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March 1, 2016

### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Fish and Wildlife Committee members

**FROM:** Laura Robinson, Program Implementation and Liaison Specialist  
Lynn Palensky, Program Development Manager  
Tony Grover, Fish and Wildlife Division Director

**SUBJECT:** Habitat reach assessment proposal: *Identification of Suitable Habitats for Blocked Area Reintroduction*

**PROPOSED ACTION:** Fish and Wildlife Committee consider and recommend for Council decision implementation of the habitat reach assessment proposal, within the conditions of the Request for Proposal (RFP) as part of the Council's 2014 Fish and Wildlife Program (Program) priority measure: *Investigate blocked area mitigation options*

### SIGNIFICANCE

The proposed action implements the first step of the Program measure to *investigate the reintroduction of anadromous fish above Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee dams to mainstem reaches and tributaries in the United States*, which is part of the Program's [Anadromous Fish Mitigation in Blocked Areas Strategy](#), and is identified by the Council as one of the [emerging program priorities](#). Additionally, this action implements Council Workplan Objective 2.A *Assist Phase I feasibility study for reintroduction above CJ/GC*. Implementation of this project as proposed would be consistent with the RFP and the 2014 Fish and Wildlife Program.

### BUDGETARY/ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The RFP identified that up to approximately \$200,000 funding may be available for subject work through calendar year 2017, and also encouraged any entities involved to collaborate, seek other funding sources, and identify opportunities for cost-sharing and in-kind services. The proposal received provides both cost-share and in-kind service contributions from collaborators, and estimates \$200,000 additional funds are needed to implement the project. The sponsor noted that, "funding offered is insufficient to answer

all of the questions regarding the feasibility of reintroduction and accordingly we have structured the proposal in line with this budget.” The exact budget will be determined during contracting to ensure that the project is consistent with the proposal as reviewed by the ISRP. Depending on other funding sources, there may be multiple contract arrangements to support this work.

## **BACKGROUND**

On October 14, 2015, the Council, in coordination with Bonneville, [solicited](#) for proposals that address a Fish and Wildlife Program measure and emerging priority for funding by Bonneville.

*Habitat Reach Assessment:* The Council is interested in investigating the habitat availability, suitability, and salmon survival potential in habitats above blocked areas of the Upper Columbia Basin within the United States. The purpose of the RFP is to develop an assessment of the Columbia River and its potentially anadromous-bearing tributaries for salmon and steelhead habitat from river mile 545.1 to river mile 745.

The Anadromous Fish Mitigation in Blocked Areas Strategy in the Council’s 2014 Fish and Wildlife Program calls for a science-based, phased approach to investigate reintroduction of anadromous fish in the blocked waters of the upper Columbia River. The RFP targeted *one element* of Phase 1: the investigation into habitat potential. The completion of a habitat reach assessment will further inform that habitat potential, especially when linked with other elements of Phase 1.

On December 15, 2015, the Council received one [proposal](#) from the Spokane Tribe of Indians (sponsor) in collaboration with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Coeur d’Alene Tribe of Indians, and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, with technical support from the U.S. Geological Survey Columbia River Research Laboratory and NOAA Fisheries. On January 13, 2016, the Independent Scientific Review Panel (ISRP) [reviewed](#) the proposal for its scientific merit and found the proposal to meet scientific review with qualifications. Public comment on the ISRP review and the project proposal was open for 30 days during which one [comment](#) was received from the Spokane Tribe of Indians along with two letters of support, one from the Coeur d’Alene Tribe and one from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

## **ANALYSIS**

The proposal outlines work consistent with the tasks, deliverables, and budget identified in the RFP. Before submitting the proposal for ISRP review, Council staff confirmed that the proposal met the threshold requirements outlined in the RFP.

This proposal includes work by entities other than the sponsor and is intended to inform potential future work. The Council and Bonneville understand that other entities may be performing other related work in the same geographic area. The goals of this proposal are:

- 1) Identify the potential geographic distribution of reintroduced Chinook salmon and steelhead, should passage at Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee dams be facilitated;

- 2) Identify stream reaches and estimate the linear distance and streambed area of habitats that would be both available to and suitable for reintroduced salmonids; and
- 3) Compile existing habitat data into a database as a means to identify gaps or uncertainties that need to be filled, which will enable a quantitative assessment of current conditions that will be completed at a later time.

Additionally, the sponsor will convene three workshops with federal, state, tribal, and local/regional partners to review raw data, the modeling process, and results.

The ISRP noted in their review that the key components for an effective assessment seem to be in place, but conditioned their review with two qualifications. The qualifications are associated with expectation of future stability of the habitat (Qualification #1) and additional detail regarding the modeling approach to be used to assess the habitat suitability (Qualification #2). These qualifications are intended to help strengthen the final report and the ISRP states that they should be addressed in contracting. The ISRP looks forward to reviewing the report when the assessment is completed. The sponsor responded to the ISRP's qualifications and comments during the comment period and feel confident that many of the issues raised in the ISRP's qualifications can be addressed and incorporated into the final report.

Staff Recommendation:

Based on the ISRP review, staff recommends the Fish and Wildlife Committee support implementation of this proposal with the following conditions:

1. ISRP qualifications will be addressed in contracting;
2. The budget will not exceed \$200k, not including in-kind cost-share contributions by others; and
3. The sponsor will provide a report on findings to the Council for Council and ISRP review by the end of calendar year 2017.