

November 14, 2003

Lisa Croft
Federal Caucus Coordinator
525 NE Oregon ST, Suite 500
Portland, OR 97232-2778

Re: Joint Comments on Endangered Species Act 2003 Check-In Report for the
Federal Columbia River Power System

This letter is in response to the NOAA-Fisheries (NOAA-F) request on October 15, 2003, for comments on the Endangered Species Act 2003 Check-In Report (Check-In Report) for the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) submitted in September 2003 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE), the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), collectively referred to as the “Action Agencies.”

In a statement from the Corps of Engineers, Bonneville Power Administration and NOAA-Fisheries, dated August 16, 2003, the regional heads noted that the summer spill program appears to be excessively costly relative to the biological benefit provided. The agencies stated their goal is to *“have a method in place by next year to help ensure that biological benefits are met in the most cost effective manner available”*. *The agency heads concluded that they have a responsibility to the region to devise an approach that is less costly while maintaining the ability to achieve the biological objectives for salmon and steelhead, and will work with all interested parties in the region to accomplish this objective”*. We urge the regional heads to actively pursue this goal.

The Joint Signatories

Public Power Council, Pacific Northwest Utilities Conference Committee, Northwest Requirements Utilities, Pacific Northwest Generating Cooperative and Pacific Northwest Waterways Association submit comments and recommendations on a number of key policy issues that define the framework of salmon recovery on the Columbia River Basin.

Public Power Council (PPC) has represented the common interests of consumer-owned electric utilities in the Pacific Northwest since 1966. Our objective is to preserve and protect the benefits of the Federal Columbia River Power System for those utilities. PPC acts as a forum to identify, discuss and build consensus about energy and utility issues of importance to public power.

Pacific Northwest Utilities Conference Committee (PNUCC) formed in 1946 as an organization of 55 publicly and privately owned utilities and direct service industries to provide a forum for the coordination of resource planning efforts and development of tools and methods for load and resource analyses. Since 1980, PNUCC has been involved in planning efforts and in analysis and evaluation of programs and policy decisions proposed by the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (the Council) and BPA.

The Northwest Requirements Utilities (NRU) represents the interests of publicly and consumer owned utilities that rely upon BPA as their primary or exclusive supplier of wholesale electrical energy, including meeting their net power requirements. NRU advocates on behalf of these utilities in BPA rate proceedings and related forums and processes. NRU's goal is to ensure that a dependable supply of cost-based power from BPA is provided at the lowest price over the long term.

Pacific Northwest Generating Cooperative (PNGC-Power) is a wholesale electric power cooperative, owned by 15 members that are retail electric distribution cooperatives with service territories in six western states. As a major customer of BPA, PNGC-Power maintains continuous involvement in Columbia and Snake River issues pertaining to fish and wildlife management.

Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA) advocates for a federal policy in support of regional economic development. PNWA represents multiple industries and both the public and private sector. Members include public ports, navigation, transportation, international trade, agriculture, forest products, energy and local government interests in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

Comments and Recommendations

1. The Action Agencies should implement the most effective and cost-efficient salmon recovery measures.

Our primary message is that the current 2000 Biological Opinion (BiOp) for the FCRPS contains the necessary elements for efficient and cost effective salmon recovery. NOAA-F must provide better direction to the Action Agencies on ensuring implementation of more efficient and cost effective salmon recovery measures. The Action Agencies must work cooperatively to lead the development and implementation of more cost effective salmon recovery.

2. Performance standards should be implemented for more efficient and cost effective salmon recovery.

We recommend the implementation of juvenile and adult survival performance standards as a primary component of more efficient and cost effective salmon recovery. The primary performance standard for the FCRPS should be total system survival. In-river survival could be implemented as a secondary survival performance standard.

The current NOAA-F BiOp contains some preliminary survival performance standards. However, the document also includes 199 prescriptive measures within the reasonable and prudent alternatives (RPA) for meeting those survival standards. Instead of clarifying the purpose and goals of salmon recovery, many of the prescriptions are regarded as a substitute for fish survival. Therefore, fish managers argue over meeting the definition of the prescription rather than the actual condition or response of the fish population.

The NOAA-F BiOp, as currently implemented, does not allow the Action Agencies flexibility in implementing a variety of mitigation measures. Employing performance standards will allow the Action Agencies to identify the most effective salmon recovery measures to meet survival goals. If two or more measures are identified as providing an equal benefit, the Action Agencies should then be allowed to consider which measures are the most cost effective in their final implementation plans.

Performance standards have been demonstrated in the Columbia River basin. Douglas and Chelan County PUD's have succeeded in utilizing juvenile survival performance standards. The PUD's have met their juvenile performance standards for the 2003 juvenile outmigration. We urge NOAA-F to afford this same opportunity to the Action Agencies.

3. Action Agencies should continue to aggressively pursue research into critical uncertainties identified in the NOAA-F 2000 BiOp

The BiOp contains requirements to research critical uncertainties including delayed and extra mortality, the partitioning of mortality through the FCRPS, estuary and near ocean, and

survival in the ocean. We support efforts by the Action Agencies to evaluate the actual effects of the FCRPS on salmon and steelhead stocks migrating through the Columbia River basin.

4. Action Agencies should develop a common data management system.

There is great need for a common data management system for salmon recovery issues in the Columbia River basin. There are disparate research efforts funded by a wide variety of entities. The volume of information generated is tremendous. A central, web- based location for amassing this information would be invaluable to fish managers and policy level staff.

5. Action Agencies should fund biologically sound habitat restoration projects.

Currently, offsite habitat mitigation projects are developed through the Council's Regional Provincial Review process. The Council then recommends that BPA fund projects. Among these projects, we recommend that the Action Agencies fund those that are likely to be efficient and cost effective in recovery of salmon and steelhead stocks. We recommend that the Action Agencies more closely monitor these programs to assure that the priorities of those providing the funding for salmon recovery and those receiving the funds are consistent.

6. NOAA-F should quantitatively define hydro and non-hydro effects to salmon and steelhead populations in the Columbia River basin.

The Action Agencies are required to implement offsite improvements to habitat for the continued operation of the FCRPS. It is necessary for NOAA-F to quantify the value of that mitigation to the species of concern, and thereby quantify the effectiveness of the effort toward successful salmon recovery. Additionally, the value of natural increases in survival conditions due to the actions of other entities or natural variations in the environment (*i.e., ocean productivity*) are not properly quantified. The responsibility of hydro-related and non-hydro-related factors in salmon recovery must be identified before proper mitigation can be effected.

7. Action Agencies should make more effective and efficient use of artificially propagated salmon and steelhead in recovery activities.

We recommend the Action Agencies and NOAA-F work more quickly to understand the effects of artificially propagated fish on the viability of naturally spawning populations. Artificial propagation programs were necessary to mitigate for fish losses due to the development of the FCRPS. We support reforming hatchery practices to support the recovery of self- sustaining wild stocks.

8. Action Agencies should implement more selective methods of harvest in the commercial fisheries and elimination of mixed stock fisheries.

We support the research and implementation of more selective methods of harvest in the commercial fisheries. We recommend the elimination of mixed stock fisheries to protect the more vulnerable populations. Recent attempts for conducting selective harvest methods resulted in a significant mortality of non-target species. Additionally, we support the marking of all hatchery fish to allow better-managed fisheries and hatchery programs. We also recommend that States rescind laws that make some options for selective harvest unlawful.

9. We recognize that the Action Agencies are not always responsible for funding and authorizations obtained by other entities for timely implementation of recovery actions

Funding for restoration actions is not entirely dependent upon the Action Agencies. These federal agencies are limited by the expected budgets or congressional appropriations. Yet, implementing more effective and cost-efficient salmon recovery measures may potentially reduce the total amount of money required for salmon recovery. Furthermore, aiming for cost effectiveness will assure that the limited funds are put to the best use.

10. We recognize the dramatic improvement in salmon and steelhead populations in the Columbia River basin.

We, as a region, should be very pleased with the recent dramatic increase of salmon and steelhead populations in the Columbia River basin. Although improved ocean conditions may be a significant factor in the increase, we note that improvements in the FCRPS have also provided benefits to these same fish stocks. We recommend that the Action Agencies and NOAA-F reevaluate the ESA listings for some stocks in the Columbia River basin. Recent court decisions and improved populations of wild fish provide the opportunity to reassess current salmon and steelhead recovery activities.

Conclusion

BPA's customers pay for a majority of salmon and steelhead recovery efforts in the Columbia River basin, either directly through power rates, foregone generation or through reimbursement of congressional appropriations. Taxes and fees levied on citizens cover the remainder. BPA's wholesale power rates have recently increased over 46%. Spending on salmon recovery will increase more than 20%, from approximately \$550 million to \$700 million from 2001 through 2004.

The Public Power Council, Pacific Northwest Utilities Conference Committee, Pacific Northwest Generating Cooperative, the Northwest Requirements Utilities and the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association support continued efforts for salmon recovery in the Columbia River basin. But, the amount of money available to meet salmon recovery goals is limited. There are reasonable measures that can be implemented that will realize significant cost efficiencies with little adverse affect to salmonid resources. We further realize that meeting the intent of the NOAA-F BiOp is much more important than just spending money to meet a prescriptive RPA. We appreciate the efforts of the Action Agencies on their endeavor.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,



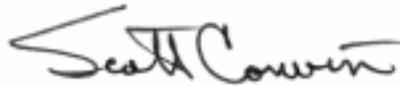
Jerry Leone
Manager
Public Power Council



Richard H. Adams
Executive Director
Pacific Northwest Utilities Conference Committee



John Saven
Executive Director
Northwest Requirements Utilities



Scott Corwin
Vice-President, Marketing and Public Affairs
Pacific Northwest Generating Cooperative - Power



Glen Vanselow
Executive Director
Pacific Northwest Waterways Association