

# **BPA fish and wildlife messages**

## **BPA Talking Points**

January 12, 1999

These talking points provide information and background on BPA messages concerning major Northwest fish and wildlife issues in 1999. A copy of the messages is included.

### ***Background***

A number of major decisions affecting Northwest fish and wildlife will be made in 1999. BPA will be a key contributor to the decision making process through its Biological Assessment (BA) on hydrosystem operations. Our current schedule calls for release of a draft BA for public comment in August with the final BA submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service in September. We are also participating in other regional processes leading toward a decision on a recovery plan for endangered Snake River salmon and a scientific framework for the region's fish and wildlife mitigation programs. BPA has also made a significant commitment to the region to implement in rates and contracts the fish and wildlife funding principles developed in collaboration with regional entities.

### ***About BPA's fish and wildlife messages:***

- The messages aim to clearly and consistently convey BPA's goals and values regarding Northwest fish and wildlife issues.
- Much of the value of the messages rests in the response(s) they may elicit from customers and constituents who hear them. BPA executives are constantly assessing how the messages are received.
- If you believe you have information that could help, please contact Phyllis Dowty by E-mail or call her at 503-230-5867.

### ***Questions and answers***

#### **1. What are the major Northwest fish and wildlife decision making processes BPA is participating in?**

BPA is participating in the following :

- Development of a long-term Unified Plan for fish recovery for the Federal Columbia River Power System by December 1999. The plan should cover at least 10 years. The Unified Plan messages below outline the major elements that BPA believes should make up the Unified Plan.
- Development of a Multi-Species Framework Plan under the auspices of the Northwest Power Planning Council. The Framework aims to develop a series of scientifically based options for determining the future of the humans, salmon, steelhead, and other species that call the Columbia Basin home. For more information, see the Framework Web site at <http://www.nwframework.org/>

- Hydrosystem operations to comply with the National Marine Fisheries Service's 1995 and 1998 Biological Opinions for listed Snake River salmon and steelhead. The BOs have been supplemented each year, after discussions with BPA, Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation, to reflect changes NMFS believes are appropriate.
- Columbia Basin Forum (formerly referred to as the Three Sovereigns), a high level policy forum in which federal, state and tribal governments working with other regional stakeholders seek to coordinate Basin-wide fish and wildlife decision making and implementation issues.
- Development of a comprehensive recovery plan for listed Snake River salmon and steelhead. According to the Endangered Species Act, NMFS is responsible for preparing the recovery plan and will be the ultimate decision maker. BPA's role in the process will be primarily through development of a BA which proposes actions BPA will take to meet our ESA obligations. BPA currently plans to submit the BA to NMFS in September after first taking public comment on the draft BA in August.
- Working with the Corps of Engineers and other agencies in preparing the Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study. This study by the Corps, which is called for in the NMFS 1995 BO, will analyze all of the major options for improving juvenile salmon survival on the lower Snake River. Public review of the draft environmental impact statement is scheduled for early 1999. Breaching of the four lower Snake River dams is one of the alternatives the study is analyzing. Others include increased fish transportation, improvements to fish bypass facilities at the dams and increased flow augmentation. For more information contact the Corps' Web site at <http://www.nww.usace.army.mil/html/offices/pl/er/studies/lrpublic/lrmain.htm>

## 1. Who is managing this BPA effort?

The administrator has assigned lead roles to the following individuals:

Lorri Bodi	Unified Plan and Multi-Species Framework.
Therese Lamb	Policy and Technical Assistant to Lorri Bodi responsible for overall coordination with BPA staff and managers.
Greg Delwiche	Hydrosystem operations and policy and technical assistance to Lorri Bodi.
Roy Fox	Policy and technical assistance to Lorri Bodi.
Karen Hunt	Columbia Basin Forum liaison.
Alex Smith	Cross agency support and coordination for the team leads through management of an ad hoc fish and wildlife strategy team.
Bob Lohn	Ongoing management of the fish and wildlife direct program under the existing Memorandum of Agreement and policy and technical assistance to Lorri Bodi.
Carolyn Whitney	Public Involvement.

The team leads will draw on BPA legal and technical staff as needed.

## 1. How will BPA work with the region toward resolution on these issues?

Overall, BPA's interest is to have an objective, open process with a goal of reaching conclusion on the Unified Plan by the end of 1999. This will involve outreach to the various regional interests – states, federal agencies, tribes, customers and interest groups – to develop a mutual understanding of the processes, establish trust in BPA, and objectively discuss regional options and alternatives.

Although progress is being made, the region continues to lack consensus on the best way to resolve major fish and wildlife issues. BPA will work to keep the parties at the table and focusing on substance. As we move forward with work on the Unified Plan, BPA believes it is important for parties to first agree on the criteria the plan must achieve. Once there is agreement on criteria and the measurable performance goals of the plan, it should be easier to reach agreement on the specific methods needed to achieve those goals and the associated costs.

## **BPA Fish and Wildlife Messages**

BPA will be involved in at least three major issues in the fish and wildlife arena in 1999:

- 1 Development of a Multi-Species Framework Plan by mid-1999 under the auspices of the Northwest Power Planning Council, federal agencies and tribes;
- 2 Development by the federal government of a new long-term fish recovery plan for the Federal Columbia River Power System; and
- 3 Hydrosystem operations to comply with the NMFS Biological Opinion for endangered Snake River salmon and implementation of the Council's plan for fish and wildlife.

Together, these efforts can achieve BPA's goal of a unified fish and wildlife plan for the hydrosystem. As a result, it is important that BPA managers and staff convey consistent messages on these issues as they work with representatives of other federal agencies and regional stakeholders.

### ***Major messages:***

- BPA is committed to fulfilling all of its fish and wildlife obligations including its trust and treaty responsibilities;
- The agency will work to keep the options open for future fish and wildlife decisions by implementing in rates and contracts the fish and wildlife funding principles developed in collaboration with regional entities; and
- BPA supports a unified plan that would establish a comprehensive long-term agreement with the region that includes a description of Federal Columbia River Power System operations for fish and wildlife mitigation.

### ***Unified plan messages:***

A unified plan must:

- Work for all Northwest fish and wildlife; must be scientifically sound; must be affordable; and it must preserve at cost, below market prices for federal power in the Northwest;
- Identify BPA's total funding obligations for hatchery, harvest and habitat measures as well as hydrosystem operations;
- Satisfy the needs of all at-risk species and meet all applicable laws;
- Include performance standards and other measures of success;
- Achieve no-jeopardy for all listed species as well as contribute to the recovery and increase of harvestable anadromous fish runs;

- Be fair – it must acknowledge the accountability of other Northwest entities for achieving the region’s fish and wildlife mitigation goals; and
- Cover at least 10 years for predictability.

***Regional partnership messages:***

- BPA wants to work with the region to develop a unified plan for the Columbia Basin;
- Because of federal deadlines, the time for the region to pull together is now.

***PATH science forum messages:***

- PATH provides important information that must be considered, along with other scientific, economic and social information when making decisions about salmon recovery;
- BPA believes that the results of the PATH modeling, once completed, will prove useful in helping the region develop a unified plan for recovering endangered salmon and steelhead;
- Current PATH information is preliminary. Future PATH work will include evaluation of alternatives for salmon and steelhead recovery that may not involve breaching dams such as changed hatchery operations, habitat improvements and/or harvest restrictions. Final conclusions about the merits of breaching must wait until this work is completed; and

***Dam breaching messages:***

- Breaching the lower Snake River dams is one of a number of alternatives being considered for the 1999 decision for long-term recovery. Other options include expanded fish barging and enhanced hydrosystem operations in combination with management of hatcheries, habitat and harvest operations.
- BPA supports regional discussion on the relative merits of all options for salmon recovery. We believe we have an obligation to the region to provide full disclosure of information regarding the effects on the power and transmission systems of breaching the dams.
- The ongoing regional discussion on breaching has two elements: a scientific evaluation that is yet to be completed and a political discussion.

**Internal Process**

- Internal alignment/agreement on these external messages is essential;
- Team leads, team members and staff must provide accurate and timely feedback from external parties; and
- Managers must communicate effectively with employees to ensure that these messages and BPA policy are clear.