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May 9, 2023

### **MEMORANDUM**

**TO: Fish and Wildlife Committee Members**

**FROM: Mark Fritsch and Maureen Hess**

**SUBJECT: Update on concepts for the next project review**

### **BACKGROUND:**

**Presenter:** Council Staff

**Summary:** Staff will propose initial draft concepts for an updated approach to the project review process and seek feedback from the Committee.

**Relevance:** For more than 25 years the Council has developed and conducted reviews of Bonneville direct-funded projects that are implemented to mitigate, protect and enhance fish and wildlife as directed under the Northwest Power Act. We propose to update the project review process to acknowledge that the projects implemented under the Fish and Wildlife Program have been reviewed numerous times, and the project's basic premises and scientific soundness have been accepted. We intend the next review process to acknowledge the maturity of these ongoing projects, while recognizing the complexity and current dynamics of how projects are implemented, and meeting science review requirements as directed by Section 4(h)(10)(D) of the Act.

**Workplan:** Fish and Wildlife Division work plan 2023; Program Implementation, Next Project Review.

**Background:** The Council has developed and conducted reviews for more than 25 years of Bonneville direct-funded projects that are implemented to mitigate, protect and enhance fish and wildlife as directed under the Northwest Power Act (the Act).

The Council's project reviews and recommendations (Council reviews) have yielded many benefits through the years. These rigorous reviews have resulted in clear documentation of each project's purpose, objectives, and results; project improvements through independent scientific review (science review) and feedback; facilitation of sharing project data and information; increased transparency and accountability and the identification of project contributions to the Program and to the region.

As the Council considers how to meet the review requirements of the Act in the coming decade, the Council believes it is important to continue maximizing the benefits of project review, while recognizing that there has been considerable growth and change over the last 40 years of project development and implementation. The projects implementing the Council's mitigation Program have grown in numbers and complexity through the years. In addition, they have been reviewed and recommended by the Council numerous times, and their continued implementation and scientific soundness has been accepted.

Due to the maturity of the Program's projects and that most have been reviewed numerous times, the information requested about the projects has also evolved over time. Early project reviews focused primarily on the proposed project details to ensure the projects were scientifically sound. Contemporary reviews have shifted to focus on project results and the adaptive management of ongoing work.

The Program has 317 projects<sup>1</sup>, of which approximately 274 active and ongoing Council-recommended projects. These 274 projects are the focus of the project review process described here – ongoing protection and mitigation work and support activities. New projects that have no previous review and recommendation will be addressed separately for Council consideration and action.

#### *Principles retained from previous project reviews*

- Projects will continue to be grouped to maximize review efficiency. To some extent the review groupings will be categorical, but there are opportunities to further partition groupings into smaller sets of projects that are focused on similar objectives or purposes. In addition, there

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<sup>1</sup> As of August 2022. These numbers are presented to demonstrate the concept associated with the proposed project review approach.

may be opportunities to group and review projects geographically, to be able to better understand the context in which various types of projects fit together in a geographic landscape.

- Reviews and recommendations will continue to be multi-year and are likely to be different for different types of projects depending on project grouping.

#### *New concepts for the project reviews*

- All of the ongoing projects have been through numerous project reviews. Each project's basic premise, scientific soundness, and reason for existence in the Program has generally been accepted. Projects reviewed many times may not need an extensive project review this time around, even if some sort of implementation check-in is warranted.
- The upcoming reviews will focus on targeted questions. While to some extent the Council will need to look at every project and possibly tailor specific review questions for each project, similar projects can also be grouped in a way to streamline the review questions to be asked, tailored to the status and type of ongoing project. And then the questions to be asked will help structure the review process for that project or group of projects. For example, project review questions may focus on:
  - A check-in on project outcomes, based on ongoing project reporting: Is a project contributing to or achieving its stated objectives?
    - If not, are there ways in which the project can or should be adapted to increase its chance of success in meeting its objectives?
  - Are there resources available that support adaptive management, such as new techniques, evolved best practices, and emerging scientific literature?
  - Specific information related to the project or a group of projects to provide information useful for evaluating overall performance of the Council's Fish and Wildlife Program.
- Streamlining and focusing the review effort and the questions for discrete sets of projects asked before the review process begins should improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the process and lessen the administrative demands on project sponsors, and the ISRP.

- The project review process will not address budgets except at only a high level, with the Council at most focusing on whether funding is sufficient to allow for implementation of the activities identified.

*Objectives for review:*

- Serve as an implementation check in on project actions:
  - Review the project's progress in achieving its stated objectives.
  - Use targeted questions or topics for the benefit of the Council and regional policy, management, and coordination efforts.
  - Provide an opportunity to confirm administrative changes (i.e., project title name changes, plans for merging contracts, etc.) and project work elements and objectives.
- Address any outstanding Council recommendations.

Staff are initiating the effort of gathering feedback with partners (i.e., Fish and Wildlife managers, Bonneville, and science panel) to further develop and refine the project review process. So far, these initial draft concepts were recently shared at the Regional Coordination Forum on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Staff are continuing to seek feedback broadly and appreciate the opportunity for feedback from the Committee on the approach to date.

More Info:

- [Information on past project reviews and recommendations](#)
- [Independent Scientific Review Panel background](#)
- [Project mapping memo, September 2021](#)