

INTRODUCTION

A. THE NORTHWEST POWER PLANNING COUNCIL

The Northwest Power Planning Council, an interstate compact agency of Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington, was established under the authority of the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980. The Act directs the Council to develop a program to “protect, mitigate and enhance fish and wildlife, including related spawning grounds and habitat, on the Columbia River and its tributaries ... affected by the development, operation and management of [hydroelectric projects] while assuring the Pacific Northwest an adequate, efficient, economical and reliable power supply.” The Act also directs the Council to ensure widespread public involvement in the formulation of regional power policies.

This document is the Council’s Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program. As a planning, policy-making and reviewing body, the Council develops and then monitors implementation of the program, which is implemented by the Bonneville Power Administration, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and its licensees.

The Northwest Power Act directs the Council to develop its program and make periodic major revisions by first requesting recommendations from the region’s federal and state fish and wildlife agencies, appropriate Indian tribes (those within the basin) and other interested parties. When the Council issues a draft amended program, an extensive public comment period is initiated that includes public hearings in each of the four states and consultations with interested parties. After closing the comment period, and following

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a review and deliberation period, the Council adopts the revised program. This must occur within a year of the deadline for receiving recommendations for amendments.

B. A NEW PROGRAM STRUCTURE

This is the fifth revision of the Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program since the Council adopted its first program in November 1982. This time, as in the series of program amendments between 1991 and 1995, the program is being revised in phases. Unlike past versions of the program, which were criticized by scientists for consisting primarily of a number of measures that called for specific actions without a clear, programwide foundation of scientific principles, this version of the program expresses goals and objectives for the entire basin based on a scientific foundation of ecological principles. In the future, the Council will amend into the program locally developed plans for the more than 50 tributary subbasins of the Columbia River and a plan for the mainstem. These plans will be consistent with the goals and objectives for the basin and also with goals and objectives that will be developed for the 11 ecological provinces of the

basin. The provinces are groups of adjacent subbasins with similar ecological features.

With the subbasin plans in place, the program will be organized in three levels: 1) a basinwide level that articulates objectives, principles and coordination elements that apply generally to all fish and wildlife projects, or to a class of projects, that are implemented throughout the basin; 2) an ecological province level that addresses the 11 unique ecological areas of the Columbia River Basin, each representing a particular type of terrain and corresponding biological community; and 3) a level that addresses the more than 50 subbasins, each containing a specific waterway and the surrounding uplands.

The Council believes this unique program structure, goal-oriented and science-based, will result in a more carefully focused, scientifically credible and publicly accountable program that will direct the region’s substantial fish and wildlife investment to the places and species where it will do the most good.

C. THE FRAMEWORK CONCEPT

The program’s goals, objectives, scientific foundation and actions are structured in a “framework,” an organizational concept for fish and wildlife mitigation and recovery efforts that the Council introduced in the 1994-1995 version of the program. The 2000 program, organized with the framework concept, is intended to bring together, as closely as possible, Endangered Species Act requirements, the broader requirements of the Northwest Power Act and the policies of the states and Indian tribes of the Columbia River Basin into a comprehensive program that has a solid scientific foundation. The program also states explicitly what the Council is trying to accomplish, links the program to a specific set of objectives, describes the strategies to be employed and establishes a scientific basis for the program.

Thus, the program guides decision-making and provides a reference point for evaluating success.

To develop a framework for the program, in November 1998 the Council initiated the Multi-Species Framework Project. The Framework Project was managed by a state-federal-tribal committee and administered by the Council. The project brought together hundreds of individuals representing state and federal agencies, Indian tribes, environmental and industry groups, and interested citizens to propose and discuss potential fish and wildlife recovery actions. The actions ranged from breaching dams to leaving them in place, and from shutting down fish hatcheries and fish harvest to boosting artificial production of fish. From more than 100 actions proposed in the process, the Council assembled seven alternatives for analysis using a state-of-the-art analytical system called Ecosystem Diagnosis and Treatment (EDT). The EDT analysis addressed the biological benefits of each alternative, and a separate Human Effects Analysis addressed the economic and social impacts and benefits of the alternatives.

The Council did not choose a specific alternative for this version of the program. Rather, the goals and objectives in this program were derived from the recommendations received from the region for amendments to this program and from

among several of the Framework Project alternatives. Through an amendment proceeding that began in January 2000, the Council restructured the program with a comprehensive, underlying framework of general scientific and policy principles that apply to the entire Columbia River Basin. The fundamental elements of the program are:

The vision, which describes what the program is trying to accomplish with regard to fish and wildlife and other desired benefits from the river;

The biological objectives, which describe the ecological conditions needed to achieve the vision; and

The implementation strategies, procedures and guidelines, which guide or describe the actions leading to the desired ecological conditions.

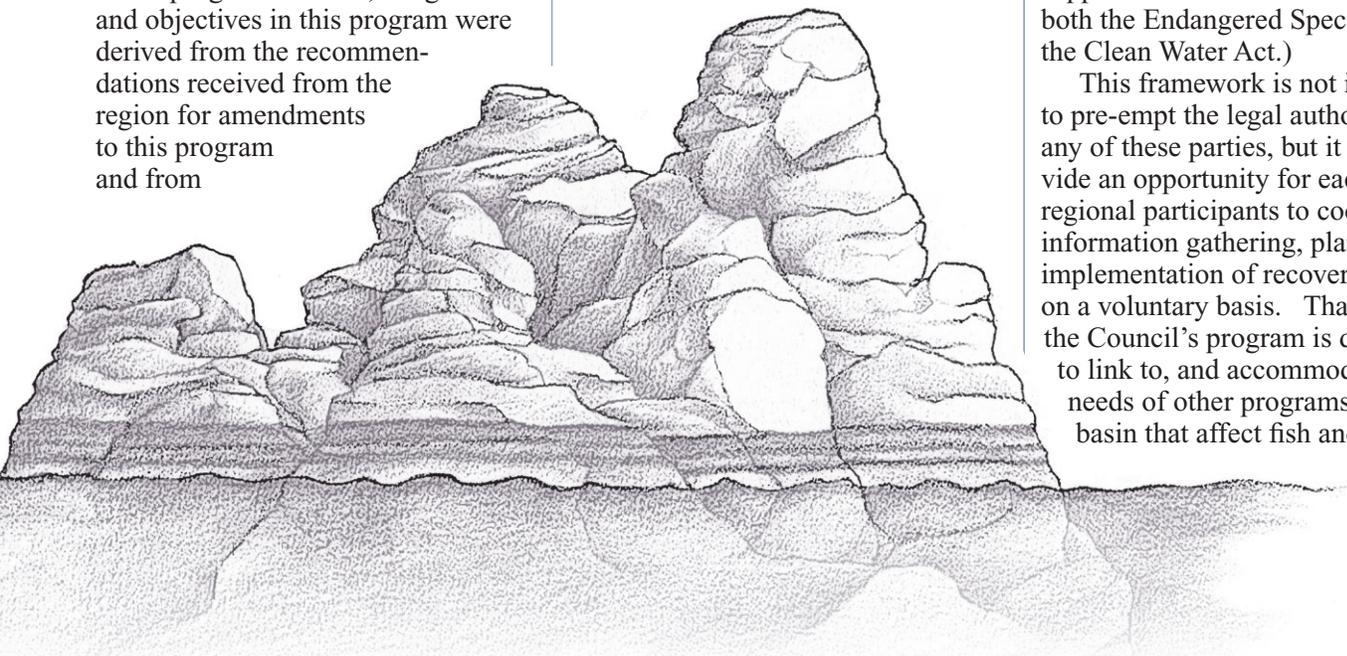
In other words, the vision implies biological objectives that set the strategies. In turn, strategies address biological objectives and fulfill the vision. The scientific foundation links the components of the framework, explaining why the Council believes certain kinds of management actions will result in particular physical habitat or ecological conditions of the basin, or why the ecological conditions will affect fish and wildlife populations or communities.

Under the Northwest Power Act, the Council's fish and wildlife program is not intended to address all fish and wildlife problems in the basin from all sources. But the Council adopted the vision, objectives, strategies and scientific foundation with the belief that they will complement and help support other fish and wildlife recovery actions in the region.

This program recognizes that others besides the Council are developing plans and taking actions to address these issues. In particular, the four Northwest states and the Columbia Basin's 13 Indian tribes each have fish and wildlife initiatives under way. Many of these parties already have subbasin and watershed planning initiatives under way, and are also addressing Endangered Species Act concerns.

Throughout the basin, the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are administering the Endangered Species Act, which requires information gathering, planning, and mitigation actions. In addition, the Environmental Protection Agency, in cooperation with the states and tribes, is taking actions to achieve compliance with the Clean Water Act. (As used elsewhere in this program, "applicable federal laws" includes both the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act.)

This framework is not intended to pre-empt the legal authorities of any of these parties, but it does provide an opportunity for each of these regional participants to coordinate information gathering, planning, and implementation of recovery actions on a voluntary basis. That is, the Council's program is designed to link to, and accommodate, the needs of other programs in the basin that affect fish and wildlife.



This includes meeting the needs of the Endangered Species Act by describing the kinds of ecological change needed to improve the survival and productivity of the diverse fish and wildlife populations in the basin.

Measures implementing this program are funded by the Bonneville Power Administration through revenues collected from electricity ratepayers. Although Bonneville has fish and wildlife responsibilities under both the Endangered Species Act and the Northwest Power Act, in many cases, both responsibilities can be met in the same set of actions. Therefore, in recommending projects for funding under this program, the Council will address both sets of responsibilities wherever feasible. Again, knowledge of the plans and activities of other regional participants will be essential for the Council to be able to assure that the projects it recommends for funding are coordinated with, and do not duplicate, the actions of others.

D. IMPLEMENTATION DURING A PERIOD OF TRANSITION

In the future, the program will be implemented primarily through subbasin plans, which will be consistent with the programwide goals, objectives and scientific foundation. While those plans are under development, the Council has provided for ongoing project review and funding.

A subbasin assessment and planning process will complete the program at the subbasin level and provide the implementation plans out of which fish and wildlife projects are proposed for Bonneville funding to implement the program.

The subbasin assessment is a technical exercise designed to identify the biological potential of each subbasin and the opportunities for restoration. Based on this, fish and wildlife managers, land managers, private landowners, and other people responsible for fish and wildlife and

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habitat conditions in the respective subbasins can develop subbasin plans consisting of goals, objectives, strategies, and proposed actions that are consistent with the objectives and criteria in the program.

Depending on the extent and quality of past assessment and planning work, the planning process in a particular subbasin could range from a relatively quick and straightforward review and updating of existing plans to a fundamental and extensive development process. Using the program amendment procedures in the Northwest Power Act, the Council intends to review subbasin plans and adopt agreed-upon plans into the program.

Meanwhile, the Council will continue to make annual recommendations to Bonneville regarding funding of projects to implement the program. The Council relies on the recommendations of the Independent Scientific Review Panel and the region’s fish and wildlife managers as the basis for its funding recommendations. The Council and the Independent Scientific Review Panel also have a responsibility for reviewing other fish and wildlife projects proposed for funding by federal agencies and reimbursed by Bonneville.

The program describes a rolling project review process in which one-third of the program and fish and wildlife projects funded by Bonneville are reviewed each year in some depth by the fish and wildlife managers, the Independent Scientific Review Panel and the Council. An important criterion for a funding recommendation is consistency with the vision, objectives and strategies in the revised program and in the relevant subbasin plan, when adopted. In

the rolling project review, the priorities for actions at the basin, province, and subbasin level will be reflected as budget priorities for implementation of specific projects.

The program includes procedures for monitoring and evaluating biological benefits gained by actions taken under the program. The evaluation process feeds information back into the program planning and project review process, with adaptive management mechanisms for revising program objectives or actions if what has been adopted proves unsuccessful.

Because this program has a significantly different structure and implementation procedure than past versions of the program, the Council wanted to make a provision for projects initially funded under previous versions of the program to continue — as long as they are reviewed by the Independent Scientific Review Panel and recommended for funding by the Council. Thus, unless expressly modified by the provisions of this program, existing projects will continue to be in effect.

Most of the existing projects in the program are specific items for implementation at specific locations. As part of the subbasin planning process described above, these measures will be reviewed, together with proposals for new measures, for inclusion in subbasin plans. When a subbasin plan is adopted, it will include both the new measures for that subbasin and the existing measures that will be continuing. At that time, the measures currently in the program for that subbasin will be replaced by the subbasin plan.

