

Tom Karier  
Chair  
Washington

Frank L. Cassidy Jr.  
"Larry"  
Washington

Jim Kempton  
Idaho

Judi Danielson  
Idaho



Joan M. Dukes  
Vice-Chair  
Oregon

Melinda S. Eden  
Oregon

Bruce A. Measure  
Montana

Rhonda Whiting  
Montana

May 9, 2006

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Council Members

**FROM:** Joan Dukes, Vice Chair  
John Shurts, General Counsel; Peter Paquet, Manager, Resident Fish and Wildlife; John Harrison, Information Officer

**SUBJECT:** Discussion with the Columbia Basin Trust regarding the draft Center of Knowledge issue paper

In 2005 the Council and the Columbia Basin Trust (CBT) agreed to collaborate on the development of an Internet-based portal of information about the transboundary Columbia River Basin. As envisioned by the Council and CBT, the portal would be a comprehensive, publicly accessible repository of information about the Columbia River in its international dimensions. The Council and CBT directed staff to develop an issue paper describing the portal and how it might be developed.

As described in the attached draft issue paper, the International Columbia River Basin Center of Knowledge (*a working title*) would be a place to share data, information, and knowledge and to encourage dialogue and public awareness of the water, power, fish and wildlife and related aspects of the transboundary Columbia River. At this meeting, staff requests the Council and CBT approve the draft issue paper, with any additional changes, for release for 30 days of public comment. Assuming favorable comments, staff of the Council and CBT would proceed to develop the Center according to the steps described in the paper.

The draft issue paper recommends initial development of the center in two phases:

### Phase 1:

Step 1: The CBT and the Council position themselves as the collaborative central managers and facilitators. This must be done in a way that allows others to easily join and have a significant role in directing the initiative. It must also allow for the eventuality of others taking over management of the initiative in the future.

Step 2: The CBT and the Council facilitate a broad partnership of organizations to share information through the Center.

Step 3: The CBT and the Council work with the partnership to finalize a business plan that describes in some detail (e.g., market, finances, timing, management) how this initiative will unfold.

Phase 2:

The CBT and Council collaborate with partners to establish the information portal as an Internet site, either as its own entity or as a page on the CBT's and Council's sites.

# **The International Columbia River Basin Center of Knowledge**

## ***A Proposal to Share Knowledge and Information Across the Border***

### **Draft**

**May 9, 2006**

#### **A) Introduction:**

The Columbia Basin Trust (CBT) and the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (Council) propose the creation of a comprehensive, publicly accessible repository of information about the Columbia River in its international dimensions. The International Columbia River Basin Center of Knowledge (*a working title*) would be a place to share data, information, and knowledge and to encourage dialogue and public awareness of the water, power, fish and wildlife and related aspects of the transboundary Columbia River.

The CBT and the Council commit to play a facilitating role with the objective of building a broad partnership of organizations to realize this project. Working together to create the Center would implement commitments the CBT and Council made to each other in a July 2000 Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies. The Trust and Council committed, among other things, to work together on bi-national projects to inform and educate citizens about Columbia River water management and related matters.

#### **B) Background:**

##### **1. The CBT & the Council**

The CBT is a Crown Corporation of the Province of British Columbia in Canada. The Council is an interstate compact agency established by the four states in the United States portion of the Columbia Basin, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington.

The CBT and the Council have common interests.

The CBT was established in 1995 by the Province of British Columbia in recognition of the impacts to the CBT region from the construction of the Columbia River Treaty Dams. The CBT's mandate is to support the social, economic and environmental well-being of the residents in the CBT region who were most adversely impacted by the creation of these dams, and to achieve greater self-sufficiency for present and future generations. The CBT manages a financial program that includes business loans and investments, direct spending on social, economic, and environmental programs, and, through a joint partner venture partnership with Columbia Power Corporation, investments in hydropower projects.

The United States Congress authorized the four Northwest states to form the Council in 1980 for the purpose of developing and overseeing regional energy and fish and wildlife plans and programs. The Council's plans and programs must protect, mitigate and enhance fish and wildlife of the Columbia River Basin affected by the Columbia hydropower system while also assuring the Northwest an adequate, efficient, economical, and reliable power supply. The federal agencies operating or regulating the Columbia hydrosystem then have legal obligations toward the Council's program, including significant actions and expenditures required from the Bonneville Power Administration in a manner consistent with the Council's fish and wildlife program. In both its power planning and fish and wildlife program, the Council must treat the entire Columbia River, including the Canadian portion and its hydropower projects, as a single system. The Council's fish and wildlife program includes addressing the impacts on transboundary species.

Both the CBT and the Council have similar obligations to inform and involve the public in their plans and programs, obligations as significant as the plans and programs themselves. Those obligations underlie the joint commitment to public information and education that the CBT and the Council made in 2000, described above.

## **2. The Transboundary/international Dimensions of the Columbia River**

The Columbia has many international dimensions of present and future water management that over time will require an increasing public understanding and awareness on both sides of the border in order to anticipate and address potential conflicts. The most obvious aspect concerns the coordinated system operation of the dams and reservoirs on both sides of the border for flood control and hydroelectric power. For example, water stored behind Mica Dam in British Columbia helps prevent flooding in Portland, Oregon, 900 miles downstream, and coordinated release of the Canadian storage water provides electricity that is sold as far away as Southern California.

However it is recognized that transboundary Columbia River water management issues extend further to such matters as the impacts of flows, dam operations and reservoir elevations on fish, wildlife, recreation, private property, agriculture, cultural sites, and human health. The impact of dam operations in one country (such as Libby Dam on the Kootenai/Kootenay tributary) result in flows and reservoir levels that affect land uses in the other country. Another key dimension to the transboundary Columbia is that multiple jurisdictions have authority over water and watershed management, and fish, wildlife, and energy production. These agencies include state, provincial, United States and Canadian federal, first nations and tribal governments, as well as municipal and regional/county governments. In addition there are a large number of non-governmental entities involved in a variety of ways. Another transboundary dimension of the Columbia watershed is that a number of Columbia tributaries, including the Kootenai/Kootenay, Okanagon/Okanagan, Flathead, Similkameen, and Kettle have unique bi-national water management issues.

Currently there is no specific resource tool that draws together information about the water management dimensions of the international Columbia River Basin. That is the purpose of the proposed Center.

## **C) Project goals and objectives**

### **1. Goals**

The common goal of the CBT and the Council is to facilitate the development of an international partnership that will develop a knowledge portal about the Columbia River system in Canada and the United States. The focus of the portal will be on water policy and management of water resources and watersheds of the Columbia River Basin in the area of the international border. Initially, the project will:

1. Establish an organized portal of information on Columbia River history, water uses, resources, issues, and policies and;
2. Ensure equal and open access to this information for all people.

Over time, the project could facilitate transboundary dialogue, engagement, education, collaboration, and research on issues that are identified as priorities on both sides of the border.

### **2. Objectives**

#### **1. Information Sharing**

Provide information that will assist resource managers, planners, and elected officials in dealing with international water policy issues in the basin;

#### **2. Knowledge**

Provide education on the multi-faceted and multi-valued nature of the water resources of the Columbia Basin;

#### **3. Dialogue**

Create a deeper understanding about Columbia River Basin international water and water policy issues in both Canada and the United States through the development of a framework of collaboration, information-sharing, and discussion that could help avoid future conflicts and assist in making informed management decisions on the Columbia River system.

## **D) Summary**

This project will have four major components or phases, with each phase proceeding in sequence. Subsequent phases would follow after approval by the Center partnership of organizations.

**Phase 1 (Set-up):** The CBT and Council propose to continue facilitating and managing this process through the set-up and subsequent phases until another option is developed. The set-up phase will contain three major components as follows.

1. The CBT and the Council first position themselves as the collaborative central managers and facilitators. This must be done in a way that allows others to easily join and have a significant role in directing the initiative. It must also allow for the eventuality of others taking over management of the overall initiative in time.
2. The CBT and the Council facilitate a broad partnership of organizations to share information through the Center.
3. The CBT and the Council work with the partnership to finalize a more detailed business plan that describes in some detail (e.g., market, finances, timing, management) how this initiative will unfold.

### **Phase 2 (Information Sharing Portal):**

This information sharing portal likely would be Web-based and would build upon existing information-sharing tools. It would necessitate building a new interface for the existing portals. This interface would be specific to the Columbia Basin information that we identify for this project.

The Information Sharing Portal (Phase 1) will involve the creation of a repository of information or, more precisely, access and links to information held by the partner entities of the Center. These entities would include, but not be limited to, colleges and universities, state, provincial, and federal government agencies, Canadian First Nations, American Indian Tribes, and watershed-based organizations in both countries. The most likely form the Center would take (or at least its major aspect at first), would be a Web(Internet)-based portal through which people could find and get access to relevant information held by as many entities, public and private, as possible. It would provide information and links not just to technical information about the international Columbia, but also to information about Columbia River history, water uses, water resources, water laws and policies, government statutes and authorities (including United States Tribes and Canadian First Nations), and contemporary water issues. The Center would not be a forum for the partners to develop policies, and it would not assert policy positions on behalf of the partners.

The Web-based portal would build on Columbia Basin data- and information-sharing tools that already exist in British Columbia and the United States. Target audiences would include water and resource managers, watershed planners, power planners, educators, students, elected officials, and interested members of the public in both countries. Access would be free and public.

It is too early to tell what funding, if any, would be required for the development and maintenance of this Web-portal system. Additional funding needs will be minimized if the staffs of the CBT, the Council and other partner entities undertake as many of the tasks as possible as part of their normal duties. The Council and the CBT will explore additional costs in coordination with portal partners.

### **Phase 3 (Columbia Basin Institute):**

This institute would use the information portal and be tasked with analysis and research based on issues that exist on both sides of the border. It would begin to engage a series of experts who are interested in developing new ways and tools for managing complex water basins in an applied situation.

### **Phase 4 (Transboundary Forums):**

These forums or dialogues would be based on the information portal and the analysis and research undertaken by the Columbia Basin Institute bringing together resource managers and decision-makers from both sides of the border.

## **E) Next steps**

- The directors of the CBT and the members of the Council approve this discussion paper and release it for a period of public comment.
- The staffs of CBT and the Council develop a protocol agreement that positions the CBT and the Council as the joint primary managers of this initiative while (a) allowing others to join as meaningful participants, and (b) allowing for the possibility of others to take over management as the initiative develops.
- Assuming the public comments are supportive, CBT directors and Council members direct staff to meet with potential partners including government agencies, Tribes/First Nations and academic institutions in the United States and Canada.
- The staffs of CBT and the Council work with the partnership to create a more detailed business plan model that identifies: market, management, finances, timing, location, and other items normally found in most standard business plans.

- Technical staff of the CBT and Council coordinate development of the website with partners who are willing to share information.
- Once the website is established, enhance public education and information-sharing through bi-national public dialogues, conferences, research, and analyses.

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