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June 1, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: John Shurts, Jim Ruff, Erik Merrill

SUBJECT: ISAB mainstem peer review group

The Council agenda for the June meeting includes a discussion of the concept of having the ISAB establish and oversee what we are calling a mainstem passage peer review group. This is an idea the staff first introduced to the Council about six months ago. The members expressed general interest, but further consideration of the idea has been put off due to other business. The time is ripe to revisit the concept. And assuming the Council is interested in moving forward on this idea, we will have a draft letter to the ISAB to this effect ready for the meeting.

The basic proposal:

The ISAB would create and oversee a standing "mainstem passage peer review group." This group would be available "on call" and used on a regular basis to review everything from questions arising out of long-term operations and fish passage planning (such as the analyses that go into developing a new FCRPS Biological Opinion), to key issues relevant to annual operations planning (whether unique or recurring, such as if and when to begin spilling or to begin transporting fish), to specific in-season questions and analyses, to reports evaluating mainstem actions and conditions after the fact (such as survival analyses post-season), to research questions and results (including key issues out of the mainstem monitoring and research activities of the Council's program and the Corps' AFEP program). That is, the group would be available as needed to review on a systematic basis whatever specific scientific/technical questions and issues arise out of the relationship of fish and wildlife to mainstem reservoir and dam passage operations, in a manner akin to the regular review by the ISRP of Bonneville-funded off-site mitigation and research projects.

The ISAB would create this mainstem peer review group in response to a request from the Council, and in consultation with the Council's ISAB oversight partners and working with the ISAB ex officios and the ISAB coordinator (Erik Merrill). The ISAB would decide for itself how large this subcommittee or peer review group should be and who its members would be. But the basic idea would be 4-6 members, made up of 2-3 sitting members of the ISAB/ISRP

plus invited experts on mainstem passage issues and/or statistical analysis (in the mode of the ISRP peer review groups). We would also develop a regularized, streamlined process for presenting mainstem questions and analyses to this group for review, with access given in some way to the relevant governmental and non-governmental entities in the region to request that a question or analysis be reviewed.

The point would be to provide an independent review forum and, shortly thereafter, a body of review principles and results to bring greater credibility and uniformity to mainstem passage and system operational discussions, analyses and decisions. These review functions are consistent with the functions specified in the ISAB's Terms of Reference as principal activities for the Board, such as to "review the scientific and technical issues associated with efforts to improve anadromous fish survival through all life stages, based on adaptive management approaches."

Additional points:

- We would want to make sure the ISAB as a whole is reserved for its usual role of addressing broad, "big picture" scientific questions relating to mainstem passage issues, and rely on the peer review group for the many more specific peer review exercises. The ISAB itself should mostly be responsible for deciding which matters require full ISAB attention, and which matters are appropriate for the mainstem peer review group, although the ISAB oversight partners could also specify when it wanted an issue addressed by the full ISAB.
- One quality we would ask the ISAB to make sure the peer review group has is the ability to respond very quickly -- within a matter of days - to review analyses and recommendations during in-season management or whenever a quick review is necessary.
- As for what documents, issues, questions, analyses, evaluations, etc. will be reviewed by the peer review group and how, we suggest that the Council think of this in two categories:
 - 1) The Council, the other ISAB oversight partners and the ISAB define a set of expected actions and analyses that would automatically or ordinarily go to the peer review group (e.g., annual plans to begin the season; key or controversial study designs for the coming year's research projects, such as the Snake River fall chinook in-river/transport study; in-season analyses and recommendations, such from the NOAA, the Fish Passage Center and other entities; annual retrospective analyses from NOAA Fisheries, the FPC and others; etc.); and
 - 2) The ISAB would also work with Erik Merrill and Jim Ruff and with the relevant staff of the ISAB oversight partners (with the help of the ISAB ex officios) to set up a responsive gate-keeper approach and criteria to decide how to identify other proposals and analyses that deserve review and whether and how to handle other requests for review without the need to take every issue and every request through the Council, NOAA, and CRITFC.
- The Council would also ask the regional entities involved in producing the kinds of planning, analyses, evaluations and/or research proposals that would be subject to regular review by the peer review group to coordinate the production of their work with the ISAB to assure the

most efficient review process. At a date after the establishment of the group, the Council or the ISAB could send letters to that effect to the likely entities.

- As part of the its Fish Passage Center transition, now largely on hold during the litigation, Bonneville contracted with Battelle NW not only to provide non-technical analyses, but also to set up an independent technical peer review team to review this analysis. We do not need two peer review groups, and it is our sense that the ISAB group we propose here would have a wider focus than what Bonneville was working with Battelle NW to get in place, could and should provide that peer review function in the long run, and would benefit more from being tied to ISAB oversight. We suggest working with Bonneville and Battelle to merge the two peer review group ideas into one group, under the ISAB.

Why this proposal at this time?

We have been thinking about the benefits of establishing this group ever since the new ISAB members came on board and we added a mainstem technical expert to the staff. The Council and the region have the ISAB to address broad scientific questions from across the spectrum, and the ISRP and its peer review groups to review more specific proposals and questions regarding the off-site mitigation part of the program, whether annual proposals for project implementation or more specific project questions that arise throughout the year. But we have nothing comparable to the ISRP to review the many specific mainstem operations and passage matters that occur annually, in-season and in retrospective analyses and evaluations. More and more mainstem questions keep coming to the full Board, but many of them are asking specific technical questions about specific analyses that are not really appropriate for the Board. Also, the questions are coming to the Board in an uncoordinated and ad hoc fashion and issues are being addressed in a less than systematic way. And for the region as a whole, it seems more and more necessary to establish a systematic, coordinated peer review function to try to change the dynamic of the on-going morass of the same mainstem debates.

What is the vehicle for getting this going?

Based on this memo, staff will draft a letter to the ISAB (and to the ISAB oversight partners) asking the ISAB to establish this peer review group for mainstem passage issues. The draft letter will indicate that the establishment and use of such a group is a strong priority of the Council and, we hope, others. The Council should then direct the staff to work with the ISAB and the ISAB oversight partners through the ex officios and the ISAB coordinator to figure out the best way to make this happen. Erik Merrill estimates that it would not take long, two to three weeks perhaps, to set this group up, once given the assignment. It would take longer than that to set up the gate-keeper approach and criteria to decide how to identify proposals and analyses that deserve review (#2 above), but in the meantime the group would be ready to review whatever set of questions, reports and analyses the Council or the ISAB partners direct its way (#1 above).

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