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August 3, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: Peter Paquet, Manager, Wildlife and Resident Fish

SUBJECT: ISAB review of data management proposal and summary of public comment

Background - In May 2000, the Independent Scientific Review Panel reported on the inadequacies of the data system for Columbia River Basin fish and wildlife. The panel noted significant data gaps and significant inconsistencies in the way data were collected and reported. The panel recommended a systematic approach to address a wide variety of tasks including an inventory of existing data, a survey of unmet data needs, proposals for filling data gaps, and development of standardized data collection and reporting protocols.

Following this report the Council undertook several initiatives to respond to these recommendations. The Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding with NOAA Fisheries to work collaboratively in developing a regional data system, supported a contract with Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), and helped establish the Northwest Environmental Data Network (NED). At its May 2006 meeting the Council issued a proposal, which was intended to build on these initiatives, and offered a proposed method to implement an integrated, regional data management system.

The Council asked for public comment on the proposal and asked the Independent Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB) to review it. The Council received twelve comments on the proposal, which came, for the most part, from regional fish and wildlife entities.¹

¹ Comments were received from the following organizations and individuals: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA); Bureau of Reclamation (BOR); Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission (CRITFC); Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW); Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW); Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks (MDFWP); Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority (CBFWA); Pacific Northwest Aquatic Monitoring

The comments and the ISAB review are available at the Council's website (www.nwcouncil.org/library/2006/2006-7.htm). The purpose of this memo is to provide a brief synopsis of the both the comment received and the ISAB recommendations. Staff is working with the Council's regional partners to assess the merits of the comments and recommendations and intends to provide the Council with options for addressing these issues at the September Council meeting.

Public Comment – All commenters were generally supportive of the concept and goals stated in the proposal and most complemented the Council for addressing the issue. However, while supporting the overall concepts and goals there were a number of suggestions on the details for achieving them. Bonneville and the fish and wildlife managers² stated that it is their belief that the existing coordination forums and ongoing projects, such as PNAMP, NED, CSMEP, etc., are currently advancing these objectives stated in the Council's proposal from both a Columbia Basin and a Pacific Northwest regional perspective. In general, they agree that rather than creating a new, and perhaps duplicative, entity that we could meet the information and data management needs through additional leadership, support, and regional cooperation in ongoing initiatives.

Several of the above commenters suggested using the current project solicitation process to reshape existing projects and processes to move in the desired direction, and to focus initially on increasing access to information derived from basic data.

The comments indicated a strong support for a web-based/portal based approach over a data warehouse approach. Several commenters pointed out that a data warehouse approach would be contrary to the recommendations of both the ISRP and SAIC.

A number of commenters raised issues concerning the scope of the proposal, both from a geographic and from a data perspective. Bonneville stated, that while it supports the concept of regional approach to data management it does not see it as appropriate for it to assume the data management responsibilities of the broader Pacific Northwest. However, Bonneville also stated that they would work with the Council to bring all members of the federal caucus under the umbrella of the NED memorandum of understanding.

Several agencies and one individual were concerned that focusing only on Fish and Wildlife Program funded projects would fail to establish a comprehensive data system because it would not include the many, important non-FWP funded projects and data sets necessary to meet regional monitoring and evaluation needs. This includes salmon harvest data, most of the hatchery production data, and most of the spawning escapement data as well as many key resident fish and habitat data sets. It is their belief that a collaborative approach, adopted by a wider group of agencies and programs is likely to provide larger benefits, faster, and at less cost.

Partnership (PNAMP); Northwest Environmental Data-Network (NED); Flathead Basin Commission: Bruce Schmidt; Keith Wolf; and Thomas Tinsley.

² MDFWP, ODFW, WDFW, CBFWA, CRITFC

Several comments raised issues about potential costs associated with the proposal. The Flathead Basin Commission, while in support of the concept, wondered who would pay for conversion of historic data and data entry? Others pointed out that many of the basin's potentially important data providers may have neither the technical nor the staffing capabilities to necessary to implement anticipated regional data protocols. It is suggested that some funding may be necessary to support the development of data management infrastructure within these entities.

ISAB Review – In its review of the proposal the ISAB found that the Council proposal and the underlying NED framework to be supportable, but recommended that it first be initiated as a demonstration project. They underscored the urgent need for this type of effort recommended that it be given highest priority. The panel also emphasized that if such a proposal is to be successful there will need to be assurances of cooperation in such an effort by key data entities. Agreements should be in place before proceeding with an RFP. They also stressed the necessity of sustainable financial support to assure ongoing updating and management of regional data sources.

The panel recommended the development of a more detailed prospectus that provides estimates of the overall projected size and cost of implementing such a proposal. Further recommendations focused on the need to better clarify the relationship of the proposal to existing data management efforts, such as StreamNet and on the necessity of ensuring project compliance through contractual deliverables.

Despite these caveats, the ISAB recommended that the proposed data center approach be initiated with a demonstration project on a limited/pilot scale using only a limited number of data sets. They suggest that it would be best for the proponents, perhaps under the auspices of NED and PNAMP, to agree upon a pilot-scale project to test out the data center concept and provide a list of specific elements that should be considered in a demonstration project.