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January 3, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Fish and Wildlife Committee Members

FROM: Jim Ruff

SUBJECT: Update on status of Snake River fall Chinook transportation evaluation

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to provide the Fish and Wildlife Committee members and staff an update on the current status of the Snake River (SR) fall Chinook transport evaluation for 2008. This study is intended to evaluate one of the Columbia Basin's critical research uncertainties, e.g., whether barged juvenile fall Chinook or those that migrate in-river through eight federal hydropower projects survive better to return later as adults.

Summary

The good news is there was adequate broodstock collection this fall of SR fall Chinook at both Lyons Ferry Hatchery and at the Lower Granite adult trap to meet all production priorities on the *U.S. v OR* production priority list. Thus, the Corps of Engineers-funded SR fall Chinook inriver-transport study should be implemented this summer. At this date it is still undecided where the production priority of juvenile fish necessary for a multi-year transport study will eventually fall on a revised production priority list currently under consideration by the *U.S. v OR* parties.

Background and Discussion

A large number of SR fall Chinook adult fish made their way up the Columbia and Snake rivers this past fall, enough to supply all of the *U.S. v OR* production needs. Through December 9, 2007, the SR fall Chinook count at Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River was 10,197 adults, compared to 8,048 fish last year and a ten-year average of only 7,717 fish. Adult fish that return to Lyons Ferry Hatchery and those that are trapped at Lower Granite Dam are used as broodstock to meet the *U.S. v OR* production needs.

A priority list for the use of hatchery fish has been established among the parties to the ongoing *U.S. v. OR* litigation.¹ The extant priority list includes the rearing of surrogate fish² needed for the transport study as numbers 12 and 14 out of 17 total production needs. The insufficient collection of broodstock in the fall of 2006 allowed for the rearing of only enough fall Chinook to meet nine of the listed priorities.

Ad hoc technical-level work group meetings on this issue were held over the summer and into the fall to work on developing a plan and schedule to move forward with a summer transportation study in 2008 and out years. This technical work group consisted of technical representatives from the Nez Perce Tribe, NOAA Fisheries, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife and the Corps of Engineers (Corps).

The *U.S. v. OR* parties of the technical work group reached a consensus in October 2007 on a collaborative long-term study design and framework to evaluate SR fall Chinook transportation. This is noteworthy because last year the Treaty tribes indicated to the Corps that providing production fish for this study was contingent on the development of a consensus long-term study plan. In late 2007 the study plan was released to the Corps' Studies Review Work Group for review and also presented to *U.S. v. OR* policy representatives.

In an October 19, 2007 letter from the *U.S. v. OR* parties to Brigadier General Gregg Martin of the Corps, it states that "the *U.S. v. OR* parties all endorse the Consensus Research Proposal and the package of tasks and activities it represents." The letter also says the *U.S. v. OR* parties are "poised to re-prioritize fall Chinook hatchery production priorities to ensure ... surrogate rearing and PIT-tagging [to implement this study] starting with the Brood Year 07 releases in 2008."

I have been informed that the *U.S. v. OR* parties will be re-considering changing the production priority list at their meeting later this month, and could possibly even approve and sign a revised priority list at the January meeting. The Corps has requested that the surrogate fish needed for the transport study be given a higher priority so there would be a greater certainty that this research could continue in future years.

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¹ This ongoing litigation, which is overseen by the U.S. District Court of Oregon, is used as a forum to negotiate hatchery production levels and purposes, as well as harvest allocations. Management agreements reached in court dictate how the hatchery production is used. Represented are the states of Idaho, Oregon and Washington, the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Warm Springs and Yakama tribes, NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

² Surrogate fish are hatchery fall Chinook that are reared to a smaller size, similar to that of wild or naturally produced fall Chinook.