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June 28, 2007

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: Mark Fritsch, Project Implementation Manager

SUBJECT: Conceptual design for the next project review process

At the July Council meeting, staff will review this working draft that outlines a conceptual design for the next project review process. Council staff will describe the proposed category-based approach and the timelines for the process. The staff is not asking the Council to make a decision, only to provide feedback and guidance on the suggested approach.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The category-based approach described here promises a project review process that is more streamlined and efficient and more in line with the practicalities of a long-term mitigation program, while still providing the appropriate levels of technical and policy review and accountability. Parts of this approach are new and untested. If the Council decides to proceed with this approach, it will take a substantial amount of effort and support from the region to develop and implement it in a timely manner.

BACKGROUND:

As described in the Council's Final Decision Document for the Fish and Wildlife Project Funding Recommendations for Fiscal Years (FY) 2007 through 2009, the Council stated its intent to begin the next project review cycle in the "near future":

"The Council intends to renew a sequenced review of its program in the near future -- a format similar to the last provincial review process. This process will divide the program into several "tracks". If the Council decides to initiate this sequenced review soon, it is possible that it could be completed in time to revise or replace some Fiscal Year 2009 funding recommendations -- the third and final year of the recommendations-- that will be made in this current project review. The Council has not established a schedule for the

follow-on sequenced review process. The Council simply wants to note here that it is possible that the third and final year of the recommendations may be revised/replaced if the Council, in the future, decides to start the next review process very soon” (Future project review process: FY07 and beyond, NWPPC, June 2006).

At the Council meeting in March, staff presented a conceptual design and a category-driven approach for the next project review process. This proposed approach would build upon reviews of key aspects of the Fish and Wildlife Program, such as monitoring and evaluation, data management, project operation and maintenance, but also recognize the investments the Council made in the region over the past 26 years. This approach also incorporates elements such as targeted solicitation, sequenced review, and aggregating projects and topics addressed by the ISRP in its report on the needs for future project reviews (ISRP document 2006-7). This proposed project review sequence includes many of the attributes of past reviews, such as ISRP review, site visits, local input, and public review). This proposed new approach will also allow the Council to address concerns regarding the projects that were tagged with the “interim funding” conditions in the FY 2007 - 2009 recommendations.

Any project review process will need to fit with other processes the Council will be addressing in the near future (i.e., program amendment process, a possible long term settlement agreement between BPA and some tribes and the new Biological Opinion).

The timeframe associated with this new approach should provide continuity to the project sponsors through FY 2009. We should also have sufficient time to work with others in the region to gain acceptance for this new approach before we need to initiate the review sequences during FY 2008.¹

ANALYSIS:

Figure 1 provides a schematic of the proposed process. Although staff support this approach, it is one of many possible alternatives or strategies, and is intended to generate discussion and direction from the region.

A key component of the category-based approach is that the proposed categories would ‘lump together’ projects in our program that carry similar levels of certainty from the past and over the near term (1-5 years) and the longer term (5-10 years).

Projects associated with the near future can be placed into two categories, i.e., what I call here Core Basinwide and Long-term Type. Both categories include projects that are likely to continue for the longer-term (5 - 10 years) and not anticipated to change significantly in the short term (1 - 5 years). In these categories the Program would acknowledge that in the near future we will not likely alter any particular project -- for example, close a hatchery, stop purchasing coded

¹ The approach described in this memorandum concerns the project review process for the years after FY2009. The recent draft Proposed Action calls on Bonneville to fund additional habitat actions in FY2008-09. The Council is likely to be involved in helping to define and review those actions at the same time as it is working to develop the approach for the post FY 2009 project review process, as noted in the separate box on the right-hand side of Figure 1 below.

wire tags, sell a parcel of land. This reflects the basinwide- and province- level needs that we are currently funding in the program.

- Core Basinwide projects are integral to the infrastructure and/or information needs of the Northwest Power Act/ESA program in the Columbia River Basin for planning and management. These include, for example, regional research, monitoring, and evaluation projects, data management, and coordination and support projects.
- Long-term Type projects are those that, based on previous reviews, are necessary to protect past investments and commitments made to the particular project. These include, for example, hatchery operation and maintenance, monitoring and evaluation lands, and fish passage operations and maintenance. Reviews and funding recommendations would be based on applied criteria and performance metrics.

These two categories (Core Basinwide and Long-term Type) would be defined and initiated prior to a review for projects in the remaining category in the center part of the figure, which I label 'Subbasin Plan Habitat Implementation'. This latter category is intended to address on-the-ground needs for projects. These projects would usually be driven by time-deliverable objectives linked to local priorities at a subbasin/province level, or to the new Proposed Action, and/or to implementation needs identified in the upcoming program amendments. Time frames associated with this category would most likely be limited to periods of 1 - 5 years. Project review would be structured very much like past processes, but allowing more time for our review panels to do site visits. In addition, this category could be staggered, not only at an intra-category level, but also with other categories (i.e., Core and Long-term).

A key component of the proposed category approach is the development of a more efficient mechanism for review of the projects in the Core Basinwide and Long-Term categories. It is anticipated that these categories can be reviewed with the use of criteria that will build on past decisions, such as, step decisions for hatcheries, and regional guidance documents such as the Council's regional monitoring and evaluation framework. This will align regional approaches such as data management and monitoring and evaluation, and also allowing better review of the more dynamic, on-the-ground projects in the subbasin. On an annual basis, these categories will be checked to ensure they are properly scoped and that they are performing as intended.

Figure 1: Schematic of proposed category-based approach for the next solicitation and review process.

