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NEWS RELEASE:
Salmon will spawn below Bonneville Dam

Bonneville Power Administration

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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PORTLAND, Ore. – Betting on a wet winter, federal agencies agreed to increase flows in the lower Columbia River Nov. 4 to raise the water levels below Bonneville Dam and make more spawning habitat available for Columbia River salmon.

“These fish are not protected under the Endangered Species Act, but we will still do all that we can to maximize production,” said Brian Brown, the National Marine Fisheries Service’s hydro director.

This decision is based on an agreement between NMFS, Bonneville Power Administration, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the states of Washington and Oregon.

Depending on winter weather conditions, there is still a chance that there may not be enough water in the river system to continue to provide these flows at a level that keeps the eggs below Bonneville Dam covered until they hatch. “If water conditions are below normal, we have a commitment to explore all alternatives for continuing this operation,” Brown said.

There is also risk of not being able to fill Lake Roosevelt, behind Grand Coulee Dam on the upper Columbia River to the level required by NMFS’s Biological Opinion, to provide spring streams flows for endangered salmon migrating to the ocean. “The state and federal fishery managers understand this risk and gave it careful consideration in making their recommendation,” said Bob Lohn, BPA’s fish and wildlife manager.

The fishery managers recognize that providing these increased flows will cause lower than normal levels behind Grand Coulee Dam this winter. If winter snowfalls materialize as expected, Grand Coulee will continue to release water to provide flood control protection for the region, and to keep the salmon eggs covered. If the winter snow pack does not develop, it may not be possible to continue these flows as Grand Coulee tries to refill before spring to meet the levels required for fish migrations.

Agency biologists will monitor the spawning activity down stream of Bonneville Dam. This information

will be critical to future discussions about providing the flows and continuing to meet the prior commitments of the Biological Opinion.

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