15 September 2006

Mark Walker
Director of Public Affairs
Northwest Power & Conservation Council
851 SW 6th Avenue, Suite 1100
Portland, Oregon 97204-1348

Dear Northwest Power & Conservation Council,

At a recent Northwest Power & Conservation Council meeting, a Council staff member recommended that the Description of the Maturation Study within the project 198605000 White Sturgeon Mitigation and Restoration in the Columbia and Snake Rivers Upstream from Bonneville Dam be terminated. The Council staff member's analysis of our proposed work resulting in the recommended termination was incorrect. The cooperators of the white sturgeon work were not consulted in this analysis, and this project has not yet been completed. The ISRP 2006 comments did not recommend that the Description of the Maturation Study within the project 198605000 White Sturgeon Mitigation and Restoration in the Columbia and Snake Rivers Upstream from Bonneville Dam be terminated.

The purpose of this proposed work is to determine the maturation cycle in wild white sturgeon. This project has been a part of another project to develop a less-invasive means by which to determine sex and stage of maturity of white sturgeon which has been completed. The work to describe the maturation cycle will provide a critical piece of information for harvest management and recovery of white sturgeon throughout the Columbia River Basin. The outcome of this project will be a description of the reproductive structure as well as the spawning periodicity of a healthy population of white sturgeon. Understanding the reproductive structure and spawning periodicity of a healthy population is essential for several reasons. For management of the Zone 6 white sturgeon populations, sustainable harvest levels of sturgeon are based on population models and fecundity estimates, of which reproductive structure and spawning frequency are critical elements. For recovery efforts of the threatened Kootenai River white sturgeon, the Red Listed Upper Columbia River white sturgeon, and the Nez Perce's white sturgeon population in the Snake River, it will be essential to recover these populations to a more natural structure which will be information provided by this project.

To date, Bonneville Power Administration has supported the development of a less-invasive means by which to determine sex and stage of maturity and the description of the maturation cycle since 2000 to a total of approximately $522,000. Currently, the description of the maturation cycle project is 80% complete and will be completed in 2009. The project to develop methods to determine sex and stage of maturity of sturgeon has been completed. I, the principal investigator of these projects, have recently joined the USFWS and maintain an affiliate Assistant Professorship at Montana State University (MSU). This project is a collaborative effort with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). The cost to complete the description of the maturation cycle is

$10,487 in 2007, $10,549 in 2008, and $10,611 in 2009 for the principal investigator at MSU and $25,574 in 2007, $26,086 in 2008, and $26,608 in 2009 for WDFW. The combined cost is $36,061 in 2007, $36,635 in 2008, and $37,219 in 2009 for a total of $109,915. The in-kind contribution of the USFWS to this project is $36,750 in 2007, $38,587 in 2008, and $40,512 in 2009 for a total of $115,849. We are asking that the Northwest Power & Conservation Council strongly consider funding the completion of this project within the White Sturgeon Mitigation and Restoration in the Columbia and Snake Rivers Upstream from Bonneville Dam which would require adding the Description of the Maturation Cycle Project total to the existing $1.15 million dollar budget each year during the 2007-2009 funding cycle. The cost to complete the description of the maturation cycle is low and the value of the information to management and restoration of white sturgeon throughout the Columbia River Basin is high.

Sincerely,

Molly A.H. Webb, Ph.D.
Project Leader
USFWS/MSU