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November 29, 2007

DECISION MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: Mark Fritsch, project implementation manager

SUBJECT: Deferred fourth quarter within-year project funding requests

PROPOSED ACTION: Council decision on two deferred fourth quarter within-year project funding requests from the November Council meeting.

BACKGROUND:

On October 16, 2007, the Council staff presented to the Fish and Wildlife Committee the requests and reviewed the schedule for the within-year budget adjustment requests for the Fourth Quarter of Fiscal Year 2007. These fourth quarter requests, reviewed in July, August, and September, will be treated as an amendment to the start-of-year budget for Fiscal Year 2008.

On November 12, 2007 the Council recommended funding for seven of the within-year requests for a total of \$364,146 in expense funding and \$102,500 in capital funding in Fiscal Year 2008, and \$182,174 in expense and \$6,000 capital in Fiscal Year 2009. These recommendations were conditioned for particular projects. As part of this recommendation the two following requests were deferred to the December Council meeting.

- Project 2002-053-00, Assess Salmonids in the Asotin Creek Watershed, and
- Project 1998-004-01, Columbia Basin Bulletin

ANALYSIS:

I. Project 2002-053-00, Assess Salmonids in the Asotin Creek Watershed. You will recall that the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) requested \$113,437 in expense funding in Fiscal Year 2008 and \$213,437 in Fiscal Year 2009. The WDFW requests reinstatement (continuation) of full funding as recommended by the Council as part of the Fiscal Year 2007 - 2009 recommendation. The project estimates adult and juvenile salmonid abundance in the Asotin Creek watershed. The request is in response to Bonneville's decision to reduce the project's funding by approximately 50 percent in Fiscal Year 2008 and to terminate

the project in Fiscal Year 2009. Bonneville is confirming its previous decision regarding this project and does not support the request.

The Asotin Creek project is a cost-effective way to monitor both adult and juvenile steelhead. What makes the Asotin project more valuable is that this monitoring is occurring on an unsupplemented population of ESA-listed wild steelhead. Council staff feels that the data collected could be important as a reference stream in the region's monitoring and evaluation efforts. The ISRP and ISAB have identified reference stream population data as a serious data gap in the Columbia River Basin. They assert that one of the most critical components of the hatchery monitoring and evaluation programs should be the comparison of abundance and productivity metrics (i.e., natural origin returns, spawner recruit ratio, number of juveniles per redd or female, etc.) of supplemented and unsupplemented (i.e., reference or control stream) populations for both adult and juvenile fish. The project is also listed in the draft Biological Opinion in the Supplemental Comprehensive Analysis that addresses the project's link to monitoring effects of hatchery programs against non-supplemented references areas.

This within-year project funding request received more support than any of the other requests reviewed as part of the quarterly review with letters of support from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Nez Perce Tribe, and the Snake River Salmon Recovery Board. In addition, a letter was received and distributed at the Council meeting on November 13, 2007 from Michael Schiewe for the Wells Hydroelectric Project Habitat Conservation Plan Hatchery Committee (which includes signatures from NOAA Fisheries, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, WDFW, Colville Tribes, Yakama Nation and the Douglas County Public Utility District) stating the importance of this project for monitoring the effectiveness of hatchery programs in the Columbia River Basin. Based on this information the Council staff recommended that the Council approve \$113,437 in Fiscal Year 2008 and \$213,437 in Fiscal Year 2009 in the expense budgets at the November Council meeting.

Based on the nature of the project and the interest that the request has generated, the Fish and Wildlife Committee choose to defer a decision on this request until the December Council meeting in order to clarify the information received on this project and the project's standing in the draft BiOp. The Council concurred with the Committee recommendation.

Since the November Council meeting Bonneville continues to support its previous decision. The project is mentioned in two places in the BiOp (please see below) and its supporting documents. The references seem to not obligate funding for the project, but rather to show that they were considered as ongoing baseline as part of the assessment of hatchery effects on ESU viability.

- RPA No. 50, RM&E Strategy 1 --Monitor the Status of Selected Fish Populations Related to FCRPS Actions. The Implementation Plans for this RPA include, by reference: "Specific projects for implementation in the 2007-2009 period are identified in the FCRPS BA Attachment B.2.6-1." Within that BA Attachment, this project is listed in Table 8 (p. B.2.6-1-24), which includes the following footnote:

While BPA currently provides regional support for these fish population status data, all of these projects are under review for monitoring efficiencies and prioritization of RM&E efforts and there [sic] scope of work and/or funding levels are subject to change in FY 2008 and FY 2009.

- Supplemental Comprehensive Analysis of the Federal Columbia River Power System and Mainstem Effects of the Upper Snake and Other Tributary Actions; § 7, An inventory of Current Hatchery Programs in the Interior Columbia Basin and Their Effects on Salmon and Steelhead Viability. This project is listed in the table on p. 61 for Snake R. Steelhead ESU (A-run) as having an *Unknown* hatchery effect on population viability. In the Column titled “New Hatchery Actions that Potentially Could Contribute to Recovery,” the entry for the project is:

Continue to fund operation of the existing weir and spawning escapement. Fund genetic analysis of existing samples (WDFW).

Indications are that evaluations continue to define the level of funding that is being has been promised/expected/required for projects as part of the BiOp.

In addition, it has come to the Council’s attention that the project has received funding from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) for Fiscal Year 2008 at \$88,113¹. Even with these funds the project will have difficulty sustaining the collection of this seemly valuable baseline information as addressed in the BiOp, but also for the rare value it contributes to monitoring an unsupplemented reference stream necessary for evaluating supplementation programs. The project would need an additional \$25,342 to meet the requested budget adjustment.

With the information at hand, the Council staff feels that we need confirmation from Bonneville and NOAA regarding the importance of this project to the BiOp. It seems that this project is being presented as valuable part of the baseline activity of what is currently occurring in the basin. Though the project may be able to maintain project integrity in Fiscal Year 2008, there is no certainty that loss of time-series information being collected would not be jeopardized.

Asotin Recommendation

Based on this information the Council staff recommends that the Council approve \$25,342 in Fiscal Year 2008 and \$213,437 in Fiscal Year 2009 in the expense budget at the December Council meeting.

II. Project 1998-004-01, Columbia Basin Bulletin. You will recall that The Columbia Basin Bulletin (Bulletin) sought \$25,000 to achieve the funding level recommended by the Council for Fiscal Year 2008. Bonneville had provided \$135,000 in Fiscal year 2007, but decided to provide only \$100,000 in Fiscal Year 2008 and \$50,000 in Fiscal Year 2009. The Bulletin sought the \$25,000 in order to adequately cover the anticipated workload with the upcoming program amendment process and BiOp remand developments (to assist in maintaining the integrity of the Bulletin, the Council provided \$15,000 in July 2007 from its Fish and Wildlife Division budget to supplement the Bulletin during this period).

At the November meeting, the Fish and Wildlife Committee and the Council discussed the Bulletin’s request for supplemental funding in Fiscal Year 2008 and decided to defer the decision

¹ With these funds and the Fiscal Year 2008 funding from the program the project funding level for implementation is \$188,113.

to the December meeting. Bonneville has confirmed its previous decision regarding this project and does not support the request. Bonneville continues to encourage the sponsor to find alternative funding sources during this time of transition.

The Council staff agreed with Bonneville that supplemental funding is not sustainable in the long-term, and that alternative funding sources need to be found and implemented. During the staff presentation to the Fish and Wildlife Committee it was determined that there was a need to resolve the needs for the Bulletin not just for Fiscal Year 2008, but also for Fiscal Year 2009. For this reason the request was deferred to the December meeting with the anticipation that this project could present a work plan that would outline the transition to alternative funding sources. The Council agreed with this recommendation.

Council staff contacted the sponsor, Bill Crampton of Intermountain Communications, on November 16, 2007, and advised him of the committee and Council discussions. In response, Mr. Crampton said that early next year he will send a notice to Bulletin subscribers summarizing the history and purpose of the project and informing them about the recent policy and funding decisions by the Council and Bonneville. Subscribers would be informed that in the coming months, some of the Bulletin's e-mail newsletter content would only be accessed by paid subscribers, as directed by Council and Bonneville. In addition, Crampton will also seek sponsorships for the Bulletin from organizations. By mid-summer it should become clear whether the Bulletin can be sustained, or partially sustained, under this plan.

Bulletin Recommendation

This sequence, with the Fiscal Year 2009 funding level (i.e., \$50,000), would allow the Bulletin sponsor to determine if he can sustain his anticipated workload associated with the BiOp and amendment process and transition to this alternative funding source in Fiscal Year 2009. Therefore, there is no need to act on the within-year funding request.

Bulletin Alternative

1) Approve the within-year project funding request for Fiscal Year 2008 and 2009.

The Council could decide to fully support the needs of the Bulletin and maintain the previous level of support. This support is important as it will come at a time when the region has entered into some very important processes associated with the Council's program amendment process and the BiOp remand process, and there is a vital need to keep all stakeholders informed during this period. If this alternative is selected, the Council would recommend to Bonneville a funding adjustment of \$25,000 in Fiscal Year 2008 and \$90,000 in Fiscal Year 2009 to maintain a funding level of \$140,000 per year.