

# State, Federal and Tribal Fishery Agencies Joint Technical Staff

*Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission*  
*Idaho Department of Fish and Game*  
*Nez Perce Tribe*  
*Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife*  
*US Fish and Wildlife Service*  
*Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife*  
*NOAA Fisheries*

April 20, 2004

John Wellschlager  
Bonneville Power Administration  
905 NE 11th Ave / PO Box 3621  
Portland, OR 97208

Joe Lucas  
Grant County PUD  
P.O. Box 878  
Ephrata, WA 98823

Dear Mr. Wellschlager & Mr. Lucas:

The joint agencies and tribes are sending this letter to express serious concern regarding the operation that occurred in the Mid-Columbia River this past week. According to the Facilitator's draft summary notes for the April 14 TMT Meeting:

“The salmon managers presented SOR 2004-5 on Priest Rapids flows and spill at Bonneville. In light of the recent decrease in the water supply forecast, a lack of fish numbers, and maintenance work by the BOR, the salmon managers requested that water be released from Grand Coulee on April 15<sup>th</sup> for 7 days a week to provide 110 kcfs flow at Priest Rapids, and continue this operation until further notice. Once 110 kcfs is reached, do not reduce to 70 kcfs in order to minimize fluctuations.

BPA supported the SOR with the caveat that the 110 kcfs at Priest Rapids is a weekly average. BPA will ramp up flows over the weekend so the weekly average will stay within the flow band. The salmon managers will look at water and fish conditions to determine when to change from 110 kcfs.

**ACTION:** BPA will ramp Priest Rapids up to 90 kcfs over the weekend, and maintain a weekly average of 110 kcfs, keeping in mind the request to minimize fluctuations.”

We are concerned about operations in the Mid-Columbia over the last several days. First, according to the above notes, BPA said they would “ramp up flows to 90 kcfs over the weekend and maintain a weekly average of 110 Kcfs”, while also stating at the TMT meeting that they would not decrease flows over the weekend on the way up to 110 Kcfs. The following table displays average daily outflows from Chief Joseph and Priest Rapids dams.

Date	Ave. Daily Flow at CHJ, Kcfs	Ave. Daily Flow at PRD, Kcfs
4-15-04, Thursday	74.0	101.8
4-16-04, Friday	106.2	103.7
4-17-04, Saturday	85.0	93.1
4-18-04, Sunday	72.9	97.3
4-19-04, Monday	120.5	124.9

According to Priest Rapids data, BPA actually ramped *down* to approximately 72.9 Kcfs over the weekend, relative to CHJ discharges on Thursday and Friday and in doing so, did decrease discharges on the way to 110 Kcfs. Also, average daily discharges on Monday (4-19-04) were 120.5 Kcfs, much higher than called for by the Salmon Managers. SOR 2004-5 Modified asks for 110 Kcfs seven days per week at Priest Rapids because of refill concerns at Grand Coulee Dam. If the 110 kcfs is met as a weekly average, as BPA stated in above notes, this will mean flows will drop significantly below 110 Kcfs at some point during the week, which would not be consistent with SOR 2004-5.

The most troubling action at Priest Rapids Dam over the last several days has been the extreme flow fluctuations at, and below, Priest Rapids Dam. The following table shows average, maximum, minimum, and daily flow fluctuations at the USGS Gage below Priest Rapids Dam.

Date	Flows at USGS Gage below Priest Rapids, Kcfs			
	Average	Maximum	Minimum	Daily Flow Fluctuation
4-13-04	77.4	84.6	70.8	13.8
4-14-04	102.4	128.0	71.4	56.6
4-15-04	100.5	112.0	82.0	30.0
4-16-04	102.6	119.0	86.8	32.2
4-17-04	91.4	120.0	72.3	47.7
4-18-04	97.3	117.0	83.1	33.9
4-19-04	120.6	177.0	79.8	97.2

The last paragraph above under “Action” states that “BPA will keep in mind the request to minimize flow fluctuations.” The table above clearly shows that fluctuations have not been minimized that could have resulted in a high stranding mortality of peak numbers of Hanford Reach bright fall chinook emerging below Priest Rapids Dam at this time. This operation is not consistent with the flow restriction criteria in the Hanford Reach Protection Program<sup>1</sup> which has

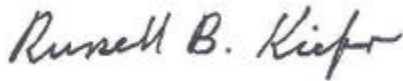
<sup>1</sup> The Program is also a key provision of the Vernita Bar Plus Settlement Agreement in which BPA, Grant PUD, NOAA Fisheries, WDFW, Douglas PUD and Chelan PUD are parties. The flow criteria in the Agreement limits flow fluctuations to 20 kcfs when the previous days’ average weekday daily Wanapum inflow is between 36 and 80 kcfs or to 30 kcfs when the previous day’s average weekday daily Wanapum inflow is between 80 and 110 kcfs. The

been submitted by Grant County as part of their license renewal application. As witnessed in 2001, a single event of wide flow fluctuations has the potential to strand and cause mortality to tens of thousands of Hanford Reach fall chinook fry.

We urge the power agencies to implement SOR 2004-5 and avoid the situation that occurred this past week. This incidence is regrettable since implementation of the Hanford Reach Protection Program was one of the major offsets being considered by the Federal Agencies related to the spill reductions. This action alone may make this option not available this year.

Sincerely,

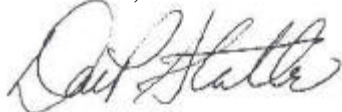
Russ Kiefer, IDFG




Ron Boyce, ODFW



Bob Heinith, CRITFC



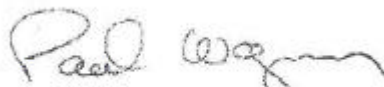
Dave Statler, Nez Perce Tribe



Cindy LeFleur, WDFW



Dave Wills, USFWS



Paul Wagner, NOAA Fisheries

Cc: Steve Wright, BPA  
Tim Culbertson, Grant County PUD

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Agreement has not yet been approved by FERC as an amendment to the existing license. CRITFC and its member tribes and the USFWS recommend maintaining stricter criteria (limit flow fluctuations to no more that 10 kcfs when Wanapum inflows are between 36 and 80 kcfs) and advocate reset of 24 hour flows during daylight hours when fish are more mobile and can better escape receding flows.