



---

**Grant Soil and Water Conservation District**  
721 S. Canyon Blvd. - John Day, OR 97845 - Phone (541) 575-0135

April 22, 2016

Henry Lorenzen, Chair  
Northwest Power and Conservation Council  
851 SW 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 1100  
Portland, OR 97204-1348

Subject: Review of John Day Habitat Enhancement Implementation Strategy (Project #2007-397-00).

Dear Mr. Lorenzen:

Introduction

The Grant Soil and Water Conservation District (District) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments regarding the Independent Scientific Review Panel (ISRP) Review Report (Memo ISRP 2016-4) of the John Day Habitat Enhancement Implementation Strategy (Strategy) (Project #2007-397-00). The enclosed remarks are submitted on behalf of the District Board of Directors (Board) to seek clarification from the Power Planning and Conservation Council (Council), regarding divergences and inconsistencies associated with implementation of the subject Strategy.

Background

Supervised by a five member Board of Directors, elected representatives from the citizens of the District, the Board is empowered by Oregon Revised Statute to provide representation, leadership, and cooperative coordination in regards to the conservation, protection, and development of the area's renewable natural resources for the benefit of its constituents. The Board holds these responsibilities and obligations most seriously as they form the foundation for the years of cooperative partnerships resulting in positive and proactive restoration and enhancement of the Upper John Day Basin riparian and uplands ecosystems. Acting under this authority, the District has played a key partnership role in the development, coordination, and implementation of the subject Project, along with the other referenced Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) Projects (#1984-021-00 and #1993-066-00) since their inceptions. It should be noted that the District's partnership within the ODFW Project #1984-021-00 has been ongoing for 32 years.

The informal partnerships in and around these Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) Fish and Wild Projects operating within the Upper John Day Basin have been instrumental to creating a collaborative and unprecedented frame work of restoration achievement. Hundreds of successful voluntary projects benefiting anadromous fish populations can be credited to the cooperative nature of this group.

While each BPA Project has operated independently, they have continued to work in a parallel and common manner for the benefit of all involved. This unique situation has allowed both project sponsors and partners to build specialized expertise without duplication, optimizing project processes and financial efficiency through the use of shared resources. In addition, the associated alignment of work plans and project qualifications has created a stable program platform from which credible and positive landowner and community relationships have been fostered and sustained.

## Comments

Recent adoption and implementation of the Strategy by the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (CTWSRO) has raised multiple Board concerns, many being shared within the ISRP Report. These matters arising from the Strategy's application have caused significant disruption to District operations, strained our relationships with area landowners and other funding partners, and created a conflictive situation between the BPA Projects operating within the Upper John Day Basin. Although the Board is fully supportive of utilizing strategic planning and adaptive management processes to improve the efficacy of BPA mitigation investments, the presented Strategy has generated the following Board issues:

### 1. The Strategy granting process has disproportionately discounted the vested interests of the District.

- The abruptness by which the CTWSRO transitioned from a cooperating partner to a granting organization, immediately created financial uncertainty for the District, which had retained technical staff and developed capacity to support an annual funding contribution that was relatively consistent over a preceding ten year period. The recent 2015-2017 grant award to the District through the Strategy, is an 88% reduction to this average annual investment.
- The District had recurrently leveraged this Project's investments in advance with other partner funding sources (e.g. Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board & Bureau of Reclamation) to maximize program effectiveness and sustain a reliable implementation schedule. The resulting project cancellations, postponements, and uncertainty of District work plans created by the Strategy's adoption, caused many District projects to immediately become unfeasible. This required the District to retract or extensively modify many established agreements, subjecting the District's credibility to undue injury with both its partners and cooperating landowners.
- The Board strongly believes the restoration targets within the Strategy could be more effectively achieved through existing partnership networks and localized work plans. While regional ecological based plans are essential to guiding and justifying related restoration activities, it is equally important to include variances for local economic, social, and cultural needs. In these instances, a grassroots entity such as the District would seem to be best positioned to create the balanced and lasting relationships necessary to achieve landscape level restoration goals. Establishment of another competitive granting process through the Strategy may only work in contrary, increasing competition between entities, destabilizing existing local capacity, and diminishing the level of current cooperation between established partners and cooperators.

### 2. Prioritization and ranking criteria significantly disparages opportunities to improve fish habitat conditions on private working lands.

- The Strategy prioritization seems to be largely based on addressing the maximum number of limiting factors addressed through the proposed project actions. Many of the treatment alternatives necessary to address the noted factors often exceed the risk thresholds of the majority of our area agricultural producers, which make up the Basin's predominate landowner type. Without broad landowner support for such restoration practices to maximize a proposal's score, projects located on private land are anticipated to fall well below funding lines resulting in an unbalanced distribution of resources towards public or conservation exclusive property locations. The resulting condition from the Strategy scoring appears to demonstrate a discount of the Basin's Agricultural Industry and the area communities that significantly rely on their economic contributions.

### 3. The lack of endorsement by other stakeholders, BPA, or the Council seems to have created uncertainty regarding the Strategy's validity in meeting the mitigation expectations of BPA or ESA Recovery Targets and Priorities established through the Mid-Columbia Steelhead Recovery Plan.



- Throughout the Strategy development and implementation process, the District was regularly informed by the Project Sponsor that future projects would be required to maximize treatment of identified limiting factors to qualify for an investment. In response, the District immediately began working to incorporate additional actions into its projects to accommodate this new process requirement. The resulting reaction caused the District to completely abandon some projects that were not likely to meet funding thresholds and re-scope the majority of its other projects to expand them to include addressing the new required limiting factors. This re-evaluation process placed the District in a disingenuous position with its commitments and cooperating landowners, by now requesting broader concessions than had previously been conveyed and are substantially different from those recently required within prior projects.

The District also widely communicated these new project conditions to area landowners, describing that many previously sponsored projects may no-longer be supported through this BPA Program. Concurrently however, the types of restoration activities in question seem to have continued to be implemented independently by the Project Sponsor. This creates significant confusion as to what is, or is not, a qualifying mitigation action in the opinion of the ISRP and Council, and further demonstrates that a level of subjectiveness may exist in the current Strategy's prioritization process.

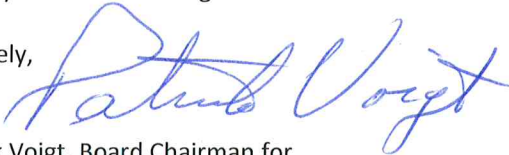
#### Conclusion

Overall, the Board believes the Strategy seems to improve little upon existing Basin Recovery Plans and will not form any better foundation of cooperation between the needed participants than what has already existed in the Upper John Day Basin. The simple lack of endorsement by key area interests should give pause to the ISRP and Council, and demonstrate that this Strategy seems to have been pursued independently to perhaps serve the preferences of a few while discounting the history of successful cooperative work by the District.

Lastly, it needs to be stated that it is not the intent of the Board to appear disharmonious or seem critical or negative in these matters. As previously stated, the Board takes its responsibilities and obligations most seriously and is proud of the years of accomplishments made through the cooperative partnership which it is a part of.

Thank you for considering the Board's Position on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Patrick Voigt, Board Chairman for  
Grant Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Directors

Cc: Grant County Commissioners

