

To Hon. James A. Redden and the NWF v. NMFS Steering Committee:

This is to advise that NOAA Fisheries is today beginning the process of releasing a draft Biological Opinion (BiOp) for the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS). That process will include the following steps:

1. In response to a previous request from the Four Governors (States of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana) a meeting began at 8:30 a.m. PDT today between the Natural Resources Advisors of the Four Governors and the Regional Federal Executives of NOAA, Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and Bonneville Power Administration. The meeting is being held in the Conference center at Portland Airport. The primary purpose of the meeting is to provide information as to the present conclusions of the new Draft BiOp.

2. On or before 1:00 p.m. PDT NOAA will issue a press release outlining the preliminary conclusions in the draft BiOp and will hold a Telephone Press Conference for members of the media from 1:00 to 1:30 pm, PDT.

A copy of this press release and fact sheet will be forwarded by email to all recipients of this message as soon as it is issued, and posted on the remand website.

3. The final text of the Draft BiOp is now undergoing review by NOAA and will be released to the salmon co-managers and for public review not later than September 10, 2004.

The draft BiOp will set forth the following conclusions:

- * NOAA has concluded that nearly all Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed populations of salmon and steelhead have significantly improved from the numbers counted in 2000 and are well above the 10 year average returns.

- * These new numbers are the result of funding of federal, state, local and tribal restoration of hundreds of miles of in-river and estuary salmon habitat, state of the art technological upgrades to hydroelectric dams and other facilities, and recent favorable ocean conditions. These efforts will continue in the future, including a request by the Bush Administration for an additional \$100 million in the President's 2005 budget request for hundreds of collaborative, locally-driven projects.

- * The new draft BiOp will provide for a significant commitment of future resources by federal agencies operating the FCRPS. It will include a commitment to boost fish survival through the FCRPS (including efficient spill and removable spillway weirs and other similar improvements) over the next 10 years.

* The draft BiOp will also respond to the opinion of Judge Redden in this case that measures to help endangered species that are relied upon are reasonably certain to be carried out. This is done by clearly identifying remedial actions necessary for each species and by providing the tools to measure results. It will define in greater detail the specific hydropower, habitat and hatchery actions that need to be taken and will provide specific performance standards for these actions.

* The new draft BiOp performance standards will require the federal agencies operating the dams to achieve specific levels of survival for juvenile and adult fish passage through the dams, but they will be given flexibility as to how best to achieve that survival.

* The new draft BiOp will continue the major salmon protection efforts included in the prior BiOP, including predator control and habitat improvements, and the funding by BPA of its fish and wildlife program - currently providing an average \$139 million each year for such projects.

Based on these provisions, NOAA will preliminarily conclude in the draft BiOp that the proposed operations of the FCRPS will not be likely to jeopardize the ESA listed fish.

After input and discussions with co-managers and other affected parties, a final BiOp will be issued on or before November 30, 2004 in accordance with the schedule approved by the Court in this case.

We will provide further information and documents to all of you as they become available.