



Independent Scientific Review Panel
for the Northwest Power & Conservation Council
851 SW 6th Avenue, Suite 1100
Portland, Oregon 97204
www.nwccouncil.org/fw/isrp

Memorandum (ISRP 2007-4)

April 18, 2007

To: Peter Paquet, Acting Fish and Wildlife Division Director, Northwest Power and Conservation Council

From: Eric Loudenslager, ISRP Chair

Subject: Response Review for Project 2006-003-00, Desert Wildlife Area O&M (Wetland Enhancement)

Background

At the Council's request, the ISRP reviewed a response from WDFW for proposal 2006-003-00, *Desert Wildlife Area O&M (Wetland Enhancement)* to the ISRP's preliminary review in the FY 2007-09 project selection process. The project sponsor developed and thought they had provided a complete response, but the Council and ISRP received a partial response. With issues left unaddressed, the ISRP recommended "Not Fundable" (review appended below). Subsequently, the Council recommended funding for the project conditioned on an ISRP review of the full response. This review completes the intended FY 2007-09 project review cycle.

Final Recommendation: Meets Scientific Review Criteria

The ISRP finds that the proposal, with the clarification provided in the response, meets the ISRP's review criteria. The sponsors have adequately responded to the most serious concerns raised in the ISRP's preliminary review. However, the responses to several items need improvement -- in any future proposals for this work. The ISRP suggests that the sponsors expand the search for collaborators involved in similar projects and bolster information transfer. Specifically, the persistence of the created wetland habitat and the wildlife response should be documented and reported (at a later date) in a scientific paper submitted to a journal so others can benefit from the work. In future reviews, the ISRP will be interested to see the results of this project and how these issues were addressed.

Specific Comments

The ISRP's critical comments from the preliminary ISRP FY 2007-09 Report are numbered and provided in *italics* below. Each ISRP preliminary comment is followed by the ISRP's final comment (indented) on whether the sponsor adequately addressed the ISRP's concern.

ISRP Comment #1. It is likely that the nature of the methods used (excavation, burning, mowing) will have an effect on non-focal species that could be adverse. A discussion of such effects and precautions is needed.

The response acknowledges the impact and argues effectively that the benefit to focal species justifies the limited impact on non-focal species. In addition, the response notes a balance of different successional stages of wetland obligate fauna is needed, and the objective for a balance is the overriding issue. It is an effective argument.

ISRP Comment #2. There is little evidence that results have been obtained.

The response indicates that some on-the-ground tasks have been completed in September 2006 and March 2007. This information suggests that the project has moved from planning to implementation.

ISRP Comment #3. Not all key personnel are identified so it is unclear if the proposed work elements can be accomplished. The sponsors should identify what personnel will assist and what each will accomplish.

The response identifies the key personnel and is adequate. However, there is overlap of responsibilities, and a clear statement of what each person will accomplish would improve the proposal.

ISRP Comment #4. More details should be provided on excavation methods, equipment, and the timing of excavation.

The description of the excavation methods and timing is adequate.

ISRP Comment #5. The proposal refers to other similar restoration projects but no collaborative efforts are identified with other work funded in the Fish and Wildlife Program.

The response states, "No similar work, that we are aware of, has been funded by BPA's Fish and Wildlife Program. WDFW has completed 16 similar restoration projects (104 wetlands, 724 acres) on the DWA since 1983." The response indicates that the sponsors are not aware of other BPA Fish and Wildlife Program funded projects. Although they mention similar WDFW restoration projects, there is no assessment of lessons learned from those projects or of collaboration with other ongoing projects. A statement about how their approach evolved would improve the proposal.

ISRP Comment #6. Methods for restoration are described but more justification that the best scientific techniques will be used is necessary.

The sponsors indicate that they are not aware of techniques, other than those proposed, that are better for accomplishing the type of wetland protection envisioned. In paragraph three of their response, they note that when the bottom of the basin is greater than the water table (which it apparently is), there is only one way to solve the problem, and that

is excavation. The issue then becomes how to manage the situation so that the modified habitat persists for a reasonable amount of time. They seem to have an answer for that in the last paragraph of the response. The response is adequate.

ISRP Comment #7. Plans for information transfer beyond WDFW sites should be provided.

The response indicates that information transfer will be limited. Other entities interested in collaboration or conducting similar projects in the future may find it difficult to learn of this project's successes and failures.

Appendix. ISRP FY 2007-09 Review Comments (August 2006)

200600300 - Desert Wildlife Area O&M (Wetland Enhancement)

Sponsor: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)

Province: Columbia Plateau **Subbasin:** Crab

Budgets: FY07: \$320,138 FY08: \$365,205 FY09: \$222,705

Short description: Completion of, and operation/maintenance for, six wetland enhancement construction projects initiated with BPA funding (MOA and FY06 contract) on the Desert Wildlife Area.

ISRP final recommendation: Not fundable

Comment (from response loop):

The project focuses on completion of six wetland enhancement construction projects designed to increase the area of submerged aquatic vegetation and area of open water in project wetlands. The proposed project is designed to benefit waterfowl, but results will not persist over the long-term without continued monitoring and remedial action. It is likely that the nature of the methods used (excavation, burning, mowing) will have an effect on non-focal species that could be adverse. The response did address the issue of possible adverse effects of the restoration activities on non-focal species and the timing of excavation and burning. The project is not linked to a subbasin plan because the Crab subbasin was not complete at the time of proposal writing.

The proposal has a strong section on objectives and associated monitoring and evaluation plans. Methods for restoration are described but more justification that the best scientific techniques will be used is necessary. There is little evidence that results have been obtained. It appears that there has been much planning and few accomplishments for this ongoing project, perhaps because of the short history for the project. In the response the sponsors addressed the issue of little on-the-ground restoration to date due to the time needed for project planning and securing environmental compliance.

Not all key personnel are identified so it is unclear if the proposed work elements can be accomplished. Some additional general information concerning project personnel was provided in the response, but it is not clear how much effort will be allocated to the project.

The proposal refers to other similar restoration projects but no collaborative efforts are identified with other work funded in the Fish and Wildlife Program. Plans for information transfer beyond WDFW sites should be provided to demonstrate a wider distribution of successes and lessons learned to benefit others involved in similar activities.

Not enough information was provided in the proposal or response to justify that the proposed restoration methods are scientifically based or adequate to benefit target species.

w:\em\ww\isrp projects and reports\1 final isrp reports\isrp 2007-4 desert wildlife area o&m.doc