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October 28, 2010

MEMORANDUM

TO: Fish and Wildlife Committee members

FROM: Mark Fritsch, project implementation manager

SUBJECT: Council decision on Project #2008-800-00, *Montana Resident Fish Habitat Acquisition*, Columbia Basin Fish Accord project.

PROPOSED ACTION: The Council staff recommends that the Council support this project for implementation.

BUDGETARY/ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The total budget for this Accord project equals \$50,000 expense and \$15,500,000 capital funds. To date, one contract has been let to implement this project that has a performance period of December 1, 2009 to June 30, 2011 with a budget of \$40,000¹.

BACKGROUND

On August 26, 2010, the Council received a proposal from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP), Project #2008-800-00, *Montana Resident Fish Habitat Acquisition* for science review and on September 29, 2010 the ISRP provided their review (ISRP document 2010-32). The ISRP requested additional information before they could determine if the proposal met scientific criteria. To date no public comment has been received on the ISRP review.

This project implements the Columbia Basin Fish Accord with the State of Montana. The goal of this project is to secure remaining priority fish habitats within the Swan River Valley, a tributary to the Flathead River. These acquisitions are part of an effort that has been going on for over 13 years that lead to an agreement (i.e., Montana Legacy Project) in 2008 to purchase 311,000 acres of corporate timberland in western Montana, including 66,000 acres in the Swan River valley in an effort to protect the associated fish and wildlife habitat, while promoting sound timber management and continued public recreational opportunities. This project will contribute to this effort.

¹ Established to manage and administer pre-acquisition activities (i.e., appraisal), plans and reports.

On October 14, 2010 the Council received a response from Bonneville intended to address the additional detail as requested by the ISRP and on October 27, 2010 the ISRP provided their final review (ISRP document 2010-35). The ISRP found that the project “*Meets Scientific Criteria (Qualified)*.”

ANALYSIS

The ISRP found that MFWP provided sufficient information for the review panel to support this project. They noted that land and associated wetland and stream acquisitions are a Fish and Wildlife Program strategy to protect and restore focal species impacted by Columbia River hydrosystem development. In this specific instance, the information provided by MFWP is sufficient to identify bull trout in Swan Valley as a focal species and technically justifies the acquisition.

The ISRP discussed some issues with the project including the desire for more information on the status and distribution of westslope cutthroat trout and non-native rainbow trout in the area, the desire for additional detail regarding parcel relationships to focal species, and the need to provide estimates of benefits to fish and wildlife of proposed parcels. As it has with other projects the ISRP also had additional questions on future monitoring plans. The ISRP does not want responses to the qualifications, but are providing them to benefit the integrity and soundness of these acquisitions.

Based on the ISRP review, the importance of this project for bull trout in the Swan Valley, and to assist in securing key parcels in association with the Montana Legacy Project, the Council staff recommends that the Council support this project for implementation.