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May 5, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: Fish and Wildlife Committee members

FROM: Mark Fritsch

SUBJECT: Impact of Covid-19 on the Fish and Wildlife Program

BACKGROUND:

Presenter: Mark Fritsch will be joined by Scott Donahue (Bonneville Power Administration)

Summary: Council and Bonneville staff will present a brief report on the implications of the COVID-19 situation on the implementation of the program regarding office and field activities.

Relevance: Section 4h(10)(D) of the Northwest Power Act directs the Council to review projects proposed for funding by the Bonneville Power Administration to implement the Council's Fish and Wildlife Program (Program).

Workplan: Fish and Wildlife Division preliminary work plan 2020; Program Implementation (2014 Program and 2020 addendum).

Background: Social distancing, stay-home orders, and other public-safety responses to the COVID-19 pandemic are causing a mix of reactions to the implementation of fish and wildlife projects in the Columbia River Basin, from no impact, to delays, to cancellation.

As outlined in the below the effects of the COVID -19 situation are very fluid and changing daily. It's too early to truly understand the full ramifications that will result, but through time it will be more apparent.

At this time many of our partner entities are operating like the Council offices – some are closed with limited work occurring, some are open and working, but it varies and changes over time. Some field and administrative staff have been placed on administrative leave or furloughed but that varies also.

General Implications

- Habitat projects have not been affected; exceptions are preliminary assessments needed for design implementation.
- Hatcheries continue to operate (although closed to the public) and in most situations mass fish-marking continues. Initially some marking was curtailed, mostly associated with yearling fall Chinook. For all other species marking may be delayed, which may have effects, until later in the summer and/or fall. Some early fish releases have occurred for some resident species (e.g., Kootenai white sturgeon and Burbot).
- Some research has been delayed and data series may be affected.
- Monitoring and surveys continue or may be delayed depending on the specific metric or life history stage studied.
- General field work that is not time-critical is delayed.
- Travel costs have increased for field activities that now require multiple vehicles to get to job sites.
- Operation and maintenance activities experienced some initial delays but are now being generally treated as essential.
- Construction activities were originally suspended but are now continuing.
- Personnel who are unable to work in the field are focused on other tasks, such as data entry management, reports and required training.

Specific and Regional Implications

- Oregon and Washington closed spring commercial and sport salmon fishing in the Columbia River.
- In Oregon, all hunting and recreational fishing, crabbing, and clamming seasons remain open but are limited to Oregon residents only.
- Idaho has not closed hunting and fishing but some nonresident licenses, permits, and tag sales were suspended by the Fish and Game Commission this month.
- In Montana, fishing access sites, state parks, and wildlife management areas remain open, but fishing piers, playgrounds, and group-use facilities are closed to the public.
- The Northern Pike Minnow Sport Reward Fishery is delayed until at least May 11th.

- Washington and Oregon suspended the capture and removal of sea lions that prey on Spring Chinook Salmon in the tailrace of Bonneville Dam
- The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board suspended grants and contracts not already awarded potentially affecting cost share
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers notified Washington and Oregon authorities that if total dissolved gas or gas bubble trauma monitoring is disrupted by pandemic restrictions, the Corps will revert to spill levels of 110 percent TDG at eight Snake and Columbia river projects.
- NOAA Fisheries suspended the capture and tagging of spring Chinook near Astoria for its ongoing research into predation by marine mammals in the lower Columbia River; that work may resume in the fall

More Info:

- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife COVID-19 site: <https://myodfw.com/COVID-19>
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game COVID-19 site: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/covid19>
- Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks COVID-19 site: http://fwp.mt.gov/news/newsReleases/covid19/nr_0020.html
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife COVID-19 site: <https://fortress.wa.gov/dfw/erules/efishrules/erule.jsp?id=2490>
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Portland District: <https://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/Media/News/Article/2136443/agencies-encourage-outdoor-enthusiasts-to-do-the-right-thing/>
- NOAA Fisheries: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/noaa-fisheries-coronavirus-covid-19-update>