

Background

In July 1999, the four Northwest Governors asked the Northwest Power Planning Council to begin reporting annually on expenditures of the Bonneville Power Administration to implement the Council's Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program. The Governors directed the Council to provide an accounting and assessment of those expenditures, and to devise a method of assessing the response of the basin's fish and wildlife resources to funding decisions.

The Council issued its inaugural report in January 2001. That report included, at the Governors' request, historical documentation on past

expenditures and program successes and failures. This second report includes updated information on Bonneville's expenditures and also information about Columbia River salmon and steelhead runs and fisheries.

The Northwest Power Act and the Power Planning Council

The Northwest Power Act of 1980, the federal law that authorized the states of Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington to form the Northwest Power Planning Council, directs the Council to prepare a program to protect, mitigate and enhance fish and wildlife of the Columbia River Basin that have been affected by

hydropower. The Act also directs the Administrator of the Bonneville Power Administration, the federal agency that sells electricity generated at federal dams in the Columbia River Basin, to use the Bonneville fund in a manner consistent with the Council's program. The Council has amended its program periodically since 1982, when the first program was adopted. The current program was adopted in October 2000.

The Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program

The Council is a planning, policy-making and reviewing body. Consistent with the Northwest Power Act, the Council develops the fish and wildlife program and monitors its implementation. The program is implemented primarily by Bonneville but also by the region's fish and wildlife agencies and tribes, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and its licensees.

The program directs scientific research, habitat protection, including acquisitions and easements, construction projects to improve habitat and fish passage, hatchery development and operation, and also establishes certain reservoir elevations and flow requirements to protect anadromous and resident fish and their habitat. Other measures call for using stored water to maintain appropriate water temperatures and protect streambeds.

A Broad Focus on All Fish and Wildlife

The Council's program addresses hydropower impacts on all fish and wildlife of the Columbia River Basin. These species include anadromous (ocean-going) fish such as salmon and steelhead, resident fish (those that live and migrate only in freshwater) and wildlife. Hydroelectric projects created a number of problems for fish and wildlife including mammals and birds. Dams altered river flows, inundated spawning, rearing and shoreline habitat areas and blocked natural migration patterns. For some species, the creation of reservoirs behind the dams created new habitat by flooding shoreline areas. Waterfowl such as migratory ducks and geese particularly benefited in this way, and the Council's program accounts for these habitat gains in calculating net habitat losses.

The Council has a broad mandate regarding fish and wildlife mitigation in the Columbia basin and has worked to incorporate the needs of listed species with its broader obligation to protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife species harmed by the construction and operation of the hydropower system.

Project Reviews and Subbasin Planning

Through an annual process since 1996, the Council and Bonneville solicit projects to implement the program. The Council submits project proposals for





review by the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority,¹ the Independent Scientific Review Panel² and the general public and then recommends projects to Bonneville for funding.

recommendations will be based on these plans, which the Council anticipates completing and amending into the fish and wildlife program by mid-2004.

Currently, the Council is transitioning from an annual cycle for project review and recommendation to a three-year cycle and also is working with state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, Indian tribes and watershed-based citizen organizations to develop comprehensive plans for each of the 62 tributary subbasins of the Columbia River. Future project solicitations, review and

¹ The Authority is an association of state and federal fish and wildlife agencies and the 13 Indian tribes in the Columbia River Basin. The Authority coordinates planning and implementation of fish and wildlife management issues among its members.

² The Independent Scientific Review Panel was created by the Council in response to a 1996 amendment to the Northwest Power Act that called for greater scientific scrutiny and public accountability of expenditures through the Council's program. The 11 members of the Panel are nominated by the National Academy of Sciences and appointed by the Council.