

Qs and As
Federal Executives Memo

Potential questions and suggested answers:

Why is the Federal Caucus starting a process that seems to duplicate the Multi-Species Framework Project?

The Federal agencies have a significant assignment to complete—the reconsideration/development of a new Biological Opinion, which is required by the Endangered Species Act. The agencies cannot delegate this specific responsibility. The '95 Biological Opinion anticipates that a long-term decision will be made on the configuration of the Federal Columbia River Power System at the end of 1999. It is incumbent on the action agencies (BPA, Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation) to prepare biological assessments and the regulatory agencies (NMFS and USFWS) to prepare biological opinions for this decision. In addition, we believe it is important that the Federal agencies speak in a well-coordinated fashion as we approach the critical decisions related to the biological and economic impacts of operating the Federal hydrosystem. The intent of the Federal Caucus is to develop a unified Federal approach that benefits from information developed by the Framework. To that end the members of the Federal Caucus are participating in the Framework and fully support its goals.

The timing of the work planned by the Federal Caucus and the timing of the Framework study process match well. The products of the Framework will be coordinated with the Federal Caucus products.

The Federal Caucus schedule appears to be more aggressive than the Framework schedule. Doesn't this risk foreclosing full and open consideration of ideas and concepts by the Framework?

The regional executives for the participating Federal agencies asked the Caucus to develop early draft products to identify any gaps that might exist and to allow time to consider interactive effects across the four H's. A fleshed-out draft of the biological assessment and a paper covering multi-species effects and options in all four H's - hydro, harvest, hatcheries and habitat- will be available in the fall ready for an extensive public involvement process, which will seek to test concepts with regional stakeholders. We intend to coordinate with the Framework throughout the year as the products are developed and decisions are made.

Some regional stakeholders have expressed a perception that the members of the Federal Caucus are not actively engaged in the Framework process. Is this because you have your own process?

We believe the Framework is a critical piece of the regional discussion related to fish and wildlife recovery. We have urged the Framework to stay on schedule because we anticipate considerable benefit from a "cross pollination" of the two processes and we intend to actively participate.

How can regional stakeholders influence what the Federal agencies are doing?

We will be reaching out to regional stakeholders as we prepare our working papers and proposals, through the Framework, Forum and individual meetings. We are also planning public involvement later this year on the draft biological assessment and the “Four-H paper”. We are still working to finalize the schedule for these.

How will the Federal Caucus coordinate with the Forum?

The Forum is intended to be a place where the governments of the region come together to coordinate, communicate and work out policy issues. The Federal agencies are represented in the Forum and will utilize the Forum to coordinate policy, test concepts, and develop recommendations. The information generated by the Framework Project will be one of the sources of information the Forum considers in its deliberations.

Are the Federal agencies thinking through their responsibility for Government-to-Government consultation with the Northwest Tribes?

The Federal Caucus is committed to clear and open communication with the Tribes. Some meetings have already been conducted and others are currently being scheduled. The Forum will also serve as a way of coordinating with the Tribes.