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August 5, 2010

MEMORANDUM

TO: Fish and Wildlife Committee Members

FROM: Patty O'Toole, Program Implementation Manager
Laura Robinson, Fish and Wildlife Division Intern

SUBJECT: Status update on Subbasin management plan updates and development of Multi-year Action Plans

At the August Council meeting, the staff will provide a status update and some topics for the Committee to consider for both the subbasin management plan updates and the multi-year action plans. A discussion of those topics follows.

Subbasin Management Plan updates - some considerations

The 1996 Independent Scientific Group's *Return to the River*, and the Independent Scientific Review Panel's (ISRP) 1997 *Review of the Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program as directed by the 1996 amendment to the Power Act* identified as a significant shortcoming of the Program that actions were not explicitly linked to identified problems (limiting factors) and objectives. These reports suggested a scientific framework be established that would support implementation of actions to achieve stated objectives. The main point of reshaping the Program from 2000 to 2010 was to provide such a framework, which included the development and adoption of subbasin plans in 2004 and 2005.

The most important purpose for the mainstem plan and the subbasin plans was to provide a broad but explicit mainstem and subbasin context for implementing habitat measures (actions). These plans served to provide the linkage for key species between limiting factors, objectives and strategies. Providing this linkage was necessary to guide and explain planning and implementation decisions and to perform monitoring and evaluation to determine whether a collective set of actions results in the desired outcome.

The Council's 2009 Fish and Wildlife Program calls for voluntary updates to the subbasin management plans. Council staff is taking into consideration how the plans are being utilized in the basin today in order to take the best approach for updating the Subbasin management plans. One initial use of subbasin plans was as a base for other planning efforts in the region. For

example, since the plans were initially adopted in 2004 and 2005, new planning efforts have developed with subbasin plans as the catalyst such as recovery plans, and related facets of the biological opinions.

Another important use of subbasin plans is by the ISRP when reviewing project proposals. Before calling for updates to subbasin management plans, the staff will therefore talk with members of the ISRP to learn how the subbasin plans assist the ISRP in their review. Specifically we will explore whether the plans provide background material and context, if they help the application of the specific review criteria, or if they aid the ISRP in another manner.

The staff is not only seeking input from ISRP, but anticipates “polling” our regional partners. We plan to speak with local, tribal, state and federal entities to see if and how the plans are utilized in the Columbia River Basin.

There are alternative processes the Council could utilize for proceeding with the updates to the subbasin management plans. As this will be a voluntary effort we do not recommend creating a process that will be a burden for our partners in the region. We also recognize that there may not be obvious incentive for updating the plans as doing so will likely not increase available funding opportunities. Given these considerations, staff is likely to recommend a relatively simple effort. An example of a simple effort would consist of the Council calling for updates as a simple narrative revision, a similar approach to the existing descriptive-style subbasin plans. This could be addressed in a letter to the region, or as part of another future amendment process such as action plans, HSRG, MERR or the next overall program amendment. This would require relatively little work up-front from staff and could be initiated fairly quickly.

One alternative to the simple update could involve transferring the narrative text from current subbasin plans into a structured database with a public web-based access system. The Council could then ask for updates where changes are needed within the structured online database. Staff anticipates that this would be faster and easier for the region to update their information in the long term, but would take more staff time up-front to assemble the significant amount of subbasin information and prepare for updates. Given the considerations mentioned above, we don’t suggest pursuing this alternative at this point, but the Council may want to consider the value of maintaining the vast information found in the subbasin plans, in a more accessible, web-based format for the long-term.

Multi-year Action Plans - update

The 2009 Fish and Wildlife Program calls for the development of Multi-year Action Plans (MAPs) as follows:

[T]he Council will work with recommending entities, Bonneville and others to shape the measures recommended for all areas of the Program into multi-year action plans similar to those implementation plans in the 2008 Biological Opinion and the Accords. The Council will then work with Bonneville and relevant entities to estimate multi-year implementation budgets and secure funding commitments that ensure adequate funding for these action plans.

The task consists of developing long-term plans for each subbasin which will include actions recommended to the Council during the 2009 Program amendment process. The Program provides guidance as to what the action plans should include: ongoing and new proposed actions, expected benefits, sequence of work, priority of work, monitoring and evaluation as appropriate and estimated budgets. The original intent of this effort was “to shape the measures (the various actions recommended during the amendment process) recommended for all areas of the Program into multi-year action plans and work with Bonneville and relevant entities to estimate multi-year implementation budgets and secure funding commitments that ensure adequate funding...”

Staff has proceeded to develop a database to house information pulled from the recommendations, the Status of the Resource (SOTR), Pisces, and Taurus to identify (at a relatively high level) actions or projects. Staff is linking limiting factors with the actions, and assembling other relevant information such whether the action is existing or new, cost estimates and other necessary information. As this work developed, we learned of similar efforts either underway or anticipated to occur in the near future. Staff believes that the Council should consider how these efforts relate to the development of actions plans as described in the Program.

NOAA Fisheries is currently creating a recovery plan implementation tracking system, involving recovery boards in the basin. Similar to the Council’s MAPs, NOAA Fisheries will illustrate linkages between recovery plan actions and known “habitat concerns” (limiting factors).

In addition, Bonneville is working on methods to track biological opinion implementation using Pisces and Taurus. Eventually this effort will link habitat actions, at a work element level, to limiting factors (what NOAA Fisheries is calling habitat concerns). There are also other federal- and state-led efforts on implementation tracking.

As a result of these other programs, staff has been contemplating how the Program’s MAPs fit with these other efforts. At the August meeting, staff will be prepared to discuss with the Committee the following considerations and challenges and how they may influence our objectives for action plans.

Some considerations:

- Action plans will be an important set of information for the MERR (via the Program Synopsis).
 - The Program Synopsis will be a visual snapshot of the Program’s implementation and progress in protecting, mitigating and enhancing fish and wildlife.
- MAPs will provide a way to track implementation of on-the-ground work against the recommendations submitted during the amendment process.
- Council could consider including the work done by the Corps of Engineers and other entities. This could help eventually identify duplicate work or opportunities to coordinate/gain efficiencies.
- MAPs could serve as a “menu” of actions to consider for when times call for more habitat action implementation.
- For the most current information, this effort should live-link with Pisces and Taurus to the extent possible for accurate and consistent information about *current* actions/projects.

Some challenges we face:

- Shifting definitions of key elements (limiting factors, etc).
- Currently not live-linked with BPA, recovery plans, etc.
- Current plans are focused at a high level - while other agencies are doing more detailed scale assessments. The Council could get to that finer scale of details over time.
- With multiple entities performing similar work it will be important to ensure that coordination occurs to minimize duplication.
- Addressing these challenges will result in a longer timeframe than planned.