

# Status of Draft MERR Plan and its RME Implementation Strategies

November 21, 2011 Update

[www.nwcouncil.org/fw/merr](http://www.nwcouncil.org/fw/merr)

In the 2009 amendments to the *Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program*, the Council committed to developing an improved framework and strategies for monitoring and evaluating the various activities and elements of the program. The draft Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Reporting Plan (MERR) and the associated Implementation Strategies are part of that commitment.

The draft MERR Plan and the Implementation Strategies are not formally adopted Council documents or part of the Fish and Wildlife Program, nor will they be the basis on which formal decisions are made in the near-term, such as within the category and geographic proposal review processes.

The draft MERR Plan and Implementation Strategies are intended as a way to organize information so that the Council, the Council staff, and all others active within the Program have a workable way to understand the research, monitoring and evaluation (RME) activities people need to implement or expect to implement over the next few years, and how those specific activities relate to the broader RME needs of the Program. We hope these documents will be useful as guidance by all relevant parties to help link specific RME actions to a larger framework, so that, for example, the ISRP will be able to see how specific RME actions relate to broader RME needs and strategies, and the Council will have a better sense of what RME activities people are planning so as to help us in our planning for Program-level evaluation and reporting efforts.

We will continue to work further on the draft MERR Plan and Implementation Strategies in this light, in collaboration with others. We will also consider the information and the guidance within the Plan and Strategies when the Council next formally amends the Fish and Wildlife Program in 2013-14.

## Status of draft MERR Plan Document

The draft MERR Plan serves as a platform to informally work with the region prior to the 2014 Program amendment process. Ideally, a potential approach to fleshing out these RME related components of the Program would be drafted in time for the region to formally react to, i.e., submit supporting/alternative/non-supporting recommendation, to these suggestions during the 2014 amendment process.

The Council released an initial draft of the MERR Plan that outlined its various topics and presented some suggested content during March 2010 (Council document [2010-04](#)) for regional feedback. Staff then began incorporating, as feasible, these comments through revisions, with the latest version being Council document [2010-17](#).

Several placeholders remain to be addressed by staff to incorporate remaining public comments, new ideas, and alternative approaches to the originally described approaches. The appendices of the MERR Plan are also in development and revision, including those pertaining to the Implementation Strategies. As text for the placeholder topics and for the appendices (e.g., Implementation Strategies) is developed, the council will notify the region and encourage the region to send additional comments to Council staff to further improve these components.

The majority of the work during 2011 has focused on:

- working with the Basin's fish and wildlife agencies and tribes (or a subset of managers depending on the topic) in drafting and revising the implementation strategies; and
- the placeholders related to drafting a potential revised set of objectives for the Program at the basinwide and provincial level.

## **Next Steps for Draft MERR Plan Document Placeholders & Implementation Strategies**

### **Council Management Questions**

In October 2009 the Council approved a draft working list set of management questions and adopted 3 high level indicators (HLIs) to begin reporting to Congress on program progress and status of the basin's fish and wildlife. These draft questions are linked to the Council's (draft and approved) HLIs and associated fish and wildlife indicators (FWI). Many of the draft HLIs remain in the 'to be determined' status and these may be informed by these draft Implementation Strategies. These draft management questions have been revised per comments received, and may be revised in the future as needed to align with FW Program Objectives (below) as well as to incorporate additional public comments.

### **FW Program (Biological) Objectives**

Staff is currently focusing on this section. As staff develop draft suggestions for Basinwide and Provincial objectives these will be discussed with the Fish and Wildlife Committee for further guidance.

Some initial discussions have already occurred during Fish and Wildlife Committee meetings to provide staff with guidance. Staff plans to draft some initial objectives to further this discussion early during 2012. Staff aim to have final draft objectives, with support from the Full Council to

share with region for feedback by summer/fall 2012. These final draft objectives will be revised per comments from the Council Members and the region prior to the start of the 2014 Program amendment process.

### **Performance Standards**

This section will be revised to reflect current standards already in Program (e.g., SAR, Salmonid run size; Reach survival), and any standards needed for newly developed FW Program Objectives. This section will incorporate public comments received on March 2010 version of draft MERR Plan as well as additional comments from the Council Members and the region prior to the start of the 2014 Program amendment process.

### **Prioritization Criteria**

This section will likely be revised as more generic guidance that will build upon current Program guidance (e.g., protect the strong), public comment input, and approaches used by other regionally developed approach (e.g., addressing most influential limiting factors). This section will incorporate public comments received on March 2010 version of draft MERR Plan as well as additional comments from the Council Members and the region prior to the start of the 2014 Program amendment process.

### **Decision Making Process**

This section will likely be removed or be limited to a broad summary of the decision making process under the FW Program. This section will incorporate public comments received on March 2010 version of draft MERR Plan as well as additional comments from the Council Members and the region prior to the start of the 2014 Program amendment process.

### **Research Approach**

This section will be revised once the Council's Research Plan is updated during 2012-2013. This section will likely summarize overarching guidance used in developing and, initially, general guidance for implementing the updated Council research plan. Potential for prioritizing implementation of the Research Plan will be discussed with agencies and tribes while updating the Research Plan.

This section will incorporate public comments received on March 2010 version of draft MERR Plan as well as additional comments from the Council Members, programmatic recommendations from the project category review process, and the region prior to the start of the 2014 Program amendment process.

## **Monitoring Approach (Compliance/Implementation / Status & Trend / Effectiveness)**

This section may be revised as needed to reflect Council recommendations/guidance, programmatic recommendations from the project category review process, as well as additional comments the region prior to the start of the 2014 Program amendment process. This overarching guidance may be informed by implementation strategies as these are developed.

## **Evaluation and Reporting Approach (ISRP Review / HLIs / Science Policy / other)**

This section currently describes the ISRP project review process, Science-Policy exchange, and High Level Indicators. When revising this section, staff may consider adding guidance to encourage ongoing and new approach for broader synthesis and exchanges above the individual project level (e.g., YKFP, AFEP). This section will incorporate public comments received on March 2010 version of draft MERR Plan as well as additional comments from the Council Members, programmatic recommendations from the project category review process, and the region prior to the start of the 2014 Program amendment process.

## **Data Management and Sharing Requirements**

This section may be revised as needed to reflect Council recommendations/guidance, programmatic recommendations from the project category review process, as well as additional comments the region prior to the start of the 2014 Program amendment process. This overarching guidance may be informed by implementation strategies as these are developed.

## **Implementation Strategies**

Staff working with the Basin's agencies and tribes to complete a first draft of the RME implementation strategies (IS) for resident fish, wildlife and anadromous fish. The IS should be developed by the Basin's agencies and tribes, and aim to integrate other regional products as appropriate to provide a holistic understanding of the status of RME activities in the Columbia River Basin. This includes incorporating as appropriate the content of RME synthesis, such as for lamprey and sturgeon, called for by the Council's RME and AP+ project category review process during 2010-2011.

To-date, several agencies and tribes have collaboratively taken on the challenge of developing these products through a process facilitated by CBFWA staff and involving Council staff. Due to the large regional effort the draft MERR Plan's IS, these are further along than the placeholders in the main MERR document, e.g., the objectives. The IS are currently at various stages of development, as described below. As the draft IS are completed by participating agencies and

tribes and provided to the Council for inclusion under the MERR Plan's IS, the Council will validate and revise with the agencies and tribes the information contained in these strategies as outlined in the November 2010 draft MERR Plan. During the 2014 Program amendment process the region, including agencies and tribes, may consider submitting to Council recommendation related to these IS.

***Status of the Anadromous Implementation Strategy – Anadromous Salmonid Monitoring Strategy (salmon and steelhead)***

The development of a coordinated basin-wide tributary monitoring strategy differed in approach for fish status and trend, habitat status and trend, habitat effectiveness, and hatchery effectiveness due to the differing status of existing commonalities among entities gathering this monitoring information. All monitoring topics were discussed with state and tribal fish and wildlife managers during the 2009 sub-regional and regional workshops, collectively referred to as the 2009 Columbia Basin Coordinated Anadromous Monitoring Workshop<sup>1</sup>. The details for the monitoring of habitat status and trend and the effectiveness of habitat and hatchery actions conducted by entities in the Basin, however, were not finalized during the 2009 workshops and instead are being developed through ongoing processes, e.g. PNAMP workshops, CRHEET, and CHaMP.

This strategy is currently being revised to address ISRP/ISAB comments receiving early in 2011. Components of the strategy that are in-development will be described including the intent to refine as appropriate these sections in future versions of the ASMS, such as the data sharing strategy for viable salmonid population parameters through the Coordinated Assessment process and data sharing for fish habitat. Once a revised draft is completed during 2012, incorporating input from agencies and tribes, it will be re-submitted to Council staff to obtain regional draft input and more formal ISAB/ISRP critique to help further improve/complete strategy (2012-2013). Overall process for refining this IS is described in the last section.

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<sup>1</sup> A regional workshop was convened by Bonneville, CBFWA, NOAA and NPCC during October 20-21, 2009 and November 3-5, 2009 in Skamania Washington to develop Basin Coordinated Anadromous Monitoring Strategy. The purpose of the Regional Workshop was to reach agreement among participants on an efficient and effective framework and project specific implementation strategy for anadromous salmon and steelhead monitoring to assess (1) Viable Salmonid Population (VSP) criteria, (2) habitat effectiveness and (3) hatchery effectiveness in the Columbia Basin. The agreed-upon framework and strategy will address the needs of the NPCC's Fish and Wildlife Program, meet the needs of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) BiOp (at a minimum), and contribute to the monitoring needs of ESA recovery planning and other regional fisheries management needs.

### ***Status of the Anadromous Implementation Strategy - Lamprey***

This strategy is being developed through the Columbia Basin (CBFWA) Lamprey Technical Working Group in conjunction with Council lamprey synthesis requested as an outcome of the 2011 RME-AP+ project category review. The draft strategy/synthesis is expected to be completed during 2011/2012. Once completed, the strategy will be submitted to Council staff to obtain regional draft input, and informal ISAB/ISRP critique that will help further improve/complete strategy during 2012-2013.

### ***Status of the Wildlife Implementation Strategy***

Many of the wildlife agencies and tribes have been working on the framework for this initial draft Wildlife Monitoring Implementation Strategy (WMIS) since the fall of 2009. Developing relevant high level indicators for wildlife within the context of the Council's Program has been a challenge and will require continued discussion and coordination into the future. This WMIS is the first draft iteration, and will continue to develop and expand over time to include additional HLIs as they are adopted by the Council (i.e., Ecosystem Health). A near final draft aims to be completed prior to the start of Council's ISRP review of data management projects in November 2011, to serve as contextual background for wildlife data management projects. Next steps for this IS are described below.

### ***Status of the Resident Fish Implementation Strategy***

A subset of agencies and tribes working on resident fish in the Basin (up to 17 per subcomponent identified below) have been working on this IS since 2010. To make this task manageable, the agencies and tribes divided the IS into 8 subcomponents: the resident fish IS: white sturgeon, bull trout, burbot, kokanee, cutthroat trout, redband-rainbow trout, largemouth bass, and mussels. The agencies and tribes also subdivided the process into three phases. In phase one, which is now complete, the RME efforts conducted by participating agencies and tribes for resident fish species in the Basin were compiled. This compilation is organized by focal species/subbasin/province, existing research, monitoring, and evaluation (RME) information. During Phase 2, which is scheduled to begin late 2011/early 2012, resident fish managers and researchers will collaborate to develop comprehensive RME implementation strategies, across provinces, for each focal species. During spring 2012, managers will begin Phase 3, which will consist of working to develop a protocol for data management, sharing, and reporting.