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January 13, 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 Columbia River Fish Accord proposal. This recommendation was made by the Council at its meeting on January 12, 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 January.

Expanded Multi-Species Acclimation in the Wenatchee/Methow Basins, Project # 2009-001-00

In May 2008, Bonneville, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation signed agreements with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation (CTWSRO), the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN), the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC), the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and the states of Idaho and Montana to implement a set of projects and actions that will deliver specific, scientifically sound results for the region's fish and wildlife. Collectively these agreements are known as the Columbia Basin Fish Accords.

As with all projects in the Fish and Wildlife Program, Accord projects are subject to scientific review by the ISRP. As outlined in the guidance document associated with the review process for the Accords, the Council recognizes Bonneville's commitments to the projects under the Accords. However, the Accords do not alter the Council's responsibilities with respect to ISRP review or the Council's role following ISRP review. Consequently, the Council will provide its recommendation on each project based on full consideration of the ISRP report and the Council's Program.

The objectives of this project are to develop an expanded acclimation program for existing spring Chinook and steelhead hatchery mitigation programs in the Wenatchee and Methow basins. The acclimation project – which focuses on just a small aspect of these existing programs – proposes to implement and to test the generally accepted concept that acclimating and releasing fish in a manner that mimics natural systems (i.e., existing ponds with minimal modifications) increases the effectiveness of integrated hatchery programs and can be used to improve the Viable Salmonid Population (VSP) status of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Chinook and steelhead. Through the implementation of these objectives, small acclimation/release sites will be scattered throughout appropriate spawning habitat (“targeted acclimation”) in an effort to disperse returning adults to appropriate locations and produce higher smolt to adult survival rates than direct scatter-type or large single-point releases. Acclimating multiple species in one pond increases the number of acclimation sites available for each species. The goal of the project is to help achieve the recovery goals for the two listed stocks using existing Chelan County Public Utility District (CCPUD) steelhead hatchery program fish and Douglas County PUD (DCPUD)/Grant County PUD (GCPUD) spring Chinook hatchery program fish.

The Yakama Nation (YN) proposal was submitted to the ISRP for review, and on April 1, 2009 the ISRP provided a review (ISRP document 2009-10). The ISRP found that the proposal “Meets Scientific Review Criteria (Qualified)”. No public comment was received on the ISRP review.

The ISRP found the project narrative adequate to understand the intent of the project, but qualified their recommendation with the understanding that the proposal lacked sufficient detail to fully appraise any likely benefits to fish and wildlife. The ISRP requested the following items be addressed as part of the plan.

1. fully document the current status of the resource (spring Chinook and summer steelhead) in the two subbasins;
2. establish clear improvements to the VSP parameters for these focal species as a consequence of using long-term acclimation ponds;
3. craft a monitoring design to evaluate any success (especially since the sponsor acknowledges not much is known about whether this strategy will improve the status of the species); and
4. integrate the principles from the Council’s 2009 program, the HSRG findings, the Upper Columbia River Chinook and Steelhead recovery plan, the 2008 BiOp, and impending hatchery biological opinions.

On April 14, 2009, based on the ISRP review, the Council supported this project with the understanding that implementation would depend on the outcome of the proposed planning effort (objective 1) and future review by the ISRP and Council.

On November 18, 2009 a submittal was received from the YN (via Bonneville) intended to address the condition placed on this project. On December 22, 2009 the Council received the ISRP review (ISRP document 2009-57) of the YN’s response.

The ISRP found the documentation provided by the YN in response provided an adequate description of the status of spring Chinook and steelhead in the two subbasins (#1 above) and partially met the qualification for monitoring design (#3 above). The ISRP continued to find the documentation did not meet the qualification for establishing clear improvements to the VSP

parameters for these focal species (#2 above) or for integrating the principles from the Council's 2009 program, the HSRG findings, the Upper Columbia River Chinook and Steelhead recovery plan, the 2008 BiOp, and impending hatchery biological opinions (#4 above). The ISRP did, however, continue to find the project proposal "Meets Scientific Review Criteria (Qualified)" and recommended that deficiencies in meeting these qualifications be addressed in contracting and future project reviews. In doing so, the ISRP noted that the proponents plan to use existing hatchery production, subject to parallel NOAA BiOp evaluation, and existing ponds with minimal modification.

The ISRP determined that these remaining deficiencies (i.e., clear improvements to the viable salmon population and integration of the principles of existing process) could be addressed in contracting and future project review. Their conclusion is based on the understanding that the Yakama Nation plans to use existing hatchery production, subject to a parallel NOAA BiOp evaluation, and existing ponds with minimal modification.

This project uses existing production under the CCPUD (i.e., Wenatchee River, Eastbank Fish Hatchery) and DCPUD (i.e., Methow River, Methow Hatchery) hatchery programs. The Hatchery and Genetic Management Plan (HGMP) for the Wenatchee has been submitted to NOAA. The HGMP for the Methow is under management review and is due to be submitted the end of January. The hatchery program actions embedded in these HGMPs will be consistent with best management practices as reflected in the HSRG guidelines for PNI (proportion of natural influence), pHOS (proportion of hatchery-origin adults on the spawning grounds), pNOB (proportion of natural-origin adults in the broodstock), and limitations of the number of generations of supplementation as reflected in the Council's 2009 Fish and Wildlife Program. Upon approval of the HGMPs, NOAA will prepare and issue biological opinions for the hatchery programs. Adult returns from the proposed acclimated releases will be managed as described in revised HGMPs consistent with HSRG recommendations.

This project seeks to improve the efficacy of current supplementation programs by providing acclimation sites (i.e., existing ponds with minimal modifications) for the purpose of improving homing fidelity, distribution of returning spawners, and potentially smolt-to-adult survival rates. Additionally, the YN will be evaluating the concept of acclimating multiple species in a single pond. The benefits of acclimation and the efficacy of mixing multiple species in the same pond will be evaluated through this project. Smolt-to-adult survival (SAR) and other response parameters will be compared to the existing PUD hatchery program of direct releases to determine the benefits associated with this project's concept. Thus, as the ISRP indicated, these qualifications can be addressed in contracting and future project reviews.

Based on the ISRP review the Council supports implementation of this project where the condition placed on this project, as part of the Council decision on April 14, 2009 has been adequately addressed and where data addressing the deficiencies as outlined by the ISRP will become available for future reviews.

Sincerely,

Tony Grover
Director, Fish and Wildlife Division

cc: Jamae Hilliard Creecy, BPA
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