

From: Philip Howell  
Sent: Wednesday, October 04, 2006 2:37 PM  
To: Baugh, Zenobia  
Subject: Draft NPCC fish and wildlife program funding recommendations

Fourteen proposals related to bull trout, an ESA-listed species, were submitted. Six of these were determined by the ISRP to be fundable, including one (200724600) fundable in part. Three of the ISRP-recommended projects were also recommended for funding by the Mainstem System Review Team (MSRT). The Council and Council staff recommended against funding any of these. In the Council draft recommendations documents provided for public review (<http://www.nwcouncil.org/fw/budget/2007/draftrec/Default.asp>) no explanation is provided; however, the Council staff memo to the Council members (8/3/06) includes the following:

Bull trout monitoring: The MSRT also recommended three bull trout monitoring projects. Two propose to monitor bull trout migrations into the hydrosystem (Proposals 2007-033-00 and 2007-146-00. The staff's discussions with the Corps and Bonneville staff indicated that the Corps would likely not be monitoring passage of bull trout at its Snake River projects until 2008 at the earliest when and if results of an ongoing Corp-funded study indicate significant numbers of bull trout are migrating into the Snake River from tributaries.

A third ongoing project, 1994-054-00, proposes to monitor bull trout status and movements in several tributaries. The MSRT recommended funding the continued work of this project at \$367,000 a year. However, the staff's reading of the proposal is that it is directed at tributary land and water management and does not inform mitigation for the hydrosystem.

The staff recommends that the Council defer implementation of the first two projects and terminate the third.

Project 200714600 is characterized in the memo as monitoring bull trout migrations into the hydrosystem. From the proposal, this is a minor part of the project; most of it relates to monitoring bull trout populations in tributaries of the Snake River within southeast Washington, as its title indicates. Objective 3 of project 199405400 that is focused on monitoring essentially has nothing to do with tributary land and water management. The other two objectives in the proposal, on the other hand, are directly related to downstream movement of bull trout, including potential use of the mainstem Columbia River affected by hydrosystem management. In fact, the Walla Walla subbasin is the only portion of the Columbia Basin where a large number of bull trout have been and would be tagged under project 199405400 and complementary work by the USFWS and Utah State University to feasibly assess potential use of adjoining portions of the Columbia River. Terminating the project at this point would squander BPA's investment through the project and from the USFWS in establishing the PIT-tag detection infrastructure and future returns from the past two years of PIT-tagging that would provide the only survival rates of downstream migrant bull trout available in the basin.

The solicitation for proposals from the Council and BPA specifically

requested projects “to protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife affected by the development and operation of the Columbia River hydro electric system as presented in the Council’s adopted 2000 Fish and Wildlife Program.” The 2000 Fish and Wildlife Program acknowledged impacts of the hydrosystem on bull trout: “The development and operation of the hydrosystem has also resulted in losses of numbers and diversity of native resident fish, such as bull trout...” As a result, the Council has to date funded several bull trout projects. Recent subbasin plans developed through the Council likewise affirm support for bull trout management, research, and monitoring projects. The draft bull trout recovery plan (USFWS 2002) contains further details on the impacts of the Columbia hydrosystem on bull trout beyond those identified for the upper Columbia River (Lake Pend Oreille). As discussed in the recovery plan, the mainstem of the Columbia River provides the only potential natural source of connectivity among many of the populations and core areas in the Columbia River DPS, which is considered vital for species persistence. The 2002 USFWS Biological Opinion on the Federal Columbia River Power System contains terms and conditions that include estimating the numbers of bull trout migrating to and from the lower Columbia River reservoirs. The USFWS is currently completing a 5-year status review of bull trout and possible reconsideration for listing under the ESA. Reduced support from the Council reflects continuing threats to the species, lower likelihood of recovery, and need for further ESA listing.

In considering the bull trout monitoring proposals, the MSRT stated a desire “to insure there is a common strategy for monitoring bull trout (consistent with the MSRT desire to see a coordinated plan for monitoring salmon and steelhead).” The NPCC’s own research plan (NPCC 2005), the ISAB, and the ISRP (ISAB and ISRP, draft) recognize this same need for a coordinated, regional approach to monitoring. Proposal 199405400 is the only 2007-9 bull trout proposal submitted specifically designed to develop a technically and statistically rigorous, coordinated monitoring design for bull trout with basinwide and species-wide application. Such an approach avoids piece-meal and inconsistent monitoring with limited application and utility in assessing the status of the species that has plagued past and current status assessments (USFWS 2005). This objective of the proposal is an outgrowth of efforts of the USFWS’ Recovery Monitoring and Evaluation Group (RMEG), which was established with the express purpose to develop a species monitoring approach and includes representation from all of the states in the Basin, and past monitoring-related research of the project. RMEG would be an active collaborator in the project. Trial subbasins for the project would include the John Day and Grande Ronde. BPA has requested that RME proposals be coordinated in Pilot RME subbasins, which include the John Day. The Collaborative System-wide Monitoring and Evaluation Project (CSMEP) is attempting to significantly increase attention to bull trout and other resident fishes. They have proposed a monitoring pilot in the Snake Basin, including the Grande Ronde subbasin but do not have a monitoring design for bull trout, which project 199405400 could provide.

“linkage between research and management actions” (Comment–basinwide proposal spreadsheet)--All of the objectives of proposal 199405400 have direct application to management. As previously discussed, the monitoring objective of the proposal is linked to development of a monitoring plan for bull trout across the basin to help insure an effective and efficient use of limited funding for monitoring. Assessing the status, trend, and distribution of bull trout is fundamental to the management of the species,

which is a primary reason this proposal was identified as a core project by the MSRT. Besides contributing information on potential use of Columbia River, the other objectives of the proposal also have direct application to other aspects of management. For example, the states in the region are in the process of developing and implementing water quality criteria under the Clean Water Act. Criteria are included for bull trout; however, specific data for migratory bull trout, such as would be provided by the project under the proposal were lacking (see EPA 2003 and ODEQ 2003). Temperature and distribution data generated by the proposal can be used to help managers determine what temperatures encountered by migrating bull trout are, what water quality criteria for bull trout should be, and where they should be applied.

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Thank you for your consideration of these comments on the Council funding recommendations.

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