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Subject: "Draft Mainstem Amendments": Document 2002-16

The Washington Trollers Association appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed Mainstem Amendments. We have enclosed detailed comments on aspects of the Draft Amendments.

People around the Northwest expect and deserve abundant salmon and steelhead runs. No one wants to sacrifice salmon and steelhead runs for an inefficient, unreliable and inadequate BPA. The NWPPC is not representing the real choices the public needs to make. The choice "fish or power" is a false one. The real decision we need to make is "do we start investing in clean, renewable energy now, or wait until we really need it and pay too much and lose our fish runs because we are in a big hurry"?

Our Association condemns the Council for wasting time and money on the current Draft Mainstem Amendments. It reads as if it were written by Enron staff, not public servants. **The problem that needs to be solved is how to diversify BPA's energy portfolio - not how to cause the extinction of a world heritage specie.**

We reference the comments of the Fish and Wildlife agencies of Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and the Columbia River Intertribal Fisheries Commission. All of these agencies comment that the goals of the 2000 NMFS Biological Opinion are not met in the draft amendments. The agencies uniformly say that the draft amendment is inadequate for salmon. Idaho and Oregon deserve special note for their recommendation to maintain the breaching the four lower Snake River Dams as an option to achieve recovery of Snake River salmon. The draft amendment gives abundant lip service to the agency recommendations, but falls far short of adopting any of them. Our association strongly urges the Council to adopt the recommendation of the agencies, as they embody the best interests of both the fish and citizens of the region.

The Washington Trollers Association is particularly upset at the attempt to divide the fish advocates into river and ocean camps. Going into great lengths to justify allocating water resources to resident species is disingenuous and divisive. The mainstem amendments should allocate sufficient water resources to both resident and anadromous fish. The Act charges the council to protect the fish and wildlife of the region, not to use them as pawns in this power play.

*Quality Troll Caught
 Salmon for Consumers*



Much ado is made of the 2000 and 2001 power year. 2000 - 2001 simply shows: 1) the Council is failing to achieve the objectives of the act, 2) that reliance on maxed out power sources jeopardizes the fish and citizens of the region. The draft mainstem amendments show you are still stuck in a box, as the options in the draft amendment lead to repeated failures for salmon and energy. Get out of the dam box and begin to diversify the generation capabilities of BPA - quit relying on water currently allocated to fish to get you out of jams.

Jobs are mentioned only with the assumption that lower energy costs mean more jobs. No analysis has been done to see how many coastal/river fishing related jobs are lost with these options. The coastal communities of Alaska, Washington and Oregon have some of the highest unemployment rates in a highly out of work region. These communities have lost major portions of their economic base as a result of the completion of the FCRPS. The costs of these lost jobs were never compensated, but simply externalized and forgotten.

As a matter of social justice, consideration must be given to the salmon dependent jobs and to restoring some of the lost economic inputs to coastal communities. The Act calls for job creation, it is time for the council to do its job and protect or provide jobs throughout the region.

In conclusion, the Washington Trollers Association finds that the Draft Mainstem Amendments are insufficient for salmon in the Columbia and Snake River. The Draft Amendments do not provide water resources for the recovery of listed salmon, nor does it supply adequate flow for hatchery salmon in the lower river. By refusing to consider all options for recovery of listed stocks (including breaching the four lower Snake River dams), and ignoring science, the Council invites mockery and derision, not to mention lawsuits. The Draft Amendments fail to consider the jobs of people connected only by salmon to the Columbia Basin. We recommend that the Draft Amendments be re-written to incorporate the comments of the State and Tribal fish and wildlife departments, with twin goals of assuring recovery of listed salmon stocks and increasing the productivity of currently harvested stocks.

We appreciate this opportunity to comment on the Amendments and we look towards the incorporation of many of the suggestions advanced by the Washington Trollers Association. We also appreciate the extension of the deadline which has permitted us to study carefully and to comment intelligently.

Sincerely,

Douglas H. Fricke
President, Washington Trollers Association

enclosure: WTA comments on the Draft Mainstem Amendments



Specific comments on draft amendments.

The following is a response to Northwest Power Planning Council's (Council) request for comments on specific items of the draft amendment. In general, our organization feels the flow recommendations in the 2000 Biological Opinion (BiOp) from NMFS are closer to the real needs of anadromous fish in the Columbia and Snake rivers than any proposal presented in the draft amendments. We feel the council is misinterpreting the Northwest Power Planning Act (Act) by claiming the draft amendments will balance the needs of migrating and resident fish species, as called for in the Act. Finally, it is our opinion that the energy events of 2000 - 2001 were by and large caused by manipulations in energy markets, not simply by drought conditions in the Northwest. We strongly urge that the criteria for power emergencies include analyses of the nature of the power emergencies, and that in the event of manipulated markets, no power emergency policies be implemented in the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS).

Comments on changes in storage reservoir operations

The draft contains statements such as on p36 (Strategies / water management / summer flow): "The council does not support the summer flow targets in the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) 2000 Biological Opinion due to lack of evidence they are related to survival within the ranges of agencies' control given reservoir and other system constraints and due to the impact these flows have on resident fish in the Columbia watershed."

This statement is logically inconsistent. How can there exist scientific uncertainty on the effects of flow on some of the most highly studied salmon in the world, and simultaneously there is high certainty of negative effects on resident species? Such statements lead us to believe that you do not want to provide adequate flows to migratory fish, and are simply looking for support for your ill construed rationales. Please believe that our organization does not take that lightly.

Contrary to the draft's assertion of uncertainty on the effects of flow, the NMFS March 2000 Whitepaper show clear and strong relationship between Smolt to Adult Ratios (SAR) and Snake River flow. In addition, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW) and their agency co-authors in their March 2002 comments agree with the NMFS 2000 Whitepaper findings on flow and SAR. The agencies all agree that the 2000Biop flows provide needed protection for listed anadromous species.

It is intuitively obvious that fish residing in the reservoirs should benefit from water in the reservoirs. Stable habitats for resident populations can not be maintained in a storage reservoir which is meant to fluctuate as water is needed without affecting flow in the river below.

However, the needs of listed species must take precedence over the needs of resident fish.

The whole point of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is to protect the nations most vulnerable species from extinction. We firmly believe this is NPPS's most pressing task.

Status Quo Alternative

The Council proposal to maintain "status quo" flow management while evaluating the benefits of flow to anadromous fish and resident fish. Our preferred flow option is the 2000 Biop flow as a minimum. Flows in excess of the Biop flows, in our opinion, will have the most benefit for migrating salmon. This approach would give several years of data with which to evaluate the Biop and higher flows.

The Council asked for ideas on how an evaluation of the proposed flow in the draft amendment are to be evaluated. We recommend that you do NOT do real-world experiments with low flows. A negative outcome to such an experiment would have serious impacts on fishing and related business, potentially for several years after the conclusion of the experiments.

The Council expresses uncertainty in the Biop flow effects on anadromous fish. The 2000 Biop flows (while being a compromise of science and politics) are much more likely to protect fish in the Columbia and Snake Rivers than the draft amendment flows. It is our belief that the Biop deserves a fair test as a tool to recover listed salmon stocks. We believe that implementing the 2000 Biop is the surest way to test it. Uncertainty will dog any paper study, and drag out resolution of flow issues. You will have one data point for extreme low flows from 2001, it is reasonable and (safer) to gather data from full flows for a number of years.

Changes in storage reservoir operations - elimination of April 10 flood control elevation target

Lower River hatcheries efficiency

The Washington Trollers Association is opposed to eliminating the April 10 flood control elevation target. This will result in a diminishment of spring run off peaks. There will be a negative effect on the adult returns of Spring Creek Hatchery fall chinook (Spring Creek hatchery management, pers comm Dec, 2002). We feel that not only will Spring Creek hatchery be affected, but other hatcheries above Bonneville.

The Washington fishery is highly dependent on lower river hatchery stocks (tules). Without large numbers of returning adult tules, we would have little of no fishery. Our fishery has been curtailed already by the elimination of a historic spring fishery, and formerly large fall runs of chinook and coho. To lose lower river hatcheries would mean the end of our fishery. We are unconditionally opposed to this proposed change. Hell No!

As for additional flexibility for the power system, we are highly concerned that NPPC feels

that more operational flexibility is needed - regardless of the effects on fish. For operational flexibility, we suggest the system needs to diversify its generation capabilities away from hydro. We are unimpressed with the past performance of NPPC in this regard. In the 1980's when the Northwest had the nation's lowest electric rates, NPPC could have been planning diversification, and could have had a better chance to pay off any investment in non-hydro generation sources. We suggest that you have come to us too late (as rate payers and fish advocates) to be asking how to improve hydro system flexibility. Look elsewhere, guys.

Summer Flows

July flow and out migrants

We are truly confused by the proposal for lower summer flows. If the April 10 flood control elevation requirement is eliminated, there will be reduced flows in the April - June time period. The reduced summer flow would reduce "flows in the lower river minimally in July and to a somewhat greater degree in August". In lower water years, these flow reductions will delay migration of juvenile salmon and steelhead from all reaches of the river. Three studies (NMFS 2000 Whitepaper, PATH, and NPPC 2001 migration issue paper) indicate there is an inverse relationship between water travel times and stock performance. We are opposed to flow changes that increase travel times for out migrating salmon. We see no evidence that this is ever a good thing, nor that it can successfully be mitigated by alternate transportation means e.g. barging and trucking.

The council seeks comments on the proposal by state fish and wildlife agencies, and by tribal fishery managers to provide flows above the Biop recommendations. Our recommendation is to use flow guidelines that meet or exceed the 2000 Biop.

In addition to the numerous studies on the Columbia and Snake rivers, we call attention to studies of fish kills on the Klamath River. Providing less water than a river had prior to hydro project development results in fewer anadromous fish in the river. In the case of the Klamath, an almost total collapse of fisheries is the result of low flows from upper basin hydro development.

We feel this will be an excellent time to give a jump start towards recovery of listed stocks by providing near optimal inriver conditions to compliment good ocean conditions. We do not know how long the current ocean conditions will last, it seems to us most prudent to try to take advantage of the situation while it lasts. The current ocean conditions allow the Council to 'place bets' on two competing hypotheses: one, that the ocean conditions of the last 25 years were primarily responsible for the declines in Columbia/snake salmon runs, and two, that the declines can primarily be attributed to the development of the FCRPS. One of these horses has got to be a winner.

Spill

The question of appropriate levels of spill and TDG is asked out of context to overall survival of out migrating juvenile salmon. Since the comprehensive spill survival studies are not complete, there is no scientific basis for 115% TDG limits. However, the 2000 NMFS Whitepaper on passage indicates that 120% TDG in the tailraces produces minimal effects on juvenile migrants.

It is our opinion that the TDG limits for each project should be based on the highest achievable survival when spill ways and screens and other technologies are optimized to provide the nicest ride over the dams. However, since the highest survival path for juvenile migrants at most facilities is via spillways, we encourage continuation of spill specifically for juvenile passage.

Project by project survival

The intent expressed by the study of spill survival at individual projects is that juvenile survival can be enhanced in a piece-meal fashion. For Snake River Spring and Summer Chinook, survival to adulthood is the great challenge, not simply surviving an individual project. Our association recommends that NPPC focus intensely on creating flow conditions throughout the Columbia and Snake rivers that enhance the survival of Snake Spring and Summer Chinook to a rate that ensures recovery of these fish. In particular, we recommend that NPPS have as a goal of flow management a replacement rate of adults that is greater than 1:1.

Transportation

Spread the Risk

Our association feels that a 50/50 transport/in-river strategy should be adopted.

We believe that the 50/50 strategy should be implemented under a wide range of flow situations, even up to drought conditions. Our rationale is that NMFS acknowledges spill to be the safest option for juvenile migration; we therefore feel that spill must be utilized as frequently as possible in order to expedite recovery of key listed stocks. We also feel that as an experiment, in-river migration must be compared to transportation under the widest possible range of water supply, even down to drought, to provide a complete understanding of juvenile migration.

Benefit during low Snake flows?

Page 24 of the Draft Amendment indicates one of the highest priorities of the transportation study is to conduct a mass transportation of Snake River Fall chinook. Our

organization does not agree with the philosophy of having all of your eggs in one basket. We recommend you do not conduct this experiment, but rather continue to use a spread the risk approach to juvenile migration.

Our organization's members are extremely sensitive to the fate of the Snake River Fall Chinook. This fish is responsible for the limits on chinook harvest in Southeast Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California. Protection of Snake River Fall Chinook is one of the chief goals of the Pacific Salmon Treaty annex on Chinook. We will not endorse any experiments that have the slightest potential to further decrease the population of Snake Fall Chinook. Don't do this.

Smolt to Adult Ratios

Make Sense?

The council asks if "SARs are the right kind of objectives for the program...". Our organization feels that there are several alternatives to SAR as goals for the program. They include: full recovery of listed species in the Columbia and Snake Rivers by 2025, runs capable of sustaining a harvest rate of 40% AEQ mortality by 2020, adult returns of Stanley lake sockeye, Snake River Spring, Summer, and Fall chinook, Snake river steelhead, and upper Columbia river Spring and Summer Chinook at 75% or greater of 1930's runs.

Critics may say that SAR is a blunt tool, and offers no specific insight as to any particular problem, and is not useful for planning purposes. We believe SAR is appropriate because it expresses the entire situation of a population in a single statistic, and tells you how the entire system is treating fish. This makes SAR work on a programatic level and as a goal for NPPC programs. Other criteria, such as reach survival, post transport delayed mortality, et c., are primarily useful for diagnosing specific problems.

We recommend that the council adopt Smolt to Adult Ratios in the 4% to 6% range as interim goals. PATH research shows SARs in the 2% to 6% range are necessary to recover Snake Spring and Summer Chinook. Data from IDFW indicate that SARs below the recommended range have been observed during the recent period of decline in Snake Spring and Summer Chinook populations. Our recommendation is for the upper half of the range as a goal in the interim to insure declines are halted, starting with 2003 smolts.

Relationship of mainstem flow to SAR?

The council wished to know " whether mainstem actions could have any relation to achieving survival rates in the higher parts of this range.". As we all know, the most successful naturally reproducing chinook on the Columbia are the Upriver Brights. Since these are mainstem spawners, mainstem conditions have everything to do with their success. The Vernita Bar agreement recognizes the importance of mainstem flow to the continued success of Upriver Brights. We simply can not believe that the Upriver Brights

are the only salmon on the Columbia or Snake that benefit from optimal mainstem flow.

IDFW comments on the Draft Biological Opinion of 2000 clearly show the relationship of adult replacement to flow during smolt out-migration. Our organization views this as compelling evidence for the hypothesis that mainstem flow measures can affect SAR. And furthermore, the IDFW data show the only times in the years from 1980 to 1994 did adult spring and summer chinook replace them selves was when flows (in smolt years) were 100 kfs or greater at Lower Granite Dam. Given current good ocean conditions, we feel there is a high likelihood that higher SARs can be achieved with higher flows.

Emergency Criteria

"DeathStar" should never be allowed to affect fish in the river

While it is not a "proven fact" (as in court) that Enron and PG&E manipulated transmission conflicts to cause the power crisis of 2000-2001, enough information has been revealed in the press that a reasonable person would view with extreme suspicion any future "power emergencies". Reasonable people would also say "Death Star" and other Enron programs seem to have been the cause of 2000-2001 problems, which in turn caused BPA to ignore almost all fish programs in the FCRPS. It seems clear that BPA sacrificed a year class of salmon to Enron's mad schemes. We believe that safe guards need to be put in place to separate real emergencies from imagined/contrived ones.

We suggest that NPPS develop a protocol to investigate, in a quick fashion, the reality of 'power emergencies' prior to taking actions such as curtailing fish programs.

We also suggest that NPPS determine if some of the losses incurred by BPA can be recouped and added back into the fish program budget.

Question of sufficient energy sources in BPA portfolio

We are concerned that NPPS and BPA have not take the long view of power management in the Northwest. The message implicit throughout the draft amendment is that the Columbia River will be exploited without regard for fish and wildlife until maximum power is drawn. The energy emergency policy already allows this unhappy state of management; a few more dry years, few more hundred thousand people in the region, and we will have perpetual emergencies. Not good.

We propose that BPA start aggressively addressing both conservation and development of clean alternative sources of power. While energy emergencies may still happen, with generation sources diversified, BPA will be in a better position to make positive choices for fish than those of 2000-2001.

As for paying for the investments, if it really costs anything, it is our belief that give the

chance to do the right thing, the people of this region will chose to invest in saving fish and and not gambling on their energy futures. Remember the polling data from a few years back that showed people would be willing to pay slight increases in their electric bills if it went towards salmon in the Columbia River. No one is expected to be happy about having to make a similar sacrifice because NPPS failed in it's trust responsibility to the Treaty Tribes of Washington, Oregon and Idaho.