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May 31, 2012

MEMORANDUM

TO: Fish and Wildlife Committee Council Members

FROM: Nancy Leonard, Fish, Wildlife and Ecosystem Monitoring and Evaluation Manager
Tony Grover, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Division

SUBJECT: Discussion of the ISAB's comments on the draft MERR program framework

BACKGROUND:

The 2009 Fish and Wildlife Program (Program) focus is on performance, with a continued emphasis on periodic scientific review of new and ongoing actions. The Program also stresses reporting of results and accountability, adaptive management and quantitative objectives. Finally the Program calls for periodic and systematic exchanges of science and policy information and expanding the monitoring and evaluation framework with a commitment to use the information to make better decisions and report frequently on Program progress

In response to this direction, staff prepared a draft monitoring and evaluation framework in March 2010 that also described the syntheses and reports that would support assessing Program progress and adaptive management, including, high level indicators. This draft monitoring, evaluation, research and reporting plan ([draft MERR Plan](#)) was based on Program needs and the ongoing work of many others in the Columbia River Basin. Public comments were requested and received that generally supported the framework of the draft MERR Plan and provided good insight on how to strengthen the next version. The second and third versions of the draft MERR Plan were released in July 2010 and November 2010, along with a description of how 'placeholder' sections would be addressed in a systematic manner based on comments received.

The latest version is entitled Draft Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, Reporting, and Data Access Framework (draft MERR Framework) and differs in format by being a more succinct guidance document. The draft MERR Framework represents a substantial step forward as the Council prepares to amend the Fish and Wildlife Program in 2013. This iteration provides draft policy level guidance to the region. Many of the placeholders from the November 2010 version have been filled in, specifically the guidance related to prioritization and the reporting needs for Program implementation and evaluating progress. The remaining November 2010 placeholders,

pertaining to biological objectives and the Council's research plan, will be addressed later in 2012.

Following the direction in the Program, the current draft MERR Framework emphasizes the need to more strongly develop the evaluation and reporting components of the Program. The draft MERR Framework also stresses the importance to have the appropriate data management and access as this information will inform on Program progress and facilitate its adaptive management. Assessing Program action effects and effectiveness is stressed.

In April 2012, the Council requested the ISAB review the draft MERR Framework to receive suggestions on how to further improve this guidance. The ISAB comments will be posted on the Council's website <http://www.nwcouncil.org/fw/isab/Default.asp>, attached to this memo are the comments excerpted from this review (attachment 1).

The draft MERR Framework is also currently [open for public comments](#). The Draft MERR Framework was posted during March 2012 seeking public comments on its content and format. This public comment period ends September 17, 2012.

SUMMARY of ISAB's REVIEW:

The ISAB finds that the draft 2012 MERR document provides a distinct alternative to previous documents describing RM&E. The overall content of the draft Framework is good. The document does convey the message that the Council is requesting more organized and consistent data collection and monitoring to assist in its decision making.

The new, more concise format for the Framework is a substantial departure from the last draft. Although conciseness is often more efficient and effective, this draft may have become too focused and brief to be effective to address the needs of its intended audiences. The MERR information may need to be presented at several different levels of details given that there appears to be several intended audiences, including the Council, BPA staff, managers, project sponsors, and the public. For the Council the current version may be too detailed so that a two-page executive summary with some diagrams might be sufficient. To provide guidance on monitoring, evaluation, research, reporting and data access, this version falls short in providing clear guidance on why, what, when, and how the items summarized in the report should occur. Not enough detail is provided for data providers and coordinators to implement the reporting and data access strategies. However, a separate holistic document may not be necessary if the details can be described in supporting documents accessible through live web-links. This approach would be consistent with the species specific monitoring strategies developed in the current MERR approach. The linked components would be the working, evolving documents.

The organization of the current draft caused the ISAB some difficulty in conducting a scientific review and this would benefit from reorganization. The ISAB recognizes there are many ways to organize this information and offers suggestions. One suggestion is to follow the organization of the current 2009 Program MERR section, and incorporate revisions to reflect progress and changes from 2009, provide additional clarification on implementation, and incorporate other suggestions from the ISAB.

Several aspects of the draft would benefit from clarification. For example, the risk uncertainty matrix is a useful concept but more development may be necessary to guide its implementation.

Further, in the current draft the use of specific strategies and guiding principles are often not stated directly, and therefore are not clearly understood. As well, the term “appropriate scale” should be defined and its meaning clarified early in the document. Lastly, time frames are missing from the framework. Without some stipulation of when reporting or evaluation should occur, it might be difficult to use this framework. Clarification on what is to be done, by who, by when and for which audience would also be beneficial.

NEXT STEPS:

Staff agrees with the ISAB that attempting to use one succinct document to meet the needs of multiple audiences may be unrealistic. Staff will consider reorganizing the draft MERR Framework to match the organizational flow of the 2009 FW Program MERR section as suggested by ISAB. Staff is interested in moving forward with the ISAB’s suggestion of exploring web-based approach to assist in providing the appropriate amount of context and levels of details for the diverse audiences of the program’s draft MERR Framework.

Staff will work at addressing the ambiguities identified by the ISAB in revising a succinct version for the Council. Staff will work with the Public Affairs Divisions to mock up a web-based approach that would address needs identified by the ISAB, such as:

- An introductory section that provides background on the need and intent of the document would lay a foundation for understanding its purpose introductory material;
- Schematics, to explain the overall process and relationships among the elements of the draft MERR Framework;
- Access to different levels of details to address the different audiences’ need; and,
- Linkages to the draft MERR Framework components including specific monitoring strategies and HLIs report.

Staff will share an initial mock up of this web-based approach with the Fish and Wildlife Committee for their input during the July committee meeting.

Public comments on improving the content of the draft MERR Framework received by the close of the comment period on September 17, 2012 will be incorporated as appropriate within the revised layout per the ISAB suggestions.

Attachment 1:

Excerpt of the “ISAB Review of Draft 2012 MERR and HLI Reports” pertaining to the ISAB’s Comments on the draft MERR and Data Access Framework. Full report available on the Council’s website <http://www.nwcouncil.org/fw/isab/Default.asp>

Excerpt of Executive Summary

The ISAB finds that the draft 2012 MERR document provides a distinct alternative to previous documents describing RM&E. Unfortunately, the organization of the current draft caused the ISAB some difficulty in conducting a scientific review. The ISAB believes the language in the 2009 Fish and Wildlife Program provides a clearer discussion of the Council’s approach to RM&E. For example, the 2009 Program’s RM&E section follows the MERR acronym (Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Reporting) which provides a logical organizational structure. If the purpose is to create a revised RM&E section in an amended Fish and Wildlife Program, then it may be better to start with the 2009 Program language and use it as the basis for revisions. These revisions should reflect progress and changes from 2009, provide additional clarification on implementation, and incorporate suggestions from the ISAB provided below.

ISAB Comments on the draft MERR and Data Access Framework

The March 2012 Draft Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, Reporting, and Data Access Framework is available online at www.nwcouncil.org/fw/merr/Default.asp.

General Comments

The overall content of the draft Framework is good, but several aspects of the draft would benefit from clarification and reorganization. The ISAB recognizes there are many ways to organize this information and offers the following suggestions. The document should begin with introductory material and schematics, such as those used to explain the overall process and relationships among the elements in the previous MERR draft. An introductory section that provides background on the need and intent of the document would lay a foundation for understanding its purpose. The ISAB suggests following the organization in the 2009 Fish and Wildlife Program so that Guiding Principles come before Specific Strategies. This approach would outline the overall rationale for the task-oriented strategies and actions that follow, allowing specific strategies to follow naturally from guiding principles

The new, more concise format for the Framework is a substantial departure from the last draft. Although conciseness is often more efficient and effective, this draft may have become too focused and brief to be effective. Nevertheless, the document does convey the message that the Council is requesting more organized and consistent data collection and monitoring to assist in its decision making.

There appear to be several intended audiences, including the Council, BPA staff, managers, project sponsors, and the public. Therefore, MERR information needs to be presented at

several different levels. For the Council the current version may be too detailed so that a two-page executive summary with some diagrams might be sufficient. To provide guidance on monitoring, evaluation, research, reporting and data access, this version falls short in providing clear guidance on why, what, when, and how the items summarized in the report should occur. Not enough detail is provided for data providers and coordinators to implement the reporting and data access strategies. However, a separate holistic document may not be necessary if the details can be described in supporting documents accessible through live web-links. This approach would be consistent with the species specific monitoring strategies developed in the current MERR approach. The linked components would be the working, evolving documents.

In the current draft the use of specific strategies and guiding principles are often not stated directly, and therefore are not clearly understood. Definition of what is meant by strategies and guiding principles would be helpful. Some of the guiding principles seem to be objectives or intents while others seem to be tasks. Also, because the overall purpose of the document is not included, the connection of the strategies to their intended outcomes is unclear.

Time frames are missing from the framework. Without some stipulation of when reporting or evaluation should occur, it might be difficult to use this framework. Throughout the document, there is mention of the appropriateness of scale, which often refers to spatial scale, but occasionally perhaps to organismal or jurisdictional scale. The term “appropriate scale” should be defined and its meaning clarified early in the document.

Comments on Sections

A. Primary Strategies

The material in this section is not clearly presented. The section should be revised to state the strategies directly and to minimize excess words that detract from the important points (e.g., appropriate, efficient, and critical). As written, it is not clear what the primary strategies are. Based on this section strategies could be stated as:

- first focus on habitat as a primary driving factor
- then focus on artificial production and its interaction with habitat
- provide timely evaluation and reporting of information to support adaptive management
- focus on the scales that are most appropriate for answering critical questions

B. Evaluation, Reporting and Data Access

The organization of this section is confusing. The introductory paragraph seems to fit better in Section A. In each section, the guiding principles should precede the specific strategies. The principles should be stated more directly as statements of fact or common understanding of what makes an evaluation effective.

This section does not provide effective guidance because it lacks clarity. The evaluation section is weak because it does not explain what is to be evaluated, when it should be evaluated, and how it should be done. If evaluation is to be done for all monitoring and research, this section seems misplaced as it would be clearer to define what needs to be evaluated after explaining other activities. The section stipulates that monitoring and research should outline details for evaluation, but gives very little guidance on carrying out evaluations, who will receive the results of the evaluations, and what will be done with the results.

Hedge words like “when feasible” and “as feasible” should be dropped in favor of clear statements of what is needed to do this well. All work done carries these caveats.

There are several issues affecting the clarity of this section. The strategy and principles seem to be confused in the Reporting Subsection. The principles include four types of reports that do not follow from or reflect the principles, but rather seem to be part of the strategy or tactics needed to implement the broader strategy. Also, the notions of synthesis and scale are unclear. Synthesis implies the development of something new while scale is a complex notion with many implications. More care is needed in developing these terms as part of the principles and specific strategies. The principles and strategies should be clearly linked, perhaps by asking questions such as, why we need to do this and what are we going to do?

Under Reporting Principles, the four types of reports also include some more specific types of reports that are shown in italics, and at times with a key word in parentheses. The structure seems inconsistent among the four types, and it is not clear whether these are examples or the only types of reports expected. Perhaps a simpler outline structure or schematic with some direct statements describing each type of report, how they link together, who prepares them, and when they are to be prepared would help.

Under Data Access, the guiding principles and strategies again seem to be confused. A key principle would seem to be: a consistent format and methodology facilitates data sharing and synthesis. The strategy would outline the steps in getting there. This section also suffers from long descriptions of points that could be described more succinctly. People trained in data management should be able to find and use the appropriate protocols.

C. Monitoring and Research

The same organizational issues cited above are relevant for this section, including confusion between guiding principles and strategies. Also, to be consistent with the MERR name (Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Reporting) one would expect monitoring to appear before evaluation and reporting.

The risk uncertainty matrix is a useful concept for prioritizing research and monitoring, but more development may be necessary to guide going from the concept to implementation. Conceptually the risk/uncertainty framework itself introduces uncertainty as the methodology requires professional judgment to place proposed work in a particular quadrant, which will be difficult when data are lacking or when a new issue arises, such as the appearance of a new invasive species whose threat level is unknown.

Some sections are too wordy. Guidance would be more effective if it was given as succinctly as possible. Some points are common among several sections and could be described only once. An example would be the statement that sometimes the work is done by the team of biologists responsible, whereas other times a third party is hired. Some points need headings for emphasis. For example, identifying control or reference sites is critical for monitoring and should be highlighted.

The sentence in Research *i) Specific strategy*: “The Program prioritizes research of topics or the development of innovative tools where, within a reasonable amount of time and at a reasonable cost, results will likely better inform decisions.” should be clarified. Is the point that the Program places a high priority on cost-effective research that will develop information or tools that result in better decisions about fish and wildlife management? If so, the first paragraph under *ii) Guiding principles* seems to state nearly the same point and thus is redundant.

D. Overarching Guidance

It is not clear why this section is called guidance because it seems to be introductory material concerning implementation of the MERR plan. This section of the document could be placed in the introduction to provide a detailed implementation plan with specifics on data types to be provided and time schedules for providing data.

Discussion of the ISAB's comments on the draft MERR program framework



Independent Scientific Advisory Board
for the Northwest Power and Conservation Council,
Columbia River Basin Indian Tribes,
and National Marine Fisheries Service
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Review of Draft 2012 MERR and HLI Reports

Review of two documents for the Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program:
(1) March 2012 draft Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, Reporting, and Data Access Framework, and (2) the draft web-based High Level Indicators Report

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Robert Naiman
Bruce Rieman
Greg Ruggerone
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Dennis Scarnecchia
Chris Wood

ISAB 2012-4
May 30, 2012

Staff Proposed Draft Framework March 2012

DRAFT BASINWIDE MONITORING, RESEARCH, EVALUATION, REPORTING AND DATA ACCESS FRAMEWORK

A. Primary Strategies¹

- 1) This Program is primarily habitat-based, depending on actions in the basin intended to protect or improve habitat characteristics as the means to achieve Program goals. The Program also relies on artificial production as a key tool. It is therefore critical that the effectiveness of habitat actions for improving habitat and population characteristics, as well as the effects and effectiveness of artificial production, are evaluated at the appropriate and efficient scale.
- 2) The Program has not focused as much on evaluation and reporting, especially at the sub-regional and regional scale. However, it is critical for the Program's progress to learn from the implementation of evaluation and reporting by incorporating this information into an adaptive management process. Thus, it is critical that data collected through the Program be evaluated and reported in a timely manner to inform decisions, Program amendments and implementation, assessing and communicating on Program priorities, reporting needs and overall progress.

B. Evaluation, Reporting and Data Access

Evaluation and reporting on data collected at a broad scale synthesis, such as basin-wide or Program-level, has not been a strong Program focus in past years. Strengthening this focus will increase the data's usefulness to the Program. It is equally important to ensure that this valuable data resource receives the attention needed for its proper management to ensure its integrity and to maximize its impact by facilitating sharing. More detailed guidance for properly managing data, and for effectively contributing to Program progress assessments and implementation improvements is provided below.

1) Evaluation

- i. *Specific Strategy*
All monitoring and research conducted through the Program must clearly outline the details for evaluating these data at the appropriate scale. This information must be included in the project proposals and/or identify relevant documents that contain this information, such as umbrella programs and regional strategies. To ensure the evaluation contributes to a Program priority and adequately informs on Program progress, those gathering and analyzing these data must clearly state in the relevant proposals and other documents how these findings will be made available in an efficient and timely manner to effectively inform the Council needs, including reporting needs and adaptive management process that are described under the Reporting Section (B.2).

ii. *Guiding Principles*

¹Based on draft MERR Plan (version November 2011), Council RME-AP Review Category Decision memo, and 2009 Program;

Nancy Leonard

Fish, Wildlife and Ecosystem Monitoring and Evaluation Manager

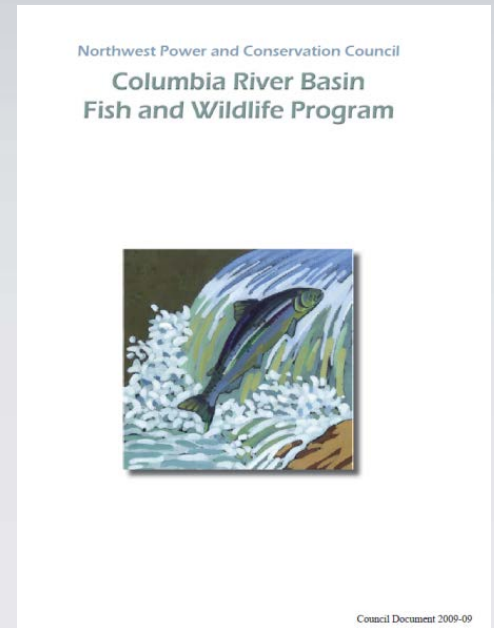
Tony Grover

Director of the Fish and Wildlife Division



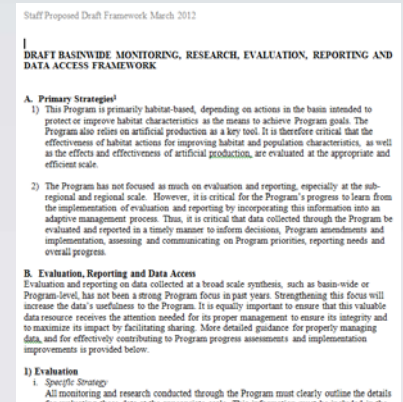
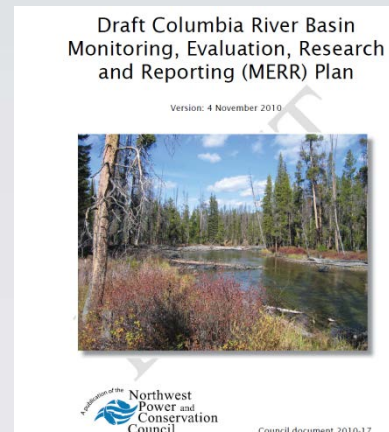
Background

- 2009 FW Program calls for
 - Expanding the monitoring and evaluation framework
 - A commitment to use the information to make better decisions and report frequently on Program progress



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- 2009 FW Program calls for
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- In response staff produced
 - Draft MERR Plan, 60-pages (March, July , Nov 2010 versions)
 - Draft MERR Framework, 11-pages (March 2012 version)



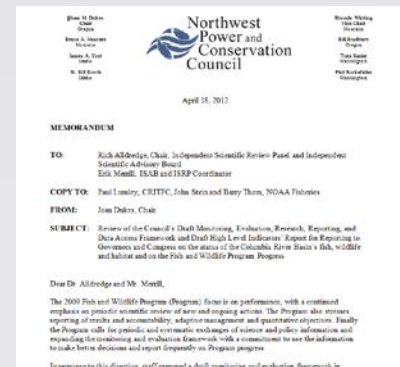
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- In response staff produced
 - Draft MERR Plan, 60-pages (March, July , Nov 2010 versions)
 - Draft MERR Framework, 11-pages (March 2012 version)
- **Draft MERR Framework**
 - **Posted March 2012 for public comments, ending Sept. 17, 2012**
 - **Submitted for ISAB review during April 2012**

Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Reporting (MERR)

March 2012 update:

- [Background information](#) for latest [Draft Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, Reporting and Data Access Framework](#) (draft Framework). Send comments to [Nancy Leonard](#) by **Sept. 17, 2012**.



ISAB Comments on Draft MERR Framework



Review of Draft 2012 MERR and HLI Reports

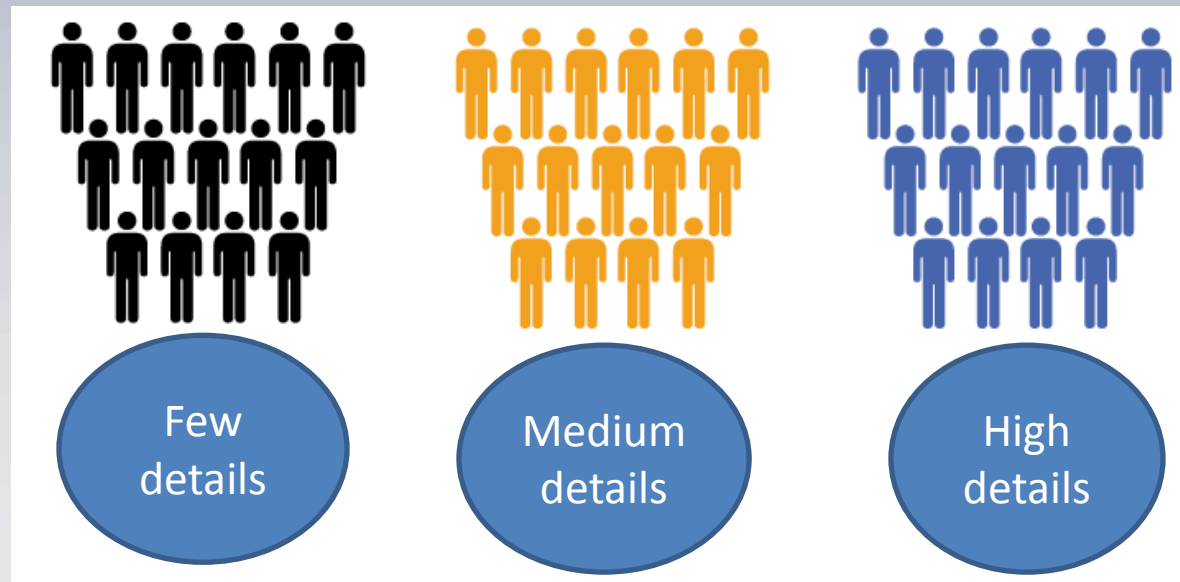
Review of two documents for the Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program:
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- Distinct alternative to previous documents
- Overall content is good.
- Conveys message for organized, consistent data collection and monitoring.
- The new, more concise format is too focused and brief
 - Several different levels of details needed
 - Perhaps provide details through web-links.
- Current draft would benefit from reorganization, e.g. 2009 Program
- Several aspects of the draft would benefit from clarification.
 - risk uncertainty matrix, strategies, guiding principles,
 - what is to be done, by who, by when and for which audience

Staff Suggestions

- Staff agrees with ISAB that 1 succinct document for multiple audiences may be unrealistic.



Staff Suggestions

- Staff agrees with ISAB that 1 succinct document for multiple audiences may be unrealistic.
- Staff suggests
 - Reorganizing to match 2009 program's organizational structure
 - Addressing ambiguities
 - Explore a web-based approach to provide details, context, and schema of elements (e.g., HLIs, monitoring strategies)
 - Incorporating Sept 17, 2012 public comments in new structure



Draft Timeline of Next Steps

If committee supports staff suggestions for MERR Framework, then suggested timeline for staff updates to FW Committee:

July

- Draft sketch or the web approach and timeline for completion

Aug.

- Update on public comments on the HLIs component

Sept.

- Update on Program biological objectives component

Oct.

- Update on public comments on MERR Framework

Nov.

- Update on Council's Research Plan component