

Bruce A. Measure
Chair
Montana

Rhonda Whiting
Montana

W. Bill Booth
Idaho

James A. Yost
Idaho



Dick Wallace
Vice-Chair
Washington

Tom Karier
Washington

Bill Bradbury
Oregon

Joan M. Dukes
Oregon

May 26, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: Fish and Wildlife Committee

FROM: Patty O'Toole, John Shurts, Laura Robinson, and Nancy Leonard

SUBJECT: Fish and Wildlife Program Planning - subbasin plans and related matters

Last December the staff provided an overview of Fish and Wildlife Program implementation and future Program planning. The staff reviewed the status of tasks identified in the 2009 Program and briefly discussed the next Program amendment process, likely to occur during 2013 and 2014. It seems unlikely that the next Program amendment process will involve significant Program restructuring or major changes. Instead, the main focus may continue to be on implementation and performance and on whether and how to further shape program monitoring and evaluation efforts.

The staff identified two key Program elements that may be exceptions to this perspective. These are the subbasin plans and biological objectives for the program (above the subbasin plan level). For a number of reasons the Council is going to have to consider whether, when and how to revise or update these Program elements. In December the Council supported the staff investment of time and resources to begin thinking about these issues.

At the June Fish and Wildlife committee meeting staff will walk through some early thinking about one of these elements, the future of the subbasin plans. The development of subbasin plans, and their adoption in the program in 2004 and 2005 was of critical importance to the Fish and Wildlife Program. The primary question we now face is how do we keep them vital and viable and improve their utility in the process. We will explore the issues related to this question, what would be the context today for updating the plans, and what the plans could look like in the future. Attached is an outline of topics we plan to discuss at the June Committee meeting.

The other key program element that may be of significance for the next Program amendment process is the fact that the Fish and Wildlife Program lacks a good set of measurable objectives above the subbasin level against which to measure program process. Program monitoring, evaluation and reporting efforts suffer without a set of objectives against which to measure progress.

Council staff has been working to collect and organize the various objectives currently in our program (including in subbasin plans) and in other pertinent programs around the region. These will be analyzed by staff to determine if there are obvious consistencies, themes or gaps that will help as we move the dialogue on program objectives ahead in the upcoming months. Staff is tentatively scheduled to bring initial findings to the Fish and Wildlife Committee meeting in July.

Discussion topics for June Fish and Wildlife Committee meeting - subbasin planning

Background

- Fifty-nine plans are adopted into the Program
- The plans were prepared at the local level to help direct fish and wildlife projects and project funding and to provide the context for public and scientific review of project proposals and for the Council's project funding recommendations to Bonneville.
- There will come a point when the plans need to be updated or the information in them will be so stale that the plans will not serve their intended function. Related considerations include how to incorporate the important aspects of the further planning work that has occurred since the first adoption of the plans into the Program and how to improve the usability of the plans so they can better serve their intended function.
- Both the technical assessments and, management plans may need updates and there are unique considerations for each.
- Updating the management plans will present opportunities for improvement, including more clearly stated priorities, refined objectives, improved analysis of artificial production, and missing monitoring and evaluation elements.
- At the same time, can the plans be made more useful? This could mean some distinct changes both in the plans and in how we are organized to use them.

Today's context

- The focus of the Council and the region is now on implementation and performance.
- There is the desire to evaluate program progress, and progress in implementation of subbasin plans.
- Subbasin plans have served as the basis for continued planning efforts such as for biological opinions or recovery plans.
- Regional acceptance of information standards and protocols is improving.
- Tools and technology are now utilized that make these plans relatively easy to use, track, report and update.
- Entities that developed these tools and methods are highly committed to using them, and will probably have little interest in spending time and energy on other efforts. It will be important to utilize these other plans and tools as much as possible.
- ISRP comments on subbasin plans and their use.

Future subbasin planning

- The staff and the ISRP are exploring ideas for how to meet the challenges presented.
- Topics to be considered include the form of the next iteration of subbasin plans. They could look different as mentioned above.
- Next iteration of plans may be a set of dynamic, interactive, web based information that utilizes available tools, and are standardized to the extent possible while still based on local input and strong science.
- Makes sense to capture many of the key elements (limiting factors, objectives, strategies, priorities, implementation plans) in a database form to make the information easier to access.
- Mapping tools are available and commonly used.
- There are examples of how other programs are recording and tracking their information. We may be able to utilize these already-available formats.

- Staff is considering what changes may be needed, what the key elements are for updating, and the methods or process for getting there.
- For the last round of planning, most subbasin plans were developed at the same time. Future updates could occur on a rolling basis, where subbasins that are most in need of an update could be updated first.
- Fundamental to this discussion is the process and timing by which updates occur.

Update on multi-year action plans

- Preliminary draft plans consist of database reports with actions, limiting factor information, budget estimates and other information.
- Technical input was received earlier this year from over twenty individuals and entities.
- We also received thoughtful comments about the intent of the Council to use the plans.
- We heard a clear message that in areas where planning has continued and evolved, the entities are committed to using their existing tools (recovery plans and tools).
- We also heard that unless it is clear exactly how action plans are going to be used, there is a limit to how much time and attention entities were willing to give.
- This is an important message that we need to keep in mind as we think about updating subbasin plans. Yet, we also have learned that implementation plans or action plans that clearly link actions back into the limiting factors and objectives identified in the plans are ultimately important for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of subbasin plans and recovery plans.

Next steps

- Staff proposes to continue discussions with the ISRP and ISAB about the value and usability of subbasin plans.
- Staff is preparing a survey to collect information on how the plans are being used, what parts of the plans could be improved upon and how to make the plans more useful, where plans are already being updated and improved upon.
- Continue internal and external discussions about how best to approach an update and when it makes sense to update the plans.
- There is no rush to complete an update immediately but to maintain the viability of this part of the Program but the plans must be refreshed at some point.