Independent Scientific Review Panel
for the Northwest Power & Conservation Council
851 SW 6th Avenue, Suite 1100
Portland, Oregon 97204
isrp@nwcouncil.org

May 3, 2004

Dr. Richard Williams, ISRP Chair, and hopefully, Dr. Richard Whitney will present the key findings from the ISRP's review of the US Corps of Engineers' Anadromous Fish Evaluation Program for Fiscal Year 2004. The report's executive summary is excerpted below. For the complete report see: www.nwcouncil.org/library/isrp/isrp2004-8.htm.

Executive Summary

This is the final report by the ISRP of its initial review of the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Anadromous Fish Evaluation Program (AFEP) for Fiscal Year 2004. The AFEP program provides scientific information to assist the Corps in making engineering, design, and operations decisions to support safe, efficient passage of fish through the eight mainstem Columbia and Snake River hydroelectric projects. The ISRP review provides the opportunity to ensure that AFEP proposals receive a similar level of scrutiny for scientific soundness as proposals in the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Fish and Wildlife Program.

The Corp's Anadromous Fish Evaluation Program and the Council's Fish and Wildlife Program represent the two largest fisheries management and recovery programs in the Columbia River Basin. However, there are significant differences between the two programs in their structures, proposal development, and proposal review processes. For example, the AFEP lacks a long-term strategic research plan or framework, whereas the Council's 2000 Fish and Wildlife Program and the ongoing subbasin planning exercise are specifically aimed at providing long-range planning for future fish and wildlife management goals. There is also a lack of coordination between AFEP and the Council's Fish and Wildlife Program, with the FCRPS 2000 BiOp being the nearly exclusive justification for the AFEP studies, thus neglecting broader, long-range goals. Nevertheless, the AFEP does a good job in using short-term research results immediately for both policy decisions and planning near-term new work. The present AFEP repertoire of projects consists almost entirely of site-specific studies directed at narrow objectives for application to the specific dam site.

The ISRP recommends that the Corps develop strategic multi-year research plans including identification of where more mechanism-oriented strategies (e.g. behavioral or mortality mechanisms) could yield benefits in research productivity, efficiency, and economy of time and funds, resulting in faster implementation of fish-protective features.

The next area of concern by the ISRP was in the AFEP proposal development and review process. Presently, the AFEP lacks an independent scientific review of proposals at any stage. In the future, the ISRP could provide this function; however, the current internal iterative process

of proposal development does not lend itself to an independent proposal review process like the ISRP provides to the Council and BPA for Fish and Wildlife Program proposals. For example, in this initial review, most of the AFEP pre-proposals were not well enough developed to be amenable to scientific review. It also appears that as a result of the iterative proposal development process, the current AFEP proposal review process has little bearing on the selection of proposals for funding. Unless the AFEP proposal development process is modified, future ISRP review of AFEP proposals may not be particularly useful, as the present AFEP process does not have clear decision points where ISRP review can provide value to the scientific quality of the proposed studies and inform project selection and funding.

Finally, the ISRP sees the need for more explicit solicitation and funding of mechanism-oriented research to solve problems addressed by the AFEP mission. Presently, AFEP proposals can be grouped into those that are dependent upon hydrosystem operation decisions for the upcoming study year and those that are independent of such constraints. The ISRP recommends that proposals in the dependent category be prepared late enough in the fall to allow for current-year data to be analyzed (project report does not need to be completed) with a specific study design based on the best current management advice or questions and include contingency plans (e.g. alternate study designs/sample sizes etc.) to cover a reasonable range of operational alternatives. Proposals that are independent of hydrosystem operations can be solicited earlier and prepared over a longer timeframe that allows for a higher standard of proposal preparation following criteria as recommended by the ISRP.