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November 15, 2010

Mr. William C. Maslen
Manager, Fish and Wildlife Division
Bonneville Power Administration
P.O. Box 3621
Portland, Oregon 97208

Dear Mr. Maslen:

The purpose of this letter is to advise you of the Council's decision on a Columbia River Fish Accord proposal. This recommendation was made by the Council at its meeting on November 10, 2010.

In addition, a purpose of this letter is to inform the project sponsor and other interested parties of the status of this Council action. The following is a summary of the action taken by the Council at the meeting in November.

Montana Resident Fish Habitat Acquisition, Project #2008-800-00

On August 26, 2010, the Council received a proposal from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP), Project #2008-800-00, *Montana Resident Fish Habitat Acquisition* for science review and on September 29, 2010 the ISRP provided their review (ISRP document 2010-32). The ISRP requested additional information before they could determine if the proposal met scientific criteria. To date no public comment has been received on the ISRP review.

This project implements the Columbia Basin Fish Accord with the State of Montana. The goal of this project is to secure remaining priority fish habitats within the Swan River Valley, a tributary to the Flathead River. These acquisitions are part of an effort that has been going on for over 13 years that lead to an agreement (i.e., Montana Legacy Project) in 2008 to purchase 311,000 acres of corporate timberland in western Montana, including 66,000 acres in the Swan River valley in an effort to protect the associated fish and wildlife habitat, while promoting sound timber management and continued public recreational opportunities. This project will contribute to this effort.

On October 14, 2010 the Council received a response from Bonneville intended to address the additional detail as requested by the ISRP and on October 27, 2010 the ISRP provided their final review (ISRP document 2010-35). The ISRP found that the project "*Meets Scientific Criteria (Qualified)*."

The ISRP found that MFWP provided sufficient information for the review panel to support this project. They noted that land and associated wetland and stream acquisitions are a Fish and Wildlife Program strategy to protect and restore focal species impacted by Columbia River hydrosystem development. In this specific instance, the information provided by MFWP is sufficient to identify bull trout in Swan Valley as a focal species and technically justifies the acquisition.

The ISRP discussed some issues with the project including the desire for more information on the status and distribution of westslope cutthroat trout and non-native rainbow trout in the area, the desire for additional detail regarding parcel relationships to focal species, and the need to provide estimates of benefits to fish and wildlife of proposed parcels. As it has with other projects the ISRP also had additional questions on future monitoring plans. The ISRP does not want responses to the qualifications, but are providing them to benefit the integrity and soundness of these acquisitions.

Based on the ISRP review, the importance of this project for bull trout in the Swan Valley, and to assist in securing key parcels in association with the Montana Legacy Project, the Council supports this project for implementation.

Sincerely,

Tony Grover
Director, Fish and Wildlife Division

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