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November 6, 2002

To: Council Members

From: Doug Marker

Subject: Proposed letter to the Bonneville Power Administration recommending funding for tribal scholarships

Attached is a draft letter proposed by Dr. Karier to be sent by the Council to Bonneville recommending the establishment of a tribal scholarship fund. Dr. Karier proposed this letter earlier this year but the Council did not complete consideration of the letter. He is requesting Council approval at the November meeting.

This issue arose because of specific proposals by tribes for funding of training and education programs for tribal members in fisheries programs. Dr. Karier's proposal is for a broader tribal scholarship fund with improved access across the region.

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We are writing in regard to the proposal that Bonneville establish a tribal scholarship fund, separate from Bonneville's fish and wildlife program for tribes impacted by the federal hydropower system in the Columbia Basin. Bonneville's interest and support of tribal scholarships in the past is commendable and should continue. Our recommendation is that this support could be better organized through the creation of a separate tribal scholarship fund with improved access and accountability.

We are aware that Bonneville has in the past provided financial support for scholarships on an ad hoc basis, sometimes with Council recommendations, for some tribes in the region. We have found it difficult to determine the exact scope of Bonneville's historical efforts in this regard because of the absence of complete records. One of the advantages of establishing a formal scholarship program would be to improve record keeping and improve accountability.

There are several other reasons why a formal tribal scholarship fund would be preferable to the current situation. If properly designed, it would allow equal access to the fund by all thirteen tribes in the Columbia Basin. It does not appear that all tribes have had the same access to scholarship funds. A formal program would also allow Bonneville to design scholarship programs that provide the maximum benefit to the tribes and the region. A poorly designed scholarship program simply replaces funds that are already available through federal, state, university, or private sources. It is important that Bonneville structure its scholarships so that they supplement other available funds, not substitute for them.

A formal program could also be designed to allow more flexibility in how funds are used. For example, we understand that Bonneville has made some funds available but only for narrowly defined fields of study. The same amount of money would be more useful if the tribes and students were given a broader choice of majors and universities. Limiting scholarships to natural resource majors or specific universities is difficult to justify.

It should be possible for Bonneville to consolidate its current tribal scholarship efforts into this single, focused program. All of these funds should become part of a more formal tribal scholarship program, organized in coordination with Northwest tribes and universities.

Given this situation, we strongly encourage Bonneville to consider establishing a separate tribal scholarship fund, administered by Bonneville in consultation with Columbia Basin tribes and other interested parties. We recommend that these meetings commence immediately.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.