



Heads Up on Fish and Wildlife

PNUCC - August 2008

Early in September, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council will release the draft of its new Columbia River Basin fish and wildlife program for a 60-day public review. A conference call is set for August 28 for a final review of text before the release. We don't know exactly what the draft will contain, but our bird-dogging of the process for the last several months has given us some insight.

- The new program makes an effort to recognize the hydro system is not the only human cause of adverse effects to fish and wildlife in the basin and that the Council needs to share the responsibility for fish and wildlife protection with other agencies. Sections of the program about new actions to address climate change and toxics have been pared back to be less detailed than originally proposed, but we'll keep close tabs on how these potentially scope-expanding sections of the program actually come out.
- The Council looks likely to remove from the draft program its acceptance of a provisional goal of increasing adult salmon runs above Bonneville Dam by 2025 to 5 million annually, despite the state of Oregon's objection. The Council may say that while the fish and wildlife managers and tribes recommend such a goal, the Council wants to set up a process to decide what numerical goals, if any, should be in the program.
- In its deliberations on the mainstem amendments, the Council declined to include Oregon's proposal on detailed operations that would have increased flow and spill -- measures that failed to make the cut in the Biological Opinion. The mainstem part of the Council's program is now built on detailed plans for the operation of each hydro facility that come from the BiOps.
- Wildlife mitigation is still a murky and potentially costly mine field in the program. The Council is trying to sort out the many controversial issues involved with wildlife crediting and what ratio to use for habitat units. The draft program still endorses a 2 to 1 ratio, but will ask for comment on that issue.

We hope PNUCC members will testify at the upcoming hearings on the draft program that begin September 16 in Astoria and end October 15 in Missoula. And we'll be preparing comments and flagging for your consideration our key concerns about the draft program once it comes out. If you have ideas or opinions to share, please don't hesitate to give me a call.

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