

State, Federal and Tribal Fishery Agencies Joint Technical Staff

*Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission
Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
US Fish and Wildlife Service
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife*

April 27, 2004

Rebecca Kalamasz
USACE
Walla Walla District
201 N. 3rd Street
Walla Walla, WA 99362-1876

Dear Ms. Kalamasz:

We have reviewed the proposed monitoring plan associated with the USACE and BPA proposal to eliminate the 1% of peak efficiency operation requirement of the 2000 NMFS Biological Opinion. We have previously reviewed and summarized the expected impacts of operations outside of 1% in Joint Technical Staff letters on May 29, 2003 and April 2, 2004. The available data summarized in these letters strongly indicate that operations outside of 1% will reduce fish survival. In the April 2, 2004 letter we listed six mechanisms, which could reduce the immediate and delayed survival rates of fish encountering operations outside of the 1% limits at McNary Dam. The mechanisms that were listed include:

- increased turbine mortality,
- increased stress and mortality associated with turbulent gateway environments,
- reduced numbers of fish passed via the spillway passage route,
- increased delayed mortality due to the increased number of guided fish,
- increased descaling rates, and
- increased forebay delay due to reductions in spill volumes.

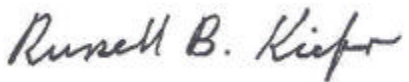
The monitoring plan presented by the USACE examines only one of these six mechanisms (i.e., descaling in gateways). Therefore, we find that the monitoring plan is inadequate for assessing the range of potential consequences of operations outside of 1% on survival of fish at McNary Dam.

We view the USACE and BPA proposals to reduce summer spill and eliminate the 1% limits at McNary Dam similarly in terms of expected reductions in fish survival. It is generally accepted that both operations will reduce survival rates of fish that encounter these operations. However, the difference between these two proposals is that mitigation measures have been presented for the summer spill reduction proposal, but are not even being discussed in the context of allowing turbines to operate outside the 1% operating criteria of the Biological Opinion. If removing the

1% limit is pursued in the future, we believe that appropriate mitigation measures to offset any and all reductions in survival should be included in any proposal to do so. Failing to provide mitigation would reduce the probability of recovering ESA-listed fish, and unjustly burden sport, tribal, and commercial fishers with reduced harvest opportunities for non-listed fish.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on this proposal and monitoring plan. We hope that the USACE and BPA will take our concerns seriously when entertaining proposals to operate outside of the 1% limits in the future.


Sincerely,



Russ Kiefer, IDFG



Ron Boyce, ODFW



Bob Heinith, CRITFC



Rodney Woodin, WDFW



Dave Wills, USFWS

Cc: Cindy Henriksen, COE