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April 5, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: John Shurts

SUBJECT: Program amendment process to add provincial-level objectives to the program

The Boise meeting includes a brief agenda item on the subject of a program amendment process to add provincial-level population and habitat objectives to the program. At the May meeting in Walla Walla, the staff intends to set before the Council a detailed plan for this possible amendment process -- "possible" in the sense that the Council never officially commits to a program amendment process until it decides to send the call for recommendations for amendments. The point of the discussion at the April meeting is simply to start separating this effort out from its home until now as just one of the process issues bubbling up during the subbasin plan amendments.

This would be the last step in the comprehensive revision of the Fish and Wildlife Program begun in the 2000 program amendments with the complete reorganization of the program framework. The subbasin plans have been a monumental step along that road, but they are not the final end post. At the last meeting the Council approved a letter explaining how it understands and intends this subject (among the other process issues). Rather than reinvent the wheel, here is a relevant excerpt from that letter:

The issue of "roll-up"-- generally described as an evaluation of the subbasin plans as a collective body of work and the setting of objectives at a collected scale -- drew far more interest and input than any of the other matters in the October issue paper. A large majority of the commentators were pleased with the subbasin planning process, but urged that a next step in the development of the Program is critical and must be completed soon -- the review of the subbasin plans as a collective body of work to establish larger-scale objectives. This is consistent with the Council's 2000 Program, which calls for the development of Province scale objectives once the subbasin plans are adopted.

The 2000 Program and the commentators generally agree that the province objectives will function to:

- Provide benchmarks for measuring fish and wildlife program performance;

- Provide a framework for a more efficient monitoring and evaluation program;
- Provide insights and context to resource allocation decisions.

In addition to completing the fish and wildlife program revision started in 2000, this province-level amendment process may allow the Council and interested parties to address two of the issues that were not satisfactorily treated in the subbasin planning: (1) the integration of habitat plans and artificial production activities, and; (2) the design and conduct of monitoring and evaluation. Every reviewer in the subbasin planning amendment process found most of the subbasin plans had deficiencies in these two areas. The province level amendment process would be designed to address these issues, and if not completely treat them, to make as much progress as possible.

This province level amendment process would benefit from the Council providing a guidance document that: (1) explains what functions the province objectives serve in the adopted program; (2) explains how the subbasin plan information should be being used to develop the province objectives; (3) establishes a common vocabulary for the amendment process; (4) describes what assumptions are made for habitat, hydro, harvest and hatchery interactions or effects and how those are considered as objectives are set, and then; (5) sets out example objectives for anadromous and resident fish, wildlife and habitat. This guidance document would **not** be a set of draft or provisional objectives endorsed by the Council -- it would not be that formal. Rather, its purpose would be to describe a certain approach to developing the objectives, a suite of transparent assumptions about “the four H’s” and the relationships between habitat and biological performance; and, finally, the objectives that those assumptions yield. This would provide all interested parties a common point of reference as they develop recommendations for the formal amendment process.

Development of the guidance document will begin soon, and the Council intends to initiate a formal amendment process later this year. The findings/Response to Comments documents that will be adopted by the Council to finish the current subbasin level amendment process should outline the purposes and general schedule of this next fish and wildlife program amendment process.

The only point I want to emphasize out of all this is the *purpose* -- the reason why the Council would do this: To provide useful objectives or benchmarks or indicators for measuring the performance of the fish and wildlife *program* (not just individual projects or subbasins), with all that implies for improving decisions over the long run based on the performance information. Objectives are needed to fit into the population- and program-scale effort at monitoring and evaluation that Steve Waste and others are developing. The Council’s program has many virtues, especially at the broadest scale (the program framework and overarching principles) and the lowest (sound subbasin plans and individual projects). Yet the program lacks the right kind of biological objectives at the right level in-between, and a cost-effective method to evaluate progress toward those objectives, to be able to say with confidence (other than anecdotal) that a collective body of very good work is adding up to the results the Council desires. This has not been for lack of trying. Developing an effective set of objectives and an effective way to evaluate progress toward those objectives has turned out to be technically difficult and quite expensive, too much of both in the past. The Council in the 2000 Program recognized this problem, and conceived of the province-level planning at the end of the program revision to make the effort to fill this gap. We believe the time is ripe to get over these obstacles.

One reason the time is ripe is because the subbasin planning process, the APRE and other efforts have left us with an amount and organization of technical information that is without precedent. Another reason is that the Council would not be doing this in isolation. Rather, the Council would be at the cutting edge of what appears to be a trend in large-scale biological restoration programs. The Council could tap into and feed off, collaborate with, and provide leadership to parallel efforts across the basin, from the PNAMP protocols, to NMFS' efforts to define population recovery targets, to the Washington Salmon Recovery Office's efforts to develop a small set of indicators of watershed health (the "dials" approach), and more. Examples of the type of objectives we are talking about, drawn from the program framework and the other efforts getting started in the basin:

Population characteristics:

- adult abundance contributions to spawning, harvest and broodstock
- increases in population productivity
- some sort of expression of the natural spawning/artificial production relationship
- some sort of expression of population diversity

Habitat characteristics:

- aggregate expressions of habitat capacity and productivity
- a small set of high-level indicators of habitat change and watershed health

We may not, in the end, be able to adopt objectives in all of these categories. It may make sense instead to define these categories into the program as potential objectives, and fill in with numbers those we are able to while putting in place an initiative to complete the others over time. But this is the obvious list with which to begin. The detailed proposal the staff brings to the Council in May will further define the types of objectives we are seeking, when and how to call for the program amendment recommendations, and finalize what technical and other preparatory work needs to happen before the Council releases the call for recommendations.

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