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STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

March 21, 2008

Mr. Bill Booth, Chair  
Northwest Power and Conservation Council  
851 S.W. Sixth Avenue, Suite 1100  
Portland, OR 97204-1348

Dear Mr. Booth;

As co-chairs of the Washington Forum on Monitoring (Forum), we are pleased to provide these recommendations to amend the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's (Council) *Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program* (Program).

The Forum was created by the Washington State Legislature to coordinate technical and policy issues and actions related to monitoring Washington's salmon recovery and watershed health, consistent with the Comprehensive Monitoring Strategy and Action Plan. The Forum is comprised of representatives from state agencies, as well as invited federal, tribal, and local government representatives. Although representatives from the Council and U.S. Forest Service participate on the Forum, they abstained from contributing to these recommendations. In addition, whereas these recommendations represent the collective perspective of non-abstaining Forum members, they do not preclude individual agencies submitting recommendations separately. For example, although the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife contributed to this letter, they also plan to submit recommendations separately.

In the context of the full range of topic areas for which the Council is seeking recommendations, given the scope of our charge, these pertain primarily to issues of monitoring and evaluation, and data management, habitat, and anadromous fish to a lesser extent. These recommendations stem from our statutory mandate to implement the priorities outlined in the state's Comprehensive Monitoring Strategy and Action Plan<sup>1</sup>.

Monitoring and evaluation are critical to tracking the performance of the Council's Program, and are also fundamental to other major activities in the Columbia River basin, including implementation of regional salmon recovery plans that are themselves built on a foundation of the Program's sub-basin planning efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.rco.wa.gov/monitoring/docs.htm#strategy](http://www.rco.wa.gov/monitoring/docs.htm#strategy)



## **General recommendations**

The overarching rationale for any monitoring and evaluation program should be a clear and deliberate adaptive management context and institutional approach. The justification for monitoring and subsequent evaluation is that it directly supports decision-making in an adaptive management context. We recommend that the profile of your adaptive management structures be raised, and that results from monitoring and evaluation efforts be synthesized and reviewed on a systematic schedule (e.g., 5 or 10-year checkpoints).

We recommend that the Program's adaptive management approach clearly identify the highest priority monitoring and evaluation questions you need to address, and that you formally adopt a process to produce a high-level (annual or biennial) Columbia Basin report of progress on those questions that is coordinated with and complementary to other existing high-level reporting efforts (i.e., Washington's State of Salmon in Watersheds reports, Oregon's "Oregon Plan" reports, Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund annual reports to Congress).

We recommend that the Program's highest monitoring and evaluation priorities should be aligned with the above reporting requirements, and that existing and new funding be directed to sustain and address gaps for the highest priorities. We also recommend guarding against the perception that it will be possible to do monitoring and evaluation everywhere, all the time. We understand the prospect of funding limitations for monitoring and evaluation, and expect the need for increased capacity will require compromise and innovative approaches to address multiple needs across the various scales of interest (sub-basin, province, population, basin-wide).

We suggest that the highest priorities for monitoring and evaluation are to implement provisions consistent with the Northwest Power Act, the Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion, and Endangered Species Act recovery plans.

Management of existing and new information from monitoring is critical. Toward that end we recommend that the Program require data sharing agreements and commitments that are responsive to required reporting needs and timelines.

Much progress has been made in recent years on monitoring and evaluation frameworks, strategies and coordination mechanisms. We strongly recommend that the Program capitalize on that progress and take full advantage of existing mechanisms (e.g., efforts state agencies, co-managers, coordination venues like the Forum, Pacific Northwest Aquatic Monitoring Partnership, Northwest Environmental Data Network, October 2007 Executive Summit). While drawing upon the successes of these mechanisms, a need exists for a monitoring and evaluation focal point for the Columbia River Basin to facilitate and coordinate the coordinators and implementers of monitoring and evaluation activities. The Council could well serve that function.

## **Recommendations related to the Council's draft Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and Science Exchange documents**

Your request for recommendations specifically asked how the Program's deficiencies could be addressed in the context of the Council's November 2007 discussion draft monitoring and

evaluation framework (Framework), and for recommendations responding to the results of the Council's science-policy exchange questions. The following points respond to those requests.

There appears to be generally good alignment among the components (implementation, status/trend, and effectiveness monitoring, information management) and approaches between the draft Framework and Washington's Comprehensive Monitoring Strategy.

The Forum strongly recommends adoption of a more "top-down" strategic framework and action plan for the Program than has been applied in the past, as an improved context for coordination and prioritization of monitoring and evaluation actions and expenditures.

Addressing a key information gap consistent with Washington's efforts, we recommend incorporation of an integrated status/trend monitoring component for fish and habitat using an overarching basin-wide design approach. In 2006, the Forum developed a pragmatic, integrated status and trend approach that includes select population-scale fish-in (adults) and related fish-out (juvenile outmigrant) components in conjunction with a hierarchy of habitat components (involving field and remote sensing methods)<sup>2</sup>.

In addition, also consistent with Washington's Comprehensive Monitoring Strategy the Forum recommends that the Program formally partner with the Pacific Northwest's Intensively Monitored Watershed (IMW) network. Intensively Monitored Watersheds are designed to address questions about the responses of fish (e.g., smolt response) to habitat actions. We recommend that the Council draw upon and build from and upon the IMW progress made by the Pacific Northwest Aquatic Monitoring Partnership involving not only Washington, but Oregon, Idaho, and Northern California. The collaborative distribution of ongoing effort on IMWs should reduce the need for expansion of the IMW network. Finally, the Forum recommends that Program IMW efforts meet the expectation for effective coordination among IMW activities, stress the need for clear IMW designs and timelines, and require individual and summary analyses and report products.

The Forum recommends that the Program require implementation monitoring for all individual projects, but that programmatic approaches to project effectiveness monitoring be established to more efficiently and effectively obtain answers needed by the Council about how different *types* of projects perform. The Forum's experience through the efforts of the Salmon Recovery Funding Board is that monitoring effectiveness of projects in terms of biological and physical responses for each and every project is not cost effective, if the need is to address general effectiveness questions about Program performance. We recommend the Council review and consider partnering with the ongoing habitat project effectiveness monitoring programs in Washington and Oregon that evaluate select categories of habitat projects, and bolster that work to address gaps of greatest interest to the Council.

As we mentioned earlier in this letter, the Forum strongly supports development and required use of complementary and compatible monitoring and data sharing standards and protocols. Indicator and related protocol compatibility is essential to be able to combine and 'roll-up' information from multiple sources for analysis at Evolutionarily Significant Unit/Distinct

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<sup>2</sup> [www.rco.wa.gov/Documents/Monitoring/Framework\\_Document.pdf](http://www.rco.wa.gov/Documents/Monitoring/Framework_Document.pdf)

Population Segment scales, and to enable synthesis for higher-level reporting needs. As a practical matter, contracts related to monitoring, evaluation and data management could be conditioned to require use of accepted standards and protocols.

Implementation of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Council's Program will demand a strong institutional structure. The Forum appreciates and supports the Council's facilitation and leadership role in developing and fostering implementation of a monitoring and evaluation framework strategy and action plan for the Program.

In summary, the Council's draft monitoring and evaluation framework and guidance are reasonable and largely consistent with similar elements of Washington's Comprehensive Monitoring Strategy and the implementation activities of the Forum. In our experience however, the level of effort that can be afforded with available resources will likely be inadequate to meet expectations. For example, the ability to address all populations and sub-basins to the same level of intensity and information detail will typically be limited (e.g., regarding key habitat attributes, habitat quality, artificial production and supplementation, population responses, effectiveness of all projects/actions). In that context, we offer the following observations:

- The ability to develop and implement a logical sequence of actionable project priorities will be hampered until a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy or framework for the Program is in hand;
- A mechanism or clear criteria to prioritize or sequence monitoring and evaluation actions to implement the strategy will be needed;
- Fostering collaborative approaches to solve commonly shared monitoring and evaluation of problems is difficult and time consuming but has the best chance producing durable, desired outcomes; and
- Managing multiple expectations with limited resources available for monitoring and evaluation will remain an ongoing challenge.

On behalf of the Forum, thank you for the opportunity to submit these recommendations. The experience of the Forum has been enhanced by the participation of the Council and staff in our work to date. We look forward to continuing positive relationship in the future.

Sincerely,



William Ruckelshaus  
Forum Co-Chair



Jeff Koenings, PhD  
Forum Co-Chair

cc: Forum members