure in the Habitat Strategy section of the 2014 Fish and Wildlife Program (page 42) and further supported in the 2020 Addendum.

Background: Inadequate streamflow has been identified as a key factor limiting the productivity of both anadromous and resident fish species. Subbasin plans and other habitat assessments throughout the Columbia Basin describe this limiting factor and identify the need for increasing instream flows to improve fish habitat.

As early as 1991, Fish and Wildlife Programs have called for the use of water transactions to benefit flows for focal fish species. In the 2000 Program, the Council recommended that Bonneville establish a funding agreement for land and water acquisitions. In 2002, Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and the Council established the Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program in response to the 2000 Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion and the Council's 2000 Fish and Wildlife Program. The primary focus of the CBWTP is to fund water transactions that improve streamflow on ecologically significant Columbia Basin tributaries for which flow is a limiting factor.

The CBWTP is administered through a partnership between BPA and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). Implementation of the CBWTP is through qualified local entities (QLEs), state, local and tribal agencies and nonprofit organizations that work collaboratively with ranchers, farmers, landowners and irrigation districts to develop, implement and monitor water transactions.

Since 2002, the QLEs have completed over 660 water right transactions that have cumulatively protected over 2.3 million acre-feet of flow in key tributary streams across the Columbia Basin. These transactions have included a number of innovative approaches including split-season leases, source switches, permanent purchases, minimum flow agreements and water produced through significant capital investments in irrigation efficiency projects.

More Info: [CBWTP Website](#)