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State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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Mark Walker
Director of Public Affairs
Northwest Power & Conservation Council
851 SW 6th Avenue, Suite 1100
Portland, Oregon 97204-1348

200606032

Dear Mr. Walker;

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) would like to take this opportunity to comment on the Columbia Basin Data Center proposal recently released for comment by the Northwest Power and Conservation Council. WDFW agrees with the goal of improving the accessibility of information about the status of fish and wildlife populations in the Columbia Basin. We also believe there is merit in working on common protocols and data formats where that makes sense. The ultimate goal of the Data Center approach is worth pursuing, but we think there are benefits to a more sequential approach. We think that the region would be best served if the initial thrust of the project is to use the current solicitation process to reshape existing projects and processes to move in the desired direction, and to initially focus on increasing access to information derived from basic data rather than on the protocols and formats of the data collection process itself. We believe that these initial steps will be more cost effective and achieve the desired benefits faster.

It is our sense that the greatest demand for information is not for the data as it is collected, but for information that is derived from the data. Most users do not want the individual stream counts of adult fish; they want to know the estimated escapement. Most users do not want to know the harvest by individual fisherman; they want to know the overall harvest for a given time period on a given population of fish. Most users do not want information about each individual hatchery release by pond; they want to know how many fish of a certain type were released in a give year at a facility. The recent example where we worked with John Harrison of the NPCC staff illustrates this point. What Mr. Harrison needed for his report was not basic field data, but information gathered from a variety of sources based on extensive analysis of the basic field collections. We think that the greatest initial gains in productivity for the typical user interested in the Columbia River will be in providing greater access to such derived information. We need to initially focus on providing run sizes, escapements, harvest, overall releases from hatcheries, and other population and management information at the level of the population, ESU,

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management unit, or other higher level where the decisions are actually being made. An initial focus on standardized data collection protocols, standardized formats, and other issues with basic data collection will be difficult and time consuming (as we have seen) and will divert resources from answering more important questions.

That being said, we think there are existing initiatives and institutions in place that can move the basin in the appropriate direction, given some small, but significant, changes in their direction. First and foremost, the NPCC should request BPA to require that all projects funded by BPA submit the data they collect in a machine-readable format to one of the current regional data centers (e.g. StreamNet). Historically there have been, and continue to be, a number of projects that have not submitted the results of their work to any common repository where they are accessible to other workers in the basin.

The Data Center proposal appears to target several goals: 1) greater accessibility to data, 2) identification of data gaps, 3) assuring data integrity, and 4) setting standard data protocols. We think that the current solicitation provides an opportunity to redirect several existing projects to more directly deal with these issues.

- Greater accessibility to data – there are several on-going and proposed projects that we think can make great strides in this area in the next few years given some direction about where to head. The Mainstem/SystemWide Review Team under the current solicitation has been addressing this in several ways. They have been working with StreamNet to identify which basic data are most important to be made available to workers in the basin. StreamNet has a history of collecting and making available basic data in the basin. This process would potentially redirect that effort to other types of data. The Fish Passage Center has made available a variety of data about issues relating to movement of both adults and juveniles. While the status of the center is unclear, that basic functionality should be included as a task under any new entity. CBFWA has undertaken the task of making a variety of information and data available through the “Status of the Resource Report”. Originally this report was conceived of as a way to provide a wide variety of data on the status of fish populations at the subbasin level. This includes a variety of basic data and derived information. The project has been extended to include more basin wide information on the status of populations at higher (e.g. ESU, population) levels. BPA staff, under the umbrella of PNAMP have been developing a prototype “portal” to tie together some of these disparate data sources.
- Identification of data gaps – the CSMEP project has invested a great deal of effort into inventorying the quantity and quality of existing data in the basin. This combined with the recently released NPCC Research Plan, and the proposed NPCC Monitoring and Evaluation Plan will go a long ways towards identifying data gaps and where work needs to be accomplished.
- Assuring data integrity – this is a difficult task. Most of the data that is of interest to management of fish and wildlife in the basin is not funded by the Fish and Wildlife program. It is collected by state, tribal, federal, and other agencies under different requirements and mandates. These agencies will have their own requirements and standards for the quality of the data they collect. The Data Center as proposed would be unlikely to have a significant ability to set standards for this data. Again, the collaborative approach of CSMEP and

PNAMP is likely to be more useful. It would be better to rely on a group like the ISRP to review and comment on the data collected within the fish and wildlife program, since this is a much bigger and more diverse task than can be effectively assigned to a small group of workers at a data center.

- Setting standard data protocols – The current CSMEP and PNAMP programs are well on their way to developing suggested protocols for collecting data. A report from CSMEP is due this year that will provide the results of work to reach agreement on methods and approaches to recommend to workers in the basin. The CSMEP proposal for the next round seeks to extend this work in a variety of areas. PNAMP is taking a similar approach, with a reach that extends well beyond the Columbia Basin. While the idea of a single person in charge is appealing in some cases, we think that the collaborative approaches used within these two existing processes are more likely to be effective given the diversity of agencies and groups working in the basin.

None of these projects will fulfill the complete vision of a Columbia River Data Center. However, combined they move us much of the way towards that goal. We think that this incremental approach will be more cost effective and efficient in achieving the stated goals of this proposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We look forward to working with you in the future to make this happen.

Sincerely,

Richard W. Stone
Wildlife Policy Lead