THE WILD SALMON CENTER

March 19, 2008

Mr. William Booth
Chairman
Northwest Power and Conservation Council
851 S.W. Sixth Avenue, Suite 1100
Portland, OR 97204-1348

RE: ***2008 Amendments to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's ("NPCC") Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program***

Dear Mr. Booth:

The Wild Salmon Center appreciates the opportunity to submit proposed amendments to the NPCC's Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program. The mission of the Wild Salmon Center is to employ the best available science to identify and protect the best remaining salmon ecosystems throughout the range of wild Pacific salmon. By working with government, tribes, business, academia and non-governmental organizations, we seek to identify and protect a network of core centers of abundance and diversity –*wild salmon strongholds*—as a foundation for maintaining healthy salmon ecosystems and economies.

Protecting strongholds complements recovery efforts and recognizes a key tenet of conservation biology by securing the healthiest populations of salmon, a flagship species for the Pacific Northwest.

Recommendation

The establishment by Bonneville Power Administration of the ***"Columbia Basin Salmon Stronghold Partnership Fund"*** (see Attachment) – a $10 million annual fund focused solely on accelerating protection and restoration of the healthiest populations of wild fish and their habitat. The Fund will help leverage additional public and private resources and will support high conservation value actions within identified "stronghold" subbasins (see Attachment). The Fund will not diminish other program components, will be in addition to existing program commitments, and will support the implementation of approved subbasin plans by funding conservation priorities and actions identified in these plans.

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Background and Rationale

Over the past one year and a half, both Bonneville Power Authority and the NPCC have participated in the *North American Salmon Stronghold Partnership* – a voluntary public/private, incentive-based initiative to accelerate protection and restoration in North American salmon strongholds. Over sixty leading scientists from Idaho, Oregon and Washington developed and applied a methodology to identify strongholds, including sub-basins within the Columbia Basin. Experts are now in the process of identifying focal key areas within sub-basins where groups can focus energy and resources on the highest value conservation and restoration investments.

As a necessary complement to recovering endangered and threatened populations, the 2000 Fish and Wildlife Program recognizes the benefit of "building from strength" to protect fish and wildlife populations that are relatively healthy and productive. The Program also recommends that the Council establish "wild salmon refuges" where critical habitat is largely intact and artificial production is absent or limited. More recently, the Independent Science Advisory Board's reports on Climate Change, and Human Population and Demographics in the Columbia Basin, both recommended increased funding to protect intact habitat in the basin.

Salmon Stronghold Partnership Fund

This Fund will support high value conservation actions in basins or subbasins that identified as strongholds by the North American Salmon Stronghold Partnership, that exhibit the biological or habitat characteristics of strongholds and/or contribute to a network of places of the most abundant, productive and diverse wild salmon and steelhead populations in the Columbia River basin.

The attached document describes these stronghold characteristics and includes the initial set of basins or subbasins for the Council to consider. To make the most effective use of limited resources, conservation actions submitted for funding should be reviewed expeditiously by a panel of experts comprised of government, tribal and non-governmental interests.

Thank you for your consideration. We would be happy to provide additional information or clarification at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Greg Block
VP for Conservation Programs

cc: Phil Miller
Mike Carrier
Jeff Allen
Jody Calica
Bobby Bruno

Columbia Basin Salmon Stronghold Partnership Fund
Draft Text

Background

The 2000 Fish and Wildlife Program recognized the benefit of "building from strength" to protect fish and wildlife populations that are relatively healthy and productive. The Program also recommended that the Council establish "wild salmon refuges" where the critical habitat or ecological processes are largely intact and artificial production is absent or limited. Wild populations in those areas and their associated spawning and early rearing habitat should be preserved and protected. Since the 2000 program, there has been considerable attention on habitat protection as evidenced by numerous paper and reports, including the ISAB's reports on both Climate Change and Human Population and Demographics in the Columbia Basin. Both reports recommend continued and enhanced funding to protect relatively intact habitats in the basin in the face of increased growth and global warming effects.

Additionally, human population growth may not be identified as a priority limiting factor for strong fish and wildlife populations with intact habitat. This Fund will effectively address this gap.

Description

The Council recommends that the Bonneville Power Administration make wild salmon refuges a focus in the 2008 program by establishing a new fund dedicated to salmon stronghold basins. This fund would not diminish any other BPA-funded program but rather would provide additional funding for projects and activities identified in approved sub-basin and recovery plans within stronghold basins. A stronghold refers to a watershed, multiple watersheds, or other defined spatial units (tributaries or focal action areas) where populations are strong, diverse, and includes areas that provide critical life-cycle requirements to anadromous fish. Stronghold habitat has a high intrinsic potential to support a particular species, or suite of species, and is expected to afford a measure of productivity resilience to Pacific salmon under predicted scenarios of climate change.

The Council will establish a streamlined process in order to act quickly, flexibly and responsibly in approving Bonneville funding for projects proposed within this fund.

Stronghold basins

The following basins identified through a scientific process undertaken by the North American Stronghold Partnership qualify as strongholds because their salmon or steelhead populations are relatively wild, abundant and diverse. The composition of listed drainages contribute to a network of interconnected but geographically stratified set of freshwater and estuarine habitats that support important centers of life history diversity and productivity of Pacific salmon populations throughout the Columbia River basin.

The North American Salmon Stronghold Partnership in cooperation with BPA and NPCC will identify focal areas within the stronghold basins included below. The identification of strongholds and focal areas will be reviewed and updated, as appropriate, every three years.

Stronghold	**State**
Columbia River Estuary below Bonneville Dam (This is a focal action area critical to survival of all Columbia River Pacific salmon)	Oregon/ Washington
Lewis basin	Washington
Sandy basin	Oregon
Clackamas basin	Oregon
Wenatchee basin	Washington
Hanford Reach	Washington
John Day basin	Oregon
Pahsimeroi basin	Idaho
Lemhi basin	Idaho

Fund Elements

The fund will be a dedicated budget within Bonneville's Fish and Wildlife Program and will be known as the Columbia Basin Salmon Stronghold Partnership Fund. This fund will support high value conservation actions to protect or restore habitat where existing populations are relatively healthy and productive and where artificial production is absent or limited.

- All funded projects must result in on-the ground protection of salmon populations and/or habitat
- Funding must implement identified gaps for high value habitat actions from the adopted subbasin or recovery plans in the Council's program for the particular stronghold area.
- Funding may be used for land acquisitions and easements; land use/management practices improvements and reconnecting and restoring habitat that has been lost due to human alterations, including support to in-basin conservation agents to better implement the fund.
- Projects must be completed within two years (from contract date)
- BPA funding must represent [75%] or less of the total project cost, including in-kind contributions
- Sponsors must demonstrate proven results and/or good track record for the proposed work