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**MONTANA SETTLES WITH FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN
CONTROVERSIAL SALMON LAWSUIT**

HELENA, Mont. -- Today Governor Brian Schweitzer announced that Montana entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the federal action agencies (Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation), the latest in a series of agreements which he referred to as “a new day in the operation of the Federal Columbia River Hydro System where litigation and animosity are replaced by sound, scientific and effective management of the system and the fish and wildlife resources impacted by it.” The Umatilla, Warm Springs, Yakama, and Colville Tribes and the State of Idaho recently announced similar agreements with the federal action agencies.

The agreement calls for BPA to provide Montana with up to \$15.5 million dollars for the permanent protection of resident fish habitat through the purchase of fee title or conservation easements in Northwest Montana. As part of the agreement, the federal government also commits to instituting Montana’s desired operations at Libby and Hungry Horse Dams. When implemented, these operations will stabilize flows out of Libby and Hungry Horse and keep more water in the reservoirs behind those facilities and the rivers below them in the months of July, August and September. These operations provide significant benefits to resident fish above and below the dams.

“This is a win-win situation as we can begin to purchase property to mitigate the loss of the riparian areas inundated by Hungry Horse and Libby Dams to improve the health and productivity of our resident fish resources,” Governor Brian Schweitzer said. “It is good to know that resident fish and wildlife in Montana are afforded the consideration that the system gives the salmon in the lower Columbia River.”

The MOA stems from a controversial lawsuit in the Pacific Northwest related to hydro system operations and fish and wildlife recovery. Montana joined the lawsuit in 2006 over concerns related to operations at Libby and Hungry Horse Dams.

Governor Schweitzer noted that three years ago he directed Montana’s members of the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, Bruce Measure and Rhonda Whiting, to get involved in this process and try to bring some sense of collaboration and common purpose to this issue. The Governor also commented that if all goes as proposed in the agreement and the proposed Biological Opinion regarding Columbia River operations the region will have accomplished the first step in reaching these goals.

“This agreement affirms our partnership with the State of Montana on long-term fish restoration,” said BPA Administrator Steve Wright. “It supports Montana’s interests in operation of the federal hydro system, providing biological benefits for Montana's resident fish and downstream benefits for threatened and endangered salmon.”

“We look forward to working with Governor Schweitzer and his staff on these projects that are so important to the State and the region.”

Governor Schweitzer expressed his thanks to the federal action agencies and all the parties involved for working extremely hard on the many contentious policy and legal issues in the case.