SYSTEM OPERATIONAL REQUEST: #2003-10

The following Federal Fishery Managers have participated in the preparation and support this SOR: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

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FROM: Susan Martin, Supervisor, Upper Columbia Fish and Wildlife Office

DATE: June 6, 2003

SUBJECT: Libby Dam Releases for Sturgeon and Bull Trout Augmentation

Flows

SPECIFICATIONS:

- * From June 5 through June 26 attempt to maintain a minimum discharge target from Libby Dam of 20,000 cfs.
- * Sturgeon augmentation flows should be followed by a ramp down to the tiered bull trout flow minimum flows / salmon flows per the 2000 Biological Opinions, except as noted below.
- * Avoid forced spill at the Libby Project.
- * Refill the project to near 2459 feet by July 1 or later if needed to avoid forced spill.
- * If on June 26 additional water is available, we recommend splitting that volume equally to extend the then current target sturgeon incubation flow beyond June 26, and to achieve a higher tiered bull trout flow through July, if possibly up to the optimum tiered flow of 9,000 cfs.

- * Should the actual volume available to split, as described above, be exceeded, we recommend that the remainder be used to further extend the duration of sturgeon incubation flow.
- * At some point early in this sturgeon flow request, while low elevation runoff remains relatively high, we recommend up to two days of maximum power house releases to facilitate ongoing U. S. Geological Survey sediment transport studies designed to aid in conservation of the sturgeon. As much advance coordination as possible would be appreciated. The contact person is Dr. Gary Barton at 253-428-3600 ext 2613, e-mail gbarton@usgs.gov

JUSTIFICATION:

As recommended by the December 2000 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) jeopardy Biological Opinion for the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS), the current volume runoff forecast above Libby Dam indicates we are in Tier 2 of sturgeon augmentation volumes (minimum volume 0.8 MAF), and Tier 2 of bull trout augmentation (minimum flow 7,000 cfs) .

The priority for the 2003 sturgeon enhancement flows is for incubation of naturally spawned eggs over gravel substrates upstream of Bonners Ferry. Sturgeon expected to spawn this year are being captured, radio tagged, and transported to the Hemlock Bar area, approximately 10 miles upstream of Bonners Ferry. The Service has determined that sturgeon spawning has begun, effective June 5, and recommends that sturgeon flow augmentation begin now (June 5 for accounting purposes since flows were already being increased at that time). Field biologists found four eggs on June 5, which were adhered to mats in the monitored gravel spawning area, approximately 6 river miles upstream of Bonners Ferry. The eggs had been deposited within the past 24 hours.

While the bull trout tiered flow minimum recommendation would be 7,000 cfs, there are incremental benefits through progressively greater wetted usable area and increased forage production in the Kootenai River below Libby Dam for increased flows up to 9,000 cfs. However, much of this incremental benefit for bull trout may be lost if the selected flow target can not be maintained through July or to the time that releases begin for anadromous fish.

We are aware that the actual runoff volume may vary from that currently projected, and accordingly, the flow and refill targets recommended above are subject to in-season coordination and adjustment.