



Striking a Balance Between Energy and the Environment in the Columbia River Basin

Subbasin Plans Proposed for Amendment into Fish and Wildlife Program



Marking another critical step forward in protecting and rebuilding fish and wildlife populations in the Columbia River Basin, the

Council adopted 29 subbasin plans as draft amendments to its Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program in October. The recommended subbasin plans are available for public review and comment until November 22.

Subbasin plans will guide the future implementation of the Council's Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program. A total of 59 recommended subbasin plans were submitted to the Council last May following nearly two years of work. The work was coordinated by watershed councils, local governments, and state, federal, and tribal agencies. The plans respond to direction in the Council's fish and wildlife program that successful mitigation of the

impacts of hydropower on fish and wildlife will be accomplished through the selection and implementation of subbasin-level goals, objectives, and strategies. Each subbasin plan has an assessment that describes historical and existing conditions, an inventory of existing fish and wildlife projects and past accomplishments, and a management plan that looks 10-15 years into the future.

During the summer, a team of independent scientists reviewed the draft plans. The Council also received comments from the public. Following these reviews, the Council evaluated the plans for their consistency with standards of the Northwest Power Act and the fish and wildlife program. Under the Act, measures adopted by the Council as part of the program must protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife affected by hydropower dams; complement the activities of federal, state, and tribal fish and wildlife

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Council Decisions

Amazon Basin/ Eugene Wetlands Phase Two Project

August 2004

The Council approved the purchase of a 65-acre conservation easement along Willow Creek west of Eugene, Oregon, to help mitigate the impacts of federal hydropower dams on fish and wildlife in the Willamette River Basin. While the dams are on tributaries of the Willamette River miles away from Eugene in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains, the mitigation is in the Eugene urban area where people, as well as wildlife, will benefit from the preservation of open spaces. The \$1.2 million easement would be added to

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Notes from the CHAIR

Judi Danielson



This fall, the Council will consider 29 local fish and wildlife plans for adoption into the Council's Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program. Also this fall, the Council released its draft Fifth Power Plan for public comment. The power plan lays out a strategy for the region to secure an affordable and adequate power system.

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Draft Subbasin Plans Proposed for Amendment

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managers; be based on and supported by the best available scientific knowledge; utilize the least-cost alternative where equally effective alternatives exist; and be consistent with the legal rights of Indian tribes. In addition to guiding the implementation of the fish and wildlife program, subbasin plans also will be used by NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a component of ESA recovery planning; by state and federal agencies for reconciling hatchery and harvest goals; and to complete an integrated monitoring and evaluation framework for fish and wildlife projects and research.

In December, following public comments, the Council plans to consider for approval the 29 draft subbasin plans for inclusion into the fish and wildlife program and, at the same time, propose 25 more draft plans for adoption and release them for public comment through mid-February. Those plans needed additional work before approval, and the work should be completed by December. A third group of draft subbasin plans, which also needed more work, is planned for adoption and public review later in 2005.

The 29 plans issued for public review in October address these subbasins: Asotin, White Salmon, Bruneau, Coeur d'Alene, Columbia Gorge, Cowlitz, Elochoman, Fifteenmile Creek, Flathead, Grays, Hood, Kalama, Kootenai, Lake Chelan, Lake Rufus Woods, Lewis, Lower Snake, Malheur, Owyhee, Pend Oreille, Salmon, San Poil, Spokane, Tucannon, Umatilla, Upper

Here is the public hearing schedule for the first 29 plans (specific locations are posted on the Council's website):

Wednesday, October 27th: Eugene, Oregon
- Wenatchee, Washington

Thursday, October 28th: Kalispell, Montana

Wednesday, November 3rd: Pendleton, Oregon

Thursday, November 4th: Boise, Idaho
- Ontario, Oregon

Monday, November 8th: Vancouver, Washington


Tuesday, November 9th: Portland, Oregon

Wednesday, November 10th: Hood River, Oregon

Monday, November 15th: Clarkston, Washington

Tuesday, November 16th: Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Columbia, Upper Mid- Columbia, Washougal, and Willamette.


All of the plans are posted on the Council's website, www.nwcouncil.org. Comments may be directed to Mark Walker, Director of Public Affairs, Northwest Power and Conservation Council, 851 S.W. Sixth Avenue Suite 1100, Portland, OR, 97204-1348. Comments also may be submitted by e-mail to comments@nwcouncil.org. Please write "subbasin plan comments" in the subject line. 

Notes from the Chair

(continued from front page)

The role of public input on both of these major projects is essential to their success. After all, along with the development of an energy plan for the Northwest and a fish and wildlife program, Congress mandated that the Council engage citizens in these important decisions.

Public hearings are scheduled throughout Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. The dates and locations are published in this newsletter on pages 2 and 4, and are available on our website as well.

I encourage anyone who cares about how we meet our energy needs and fish and wildlife protection in the basin to review our work and let us know what you think. Are we on the right path? We need to hear from you. 

Federal Proposal for Endangered Salmon Will Rely on Structural Improvements at Dams to Aid Fish Passage, Predator Control, and Habitat Improvements

The three federal agencies that run the hydrosystem in the Pacific Northwest—the Bonneville Power Administration, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Bureau of Reclamation—released in September the federal government’s new draft plan for salmon in the Columbia River Basin.

Years of development in the basin has come at a cost: The loss of habitat, overharvest, and the construction and operation of the region’s hydrosystem have all contributed to the declining numbers of salmon and steelhead. The draft plan, known as a biological opinion, proposes a 10-year operation plan for the federal hydrosystem and a few associated non-hydro measures to protect salmon populations.

The draft opinion responds to a decision by U.S. District Judge James Redden that the 2000 Biological Opinion did not adequately guarantee that some of its actions to help salmon would be implemented. The federal agencies believe the new draft opinion addresses that weakness and gives greater certainty about the plan’s recommended actions to enhance habitat and improve predator control.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) also released its analysis of the agencies’ plan, concluding that the proposal—which takes the removal of four dams on the lower Snake River out of consideration—will not jeopardize the continued existence of 12 populations of salmon and steelhead now under federal protection in the basin, and one population proposed for protection.

NOAA Fisheries said an important consideration in its decision that the operation of the dams would not jeopardize the existence of protected salmon stocks was the improved operation of the dams themselves, along with the federal agencies’ proposed improvements to the hydrosystem and non-hydro measures to help salmon. Another important factor in the fisheries agency’s “no-jeopardy” determination was the expected improvement brought about by efforts to substantially reduce predation on young salmon by northern pikeminnow. Longer-term reduction of

“Implementation of the federal dam operators’ proposal, along with other actions being taken in the Columbia River Basin, would mean the federal commitment to salmon enhancement funding will be in the range of \$6 billion over the next 10 years.”


*Steve Wright, Administrator
Bonneville Power Administration*

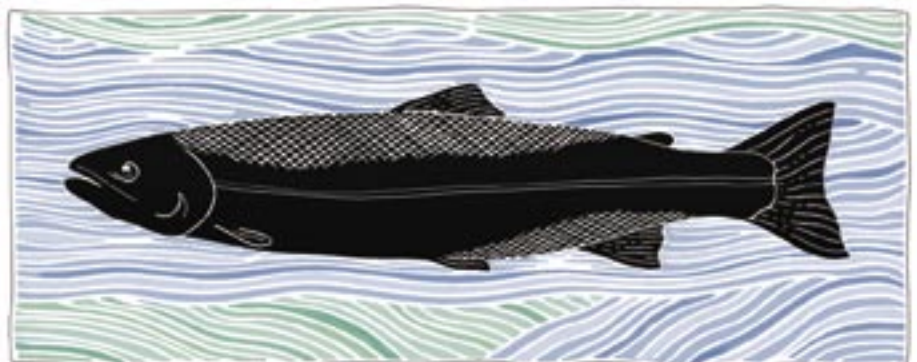
bird predation in the Columbia River estuary was also key to the no-jeopardy finding, as well as the dam operators’ commitments to structural improvements to dams to aid juvenile salmon passage. Other actions in the plan include targeting fish and wildlife funding for habitat improvements in the estuary and selected tributaries.

For the past three years, the Northwest has experienced record and near-record returns for a variety of adult salmon species. Good ocean conditions and improvements to the ecosystem affecting the entire life cycle of the salmon contributed to the good returns.

The proposal addresses the Council’s 2003 mainstem amendments to the Fish and Wildlife Program—recommendations on hydrosystem operations—that asked the federal agencies to evaluate the effectiveness of summer spill and other operations, and assess whether similar benefits could be achieved at less cost. The proposal commits to that approach. The federal dam operators’ proposed operation includes the current levels of summer spill, but leaves the door open to modifications if more cost-effective means for achieving the same biological performance can be implemented.

“Implementation of the federal dam operators’ proposal, along with other actions being taken in the Columbia River Basin, would mean the federal commitment to salmon enhancement funding will be in the range of \$6 billion over the next 10 years,” said Steve Wright, Bonneville administrator. “Modifications to hydrosystem operations that reduce electricity production will increase these costs.” Judge Redden has expressed concerns regarding the government’s conclusion that Columbia and Snake river dams do not threaten endangered salmon with extinction. In a written order issued in late September, the judge said the government may have “diverged significantly from the intent and terms” of the ruling he made last year.

The draft opinion is at www.salmon-recovery.gov. NOAA Fisheries is requesting comment on the proposal before the biological opinion is finalized at the end of November. 



Council Proposes Plan to Reduce Risk of Future Energy Shortages and High Prices

The Northwest Power and Conservation Council unveiled its draft Fifth Northwest Power Plan, a blueprint for an adequate, low-cost, and low-risk energy future in the wake of the West Coast energy crisis of 2000 - 2001.


Public Hearing Dates

October 26th: Portland, Oregon
October 27th: Eugene, Oregon
October 28th: Pasco, Washington
November 1st: Twin Falls, Idaho
November 8th: Boise, Idaho
November 10th: Seattle, Washington
November 16th: Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
November 17th: Spokane, Washington

See the Council's website for more information: www.nwccouncil.org

"We all remember the high prices and threats of shortages during the energy crisis," Council Chair Judi Danielson of Idaho said. "Four years ago, the Northwest was not positioned to ensure adequate resources and preserve low rates and low costs. As a result, we were exposed to considerable risks, and the region has not yet fully recovered. This plan will put the Northwest back on track to control our energy future."

The Council is required by the 1980 Northwest Power Act to develop a 20-year power plan to assure the region of an adequate, efficient, economical, and reliable power system; and to develop a fish and wildlife program to protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife affected by the dams. The Act also requires the Council's power plan to give first priority to cost-effective conservation; second to renewable resources; third to generating resources utilizing waste heat or generating resources of high fuel conversion efficiency; and fourth to all other resources. The power plan is updated every five years.

The draft power plan is available for public comment through Friday, November 19. The plan is available on the Council's website, www.nwccouncil.org. 

The draft plan comprises a resource development strategy to ensure the region's power supply with the least cost and least risk; and recommendations on key policy issues that affect the power system. Its key recommendations are:

Conservation

The Council recommends an aggressive and sustained development of conservation—700 average megawatts between 2005 and 2009. The Council considers improved energy efficiency to be a resource for meeting future electricity demand with the least harm to the environment. Although conservation may result in small rate increases in the short-term, it can reduce both cost and risk in the long-term.

Demand Response

The Council also recommends developing programs to reduce demand for power during periods of high prices and short supply. These agreements between utilities and customers have proven helpful in stabilizing electricity prices and in preventing outages. The Council recommends developing 500 megawatts of demand response between 2005 and 2009.

Wind

Wind generation figures prominently as a resource in the next decade. Its development depends on a number of factors: tax credits, pollution controls, decreasing production costs, and large areas of development. Over the next five years, the power plan calls for gathering more experience and information about wind resources and their performance and cost within the regional power system. The Council recommends developing wind generation at a moderate commercial scale—between 50 and 100 megawatts per year—at geographically diverse areas to resolve the uncertainties associated with this resource and to prepare for its eventual large-scale development. The level of near-term development is consistent with the wind development identified in the resource plans of regional utilities.

Prepare for New Power Plants

The region currently has a modest power supply surplus due to reduced demand and the new generating plants constructed over the past three years. However, independent power producers rather than regional utilities own most of the surplus capacity, which is available to the region at market prices. The Council believes the region should secure sites and permits to begin constructing new coal generating resources as early as 2010; and to construct a significant amount of additional wind generation shortly thereafter. Later in the 20-year planning period, some additional gas-fired generation may be needed. Transmission upgrades should be identified so all these resources can be built and brought on line quickly when required. If major transmission upgrades are needed, pre-construction planning, siting, and permitting will have to begin well before actual construction of the power plants.

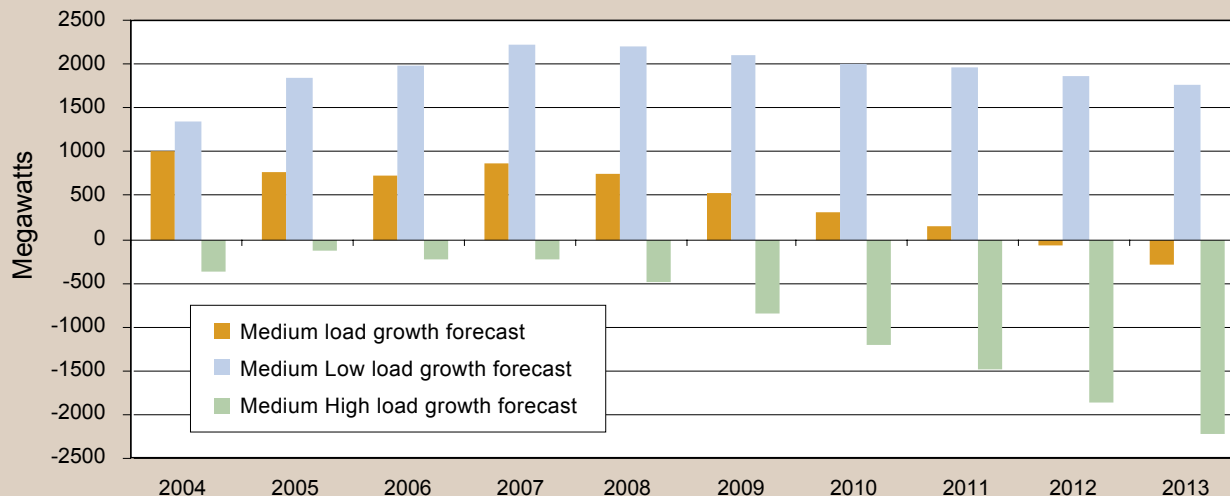
Key Policy Issues

Policy issues confronting the region include transmission operation and planning issues, the need to establish resource adequacy standards, and the future role of the Bonneville Power Administration in power supply.

Regarding Bonneville's future role, the Council recommends that the agency sell the electricity from the existing Federal Columbia River Power System to eligible customers at cost. Customers that request more power than Bonneville can provide from the existing system should be required to pay the additional cost. Regarding the other issues, the power plan supports the collaborative processes in the region currently underway to address these problems.

Council Proposes Plan to Reduce Risk

Annual - Average Load/Resource Balance (under the driest conditions)



Since 2000, over 4,500 megawatts of generating capacity has been built in the Northwest. This, combined with the loss of load due to reduced demand stemming from a slowdown in the economy, has led to a surplus of generation. The bars in this graph show the amount of generation in excess of load for three demand forecasts. The graph indicates that under the most likely range of load growth, medium, new generating resources are unlikely to be needed until the end of the decade.

Columbia River Forum Would Address International Water Management Issues

The Northwest Power and Conservation Council and the Columbia Basin Trust, the Council's closest counterpart agency in British Columbia, are considering the creation of an international discussion forum on Columbia River water issues.

Tentatively called the Columbia River Forum, its purpose would be to collect and assemble information and involve the public, elected officials and government agencies in discussions of economic, environmental, and social issues related to the Columbia River in British Columbia and the United States. The objective is to improve cross-border understanding of complex water management issues. Ultimately, this will enhance cooperation and improve decision-making on both sides of the border, the Council and Trust believe.

Four members of the Council met in Kimberley, British Columbia, last July with four members of the Columbia Basin Trust board

of directors to discuss the proposal, which later was approved by the full memberships of each agency. Also attending the July meeting were Jim Abbott, the member of the federal Parliament for Kootenay/Columbia, and Bill Bennett, the member of the provincial Legislative Assembly for East Kootenay. Both supported the proposal. Representatives of the British Columbia government and the Canadian foreign ministry's Seattle office also attended and were supportive.

Melinda Eden, Council vice chair who attended the Kimberley meeting, said the forum could provide a means of educating political leaders from both countries about Columbia River water management issues. Josh Smienk, chair of the Columbia Basin Trust, said the forum discussions would help ensure that the right issues for Columbia Basin residents will be on the table when and if Canada and the United States decide to negotiate a new Columbia River Treaty. The current treaty, which dates to 1964,

primarily addresses flood control and hydropower generation. The treaty allows for re-negotiation or termination. The earliest this could be done is 2024 if notice is given 10 years in advance.

The Trust and Council are developing a discussion paper to explain the forum concept. The first meeting could be held in the fall of 2005.

The Columbia Basin Trust, a corporation of the Province of British Columbia, was established by provincial legislation in 1995 to benefit the region most adversely affected by the Columbia River Treaty. Through an investment program, the CBT spends a portion of Canada's share of the additional hydropower generated as a result of the treaty to address the environmental, social, and economic impacts of the treaty dam construction in British Columbia. [CQ](#)

Success Stories — Colville Reservation

Habitat Restoration Focuses on Sharp-tailed Grouse

Dam construction in the Columbia River Basin altered wildlife habitat as well as fish habitat. For some bird species, such as geese and ducks, inundation of shoreline areas by reservoirs increased habitat by creating new pools and marshes. But for many other species, such as Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, the loss of shoreline trees and bushes reduced the amount of habitat and, over time, reduced populations.

On the Colville Indian Reservation, which borders the Columbia River in north-eastern Washington, grouse habitat lost to the creation of Lake Roosevelt behind Grand Coulee Dam is being replaced. The Colville Confederated Tribes, in partnership with surrounding tribes, are developing a habitat management plan that will direct activities such as planting deciduous trees and native shrubs in an area known to be used by the largest remaining population of Columbia sharp-tailed grouse in the area, a population that may number fewer than 200 birds.

The goal is to restore native plant communities, and eventually bird populations, on 60,000 acres of former agricultural lands, according to a report prepared by the tribes. The management effort is necessary in order to keep the sharp-tailed grouse population from extinction, according to the report.

Columbian sharp-tailed grouse historically were abundant in eastern Washington but have declined steadily over the years.

“There are a variety of reasons for the decline of this species, including genetic impacts, disease and habitat destruction,” said Rose Gerlinger, a wildlife biologist for the tribes. “This is a grassland species that historically has lived within and on the edge of the shrub-steppe habitat, and that habitat is declining everywhere.”

According to the tribes, increased settlement after 1900, and continuing conversion of grassland and sagebrush habitats to agriculture, also contributed to the decline, as did intensive livestock grazing on remaining patches of shrub/meadow steppe and shoreline areas after 1950.



Today, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse are classified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a threatened species in Washington. According to the tribes, in 1997 the estimated breeding population in Washington was only 716 birds, with the single largest subpopulation (about 169 birds) occurring on the Colville Reservation.

The habitat restoration project, which has an annual budget of \$170,000, supports ongoing efforts of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to coordinate acquisition and management of upland habitat for sharp-tailed grouse through the Council's Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program. Funding is provided by the Bonneville Power Administration, which is required by law to mitigate the impacts of Columbia River Basin hydropower dams on fish and wildlife.

Currently the tribes are evaluating sites in the southern part of the reservation where grouse are known to have nested in the past to determine the extent and type of restoration that would be necessary to help restore bird populations. The tribes also are monitoring female grouse to determine whether, and where, nesting is successful and whether male and female birds use habitat differently, and if so, why. This

involves investigating forage and soil types in likely nesting areas to determine what might be done to recreate appropriate habitat and forage for future populations. The tribes also are investigating the impacts of fire on grouse habitat. Specifically, decades of fire suppression contributed to an increase in the amount of shrubs, and this may have impacted grouse survival. Fires at regular intervals historically had the effect of controlling shrubbery growth as well as replenishing soil nutrients for other types of vegetation.

Calendar

Calendar of Council Meetings and Other Events:

- November 1-3: Pacific Northwest Ecosystems Then and Now, From Resource Development to Watershed-based Management. North Pacific International Chapter of the American Fisheries Society annual meeting. Stevenson, Washington. Information at www.wdafs.org/chapters/north_pacific_intl.htm.
- November 5: Water Law Conference. Portland. Information at www.theseminargroup.net or 800-574-4852.
- November 8-9: Dam Removal Workshop. Vancouver, Washington. Information at www.ewrinstitute.org/damremoval04.
- November 15-17: Lake Roosevelt Forum annual meeting. Spokane. Information at www.lrf.org.
- November 16-18: Northwest Power and Conservation Council. Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Information at www.nwcouncil.org.
- December 2-3: Land Use Law. Portland, Oregon. Information at www.theseminargroup.net or 800.574.4852.
- December 7-9: IAFWA Conservation Education Summit. Sheperdstown, West Virginia. Information at www.iafwa.org.
- December 7-9: 55th Annual NW Fish Culture Conference. Victoria, BC, Canada. Information at www.nwfcc@cofishbc.com or 1.888.601.4200.

Council Decisions

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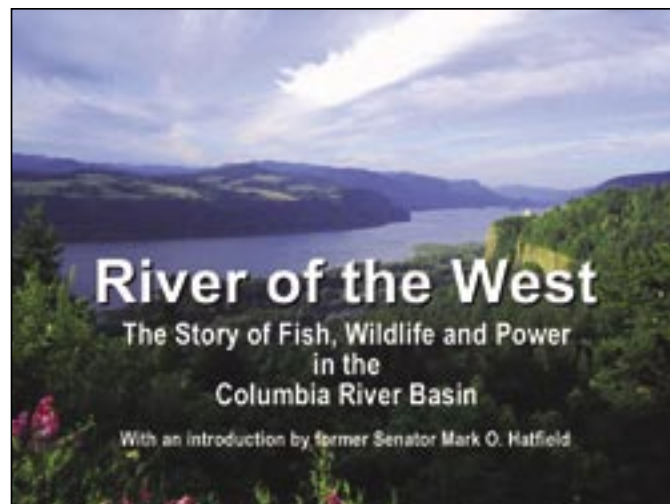
easements for three other parcels along Willow Creek that were recommended by the Council for acquisition in 2001.

Pacific Northwest Aquatic Monitoring Partnership

September 2004

The Council agreed to be a charter member of the partnership, a new effort among state, federal, and tribal fish and wildlife agencies in the Northwest to improve the monitoring of fish health and watersheds. The partnership is a voluntary, non-directive, self-organizing forum committed to developing a unified approach to monitoring in the Pacific Northwest. The partnership provides a forum for collaboration as involved parties work toward developing a coordinated approach to monitoring.

New Council Video Now Available!



The Columbia River has been the foundation of human communities in the Northwest for thousands of years. It continues to sustain a rich variety of fish and wildlife, and supplies most of the region's electricity from dams built along the river and its tributaries.

River of the West tells the story of the Columbia River Basin, from its early settlement in the 19th century and growing salmon fishery to the development of the Northwest's hydrosystem. The video provides an introduction to the history of the basin, the natural resource issues we struggle with, and the role of the Northwest Power and Conservation Council to reach a sustainable balance between the needs of fish and wildlife and the production of electricity.

Available in VHS or DVD.

Please telephone 503.222.5161 or 800.452.5161 to request a copy. See a preview at www.nwcouncil.org/video

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Council Quarterly

is produced four times a year by
the Public Affairs Division
of the Northwest Power and
Conservation Council.



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