Northwest **Power** and **Conservation** Council

October 4, 2023

MEMORANDUM

TO: **Fish and Wildlife Committee Members**

FROM: **Mark Fritsch and Maureen Hess**

SUBJECT: **Update on the next project review**

BACKGROUND:

Presenter: Council Staff

Summary: Staff will provide a brief refresher and overview of the next project review process and new information since our last update in May. Staff will provide a summary of the valuable feedback and input received from Regional Coordination Forum (April 2023), Independent Science Review Panel (June 2023) and Bonneville staff (September 2023).

In addition, the anticipated next steps will be outlined. The project mapping effort to categorize projects based on the type of work implemented is critical for structuring and scheduling the next project review cycle. Staff aim to use Bonneville's Fiscal Year 2024 Start-of-Year budget information to determine the direct Program's project list and confirm each project's alignment to categories identified by the project mapping effort (i.e., purpose and emphasis). Confirmation of this information for each project will require coordination with Bonneville and Fish and Wildlife managers (i.e., via the Regional Coordination Forum) and project sponsors. Concurrent to this work, staff will continue to develop additional concepts related to the process details and steps, in coordination with the region. In addition, staff will pilot the first set of projects (purposes identified as Basinwide, Harvest, or Predation) to

initiate the review using the updated approach. This will involve confirming project information (e.g., project mapping, identify projects amenable to science review, identify projects with outstanding Council conditions), developing a timeline and schedule, review template and associated targeted questions. Our goal is that this initial review will inform the 2025 Start-of-Year budget and work cycle. The review cycle for the remainder of the active/ongoing projects in the direct program will be identified after completion of the initial review.

Relevance: Staff continue to develop a revised approach to the next review process that recognizes the numerous past reviews and maturity of the direct-funded projects implemented through the F&W Program, and the complexity and current dynamics of how projects are implemented, while continuing to meet science review requirements as directed by Section 4(h)(10)(D) of the Act.

Workplan: Fish and Wildlife Division work plan 2023; Program Implementation, Next Project Review.

Background: The Council has developed and conducted reviews for more than 25 years of Bonneville direct-funded projects that are implemented to mitigate, protect and enhance fish and wildlife as directed under the Northwest Power Act (the Act).

The Council's project reviews and recommendations (Council reviews) have yielded many benefits through the years. These rigorous reviews have resulted in clear documentation of each project's purpose, objectives, and results; project improvements through independent scientific review (science review) and feedback; facilitation of sharing project data and information; increased transparency and accountability and the identification of project contributions to the Program and to the region.

As the Council considers how to meet the review requirements of the Act in the coming decade, the Council believes it is important to continue maximizing the benefits of project review, while recognizing that there has been considerable growth and change over the last 40 years of project development and implementation. The projects implementing the Council's mitigation Program have grown in numbers and complexity through the years. In addition, they have been reviewed and recommended by the Council numerous times, and their continued implementation and scientific soundness has been accepted.

Due to the maturity of the Program's projects and that most have been reviewed numerous times, the information requested about the projects has also evolved over time. Early project reviews focused primarily on the

proposed project details to ensure the projects were scientifically sound. Contemporary reviews have shifted to focus on project results and the adaptive management of ongoing work.

The Program has 317 projects[1], of which approximately 274 active and ongoing Council-recommended projects. These 274 projects are the focus of the project review process described here – ongoing protection and mitigation work and support activities. New projects that have no previous review and recommendation will be addressed separately for Council consideration and action.

Principles retained from previous project reviews

- Projects will continue to be grouped to maximize review efficiency. To some extent the review groupings will be categorical, but there are opportunities to further partition groupings into smaller sets of projects that are focused on similar objectives or purposes. In addition, there may be opportunities to group and review projects geographically, to be able to better understand the context in which various types of projects fit together in a geographic landscape.

- Reviews and recommendations will continue to be multi-year and are likely to be different for different types of projects depending on project grouping.

New concepts for the project reviews

- All of the ongoing projects have been through numerous project reviews. Each project's basic premise, scientific soundness, and reason for existence in the Program has generally been accepted. Projects reviewed many times may not need an extensive project review this time around, even if some sort of implementation check-in is warranted.

- The upcoming reviews will focus on targeted questions. While to some extent the Council will need to look at every project and possibly tailor specific review questions for each project, similar projects can also be grouped in a way to streamline the review questions to be asked, tailored to the status and type of ongoing project. And then the questions to be asked will help structure the review process for that project or group of projects. For example, project review questions may focus on:

[1] As of August 2022. These numbers are presented to demonstrate the concept associated with the proposed project review approach.

  - A check-in on project outcomes, based on ongoing project reporting: Is a project contributing to or achieving its stated objectives?
    - If not, are there ways in which the project can or should be adapted to increase its chance of success in meeting its objectives?
  - Are there resources available that support adaptive management, such as new techniques, evolved best practices, and emerging scientific literature?
  - Specific information related to the project or a group of projects to provide information useful for evaluating overall performance of the Council's Fish and Wildlife Program.

- Streamlining and focusing the review effort and the questions for discrete sets of projects asked before the review process begins should improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the process and lessen the administrative demands on project sponsors, and the ISRP.

- The project review process will not address budgets except at only a high level, with the Council at most focusing on whether funding is sufficient to allow for implementation of the activities identified.

Objectives for review:

- Serve as an implementation check in on project actions:
  - Review the project's progress in achieving its stated objectives.
  - Use targeted questions or topics for the benefit of the Council and regional policy, management, and coordination efforts.
  - Provide an opportunity to confirm administrative changes (i.e., project title name changes, plans for merging contracts, etc.) and project work elements and objectives.
- Address any outstanding Council recommendations.

Based on the above principles, Council staff made progress on developing a draft approach to the next project review and previewed the approach to the Fish and Wildlife Committee at the May 2023 meeting. Staff previewed the developing approach and received initial input from the Fish and Wildlife managers through the Regional Coordination Forum (April 2023), the Independent Science Review Panel (June 2023) and Bonneville staff (September 2023) to further develop and refine the project review process.

In addition, Council staff is looking forward to reinitiating the project mapping process with Bonneville and project managers that is core to the next project review by refining associated information on the purpose and

emphasis areas that projects serve (i.e., what projects are doing). This effort is critical for structuring and scheduling the next project review cycle.

More Info:

- Information on past project reviews and recommendations
- Independent Scientific Review Panel background

Update – Next Project Review

Fish and Wildlife Committee

October 2023

Northwest **Power** and **Conservation** Council

Presentation Outline

- Brief review of the developing new approach for project reviews (details described at the May 2023 Committee meeting).

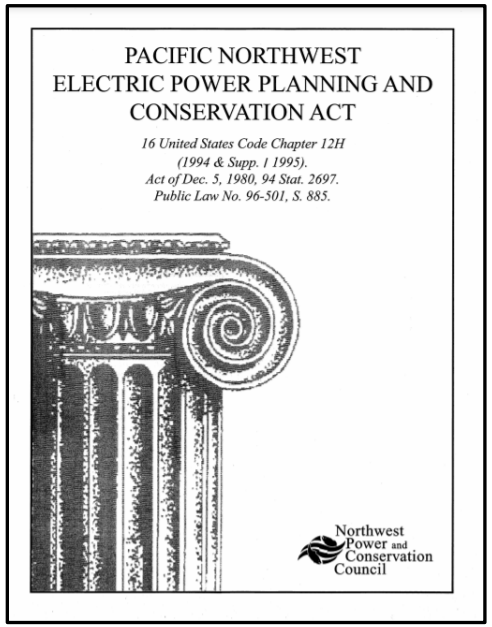
- Summary of input received.
  - Regional Coordination Forum
  - Independent Science Review Panel
  - Bonneville Staff

- Anticipated next steps.

Revised approach aims to:

I.) Continue to meet science review requirements:

- Northwest Power Act: Section 4h10D: Council role in review and ISRP review (1996 amendment to NPA)



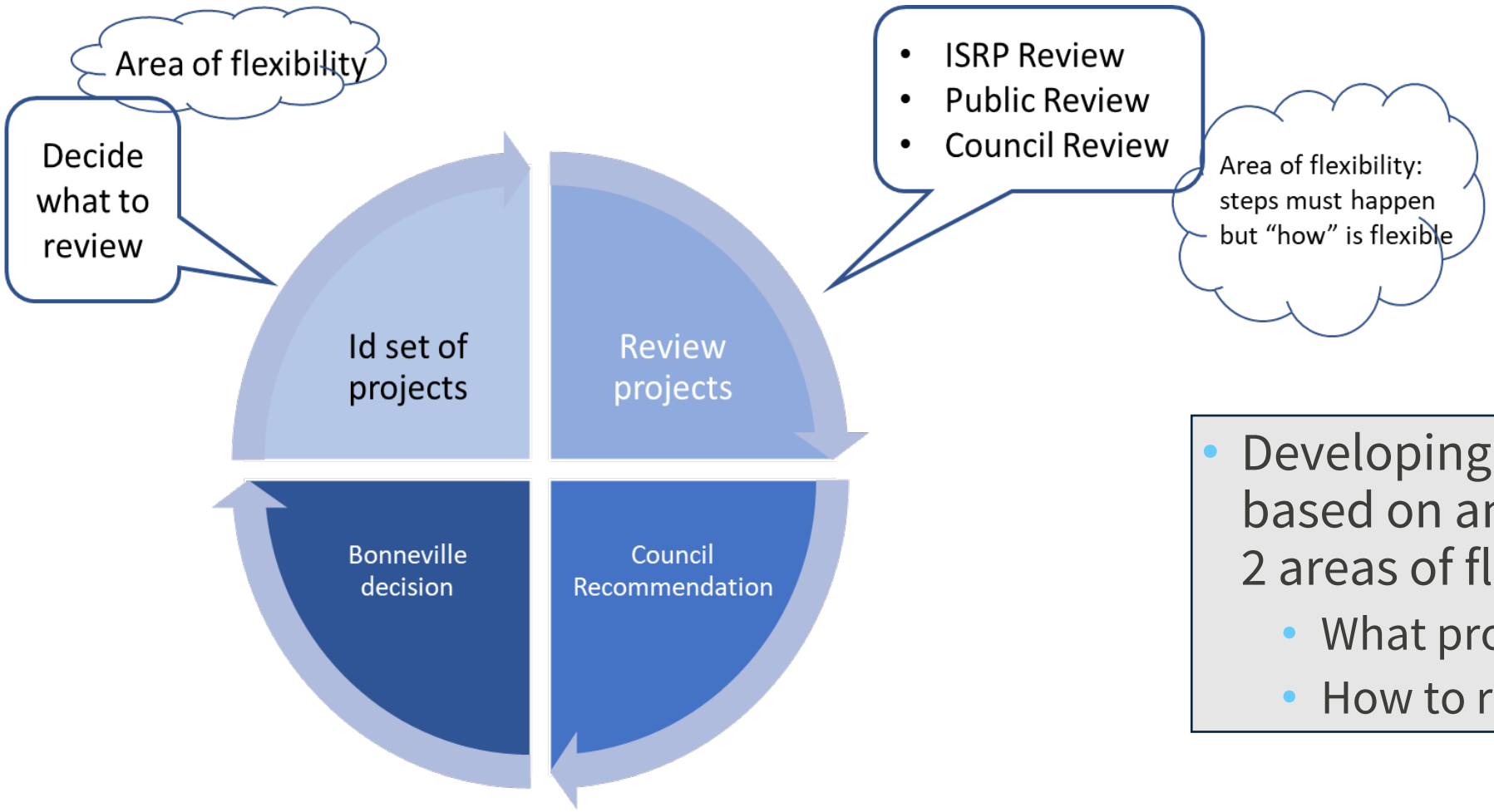
II.) Continue to emphasize transparency & accountability:

- Sharing of project data and information (i.e., project purpose, objectives, results)
- Identify contribution to the Program and region
- Identification of policy issues to address

III.) Acknowledge the maturity of the active & ongoing projects implementing the Program

IV.) Create efficiencies in the process

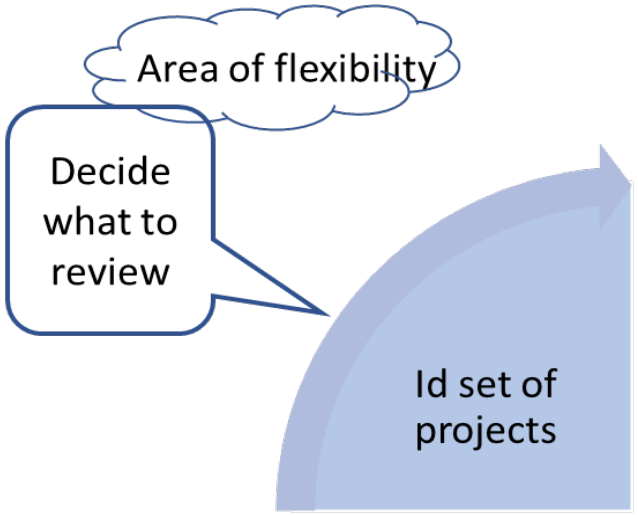
Project review and areas of flexibility



- Developing new approach based on and organized by the 2 areas of flexibility
  - What projects to review
  - How to review project

Project review and areas of flexibility

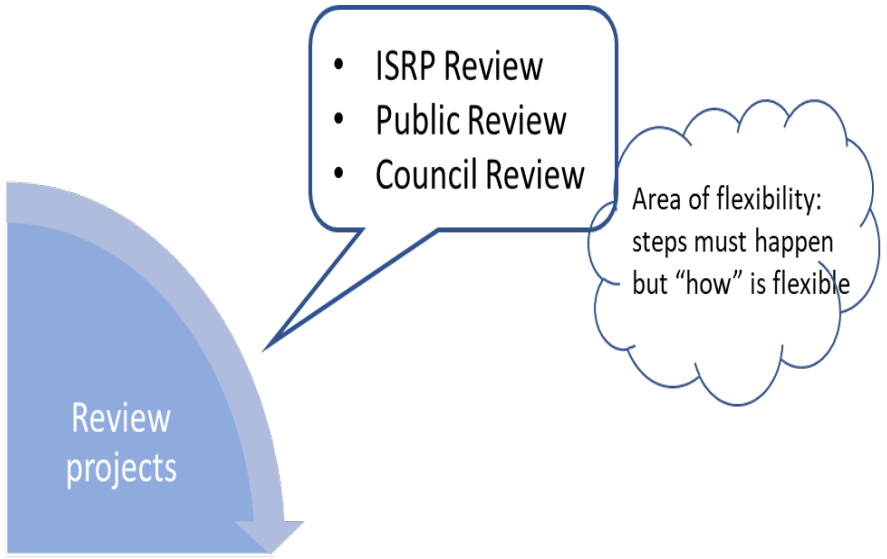
What projects to review



- Categorize and group projects by type of work implemented (Project Mapping):
  - Structure to develop targeted questions for similar types of projects.
  - Clarify which projects are amenable to science review from those that are not.
  - Create efficiencies by focusing on discrete sets of projects at a time.

Project review and areas of flexibility

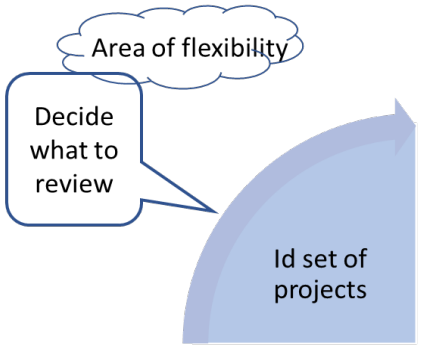
How to review



- Flexibility in organization and sequence of reviews (i.e., geographic and/or category)
- Implementation check-in on project actions
- Use targeted questions to guide review
- Create efficiencies:
  - Review materials reduced (addendum)
  - ISRP reviews projects amenable to science review
  - Targeted questions provide structure within which the ISRP will provide scientific recommendations
  - Comments/guidance intended to strengthen existing projects (additional evaluation only for projects with identified need to address Council conditions)

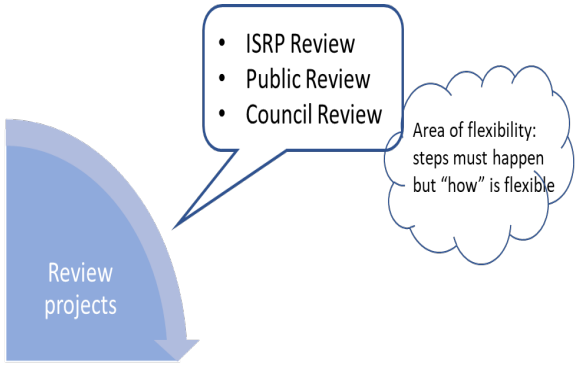
Project review components – next steps to develop

What projects to review



- Confirm existing information about projects to be reviewed:
  - Project mapping (purpose/emphasis)
  - Identify project-specific Council recommendations and need for additional science review if outstanding

How to review



- Science review process details/steps
  - Presentations, site visits
  - Review team structure
  - Feedback loop
  - Pilot set(s) of projects and targeted questions

Input Received

Regional Coordination Forum - *general support*

- Want value-added and meaningful interaction with the ISRP about implementation within the funding-limited system.
- Want reviewers to recognize legal and policy sideboards when making recommendations.
- Concern for Council not dealing with budgetary Issues, leaving it to Bonneville
- Concerns about funding levels, flat funding, and budget accountability.
- Challenges in fully implementing a project as reviewed and recommended – disconnect between proposal, recommendations, and contracting.
- Concerns about other Bonneville-funded projects that do not currently undergo ISRP or public review (i.e., should be held to same standards).
- Support for piloting a set of projects and opportunity for additional input on the approach

Input Received - continued

Bonneville – *general support*

- Like to determine what is and to what degree of review is necessary.
- Would be useful to define duration of R,M&E projects (% complete)
- Project mapping will be helpful in the review design.
- Bonneville tracks project's scope of work and has responsibility to adjust in real time, therefore not anticipating projects that are out of scope during review.
- Supports the determination of what does and does not receive science review.
- Support for organizing the review by project categories (i.e., investments and contracting are organized by categories, not geography).
- Value-added when Bonneville and Council work together
- Need consistent ISRP reviewers across project categories/types
- Need to ensure that diverse projects are not burdened unfairly (i.e., reviewed in multiple categories)
- Benefits to timing reviews to align with Start-of-Year (i.e., allows contracts to be updated prior to implementation)

Input Received - continued

Independent Science Review Panel – *general support*

- Current volume of review materials can be overwhelming.
- Varying quality and completeness in project proposals affects the review process
- No additional funding exists to change programs, so should that constrain the recommendations from the ISRP?
- Support for working with Council staff to have input on targeted questions
- Idea to conduct review in a stepwise way- first geographically to see relationships among projects and then a categorical integration of reviews to look for cross cutting issues.
- Want improved communication throughout the entire review process – *example:* The review cycle communication goes one way, ending with BPA decision. For this to really work, communication needs to flow both ways. After BPA decision, inform Council who can then inform ISRP

Input Received - continued

Independent Science Review Panel – *continued*

- Still need to know how much M&E is occurring and how it is coordinating. BPA is concerned about too much investment in M&E relative to on the ground-work.
- Program can learn a lot from a synthesis from large projects that have received decades of funding.
- Support for streamlining the approach.
- Important to maintain independent science review. Some aspects of review intersect with independence-balancing science with making sure reviewers understand legal and policy sideboards.

Anticipated next steps

1.) Project mapping effort is key to structuring the review:

- Use SOY FY2024 to confirm projects in the direct-funded program
- Confirm project mapping categories for all projects in collaboration with Bonneville and managers through Regional Coordination Forum and project sponsors.

2.) Continue to develop general concepts and options

- Science review process details/steps.
- Pilot set(s) of projects and targeted questions.

3.) Coordinate with and gather additional feedback from Fish and Wildlife managers, Bonneville, and ISRP prior to initiating next review.

4.) Pending steps above, initiate review with the pilot set(s) of projects with goal of informing FY 2025.

5.) Develop review cycle for remainder of the active/ongoing projects.