IMPLEMENTATION TEAM
CONFERENCE CALL NOTES

November 14, 2002, 1:30 p.m.-4:00 p.m.

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE OFFICES
PORTLAND, OREGON

I. Greetings, Introductions and Review of the Agenda.

The November 14, 2002 Implementation Team conference call to discuss operations for burbot was chaired by Jim Ruff of NMFS and facilitated by Donna Silverberg. The meeting list of attendees is attached.

The following is a distillation (not a verbatim transcript) of items discussed at the meeting, together with actions taken on those items. Please note that some enclosures referenced in the body of the text may be too lengthy to attach; all enclosures referenced are available upon request from NMFS's Kathy Ceballos at 503/230-5420 or via email at kathy.ceballos@noaa.gov.

II. Issue Raised From TMT Regarding Winter Operations for Burbot

The focus of today's IT conference call is SOR 2002-B1, a request for limited releases from Libby Dam for migration and spawning of Burbot in the Kootenai River. This SOR, supported by the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, the Idaho Office of Species Conservation, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Boundary County Commissioners, the City of Bonners Ferry and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, requests the following specific operations:

- Maintain low flows in the Lower Kootenai River below Bonners Ferry for 45 days between December 15 and January 31.
- Flows would be a combination of local runoff and releases from Libby Dam ranging

between 4 Kcfs and 10.6 Kcfs.

- Preferably, the releases from Libby Dam would remain below 7.3 Kcfs, the median.
- Operate the selective withdrawal system at Libby Dam to release the coldest available water during December and January if a temperature gradient exists within the reservoir.
- The requested operation is to be implemented within flood control constraints.
- Through written declaration by the regional managers, the power system will continue to be operated to assure system stability and public safety. The following definition and protocol for power emergencies as outlined by the Corps, the Bureau of Reclamation and BPA in "Cold Snap Operating Procedures" will be used for this purpose.
- The existing USFWS Biological Opinion ramping rates will remain in effect, except during emergency conditions.
- This request is subject to favorable analysis of the effects on listed species, and in-season mitigation or adjustments to satisfy their needs.
- Consideration should be given to the latest runoff forecasting procedures which will include November and December, and VARQ if adopted on an interim basis in January.
- This request will be fine-tuned in-season through the TMT.

The full text of SOR 2002-B1 is available via the TMT's Internet homepage; please refer to this document for justification and other details.

Silverberg explained that this SOR was discussed at the November 6 TMT meeting, as was Bonneville's analysis in response to the SOR. That discussion resulted in a policy issue, elevated from the TMT to the IT. The issue statement notes that, in analyzing this request, BPA's modeling has shown the cost of the requested operation would be in the range of $500,000-$1.3 million. Given BPA's financial situation and additional biological questions they have, BPA has offered a counterproposal which is cost-neutral and provides 37, rather than 45, days of special operations (so long as there is no need for flood control or cold snap operations). BPA has some biological concerns that they feel should be answered before implementing such an operation, especially given that burbot 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 effective for spawners?). A Fish and Wildlife Service decision regarding listing is due in March 2003. At the TMT, USFWS and IDFG biologists expressed their opinion that burbot are "in worse shape" than sturgeon were prior to their listing.

The specific question the TMT is asking IT to consider (full text also available via the TMT homepage) is:

- 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%?

Jim Athearn of the Corps and Bill Tweit of WDFW noted that, in their opinion, this question is poorly-worded -- rather than emphasizing the listing question, the real question is, if the Northwest Power Planning Council had already adopted a mainstem amendment which included operations for burbot, would we even be discussing whether or not they are listed? Tweit said. Silverberg replied that the policy question, as worded, was the result of a thorough and lengthy debate at last week's TMT meeting. In response to a question from Tweit, Sue Ireland of the Kootenai Tribe said the Northwest Power Planning Council is aware that the burbot issue will need to be addressed during the mainstem amendment process.

Bob Hallock of the Fish and Wildlife Service noted that higher water years offer little or no opportunity to help burbot; however, 2002/2003 is shaping up to be a low water year, at least at this point – this winter may provide one of our better opportunities for some time to do something positive for burbot, he said. There is no opportunity, at this point, to begin an artificial propagation program for this species, Hallock said, hence the urgency to do something, from a biological standpoint. He added that, because of the extraordinary fecundity of the typical burbot female – up to 1 million eggs per spawning event – it is possible to reap very high biological benefits, even from a relatively low number of spawners, if the proper spawning conditions are provided. It may be a rare opportunity, in other words, Hallock said.

Bonneville's Suzanne Cooper offered one clarification to the issue statement as worded, noting that it is not BPA's position that a listing will be required before Bonneville is willing to do something for burbot. However, given BPA's current financial condition, as well as our outstanding questions about whether or not the requested operation will in fact result in a successful burbot spawning situation, we're not willing to implement the operation as requested this year, Cooper said. However, we are planning to continue to work with the conservation groups about getting to survival and recovery of this species, she added. Ireland replied that the operation requested in SOR 2002 B-1 is needed so that monitoring and evaluation can be done to develop the very information needed to answer BPA's biological questions.

Do you have an M&E plan ready to go forward if this request is implemented? Ruff asked. In other words, are you funded and ready to go? Yes, replied IDFG's Vaughn Paragamian. To me, said Ruff, it sounds as if the issue is beginning to boil down to whether or not a 37-day burbot operation would be adequate or insufficient for your purposes. I believe, based on the evidence that we have in hand, that a 120-day operation would be optimal, Paragamian replied; 90 days would be good, and 45 days is the absolute minimum. We can certainly monitor burbot movement and spawning under a 37-day operation, but in my opinion, burbot need low-flow conditions similar to pre-Libby Dam for a minimum of 45 days.

In response to a question from Scott Bettin, Paragamian said there are currently three radio-tagged burbot in the study area, although one of those tags is stationary and has likely been expelled from the fish. He said that for the past two and a half weeks, IDFG has been attempting, unsuccessfully, to catch additional burbot for tagging; a minimum of 5-6, and

preferably 10-12, newly radio-tagged burbot are needed to ensure a successful M&E effort this year. There will also be a burbot netting operation which will provide valuable data, added Hallock. In response to another question from Bettin, Paragamian said it will become even more difficult to capture burbot for tagging once Kootenai River flows come up.

In response to another question, Ruff said it is his understanding that the current 82% forecast applies only at Libby, not in the rest of the Snake/Columbia basin. Cindy Henriksen of the Corps added that this is the first year this very early Libby forecast has been used; there has been no field testing to tell us how accurate we might expect it to be, she said.

Cooper noted that, under BPA's counterproposal, there is a 50-50 chance that Kootenai River flows below Bonners Ferry will be in the SOR's requested range during the last week of December. Given the fact that researchers have not yet caught and radio-tagged enough burbot to have a meaningful M&E operation this year, it sounds as though that evaluation could benefit from an additional week of low flows to allow more fish to be caught and tagged, Cooper said. Perhaps TMT could discuss some alternative burbot operations in the interim, she suggested.

In response to a question from Ruff, it was noted that the current outflow from Libby is 4.8 Kcfs. When does the Corps plan to start drafting Libby to its December 31 flood control elevation of 2411? Ruff asked. In the Bonneville proposal, we would start drafting December 1, yielding higher Kootenai River flows during the first three weeks of December, then dropping back down during the fourth week, Cooper replied. And the Corps is open to discussing how they get from the current Libby elevation of 2436 feet to elevation 2411 by December 31? Ruff asked. Yes, Henriksen replied. And the operation requested in this SOR would fit within the Corps' planned operation? Tweit asked. It would be one possible way to get to elevation 2411 by December 31, yes, Henriksen replied.

In response to a question from Hlebechuk, Cooper explained that the requested burbot operation would result in a 2.4 Kcfs increase over the current Libby outflow of 4.8 Kcfs. Because November energy prices are lower than December energy prices, if the burbot operation starts immediately, it will cost BPA $500,000-$1.3 million to implement. That's one of the reasons that, from our perspective, we would prefer to wait to start the burbot operation, Cooper said – the other is that another week of low Libby outflow will give researchers the opportunity to tag more fish. To us, the worst possible outcome would be for this operation to have an adverse financial impact on BPA, and to yield little or no useful M&E data, Cooper said. Howard Schaller reiterated that useful biological data will be gained even if no additional burbot are radio-tagged.

A lengthy discussion ensued, touching on the timing of the SOR's implementation, the consequences attendant on its delay, and whether or not there is anything further for the TMT to discuss relative to this issue. It was agreed to adjourn the IT meeting participants and re-convene the group as the TMT, to discuss some further burbot proposals BPA has circulated via email. Steve Kerns led this TMT discussion. Basically what I tried to do was to test some

strategies that have been proposed to minimize the cost of the proposed burbot operation, said Kerns; I spent a great deal of time talking to our experts here about current energy pricing and forecast prices through the end of November. I studied an operation that would pick Libby outflow up to full powerhouse discharge (26 Kcfs) starting next week, reduces it to 15.6 Kcfs during Thanksgiving week, then back up to full powerhouse discharge for a week and a half before ramping down to 7.3 Kcfs Libby outflow by December 15. That operation would yield a 90% confidence of being able to achieve the requested burbot flow levels at the end of December, as well as Libby's 2411 flood control elevation requirement by December 31, Kerns explained. Depending on the actual price of energy, the cost of this operation would be $400,000-$900,000 to Bonneville and an additional $100,000-$200,000 to the region.

Is that a price Bonneville is willing to live with? Paul Wagner asked. We haven't been given much room to negotiate that, Kerns replied.

One other question that arose at yesterday's TMT meeting was whether or not 10 days of 10.4 Kcfs Libby outflow was in any way acceptable, said Kerns; we could change the rampdown schedule somewhat to produce seven or eight days at 7.3 Kcfs. It depends on what is more important to you, Kerns said; that could be achieved at no cost.

Essentially, what we have is three scenarios, said Kerns – the one we discussed at yesterday's TMT meeting, the second operation described above, which would achieve a 90% probability of meeting both the burbot flow objectives and the 2411 elevation requirement at Libby, and a third operation, which would modify the rampdown rate included in BPA's original proposal to produce a week of 7.3 Kcfs at the end of December. The confidence of achieving the 7.3 Kcfs flow level is 50%, he added.

So because Bonneville's managers are not willing to incur a financial cost to implement the burbot operation, Option 2, which would cost BPA $400,000-$900,000, isn't really on the table, Silverberg observed. That's correct, Kerns replied – that's just an alternative I was asked to analyze at yesterday's TMT meeting. What's the possibility of holding 10.6 Kcfs from December 15-31 – is that something Bonneville would consider? Hallock asked. Our proposed operation gives you a 50-50 chance of holding that flow level not for 15 days, but for nine days, Kerns replied. So it is BPA's position that they are not going to spend any money on this operation? Scott asked. That's correct, Kerns replied -- we're not willing to spend any money to increase the probability from 50% to something greater than 50%.

The discussion continued in this vein for some minutes. Ultimately, Hallock said that, out of two bad scenarios, he would prefer to see 7.3 Kcfs for seven days rather than 10.3 Kcfs for nine days, due to the change in velocity. That's helpful, said Kerns. And would that still result in a 37-day operation? Chris Ross replied. It could be up to 45 days, if the weather cooperates, Cooper replied. The group also discussed the possibility of exceeding the BiOp ramp rates as a way to maintain the 7.3 Kcfs flow level for an extra day or two; Hlebechuk said her only concern is bank slumping at Bonners Ferry. We'll discuss it with Montana, she said.

So do we have a workable solution, recognizing that it is less than optimal? Silverberg asked. We would prefer a longer duration at 7.3 Kcfs, Hallock replied, but it sounds as though that is not going to be forthcoming. In that case, said Silverberg, what I've heard today is that the preference of the group is to ramp down to 7.3 Kcfs as early as possible, and to hold it for as long as possible. No objections were raised to this characterization. To be clear, said Hallock, what we would prefer is something less than 10.6 Kcfs for as long as possible. Understood, said Silverberg; it is also clear that we will be continuing to discuss this operation – in particular, ways to increase the duration of flows less than 10.6 Kcfs – at the TMT's remaining November and December meetings.

With that, the conference call was adjourned. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.

IT Conference Call - November 7, 2002

Participant List:

Chris Ross, NOAA Fisheries
Jim Ruff, NOAA Fisheries
Paul Wagner, NOAA Fisheries
Kathy Ceballos, NOAA Fisheries
Jim Athearn, US Army Corps of Engineers
Scott Boyd, US Army Corps of Engineers
Cindy Henriksen, US Army Corps of Engineers
Cathy Hlebechuk, US Army Corps of Engineers
Greg Bowers, US Army Corps of Engineers
Donna Silverberg, Facilitation Team
Robyn Harkless, Facilitation Team
Bob Hallock, US Fish & Wildlife Service
Dave Wills, US Fish & Wildlife Service
Howard Schaller, US Fish & Wildlife Service
Ron Boyce, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife
Kyle Martin, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
Jerry Kuechle, BPA Contractor
Shane Scott, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
Bill Tweit, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
Tony Norris, US Bureau of Reclamation
Vaughn Paragamion, Idaho Department of Fish & Game
Steve Pettit, Idaho Department of Fish & Game
Russ George, Consultant
Sue Ireland, Kootenai Tribe
Suzanne Cooper, Bonneville Power Administration
Nicole Ricci, Bonneville Power Administration

Scott Bettin, Bonneville Power Administration
Steve Kerns, Bonneville Power Administration
Dave Statler, Nez Perce Tribe