

State, Federal and Tribal Fishery Agencies Joint Technical Staff Letter

*Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service
US Fish and Wildlife Service*

September 25, 2007

Mr. Bill Maslen
Director, Integrated Fish and Wildlife Program
Bonneville Power Administration
P.O. Box 3621
Portland, OR 97208-3621

Dear Mr. Maslen,

The Fish Passage Advisory Committee (FPAC) understands that funding for the Fall Chinook/Chum Spawning below Four Lower Dams Contract (#1999-003-01) is being reduced for the 2007-2009 implementation of this project. We recognize that it is within Bonneville Power Administration's (BPA) authority to make this decision. Nonetheless, the FPAC has concern regarding the funding reduction and would like to take the time to provide their input relative to the elements of this contract that have direct links to making informed in-season management recommendations for chum salmon and other listed and unlisted anadromous fish.

The management of flow from Bonneville Dam during chum spawning and emergence is always a daunting task for the fish and wildlife managers. Decisions made regarding the provision of water for chum salmon can have potentially damaging consequences for the provision of flows for other segments of the spring and summer migrating fish populations. Consequently, it is of utmost importance that solid information is available for consideration when making these management recommendations.

In past years' several different types of information have been made available and utilized when making management recommendations. These include long term climate forecast predictions and water supply forecasts, as well as real time biological and physical monitoring data. The real-time provision of spawning data and redd location is extremely important to management decision pertaining to needed water levels in the fall time period. To provide numbers and locations of redds with sufficient accuracy to allow determination of redd elevation may require weekly or bi-weekly surveys. It is our understanding that redd location data will

continue to be collected, but it is unclear whether the data will be collected at frequent enough intervals to ensure that complete and accurate locations and elevations are determined.

In past years' management decisions have focused between balancing upstream storage releases for maintaining water over redds, and assuring that as much storage as possible is retained in reservoirs to provide target flows for spring migrants and to refill reservoirs for summer migrant flows. In addition to the need for accurate information on the number, location and elevation of chum redds, the fishery managers have relied extensively on the 2-D model developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to aid in developing their recommendations. The ability of the model to predict the redds that would be affected at differing water levels was hampered in the past by the lack of resolution associated with the existing information used in the model. The Bonneville Power Administration allocated significant funds in 2006-2007 to obtain the data necessary to improve the accuracy of the 2-D model (approximately \$28,000). We understand that this work element needed to complete this model has been eliminated for the 2007-2008 period. The FPAC believes that given the expenditures already undertaken by BPA, the low cost of completing the model with the already collected data (about \$30,000), and the importance of this tool for making management decisions, this work element warrants reconsideration by BPA for funding this year.

In addition, in past years the emergence timing of these fish during the spring was used to indicate the length of time that protection measures were necessarily implemented. It is FPAC's understanding that with the BPA proposed funding reductions these data will not be collected. There has not been a comprehensive evaluation of the relationship between the measured temperature units the chum redds are exposed to and the physical seining collection data of fry emergence. Consistently, the seining data shows fry emergence timing extending well beyond the expected termination data predicted by the measure of temperature units.

It is our understanding that in the absence of real-time data the in-season management will rely on historic collection data. Consequently, it is our anticipation that protection for emerging chum will be provided as long as possible through the historic emergence period, except where it may reduce flexibility for fish flows and affect total dissolved gas management during the spring and summer migration period, at which time we would enter into discussions with the Region on how best to balance the needs of chum and flows for spring and summer migrants. If this is not an acceptable consequence, then BPA should reconsider their decision to not fund emergence surveys on which salmon managers may rely. At the very least BPA could fund the analysis of the historic seining and thermal data to determine whether the thermal data could be used to effectively predict emergence timing.

Thank you for taking the input of the FPAC regarding this contract. We look forward to working with you to assure that the data collected will provide us with enough information to continue to make informed and important hydrosystem operation decisions.

Sincerely,



Bob Heinith
Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission




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NOAA Fisheries



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Cc:

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