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June 29, 2006

TO: Fish and Wildlife Committee

FROM: Doug Marker, Director, Fish and Wildlife Division

SUBJECT: ISRP "Programmatic" comments on the FY 2007-2009 proposal review and proposed Council responses

When it reviews proposals for funding from the Fish and Wildlife Program, the Independent Scientific Review Group typically makes some overarching recommendations to the Council. The panel did so again this year in Part 1 of its preliminary review of proposals (ISRP 2006-4A). The Council generally acknowledges these comments and responds with its final funding recommendations.

The ISRP's programmatic comments did not recommend against funding specific projects or project types, with the exception of its comments on captive propagation where it explained its "not fundable" conclusion for the Redfish Lake Sockeye projects. Staff will address concerns with those projects within the provincial recommendations. Most of the programmatic comments recommend future actions by the Council and project sponsors. We think most Council actions in response to the comments will be in designing the next project selection process and reviewing ongoing activities.

This memorandum summarizes those comments and proposes response by the Council.

Project and Program Review: The ISRP recommended that future reviews be sequential and consider topical reviews of similar types of projects. This is consistent with the design of the next project selection process that the staff has discussed with the Fish and Wildlife Committee and would be developed when the Council approves the design and schedule of that next process.

The ISRP recommended that the Council continue to rely on the "Three Step" review process for artificial production projects. We are recommending to the Committee that we make some revisions to that process but continue to use it for major project review.

The panel urged the Council to budget for an innovative projects category as was done several years ago. Council members have expressed interest in re-establishing such a placeholder. To

do so, we would need to reserve the funds from the program budget. When we present budget recommendations for Basinwide program research, the Committee should discuss if it wants to recommend funding for an innovative project placeholder.

In several places, the ISRP suggested requirements for project reporting as a condition of contracting. These included

- linking future proposals to Bonneville's PISCES database so that data and biological results are reported,
- requiring ongoing projects to summarize results and provide linkages to annual reports
- ensuring that data generated with public funds is readily available through publicly accessible website.

The Council should ask Bonneville to write such requirements into contracting as the data systems support them.

Monitoring and evaluation: The ISRP recommended providing statistical design and analysis support to help project sponsors with limited expertise. We need more discussion about which projects need this type of assistance and how it could be provided from a contract pool.

Another issue in this category was how various fish tagging programs work together. We are preparing an overview of these programs as part of the Basinwide project review and may suggest a more detailed workshop. In the Corps's AFEP review, there is a workgroup forming to look at the purposes and possible redundancies of tagging programs, and we are participating.

A significant issue for wildlife project monitoring was that the ISRP urged the Program to use the Habitat and Evaluation Procedure only to account for habitat units acquired against losses. HEP is currently the common accounting tool used in the Program for assessing wildlife habitat quality. It does not measure population responses to changes in habitat quality. As part of our overall monitoring guidance for the future, we need to discuss alternative monitoring methods and their costs.

Artificial Production: The ISRP urged the Council to consider two requests for proposals; first to evaluate the effects of large scale production programs for harvest on naturally spawning populations; and, second, to conduct an experiment on the long-term fitness effects on supplementation. Both are topics to discuss in the competing research priorities in the Basinwide proposal review.

The panel also suggested a specific workshop to help the design of a coordinated evaluation of supplementation to follow up to the April 2006 ISAB supplementation workshop. We will discuss the next steps from that workshop at the August meeting.

Habitat projects: The ISRP suggested some specific evaluations of habitat implementation. These included:

- Examining the lessons learned from successful Model Watersheds from the Columbia Basin and elsewhere

- A similar "lessons learned" report from Conservation Districts funded by the Program
- Evaluating incentives to propose land acquisitions with self-sustaining operation and maintenance components

We are incorporating these suggestions into currently planned staff reviews.

The panel suggested that it review habitat strategies in major subbasins on a multi-year rotation. Again, this can be incorporated into the design of the next project selection process.

They urged the Council monitoring the effects of dam decommissioning in the Columbia Basin and projects like Condit, Powerdale, and Marmot are scheduled for review. We will look at the monitoring plans of the owners of those dams.

The ISRP recommended using the Columbia Basin Water Trust Program's (CBWTP) criteria to evaluate projects that propose to improve stream flows using irrigation efficiencies. The CBWTP Technical Advisory Committee will review the applicability of the evaluation criteria for the water transaction program, to the subset of irrigation/piping projects recommended for funding by each local prioritization group.

They added their voice to the continuing discussion of Bonneville's criteria for using capital funds for projects, urging BPA to eliminate the \$1 million threshold requirement for acquisitions. They recognized this is a policy issue but pointed out that many lower cost acquisition proposals have significant benefits. We will carry this comment with us in further discussions with Bonneville on their capital policy. We expect a Bonneville report at the August Council meeting.

Finally, the ISRP made a general recommendation for increased emphasis of Program work in the lower Columbia River and estuary. These provinces each have an allocation under which current proposals are being reviewed. We will continue to work with the other funding partners in these areas, including the Corps and the Environmental Protection Agency to best coordinate of all of our program efforts.