



## Agencies Cite Progress In Fish and Wildlife Budget Talks

### JOINT NEWS RELEASE:

**Northwest Power Planning Council**

**National Marine Fisheries Service**

**Bonneville Power Administration**

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Representatives of three key agencies report progress in talks to come up with a multi-year budget that would fulfill twin goals of meeting the biological needs of the Columbia Basin's fish and wildlife populations while also providing greater certainty and predictability for the Bonneville Power Administration's fish and wildlife costs.

BPA, which funds measures in the Northwest Power Planning Council's fish and wildlife program and in the National Marine Fisheries Service's salmon recovery plan, is facing its most serious financial pressures as deregulation has brought intense competition to wholesale electricity markets.

NMFS regional director Will Stelle, BPA administrator Randy Hardy and council chairman Angus Duncan report that they have developed a common framework that embodies a number of principles, including setting some more certain funding levels. The parties were careful to point out that it is too early to characterize the discussions as a tentative agreement.

"We're hopeful these discussions will lead to a useful coming together of our agencies in a sensible, single-budget agreement. We're trying to pave the way for new levels of cooperation that will benefit the regional effort on behalf of fish and wildlife," explained NMFS director Stelle. "We definitely made progress, and if the details are still vague, that's because they remain to be worked out. But we are united in our common goal to achieve greater budget certainty for BPA without compromising biological goals for fish and wildlife."

Council chairman Angus Duncan echoed those sentiments, saying, "We've made very positive progress on key issues but continue in serious discussions on other issues. The framework we've developed is contingent on settling these outstanding issues and on agreement and ratification by our respective agencies. The goal is helping BPA with its competitive challenge *and* providing funding for full implementation of the NMFS and council fish and wildlife programs." Duncan said he would be consulting with his colleagues on the council prior to any decision.

The framework would set up a 10-year package which calls for an annual BPA fish and wildlife investment of \$435 million, based on average water conditions. (The current year investment is about \$400 million.) This would not be in a hard "cap" as BPA has agreed to absorb the risk of fluctuating water conditions. During the subsequent four years, BPA would add an additional percent of its net

power revenues to increase the annual investment to approximately \$475 million.

"These numbers come from a continuing and aggressive effort on the part of all three agencies to come up with a more certain budget," Randy Hardy, BPA administrator emphasized. "We've been working closely together to find efficiencies that would bring the costs of the measures down without compromising biological objectives. We believe these funding levels will fully cover the measures called for by the regional recovery programs."

The agencies noted that nothing in the discussions would lead to altering treaty rights with Northwest Indian tribes. Issues remaining under discussion include changes in regional preference to give BPA greater flexibility in sales of surplus energy outside the region and U.S. Treasury credits to BPA for funding non-power related fish protection measures. BPA's ability to sustain full funding of fish and wildlife measures is contingent on a resolution of these issues, Hardy said.

The package responds to a request by all eight Northwest senators for some level of regional consensus that could be used to flesh out "placeholder" language in a Senate appropriations bill now before Congress. The "placeholder" language conceptually calls for tying BPA fish and wildlife investments to its annual power revenues, but provides no details.

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