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July 15, 2008

## DISCUSSION MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Council members

**FROM:** John Harrison, Information Officer

**SUBJECT:** Columbia River Transboundary cooperation projects with the Columbia Basin Trust

**PROPOSED ACTION:** None at this meeting. Staff requests approval to proceed with each item as discussed below.

**SIGNIFICANCE:** These projects help fulfill a commitment the CBT and Council made in a July 2000 Memorandum of Understanding to work on bi-national projects to inform and educate citizens about Columbia River matters.

**BUDGET/ECONOMIC IMPACTS:** None at this time.

### BACKGROUND:

At the June 2008 meeting, the Council met with directors of the Columbia Basin Trust and directed staff to begin work on five projects:

1. Identify next steps for the International Columbia River Basin Center of Information;
2. Initiate planning for an international Columbia River conference that would address water, energy, fish and wildlife, climate change impacts, in the international Columbia River Basin;
3. Initiate planning for a headwaters-to-estuary bus tour in the summer of 2009 for elected officials of Columbia River Basin communities in the United States and British Columbia;
4. Explore the possibility of the Council and CBT co-sponsoring a fish and wildlife project in the transboundary reaches of the Columbia or its tributaries;
5. Explore combining the CBT's and ISAB's reports on climate-change impacts to the Columbia River Basin and issuing the combined report as a joint publication of the two agencies.

At this meeting, staff of the CBT and Council will provide updates on our work on these issues since the June meeting. Kindy Gosal, Manager of Water and Environment for the CBT, will join us for this report.

## **DISCUSSION**

### 1. International Columbia River Basin Center of Information

In 2006, the CBT and Council proposed the creation of a comprehensive, publicly accessible repository of information about the Columbia River in its international dimensions. The two agencies envisioned the International Columbia River Basin Center of Information as a place to share data and information, and to encourage dialogue and public awareness of the water, power, fish and wildlife, and related aspects of the transboundary Columbia River. During the last two years, staff of the CBT and Council facilitated a broad partnership of organizations to realize this project.

The rationale for developing the Center is that the Columbia has many international dimensions of present and future water management that over time will require an increasing public understanding and awareness on both sides of the border in order to anticipate and address potential issues. Among these are 1) coordinated system operation of the dams and reservoirs on both sides of the border for flood control and hydroelectric power; 2) impacts of flows, dam operations and reservoir elevations on fish, wildlife, recreation, private property, agriculture, cultural sites, and human health; and 3) water-management decisions at multiple levels of government including municipal, Tribal/First Nation, regional, provincial/state, and federal.

Currently there is no specific resource tool that draws together information about the water-management dimensions of the international Columbia River Basin. That is the purpose of the Center of Information, which has been created as a web-based “portal” on the website of the Northwest Environmental Database. Over time, the Center could be the primary source of information to facilitate transboundary dialogue, engagement, education, collaboration, and research on issues that are identified as priorities on both sides of the border.

Staff of the CBT and Council demonstrated the portal site at the June meeting. Since then, staff met to discuss next steps and propose the following:

1. Reconvene the partnership group to view the portal site and define next steps in the development of Center, including identifying the types of information that should be added to the site and potential additional partners to facilitate access to data and information. The group also would discuss options for further developing the Center that could be addressed in a comprehensive work plan. Staff tentatively has scheduled a meeting of the partnership group for Thursday, Sept. 11, in Portland.
2. Based on input from the partnership group, staff would prepare the outline of a work plan for the Center. With approval of the CBT and Council, a consultant would be hired to develop the work plan. The consultant would have experience in website development, data collection and formatting, and also familiarity with Columbia River Basin data sources. The consultant would identify types of information to add to the center, including sources of this information and how it could be accessed, what the information would cost if there is a cost to acquire it, and related matters that might be identified by

the partnership group. The consultant also would develop a work schedule including a budget. Importantly, hiring the consultant will require a financial commitment by the CBT and Council, potentially on the order of \$15,000 to \$20,000.

## 2. International Columbia River Conference

In 1998 and 2002 the Council and the CBT participated in international conferences on Columbia River water, power, and environmental issues. The 1998 conference was in Castlegar; the 2002 conference was in Spokane. In 2006, the Council and CBT participated in a conference in Castlegar organized by the Columbia Kootenay Cultural Alliance that included discussions of climate change impacts and transboundary Columbia River water issues. At the June 2008 meeting, the CBT and Council directed staff to begin planning for the next transboundary Columbia River conference. Staff proposes the following:

### A. Next step:

1. Identify and convene a steering committee to begin working on issues such as themes, format, location, presentations, speakers, budget, potential funding partners, and so on. The first meeting of this committee would be in the fall of this year.

### B. Conference themes (broadly, we see the conference focused on water, energy, ecosystems, and human population growth impacts):

1. Climate change impacts on the Columbia River (energy, fish/wildlife, water)
2. Human population growth impacts (energy, fish/wildlife, water)
3. Invasive species impacts and eradication (terrestrial and aquatic)
4. Implementation tools (how to address these issues in planning)
5. Past and future transboundary management agreements in the Columbia River
6. Past and future evolution of the hydropower system and related issues (hydropower firming wind power, for example)
7. River function and habitat issues
8. Examples from other international transboundary river basins

### C. Conference format:

1. As with past conferences, a series of presentations by scientists and policy-makers would be structured around the major themes. Keynote speakers would be invited to address major themes.
2. Special emphasis would be placed on ensuring youth have a meaningful role at the conference.

## 3. Headwaters-to-estuary bus tour:

The Council and CBT discussed a tour for elected officials of Columbia River communities from the headwaters to Astoria to educate these leaders about upriver and downriver issues such as hydropower, flood control, fish and wildlife impacts of the power system, irrigation, navigation, fisheries, geologic and human history including First Nations in British Columbia and tribes in the United States, and related issues.

Staff suggests the tour take place for seven or eight days in June 2009. A preliminary budget and itinerary are being developed, and also a list of potential partners and participants. Staff will share these details with the CBT and Council as they are developed.

## 4. Jointly sponsored fish and wildlife project:

Because the Council and CBT have different processes for selecting and funding fish and wildlife projects, jointly funding a single transboundary project will require some extensive

evaluation and research. To begin this process, staff proposes to ask project sponsors in the transboundary area on both sides of the border (projects funded through the Council's fish and wildlife program and projects funded by the CBT) to identify needs that are not being addressed. If there is a particular area or specific project or project type that is not being addressed or funded, this could provide an opportunity for the Council and CBT to support a project or an issue, perhaps including some type of financial support.

#### 5. Climate change papers:

Independent Scientific Advisory Board report 2007-2, *Climate Change Impacts on Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife*, and the Council's Fifth Northwest Power Plan (and also the Sixth Plan now in development) address the impacts of global climate change on the Columbia River. The CBT has sponsored several reports on climate change impacts, including *Preliminary Analysis of Climate Variability and Change in the Canadian Columbia River Basin: Focus on Water Resources* (October 2006) and *Climate Change and Water Users in British Columbia* (November 2007). At the June meeting, the CBT and Council discussed merging these reports into a whole-basin report and issuing it as a joint publication. Staff will engage the University of Washington Climate Impacts Group, who were involved in authoring both reports, to put together a proposal and workplan and to create a summary document that highlights information in the existing documents (and work that has happened since). The summary document would show what is happening in terms of climate change for the entire Columbia River Basin. It is anticipated that we would not ask for extensive further research, but instead use the information in the existing documents to create a whole-river snapshot.

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