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
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes
US Fish and Wildlife Service
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

May10, 2004

Witt Anderson
NWD Corps of Engineers
PO Box 2870
Portland, OR 97208-2870

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

Dear Mr. Anderson & Mr. Delwich:

RE: Removable Spillway Weir test at Lower Granite Dam for Summer Migrants.

The tribes and fishery agencies strongly support an evaluation of the Lower Granite removable spillway weir (RSW) this summer. We offer the following points in support of this evaluation:

- The Lower Granite RSW should be evaluated in summer 2004 as a critical prerequisite toward determining whether or not more RSWs should be installed at other Corps' dams.

- The Corps already has the evaluation tools (hydroacoustic equipment) in place to test the RSW for summer migrants. Past years' spring test results appear promising.

- The region's tribes and fishery agencies with the Corps have already established an evaluation plan for the summer test.

- We believe the Corps' Walla Walla District and Northwestern Division staffs support the 2004 RSW test.

- Under current summer operations, there is no spill at three of the four Corps' Lower Snake dams and McNary dam. Fish must pass through screen systems and turbines. All fish routed through screen systems are transported in barges or trucks.

- About 70% of Snake River fall chinook are transported in the summer(over 90% of fish above Lower Granite Dam are destined for transport,FPC Annual Report 2002) from four Corps dams. The best available scientific information indicates that a majority of Snake River adult chinook returns come from juveniles that migrate through the hydrosystem instead of being transported.

- The region's fishery managers ascribe an 80% mortality rate to juvenile salmon that have been transported after they are released from the trucks and barges. Possible causes are stress and handling, disease, lack of physiological preparation for saltwater and vulnerability to predation.

- The NOAA Fisheries 2000 FCRPS Biological Opinion (BiOp) calls for an evaluation that compares juvenile fall chinook in-river passage and adult returns versus transportation of juvenile fall chinook and adult returns using state-of-the-art PIT-Tag technology. The BiOp calls for the test to begin this summer.

- A 2004 Lower Granite RSW summer test provides a firm foundation toward conducting the future in-river/transportation experiment. The in-river/transportation experiment will provide decision makers with critical knowledge about which operation passage paradigm should be provided for juvenile salmon migrants. Since the hydrosystem is among the greatest factors of human-caused salmon mortality, knowledge related to passage improvements is vital toward recovery of listed stocks and preservation/enhancement of non-listed stocks. Time is of the essence in determining how juvenile passage survival through the hydrosystem can be increased.

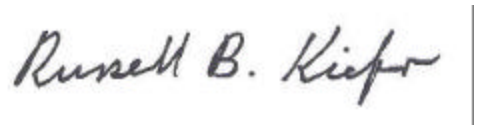
Currently the 2005 in-river (summer spill) versus transportation experiment for Snake River Fall Chinook, identified as RPA 148 in the 2000 FCRPS BiOp, has been placed on hold to an undefined future date. We have been informed through various regional meetings that the test may not occur until at least 2007. We are even more troubled to find that removable spillway weirs (RSWs), the proposed cornerstone of the in-river component of this evaluation, may not be tested for fall chinook performance prior to conducting this evaluation.

Two years of evaluations for spring migrants have been conducted with the RSW at Lower Granite. These include two years of spring migrant guidance evaluations and one year of limited spring migrant reach survival information. The results for spring migrants have been promising: RSW survival appears at least as high as with BiOp spill, and migrants experienced increased spillway passage using less water and reduced forebay delay. However, we believe it is critical to conduct testing to determine if RSWs are beneficial, and how best to operate them for fall chinook juveniles prior to conducting the critical Snake River fall chinook in-river (summer spill) versus transportation evaluation.

We strongly recommend a simple evaluation of guidance this summer with the hydroacoustic equipment already in place and possibly a short reach survival estimate with PIT tags in future years would give some indication of the RSW performance

Thank you for your consideration of our joint recommendation.

Sincerely,



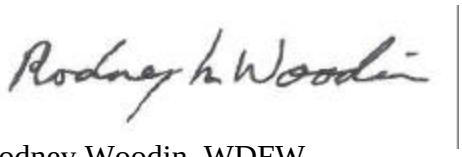
Russ Kiefer, IDFG

Ron Boyce, ODFW

Bob Heinith, CRITFC

Dave Statler, NPT

Keith Kutchins, SBT



Rodney Woodin, WDFW

Dave Wills, USFWS