

COLUMBIA RIVER REGIONAL FORUM

TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM Policy Issue for Resolution by the Implementation Team

November 13, 2002

Background:

The Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative group has been meeting since April 2002 to discuss burbot conservation in the lower Kootenai River. As a result of their conversations, and nine years of biological study of the fish, the group brought SOR 2002-B1 to TMT. The SOR requests 45 days of special operations this year to aid burbot spawning by providing low flows in the area this winter (please see SOR 2002-B1 for the full justification for the request).

In analyzing the request, BPA's modeling has shown the cost of the requested operation to be in the range of \$.5-1.3 million. Given their financial situation and additional biological questions they have, BPA has offered a counter proposal which is cost neutral and provides 37 days of special operations (so long as there is no need for flood control or cold snap operations). BPA has biological questions that they feel should be answered before implementing such an operation, especially given that the fish are not listed at this time (such as: Is this a distinct population? Will the numbers of fish spawning in the area be beneficial for recovery? Are there any other alternatives that would be cost neutral and equally as effective for the spawners? etc.) A USFWS decision regarding listing is due in March 2003. USFWS and IDFG biologists expressed at TMT that burbot are "in worse shape" than sturgeon were prior to their listing.

Issues discussed at TMT included: VARQ; forecasting uncertainties for January; and questions about existing biological information and whether it adequately demonstrates that the requested operation will provide a biological benefit.

POLICY QUESTION FOR IT:

- Should this special operation occur in the absence of a listing? Put another way, is there a regional benefit to avoiding a listing by taking action now or should the listing occur first before the region invests BPA funding in these operations? Is there a regional benefit for BPA to spend money to increase the probability of a burbot operation from 50% to 95%?

NOTE: This policy question was discussed and framed at TMT and written for distribution by the facilitation team.