June XX, 2006

Dr. Tom Karier, Chair
Northwest Power and Conservation Council
851 SW 6th Avenue, Suite 1100
Portland OR 97204-1348

Dear Dr. Karier;

The members of the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority are concerned about what we see as unintended outcomes with funding of wildlife projects under the current solicitation process. There are two areas of primary concern. First, is the potential that some key wildlife projects that require on-going operations and maintenance funding are at risk in the local prioritization processes. Second, is that the original provincial allocations may have overlooked the substantial wildlife funding that is needed for operations and maintenance funding for existing projects in the lower areas of the basin. This has the potential to make it difficult to achieve the 70:15:15 target. We believe that it is important to address these issues as soon as possible to avoid problems as the process moves forward.

As you are aware, over the years the Fish and Wildlife program has purchased land and conservation easements as mitigation for the loss of wildlife habitat due to the construction and inundation of the Federal Columbia River Power System. Along with the purchase came the need and commitment to provide for the long-term maintenance and operation of these lands in order to protect the resource values they contained. This commitment to continued funding is included in many of the various agreements and MOAs that were developed in the process. In some cases, failure to fund operations results in the loss of the habitat credits and may even jeopardize the ownership of the property.

As you might imagine the majority of the participants in many of the local ranking processes have a primary interest in fish issues. This may at some times be at odds with the long-term commitments of the Fish and Wildlife Program. Given the limited funding available in each of the provinces the competition for funding has been intense. Our members have been active participants in these local processes and have articulated the high priority nature of these wildlife projects. However, in several cases funding of projects for on-going operation of wildlife lands has fared poorly in the local ranking process, and there is concern that these projects will not be ranked high enough to be funded in some provinces.

Based on conversations with Council staff it is not apparent that the original provincial allocations considered the need for on-going operations and maintenance funding in the

lower reaches of the basin. It appears that the original planning assumed that most or all of the wildlife funding would occur in the blocked areas. While there is general agreement that spending in these areas needed to increase, we could end up with a substantial imbalance in the 70:15:15 ratio. For example, there is in excess of $4.5 million proposed for operations and maintenance funding in the unblocked areas. This represents about 3% of the total funding or 21% of the funding for the wildlife portion of the program.

We would like to urge you to consider solutions to this problem as soon as possible. It is vital to the integrity of the on-going projects that they receive the necessary continued funding. We know that it is important to respect the local selection processes. One solution would be to provide a parallel ranking process for all of the wildlife projects, under the umbrella of the 15% allocation to wildlife projects. In this way wildlife projects would be measured against other wildlife projects, rather than being weighed against the array of fish projects. This will result in a more even treatment of wildlife projects and a better, more clearly defined assurance that the most important projects will be funded and the 15% achieved.

The members of CBFWA would be happy to work with you to look for solutions to this problem. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brian Lipscomb
Executive Director