



## Heads Up on Fish and Wildlife

PNUCC - May 2008

The Northwest Power and Conservation Council is now discussing the 3,700 pages of recommendations it received to revise its Columbia River Basin fish and wildlife program. As the Council staff describes the amendments it sounds more like a funding free-for-all than an effort to rethink priorities or pare back the program to deal only with impacts from the hydro system. A refocusing of the program and how it is implemented will direct the region's fish and wildlife investments to better help the fish. Here's our take on what we are seeing and hearing:

- ♣ Council staff said most people in the region want the program's vision and basic approach to continue, although the utility community has recommended the program vision be peeled back to its original intent to mitigate for the hydro system. The Council will need to step way back from the quagmire of detailed recommendations they now face to provide real regional guidance on fish and wildlife. In the coming months, we'll keep plugging to make sure our ideas get a full airing and that the Council takes the opportunity to deliberate the benefits of a hydro system focused vision.
- ♣ Not only are we working to peel back the program and prevent further "scope creep" we are working to change the traditional way of seeking funding for projects. There's a slew of recommendations asking the Council to fund efforts to control such things as zebra mussels and toxics lurking in our waters, such as flame retardants and pharmaceuticals. Without regard to the efficacy of these projects, these specific project recommendations are too early. They should be set aside until the program is reworked and it is time to solicit projects for funding.
- ♣ PNUCC has recommended that the multitude of other regional plans for fish mitigation, including the Council's subbasin plans, only be incorporated into the program by reference, rather than in detail. Others are expecting just the opposite, which would lock the Council into a prescriptive, stagnant list of actions. Our goal is a program that is flexible and allows course corrections as new information becomes available. Our messages to the Council in June will emphasize this goal.
- ♣ One bright note is that the Council has initiated an effort to devise a set of high-level indicators to measure the success of F&W projects. That's the kind of thinking we applaud because it can get us to a program that achieves the greatest biological benefits in the most cost-effective manner.

In June, the Council will delve into recommendations about hydro operations, biological objectives and monitoring and evaluation. If the current schedule holds, staff will have whipped up a draft program by August. We'll continue our work and keep you posted. Give us call if you have any thoughts you would like to share.

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