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Date: June 30, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: Fish and Wildlife Committee Members

FROM: Patty O'Toole and Jim Ruff

SUBJECT: Discussion on Estuary by Corps of Engineers and Bonneville

At the June Council meeting, the Council approved language in the RM&E decision memo that calls for the development of an estuary-wide synthesis of information that has been collected in the Columbia River Estuary. Specifically, the recommendation reads:

The Council calls for the responsible entities to complete an estuary-wide synthesis prior to the initiation of the review of habitat actions. Discussions are still occurring with the staff of Bonneville, the Corps of Engineers and others as to the precise contours of this synthesis report. But it should be a synthesis that will summarize the research and monitoring that has occurred or is occurring in the estuary, and how that information will be evaluated, and by what methods and on what reporting schedule, and then used to inform management decisions and priorities for restoration. This is necessary if the on-the ground work in the estuary (such as the CREST and CLT projects) is ever to achieve satisfactory scientific reviews and continue with minimal disruption. The synthesis should also assess whether protocols used for the collection of information are standardized or compatible throughout the estuary, and should assess levels of uncertainty and risk in the conclusions drawn. The synthesis report should inform the further development of the research, monitoring and evaluation implementation strategies to accompany the Council's draft Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Reporting (MERR) Plan.

Both the Corps and Bonneville implement various research, monitoring and evaluation activities in the lower Columbia River and estuary and Bonneville implements habitat restoration actions as well. The 2009 Fish and Wildlife Program and the 2008 FCRPS Biological Opinion significantly increased attention on the potential for salmon and steelhead survival gains in the lower Columbia River and the estuary. Project implementation and funding levels have correspondingly increased, both for habitat actions and for monitoring and evaluation elements. But along with the growing attention to the needs in the estuary there is also a need for greater coordination and communication among different activities, including a lack of a sufficiently developed framework for linking actions and effectiveness monitoring and evaluation. At the July Fish and Wildlife Committee meeting, representatives from the Corps of Engineers and Bonneville will describe their progress towards developing the synthesis and their schedule for preparing various components of the synthesis.