



Heads Up on Fish and Wildlife

PNUCC - April 2008

The Northwest Power and Conservation Council is starting to shape changes to its Columbia River Basin fish and wildlife program, with a draft due out in late summer. We have been steeped in the issues for months and decided it was time to provide a regular heads up on where things are headed.

First, a shot of background -- The Council's program guides the spending of BPA's F&W dollars. Given recent developments - like the federal agencies' new agreements with four tribes and two states - we could be looking at a big jump in direct spending, from about \$150 million a year now to \$250 million a year in 2009. But it isn't just about dollars. Our goal has always been to see that the program is biologically sound and the measures are cost-effective. Here are a few reactions to what the Council is facing in the stack of recommendations they just received from parties all across the region.

- ♣ PNUCC has been working for over a year with Northwest RiverPartners, PPC and others to get well acquainted with the F&W program. Our recommendations were based on our view that the Council should refocus the program to deal **only** with impacts from the hydro system. That's what the law says, but over the years, the program has grown to encompass all sorts of problems, from poor fishing practices to invasive species. And customers are paying for most of it. **There's no doubt, we face an uphill battle to get the program pared down.**

- ♣ **We are more concerned than ever about the obligations subbasin plans could load onto ratepayers**, after hearing what is being proposed in many of the amendments. Since December 2004, the Council has adopted dozens of subbasin plans into its program, locally prepared plans that go far beyond the hydropower system to include the impacts of grazing, mining, noxious weeds, and so on. There is a big push to get the plans implemented on BPA's nickel. We heard F&W managers repeatedly referred to the subbasin plans as the basis for their recommendations as the summarized them for the Council. While we don't object to subbasin plans, there's a lot in them that is not BPA's responsibility. If they remain as part of the program, we'll push to share costs more broadly.

- ♣ **We're all for a F&W program that sets priorities to remedy hydro system impacts.** We heard support for our view that clear priorities would help the Council select projects that meet top goals. Project selection in the F&W program is now a rush from every direction for dollars. Clear priorities would give the Council a way to call for projects that address a specific problem, and selection could be based on mitigation needs that link directly to priorities in the F&W program.

We'll keep you posted on the hot topics as we continue to work with the Council. In the meantime let me know if you any questions or thoughts you would like to share.