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April 9, 2003

### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Regional Coordinating Group

**FROM:** Council Staff

**SUBJECT:** NOAA Fisheries and Fish and Wildlife Service Subbasin Planning Participation and Review

State and tribal subbasin planning leaders have sought clarification on how NOAA Fisheries and the Fish and Wildlife Service will participate in subbasin planning. For example, they have asked if those ESA agencies will participate at the individual subbasin level or at a higher state boundary or regional board level. This question is asked because state and tribal subbasin planners, and the Council's program, aspire to have subbasin plans be relevant and used for plans that meet ESA planning needs and requirements. The belief is that NOAA and Service participation in the actual development of subbasin plans, at some level, will help ensure that ESA standards that those agencies may have will be met.

At a meeting on January 28, 2003 the NOAA Regional Administrator Bob Lohn reconfirmed his advice of May 24, 2002 that the document "Technical Guidelines for Subbasin Planners" establishes a template that is sufficient for ESA purposes from the NOAA perspective, and that NOAA participation in the actual planning will continue to track that Technical Guidelines document. Mr. Lohn went on to explain that NOAA does have limited resources and may not be able to participate fully in every subbasin planning effort. He stated that there will be strategic participation at that level, but that NOAA would more likely participate at the state boundary or recovery board level (Level II) and at the regional level.

Similarly, at the January meeting, representatives of the Fish and Wildlife Service explained their commitments to participation in subbasin planning. Bob Nichols from the Washington Governor's Salmon Recovery Office asked for some additional contact information.

Because we did not have tribal representatives at the meeting in January, we would like the NOAA and Fish and Wildlife representatives at this meeting to again briefly explain how they intend to participate in subbasin planning.

In addition to the matter of participation, state and tribal planners have asked what, if any, review of plans would be conducted by NOAA Fisheries or the Fish and Wildlife Service one those

plans are completed and proposed to the Council for adoption into its program. Bob Lohn of NOAA Fisheries explained, in his opinion, the nature, depth, and timing of any review conducted specifically by NOAA Fisheries would depend on what the subbasin plan sponsors seek to use the plan for. For example, if the subbasin plan were simply to guide Bonneville funding, NOAA review would likely be rather limited. At the other end of the spectrum, if the plans sponsors sought to use the plan for as a foundation for a compliance agreement aimed at securing protection from NOAA regulatory or enforcement actions, a separate and thorough review may be required.

At this RCG meeting, we would like to catch up those that were not at the January 28<sup>th</sup> meeting on this topic, and have whatever further discussion the group deems appropriate.

Finally, on both the issue of NOAA and Fish and Wildlife Service participation and NOAA and Fish and Wildlife Service review of subbasin plans, the RCG may wish to consider capturing any agreements or understandings reached in writing in an attempt to dispose of this issue or further define it for additional discussion at future meetings.