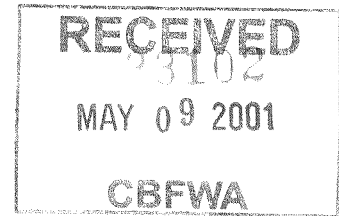


**NMFS GUIDANCE
REGARDING THE BPA/NW COUNCIL
COLUMBIA PLATEAU SOLICITATION
April 6, 2001**



Offsite Mitigation Habitat Projects

The provincial review process reflects the growing consensus on the importance of restoring ecological function to the rivers and streams of the Columbia Basin. The reviews build on a credible scientific foundation found in the Council's Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Program, the considerable expertise in the fish and wildlife agencies and tribes, and the scientific rigor of the ISRP review. The process plays an important role in salmon recovery that the FCRPS 2000 Biological Opinion is not intended to duplicate.

The habitat section of the Biological Opinion outlines an approach to habitat problems from an ESA perspective. The opinion seeks to build on and support the Council's fish and wildlife program in two primary ways:

- First, by emphasizing the need for ecological context in habitat initiatives. For the most part, the opinion expects this context to be produced by scientifically sound subbasin and watershed assessments and plans and related recovery plans. For that reason, the opinion calls on BPA to support the continued development and implementation of the Council's subbasin planning process. NMFS views this work as fundamental to the development and success of a long-term habitat program.
- Pending these assessments and plans, the opinion calls for specific initiatives to produce biological benefits in the short term (water solutions in priority subbasins), protect currently productive habitat (BPA habitat protection fund), test innovative mechanisms for habitat protection (water marketing demonstration project and leveraging for agricultural incentive programs), clear up important uncertainties (mainstem habitat program), and reestablish ecological function in the estuary.

Tributary habitat efforts in the biological opinion have the following objectives: a) increase tributary water flow to improve fish spawning, rearing and migration; b) comply with water quality standards, first in spawning and rearing areas, then in migratory corridors; c) address in-stream obstructions and diversion that interfere with listed species, and d) protect and manage both riparian and upland habitat consistent with the needs of the species. NMFS designed the biological opinion to rely to a significant degree on the fish and wildlife program, and believes the provincial reviews could help coordinate efforts between the two initiatives. NMFS offers the following guidance in that vein.

The Reasonable and Prudent Alternative (RPA) in the biological opinion includes a series of actions to address tributary habitat issues, beyond prescribing sub-basin assessment and planning. In particular, items 149-153 would apply in the plateau, as follows—

- Action 149: The provincial review could identify actions that would lead to a three-year plan for funding projects in the John Day system that complement the evolving BOR program to improve stream flows and address passage and screening problems. The BOR program is

expected ultimately to be at work in sixteen subbasins where density of water diversions, proximity of federal lands and presence of key watersheds make water diversion solutions a high priority. In its first year, the BOR program is targeted in the John Day, Methow and Lemhi subbasins.

- Action 150: The provincial review could identify opportunities to protect currently productive non-federal habitat at risk of degradation according to the criteria contained in the NMFS crediting paper (or joint NMFS/BPA criteria) as appropriate.
- Action 151: The provincial review could look for projects that could use transactional approaches to increase stream flows in the John Day system and elsewhere in the Columbia Plateau.
- Action 152: The provincial review could prioritize projects ready for implementation based on local agreements that can jointly satisfy CWA and ESA requirements as defined under this RPA item.
- Action 153: The provincial review could look for opportunities to leverage agricultural incentive programs to protect streamside habitat in the plateau.

NMFS does not urge that the provincial review necessarily limit itself to actions that implement the biological opinion. Outside the biological opinion, there may be other potentially productive habitat measures. In selecting such projects, NMFS echoes much of the advice emerging from the ISRP and the Council program's scientific foundation. That is, NMFS suggests that priority be given to proposals that:

- are based on at least a watershed assessment, and that identify and provide rationale for measurable benefits to specific salmonid life stages in a spatially explicit manner;
- protect and restore land and water habitat in ways that permanently address underlying ecosystem processes, reconnect isolated habitats or improve connections between habitats; and
- include, as appropriate, monitoring and evaluation consistent with the principles outlined in section 9.6.5.3 of the biological opinion and Research, Monitoring and Evaluation RPA Actions 183 and 184.

Off-Site Mitigation Harvest and Hatchery Projects

The Hatchery component of the biological opinion has three primary areas of focus: reform of existing hatcheries with the goal of minimizing potential adverse effects of such hatcheries on wild fish; use of safety net hatchery operations to augment populations of the most at-risk wild fish; and development of monitoring and evaluation programs that will enable NMFS and others to reduce critical uncertainties

about the performance of hatchery fish in the wild, and the extent of their effects on the productivity of wild stocks.

With these strategies in mind, NMFS encourages that the proposals for funding artificial propagation activities be configured consistent with the actions called for by the RPA. All proposals relating to existing hatchery programs should identify how they contribute to off-site mitigation as defined in the biological opinion, e.g., by accelerating the pace of reforms, increasing the margin of safety of artificial production proposals, or reducing fishery impacts on listed fish. Proposals must complement, not displace actions required elsewhere of hatchery owner/operators or fishery managers

1. Hatchery Genetic and Management Plans (HGMPs) - Action 169. Using the general menu of reform measures summarized in the FCRPS Opinion (beginning on page 9-154), the provincial review is expected to:

- identify specific hatchery reforms at existing facilities in the province that would reduce the deleterious effects of hatchery fish on listed fish in the Province;
- identify whether and how new artificial production projects might be used to aid in the recovery of listed fish;
- collect and analyze biological information, e.g., genetic samples, for delineating population structure to inform the development of HGMPs (identifying the population structure in a subbasin is a critical step in devising recovery strategies that may include intervention with artificial propagation)

Studies or project proposals should be designed to culminate in NMFS-approved Hatchery and Genetic Management Plans (HGMPs).

2. Implementation of reforms in approved HGMPs - Actions 170-173

- Projects designed actually to implement reforms identified in approved HGMPs, i.e., reforms already identified in other processes (e.g., section 7 hatchery consultations) that could be accelerated or expanded to increase their effectiveness at protecting listed fish.

3. R, M&E -

- Studies to help determine the reproductive success of hatchery fish relative to wild fish (Action 182)
- Studies to determine the temporal and spatial distribution of hatchery fish spawning in the wild (Action 174-4)
- Studies to assess effects on steelhead from hatchery spring chinook salmon reintroduction in the Walla Walla River basin, including interactions and distributions in mainstem and tributaries such as Mill Creek.
- Detailed study and analysis of out-of-basin hatchery steelhead straying into the Deschutes River, including tributaries such as Trout and Buck Hollow Creeks, and options for addressing the problem through reform of existing programs.

4. Hatchery Effectiveness Monitoring

- Projects designed to study, monitor, and/or evaluate the effectiveness of hatchery reforms and better inform future reforms. Initial efforts should focus on assessing ecological and genetic effects of hatchery production in local basins (see page 9-171 of biological opinion for a menu of actions). Ultimately, this information will be used to help improve and guide future hatchery reform measures. (Action 184)

5. Selective fishing/fisheries

- Proposals to evaluate the feasibility of utilizing, or improving selective fishing methods or gears, or creating opportunities to apply such methods or opportunities

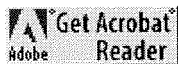


Innovative Columbia Basin Recovery Strategy

NMFS Hydro Program

- [Final 2000 FCRPS Biological Opinion](#)
 - [Cover Letter](#)
 - [Addendum to Cover Letter](#)
 - [Response to comments document](#)
 - [Errata \(Updated 4/11/01\)](#)
 - [NMFS Guidance Regarding the BPA/NW Council Columbia Plateau Solicitation](#)

- [Draft 2000 FCRPS Biological Opinion](#)
 - [Comments on 2000 Draft FCRPS BiOp](#)
 - *Available in PDF format. You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to view this document.



Federal Caucus

- [Conservation of Columbia Basin Fish: A Basinwide Salmon Recovery Strategy \(BPA Web Page\)](#)
- [Draft: "A Basin-wide Salmon Recovery Strategy" \(BPA Web Page\)](#)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- [Final 2000 Resident Fish Biological Opinion \(USFWS Web Page\)](#)
- [Draft 2000 Resident Fish Biological Opinion \(USFWS Web Page\)](#)

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