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July 15, 2010

Mr. William C. Maslen
Manager, Fish and Wildlife Division
Bonneville Power Administration
P.O. Box 3621
Portland, Oregon 97208

Dear Mr. Maslen:

The purpose of this letter is to advise you of the Council's decision on a 2008 Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) Biological Opinion (BiOp) project. This recommendation was made by the Council at its meeting on July 14, 2010.

In addition, a purpose of this letter is to inform the project sponsor and other interested parties of the status of this Council action. The following is a summary of the action taken by the Council at the meeting in August.

Research Non-Indigenous Actions, Project #2008-719-00

On December 18, 2009, the Bonneville Power Administration (Bonneville) submitted a 2008 Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) Biological Opinion (BiOp) project narrative for review by the Independent Scientific Review Panel (ISRP). The 2008 FCRPS BiOp is a 10-year plan for operations and configuration to mitigate for the adverse effects of the hydro-system on the 13 fish listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The BiOp's Reasonable and Prudent Alternative (RPA) calls for Bonneville and the other federal Action Agencies to implement specific mitigation actions to avoid jeopardy and adverse modification of the critical habitat of ESA listed Columbia River fish. This project is intended to address RPA 44, which commits to developing strategies to reduce non-indigenous fish.

On January 19, 2010, the ISRP requested additional information from the proponents to determine whether the proposal met scientific criteria (ISRP document 2010-4). No public comment was received on the ISRP review.

On April 29, 2010 the Council received a response from the U. S. Geological Survey and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. The Council received the ISRP's final review (ISRP document 2010-15) of the revised proposal on May 25, 2010. The ISRP found that the proposal met scientific review criteria (qualified).

The goal of this research project is to address key uncertainties regarding the food habits of non-native predators in the lower Columbia River during the late summer and fall and to assess the role of juvenile American shad in their diets in terms of any impacts on their health and condition. In addition, the project aims to evaluate the potential efficacy of localized removals of smallmouth bass for predation control. The project has the following specific objectives:

- Documenting the food habits and the physiological condition of smallmouth bass, walleye, and channel catfish in three reservoirs of the lower Columbia River during the late summer and fall (Objectives 1 and 2); and
- Describing and comparing relative density and diet of smallmouth bass between sites perceived to be “hot spots” and sites nearby (Objective 3).

The ISRP found the proponents did a thorough job of revising the proposal to address the ISRP’s recommendations and comments adequately and that information collected by the project will be useful in evaluating the impacts of non-native fishes on salmon recovery in the Columbia River Basin. The qualification raised by the ISRP addresses their concern regarding the study design associated with the dietary comparisons (Objective 3). Specifically, the ISRP is concerned about the ability to collect adequate numbers of smallmouth bass (i.e., sample size) in the different habitats of the forebay and tailrace to make this comparison. The ISRP raises this concern and states that the issue can be addressed in future project submissions.

During the staff presentation to the Fish and Wildlife Committee in June concerns were raised regarding the use of the information gathered from this research project. Specifically, the Committee would like to be informed, once the information has been collect through this project, on how the managing agencies in the Columbia River Basin will use this information to protect salmonids. The Fish and Wildlife Committee requested that the sponsors present the findings of this two year research project and demonstrate how this information and findings from this and other predation projects (i.e., the northern pikeminnow management program) are used by managing agencies to protect salmonids.

Based on the ISRP review, the Council supports this project for implementation. This recommendation is conditioned on the sponsors presenting the findings of the project to the Council within the next two years and demonstrating how the resulting information is being used to protect salmonids in the Columbia River Basin.

Sincerely,

Tony Grover
Director, Fish and Wildlife Division

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