



Independent Scientific Review Panel
for the Northwest Power & Conservation Council
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Memorandum (ISRP 2009-20)

June 2, 2009

To: Tony Grover, Fish and Wildlife Division Director, Northwest Power and Conservation Council

From: Eric Loudenslager, ISRP Chair

Subject: Review of CTUIR Ceded Area Priority Stream Corridor Conservation and Protection (2008-207-00)

Background

At the Council's May 1, 2009 request, the ISRP reviewed the Columbia River Fish Accord proposal titled Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation's Ceded Area Priority Stream Corridor Conservation and Protection (Umatilla Tribe Protection and Capital Acquisition; BPA project #2008-207-00). The project intends to focus on securing permanent protection of priority anadromous fish core habitats in the Grande Ronde, Umatilla, Walla Walla, and John Day River watersheds through conservation easement and capital acquisition of fee title. The proposal states that continued pressure from development and commodity based resource management threatens to seriously degrade watershed productivity and function.

ISRP Recommendation and Summary Comments

Response Requested

This project is potentially beneficial to both anadromous and resident species. As the Tribes state, this project is important because it is the major project for land acquisition under the Accords. They also provide reference that land acquisition is generally more cost-effective than easements (Prose et. al, 1986). However, not enough detail is provided in the proposal to fully assess potential benefits to fish and wildlife.

This is a potentially important project, but, before the ISRP can make a final recommendation, a response is requested in the following areas:

- 1) Does this proposal constitute the "Acquisition Plan"? Will a comprehensive acquisition document be developed as a work element associated with this proposal?

If this is the acquisition plan much more detail and explanation is needed. If developing a plan is a work element, clarification of that task is needed.

- 2) In either case, within the proposal, more explanation is needed on the quantitative anticipated benefits to fish and wildlife in terms of protection or restoration of productivity, abundance, diversity, and spatial structure (presumably from EDT/QHA estimates).
- 3) Some indication is needed of (a) the prioritization of the four subbasins – Grande Ronde, Umatilla, Walla Walla, and John Day – that are components of the acquisitions and (b) the anticipated extent of the acreage to be acquired.
- 4) Priority areas identified in the Subbasin Plans and by EDT need to be discussed in some detail, including expected gains in production and abundance resulting from the acquisitions.
- 5) More detailed discussion is needed of how scoring of criteria would be done (expert opinion, data analysis, EDT or QHA, etc.)
- 6) More details and definitions are needed for Criteria 3.
- 7) A list and relatively detailed description of sites that will be acquired or have the potential for acquisition, in so far as they are known, should be provided in the proposal or an acquisition plan. This list would aid in understanding the general characteristics of the types of areas that would be acquired under this project, and why they have been selected. (If necessary this list could remain confidential and will not be distributed beyond the ISRP.)
- 8) Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework.

Summary: This land acquisition proposal contains insufficient information for a scientific review because there is a lack of linkage between actual locations and anticipated benefits to fish and wildlife (i.e., numeric goals). The relationship between the proposed acquisition(s) and subbasin plans is described, but at a very general level. What is proposed is an opportunistic approach to land purchases as they may become available, albeit based on a rating system that seems justified, being grounded in EDT. However, an adequate tabulation of the total acquisition requirement and benefit is not provided. What percentage has already been acquired; how much might be available and over what time scale; and what benefit has been or might be accrued?

While EDT models may be limited in their capacity to project benefits, and often are based on expert opinion and less on locally-derived data, for the most part, a table of expected improvement to productivity and habitat capacity based on this modeling approach is essential. Better still would be examples where land acquisition has worked to improve abundance and productivity of salmon in nearby subbasins. Examples should be provided where land acquisition (by CTUIR) resulted in increase yield. The assumption is that there is a limitation to productivity and abundance imposed by habitat quality and quantity. Finally, a well-designed monitoring and evaluation "acquisition effectiveness" program is needed in order to evaluate benefits to fish and wildlife. Over the three watersheds in question, this might be possible, and perhaps one of the better opportunities in the Basin exists here.

ISRP Comments

1. Technical Justification, Program Significance and Consistency, and Project Relationships (sections B-D)

The rationale for selection of sites for acquisition based on priority areas identified in the Subbasin Plans and on EDT/QHA modeling is reasonable, but the proposal provides insufficient detail for scientific review. Although the project is coupled directly to Subbasin Planning and is also linked to a number of other ongoing projects, benefits to fish and wildlife are not provided. The sponsors should be commended for developing a set of criteria for selection of sites for acquisition. Each of the criteria will be scored for a site, and the total score will play a role in prioritizing the site for acquisition.

The proposal could be improved if more detailed information on the priority sites identified in the Subbasin Plans and from EDT was provided. This information could include locations of the sites within the various basins (with a map of sites in the context of each basin as a whole); size of the area; connectivity to other sites; whether the sites are used for spawning and/or rearing; and expected gains in productivity, abundance, and diversity (presumably from EDT/QHA estimates).

In the Technical Justification section, we have some questions about Criteria 3 in the Project Prioritization Table: Some definition is required for these criteria. What constitutes a “high probability”? What constitutes limited potential, significant or long-term loss, extensive short-term loss? It is not clear how these criteria would be applied.

2. Objectives, Work Elements, and Methods (section F)

The objectives and methods pertain primarily to the process that will be used to select and acquire sites. The proposal would be strengthened if there was more detailed discussion of how selection criteria would be scored. Would the scoring be based on expert opinion, data analysis, or by some other means or combination of means? Some terms in the criteria such as connectivity should be better explained in the context of the scoring procedure.

If possible, the sponsors should provide a list of the sites that will be acquired or have the potential for acquisition (with a relatively detailed description of each) as examples of the kinds of areas that would be acquired under this project.

Based on the description of the methods, the proposal is basically requesting permission to acquire all lands possible that achieve some minimum score in the rating scheme? However, there should be some technical review of the lands included as potential acquisition or easement candidates from EDT/QHA and how these sites were scored using the criteria. Some of the scoring criteria appear to be fairly subjective. Some examples of how these criteria are being interpreted would provide a better indication of how they are being applied.

Under method 5. Negotiate Sale Price, it would be prudent to determine if the landowner is amenable to sale or establishing a conservation easement before going to the trouble and expense of an appraisal.

3. M&E (section G, and F)

No M&E program is specified. The sponsors should demonstrate a commitment to M&E and describe the M&E program. Sufficient detail should be provided to demonstrate that benefits to fish and wildlife have occurred in the three watersheds. This project may provide an opportunity to compare relative benefits that accrue from different types of acquisitions.