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December 2, 2010

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: Patty O'Toole, John Shurts, Tony Grover, Peter Paquet, Nancy Leonard, Laura Robinson

SUBJECT: Overview of Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program implementation planning

Over the last several months, the staff has reviewed topics related to Fish and Wildlife Program planning with the Fish and Wildlife Committee. The discussions have included: 1) implementation of the 2009 Fish and Wildlife Program and 2) early thoughts on preparations for the next Fish and Wildlife Program amendment process. At the December Council meeting, the staff will provide the Council with an overview of these topics.

Status of 2009 Program tasks

The 2009 Fish and Wildlife Program (Program) noted the focus of the Council and the region will shift during the next decade, 2009 to 2019, from planning to implementation and performance:

The revised Program renews the emphasis on periodic scientific review of new and ongoing actions; increases requirements for reporting of results and accountability; emphasizes adaptive management as a way to solve continuing uncertainties; renews the push to develop a better set of quantitative objectives for the regional Program; commits to a periodic and systematic exchange of science and policy information; and expands the monitoring and evaluation framework with a commitment to use the information to make better decisions and report frequently on Program progress.

Nearly all of the fish and wildlife work of the Council since the adoption of the 2009 Fish and Wildlife Program has been work of this type: project review, further development of the monitoring and evaluation elements of the program, updates on reporting requirements and metrics, implementation scheduling, etc.

Staff will review with the Council the status of various tasks identified in the 2009 Program. Many tasks are in progress; some have been completed by staff or others in the region. A few tasks identified in the 2009 Program have not yet been initiated and require thoughtful discussion moving forward. Two of these are described later in this memo, Subbasin Plans and Program Objectives - biological and otherwise.

2013-2014 Program Amendment

The next Program amendment process will occur right in the middle of the 2009-2019 decade focused on implementation, performance and monitoring and evaluation. While it is early, at this time it seems unlikely that many changes will be needed or desired to the Program in 2014. Significant Program restructuring or new planning efforts will not likely be of interest in the region either.

It is likely, barring unforeseen events, that the 2009 focus on implementation and performance will remain prominent in the Council's work throughout the coming decade. Specifically, the focus of the next amendment process may turn out to be how to further shape the Program monitoring and evaluation efforts described in the draft Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Reporting (MERR) Plan. The key question to be asked during the 2014 Program amendment process related to this work is whether the Council and the region will be prepared, in five or ten year's time, to evaluate the benefits of all work under way.

Two key Program elements for discussion:

There are two important exceptions to this perspective. Staff suggests that two elements of the Program, the subbasin plans and program-level biological objectives, may require consideration by the Council as to whether and when to make significant changes or improvements. If the Council opts to make changes in these program elements, it will mean a significant investment of staff time and resources in advance of the program amendment process.

Subbasin plans. Developing the subbasin plans was the equivalent of adding a solid foundation to a large and unwieldy building. The question is when, and in what way, will we need to revisit the Program's foundation, the subbasin plans, to maintain the value of the investment and if possible at that time *increase* the benefits to the Program from the plans. There are a number of ways to address this, and a number of considerations as to when to begin. The staff would like to discuss with the Council ideas about when and how to devote resources to the subbasin plans.

Program objectives, biological and otherwise. The Program lacks a good set of measurable objectives above the subbasin level against which to measure progress. The Council has been aware of this need for some time and the efforts to develop the Monitoring Evaluation Research and Reporting (MERR) framework and the ISAB's recent comments on the High Level Indicators are just the latest two sources of the same conclusion: program monitoring, evaluation and reporting efforts will suffer without a set of objectives against which to measure progress.

Development and refinement of a good set of measurable objectives includes *more than improved adult fish abundance objectives*. While sustained increases in adult fish abundance numbers may be an ultimate target of the program, they are not by themselves, of much value for evaluating program actions. Program objectives are needed that relate to the actual work of the

Program, which focuses on improving environmental conditions for various life stages for focal species and in some cases, in producing and releasing juvenile fish into that habitat. A useful set of Program objectives might include the following:

- habitat characteristics objectives: probably at some regional or province scale that may be based on a set of indices, indicating the extent of improvements the program seeks, and is realizing in key habitat characteristics for key species
- habitat productivity, capacity and diversity objectives: improvements we expect to gain in the productivity and capacity (and diversity if we can) for the life stages of interest in that improved habitat
- hatchery related objectives: such as those developed by the HSRG, to state the desired relationship of natural to artificial production in those areas that include production
- Program implementation objectives: such as assessing progress in removing artificial barriers to fish migration, installing fish screens to protect fish from irrigation channels, mitigating for wildlife habitat units and resident fish losses, as is feasible

Staff is fully aware that it is difficult to develop objectives of this type. If the Council decides the 2013-14 Program amendment process will be the time and place to begin adding objectives of this type to the Program, staff needs to begin work now in order to be ready in time. It will require a substantial investment in time and resources of staff and many others in the region to develop detailed concepts, analytical tools, data sets, and scientific review procedures necessary for a regional effort at setting objectives for the Program