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TMGUnited States Department of the Interior **RECEIVED**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Columbia River Fisheries Program Office  
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Vancouver, Washington 9866534633  
NOV 13 2001**CBFWA**

November 13, 2001

Resident Fish Committee  
Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority  
2501 S.W. 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97213

Dear Resident Fish Committee Members:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has reviewed the ongoing and new projects submitted to the Blue Mountain and Mountain Snake provincial review for Fiscal Year 2002 funding and we offer our comments to assist the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority (Resident Fish Committee) in developing its funding recommendations. There is very little information available on the abundance and distribution of bull trout populations in the Columbia River basin, their life history requirements, and their habitat needs such as the use of migratory corridors. This information is critical to all efforts to conserve this important species. The Service included reasonable and prudent measures and terms and conditions for bull trout in its Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) Biological Opinion to address this need. Because very little basic information is available to determine the effects of FCRPS operations on listed bull trout, a major focus of the FCRPS biological opinion is on developing an understanding of the use of the mainstem and tributary streams by tributary populations of bull trout. This will require increased monitoring and evaluation in the mainstem areas as well as developing an understanding of bull trout abundance, life history and migration behavior in key tributary streams where bull trout occur. Also, this work will help in delineating core areas and understanding core area population structure to aid in recovery assessments. This information also will increase our ability to accurately assess trends in population abundance, distribution, and response to recovery actions.

The Service is working closely with the Bonneville Power Administration (Bonneville), the Bureau of Reclamation, the Corps of Engineers and the National Marine Fisheries Service in developing the 1 and 5-year Implementation Plans for the biological opinions for the FCRPS. The 2002 Plan will summarize the specific actions that will be taken to comprehensively meet the biological requirements of the listed fish but has not been completed. The Service is also working with Recovery Unit Teams in the Columbia River basin to develop a draft Recovery Plan for the Columbia River population of bull trout. Each recovery unit chapter will identify objectives, recovery criteria, and recovery actions specific to each recovery unit. The draft should be available for review soon but not in time to influence your deliberations on the Columbia Plateau, Blue Mountain, and Mountain Snake provinces.

Bull trout information in tributary streams is limited in the Blue Mountain and Mountain Snake regions and much of what we know has been collected incidental to salmon and steelhead work through a number of on-going projects funded by Bonneville. We recommend that the CBFWA continue to support this ongoing work and support new work in the tributaries to collect this information. In addition to helping to determine the effects of the FCRPS on listed bull trout, baseline information on bull trout will also be useful for guiding off-site mitigation actions for salmon and steelhead to ensure that bull trout needs are addressed, and in refining recovery plans and actions for bull trout in the Blue Mountain and Mountain Snake. The following are our specific comments on new and ongoing project proposals in the Blue Mountain and Mountain Snake provinces that the Service feels address bull trout needs under recovery planning and FCRPS Biological Opinion:

### **Blue Mountain New Project Proposals**

#### **27017. Bull trout population assessment and life history characteristics in association with habitat quality and land use: template for recovery planning.**

During your recent deliberations regarding the Blue Mountain provincial review, the CBFWA review group identified that project 27017 (*Bull trout population assessment and life history characteristics in association with habitat quality and land use: template for recovery planning*): 'could prove useful to managers in other subbasins where bull trout populations are regarded as weak, the work is not needed in the Imnaha Subbasin.' The reviewers may not understand that the project was designed to develop techniques to assess recovery planning and provide information for implementing the biological opinion. The Imnaha River basin provides a situation where the number of fish available for marking, the river logistics, and the other projects taking place in the basin for bull trout indicate this is an area with a high potential for success. We have subsequently discussed this project with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) area managers (Brad Smith and Jeff Zakel), and they agree we can overcome their logistical concerns and that it is important to develop robust tools for estimating population status (which can be applied across the bull trout Distinct Population Segment). Also, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service views this as an extremely important project for assisting in determining bull trout population status and habitat condition. The Service feels we need to systematically collect critical tributary information on bull trout to help in assessing the effects of Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) operations.

This project would assess bull trout population density, abundance and life history characteristics for core areas of the Imnaha Subbasin and evaluate relationships to habitat quality and land use based on field evaluations and mark/recapture techniques. The project would also provide the technical information to develop a template for bull trout recovery planning. This work will be needed to evaluate population response to recovery measures within and outside of the tributaries. This project will help implement reasonable and prudent measure 10.A.3.1 and terms and conditions 11.1, 11.2, and 11.A.2.2.b in the FCRPS biological opinion. The Independent Scientific Review Panel (ISRP) preliminary rating identified the project as Fundable after adequate response. The Service recommends that CBFWA and the Northwest Power Planning Council (Council) support funding of project 27017.

## **Blue Mountain Ongoing Project Proposals**

### **199405400. Characterize the Migratory Patterns, Population Structure, Food Habits, Abundance of Bull Trout from Subbasins in the Blue Mountain Province.**

This project would be complimentary to the above project and provide additional needed information in the Grande Ronde. The objectives will characterize the fine-scale population structuring of bull trout within the Grande Ronde River subbasin; investigate the seasonal movements of fluvial bull trout of the Lostine and Imnaha rivers and Catherine Creek; describe the diet of fluvial bull trout in streams with relatively few anadromous salmonids present; and employ EMAP protocols to monitor and evaluate the status and trends in bull trout populations. This project will help implement reasonable and prudent measure 10.A.3.1 and terms and conditions 11.1, 11.2 and 11.A.2.2.b in the FCRPS biological opinion. The Independent Scientific Review Panel (ISRP) preliminary rating identified the project as Fundable after adequate response. The Service recommends that CBFWA and the Council support funding this project, particularly the EMAP protocols for monitoring and evaluation and seasonal movement components.

The Service believes the above projects are complimentary and will assist in assessing bull trout recovery and implementation of the Biological Opinion.

## **Mountain Snake New Project Proposals**

### **28002 Fluvial Bull Trout Migration and Life History Investigations in the upper Salmon River Subbasin.**

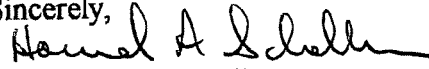
This project addresses data gaps in bull trout distribution and life history in the upper Salmon River Subbasin. This information is needed for the development of recovery actions for the Salmon River Bull Trout Recovery Unit. The geographical scope of this project appears too large for the proposed approach, and the 50 fish radio tagging sample seems too small for the size of the subbasin. A more systematic approach would lend itself well to project success. The project could be strengthened by concentrating on one major drainage at a time. Each of the 3 drainages (Yankee Fork, Mainstem, and East Fork) should receive about 50 tagged fish and 2-3 years sampling effort. It appears the proponents need to include more specific information on telemetry equipment to be used, and details such as transmitter life, size, frequencies and costs. The Service feels if the proposal can meet the above concerns and those raised by the ISRP, there are elements of the project that warrant funding.

### **28022 Evaluate Bull Trout Life History In Dworshak Reservoir, North Fork Clearwater River Drainage, ID.**

This project is directly tied to hydrosystem impacts and Terms and Conditions set forth in the FCRPS BiOp. The addition of a fixed telemetry site in Dworshak Tailrace substantially strengthened the project as a whole, in addition to the success of meeting Objective 4. This project will help implement reasonable and prudent measure 10.A.3.2 and terms and conditions 11.1 and 11.2 in the FCRPS biological opinion. The Service recommends that CBFWA and the Council support funding of the project.

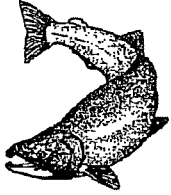
The Service will continue to work closely with CBFWA and the Council through the provincial review and subbasin planning processes to ensure that bull trout needs under the Endangered Species Act are addressed.

Sincerely,



/s/ Howard A Schaller

Howard Schaller  
Project Leader



U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Form 3-265 crfp  
Rev 7/97

FAXFORM

TRANSMITTAL COVER SHEET

TO: Neil Ward  
CBFWA

DATE: 11/13/01 TIME: 3:11 pm

Deliver on regular mail run.

Call to have picked up.

FROM:

Howard Schaller

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SUBJECT: Ltr. to Resident Fish Committee Members

Number of pages, including Transmittal Sheet: 5

COMMENTS:

