

Tom Karier
Chair
Washington

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"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

June 29, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: Doug Marker, Director
Fish and Wildlife Division

SUBJECT: Recommendations on within-year requests for the Restore Natural Recruitment of Kootenai River White Sturgeon, Project 2002-002-00.

INTRODUCTION:

On June 29, 2006 Council staff received a letter from Bonneville addressing a within year budget adjustment (see Attachment). This request was referred by the staff Budget Oversight Group to the BOG Management Group for additional review and recommendation. This referral was because the request needed action before the next quarterly review. At your meeting in July the Council staff will provide an overview of the proposed budget actions and seek approval from both the Committee and the Council.

PROPOSED ACTION:

The Council staff concurs with Bonneville's recommendation in the June 29 letter and recommends the request for the Kootenai River White Sturgeon Project for \$75,829.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Currently the Restore Natural Recruitment of Kootenai River White Sturgeon, Project 2002-002-00 is operating at the approved FY 2006 expense budget of \$700,000. The associated project to the within year request is a proposed new start Project #2007-213-00, Identifying a Desirable Habitat State for Kootenai River White Sturgeon. The Kootenai River White Sturgeon Recovery Team proposed to seek \$75,829 in FY 2006 funds for the specific work element in the project (Project #2007-213-00, Identifying a Desirable Habitat State for Kootenai River White Sturgeon - US Geological Survey (USGS), Biological Objective 3, Task 3.1 proposed at \$304,952 for FY

2007 - 2009). This work element would then be folded into and funded through the ongoing project for FY 2007 - 2009 that has been reviewed by the Mountain Columbia Oversight Group.

BACKGROUND:

Periodically projects are received that are outside the capacity of the current program budget tracking and adjustment process. These projects are emergency and time sensitive requests that need to receive a recommendation outside the fiscal year quarterly review meetings.

The staff questioned the need for action on this request at the July meeting. As the Bonneville letter explains, if the field work requested is to occur this year, they must contract this month.

The larger issue is how this request fits with the ISRP's "fundable in part" review of the 2007 proposal. Bonneville concludes that the request does pertain to the objectives that were supported by the ISRP. Their analysis also addresses the concern about duplication of work by other agencies.

The letter received from Bonneville provides a summary of the additional review that the project received through the BOG Policy Group. The information on the requests is extensive and based on this and the through review the Council staff supports the recommendation as outlined in the Bonneville letter.

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Department of Energy

Bonneville Power Administration
P.O. Box 3621
Portland, Oregon 97208-3621

ENVIRONMENT, FISH AND WILDLIFE

June 29, 2006

In reply refer to: KEW-4

Mr. Doug Marker
Fish and Wildlife Division Director
Northwest Power and Conservation Council
851 SW Sixth Avenue, Suite 1100
Portland, OR 97204-1348

Dear Mr. Marker:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in conjunction with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) submitted a within-year request for a new project proposing to investigate the cause of recruitment failure in Kootenai River white sturgeon by contrasting physical conditions to areas where fish successfully spawn (*e.g.*, Bonneville Dam tailrace). This proposed work responds directly to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2006 Biological Opinion, RPA Component 2: contrasting physical habitat and availability of prey at among areas that routinely produce young white sturgeon to areas that do not produce white sturgeon should provide information needed to guide habitat improvement efforts. The request was reviewed by the Budget Oversight Group (BOG); however, because this project was proposed in the 2007–2009 solicitation process and the request is for an early start, it was elevated to the BOG management group. Additionally, a timely decision was needed because of the possible loss of fall 2006, data-gathering opportunities. The BOG management group was generally supportive of the request, but key aspects needed to be clearly addressed. Below is a discussion of those concerns.

The urgency of this request is driven by the Federal Action Agencies' commitment during consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to initiate implementation of white sturgeon habitat projects. Because approximately 9 percent of the fish population is lost each year, time is limited to learn from the spawning-age fish (30+ yrs) of the listed population. When building quality chinook salmon, coho or chum salmon spawning grounds, models that can be observed and emulated abound; however, human-made white sturgeon spawning areas are non-existent west of the Rockies. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate known, natural spawning areas to observe what physical characteristics are present. The goal is to begin modifying areas in fall 2007, so an action plan and timeline are being devised now for completing NEPA, and obtaining 404 permits, landowner permissions and for putting contracts in place to enable this work to proceed quickly.

In their review of the proposal, the ISRP was supportive of the work overall but felt that there “seems to be more emphasis than necessary,” on modeling. Our interpretation of the comments leads us to believe that the ISRP supported work on the first three objectives of the proposal but not the fourth objective. The within-year request being made addresses only the third objective of the original proposal.

We do not believe the ISRP had concerns about the third objective, though they did express concerns about the USGS conducting field work. The ISRP suggests that others (states, consulting firms, tribes) could take on the field tasks outlined in this proposal “because each has ongoing field sampling in the locations proposed for sampling here.” The subject proposal is for sampling physical descriptors of rivers and habitat for sturgeon spawning, not work already being conducted by others; as such we do not feel that their comment applies in this case. It does not appear to us that the ISRP comments about modeling are associated with this proposal. The fourth objective, which the ISRP did not support, was to develop spatially explicit models of potential growth. Tasks associated with this objective focused on establishing a spatial modeling framework, developing a growth model, and developing a foraging model. Because the ISRP review included statements supporting the lab and field work, we infer that the comments regarding modeling pertained to the fourth objective.

The ISRP review states that “with good coordination, the existing field crews could obtain data not now being collected but perceived valuable by the Cook staff” and “the benefits are less likely to happen if these investigators go it alone without coordination with others working on the same topic.” The project sponsor is not proposing field work that others outside of the USGS are already doing. In the proposal, two field-data collection work elements were identified. The first uses plankton nets and benthic dredges to describe availability of prey for age-0 white sturgeon, including first-feeding larvae. The second is to collect bathymetry, measure water velocities with an acoustic Doppler current profiler, measure substrate particle sizes, and map sediment facies in a manner that will enable staff to populate hydrodynamic models and geographic information systems to enable comparison of physical habitat features among areas. The principal investigator of this proposal has brought the USGS hydrologist already doing this type of field work on the Kootenai River on board specifically for this objective. Mr. G. Barton, has been conducting extensive field work on the Kootenai River for many years under contract with the Kootenai Tribe and Idaho Department of Fish and Game to gather data and model hydrodynamic processes to better understand recruitment dynamics of white sturgeon on that river system. The states of Montana and Idaho work closely with the USGS and are supportive of the work they do on white sturgeon. We agree with the sponsor that staff involved in this proposal have extensive experience in sampling and are fully capable of achieving the stated objectives.

Please feel free to contact either me at 503-230-5549 for further information or if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William C. Maslen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

William C. Maslen
Director of Fish and Wildlife

cc:

Mr. Mark Fritsch, Northwest Power and Conservation Council
Ms. Judy Hertz, Northwest Power and Conservation Council
Ms. Patty O'Toole, Northwest Power and Conservation Council
Mr. Karl Weist, Northwest Power and Conservation Council
Mr. Brian Lipscomb, Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority
Mr. Tom Iverson, Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority
Ms. Amy Langston, Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority