

Resident Fish, Data Management, and Regional Coordination Category Review:

Preliminary Review of Proposals

Presented to MAG

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Objective of Review

The Council and Bonneville's review objectives for the subcategories are:

- Resident Fish: Confirm continued and proposed work in this area of the Fish and Wildlife Program and identify gaps for resident fish work for addressing limiting factors affecting fish; research, monitoring, and evaluation; and species propagation and mitigation requirements in the 2006 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service BiOp.
- Data Management: Improve value of the raw and derived data that is collected, maintained, and analyzed under the Program to evaluate program effectiveness and also improve the interconnectivity, usability, accessibility, and dissemination of that data for the region.
- Program Coordination: Confirm activities and tasks that directly support Fish and Wildlife Program implementation, reporting, and technical policy development at the Program level.

Review Criteria

ISRP reviews are based on criteria provided in the 1996 amendment to the Northwest Power Act. The amended Act directs the ISRP to review projects for consistency with the Council's Fish and Wildlife Program and whether they:

1. are based on sound science principles;
2. benefit fish and wildlife;
3. have clearly defined objectives and outcomes; and
4. contain provisions for monitoring and evaluation of results.

Pursuant to the 1996 amendment, the Council must fully consider ISRP recommendations when making its recommendations regarding funding and provide an explanation in writing where its recommendations diverge from those of the ISRP.

ISRP Requests Policy Guidance for Regional Coordination

A decision is needed on whether regional coordination is an area for scientific investigation and by whom. Four alternatives are possible and others may be identified as this issue gets policy discussion.

1. Continue with the emerging model of formula-funded coordination without including scientific investigation.
2. Encourage those making regional coordination proposals to identify important research questions for study along with their coordination efforts.
3. Hire an outside contractor to evaluate the regional coordination process and the effectiveness and efficiency of its outcomes.
4. Have Council staff do more monitoring of regional coordination outcomes and analyze whether these outcomes are contributing to achievement of Fish and Wildlife Program goals and objectives.

If any one of the three scientific approaches (2-4) are used, proposals should be revised or submitted that take a more investigative and analytical approach to assessing regional coordination effectiveness and efficiency.

ISRP Programmatic Overview

Review of regional coordination projects shows many thoughtful and interesting ideas, but little science to evaluate outcomes and learn in an adaptive management framework. Scientific analysis of regional coordination, including the development of meaningful indicators to measure success, could provide ways to effectively and efficiently carry out the objectives of the Fish and Wildlife Program.

The proposal proponents identified some key regional coordination questions that should be considered. Each proposal proponent should focus on at least one regional-coordination question and develop a research design to identify outcomes and lessons learned.

10 Sample questions were provided.

These questions should be placed in a research design framework thereby encouraging efforts to investigate outcomes of regional coordination activities.

In the next amendment to the Fish and Wildlife Program, the definition of regional coordination and the overall section on coordination in the Fish and Wildlife Program (see NPCC 2009-09: 63-64, 71) would benefit from additional clarification, taking into account the ISRP's programmatic comments.

ISRP General Comment

The main deficiency of all regional coordination proposals is that they do not place “emphasis on outcomes”; discuss hypotheses; include quantitative (and qualitative) measures and metrics; or present summary tables, graphs, and trends. Key questions, hypotheses, relationships, data gathering and analysis, reporting of results, and revisions based on what is learned are desirable.

ISRP General Comment

The main deficiency of all regional coordination proposals is that they do not place “emphasis on outcomes”; discuss hypotheses; include quantitative (and qualitative) measures and metrics; or present summary tables, graphs, and trends. Key questions, hypotheses, relationships, data gathering and analysis, reporting of results, and revisions based on what is learned are desirable.

Review of Project Number 1989-062-01
Program Coordination and Facilitation Services
provided through the Columbia Basin Fish and
Wildlife Foundation

1989-062-01 Facilitation Services

ISRP recommendation: Qualified - See programmatic comments on coordination projects

Qualifications:

A sound scientific proposal should respond to the six questions and related material at the beginning of the regional coordination section.

Meets Science Review Criteria

Meets Science Review Criteria – In Part

(Qualified) is assigned to recommendations in the two categories above for which additional clarifications and adjustments to methods and objectives by the proponent are needed to fully justify the entire proposal. The ISRP expects that needed changes to a proposal will be determined by the Council and BPA in consultation with the project proponent in the final project selection process. The ISRP also uses “Qualified” in two other situations: (1) for proposals that are technically sound but appeared to offer marginal or very uncertain benefits to fish and wildlife and (2) when further ISRP review of a project’s final implementation plan or analysis of results is needed before the project moves to full implementation. Regardless of the Council’s or BPA’s recommendations, the ISRP expects that, if a proposal is funded, subsequent proposals for continued funding will address the ISRP’s comments.

Six Questions by ISRP

1. What has been learned? What experiences, observations, insights, and background are known about regional coordination?
2. What is the problem? What is a key regional coordination question, issue, or topic that needs to be addressed?
3. What is the assessment approach? What qualitative and quantitative observations will be made to evaluate the problem? Identify the key ideas, concepts, or variables useful for studying the problem.
4. What are the methods? Identify methods used to assess the identified regional coordination issue(s) and explain their relevance. What sites, groups, time periods, roles, values, actions are important to understand? Describe how data will be collected and analyzed.
5. What are the expected outcomes? What new information about coordination will result from the assessment methods? How will outcomes be monitored and measured?
6. What is the next step? Based on the expected outcomes, identify adaptive management possibilities for the next step in regional coordination.

General Comments

- The proposal contains so much detail that it is difficult to review. Future proposals would be improved through more summary and synthesis of relevant information.
- The proposal provides extensive insight into a scientific perspective on program coordination. A number of **hypotheses** are presented about the coordination process and its outcomes. The approach provides narrative findings for the **experience** gained by CBFWA. The insights provide compelling **analysis** for developing a **sound scientific perspective** on program coordination early in the evaluation process.

Proposal Strengths

- The proposal is fully documented; **methods** and accomplishments are **exhaustively described**.
- The limiting factors statement addresses large-scale issues that have the potential to limit the effectiveness of the project. This is rare among proposals.
- The proposal provides **extensive insight** into a **scientific perspective** on program coordination.
- **Performance metrics have been identified and used to evaluate project effectiveness.**

Proposal Weaknesses

Weaknesses:

- So much detail is presented that it's difficult for the reviewer to track proposal content. The project is not only complex in itself it is also undergoing significant structural change.
- It is unclear where sturgeon or anadromous fish fit into CBFWA activities.
- It is sometimes difficult for external reviewers to assess the effectiveness of the project.

Other Comments

- The CBFWA proposal offers a detailed narrative review of the coordination history from 1989 to the present. It **analyzes changes in coordination** that have occurred and reasons for them.
- The problem statement is overly long, but at its end a summary conclusion **adequately states the problem the proposal is designed to address.**
- The proposal is focused around seven objectives, but the **implicit overarching objective** of this proposal is to coordinate disparate regional coordination projects around subject-matter themes.
- The proposal identifies three limiting factors for effective regional coordination: 1) perception of fairness, 2) participation and buy-in, and 3) adequate funding for both facilitation and participation. The proposal aims to address recent changes in these limiting factors.
- An adequate short description is provided.

Other Comments

- A detailed description of the project's major accomplishments in its former version – the Annual Work Plan.
- A complete description of ISRP comments and CBFWA response in terms of developing tools to monitor impact is provided.
- A good description of changes in CBFWA focus and configuration in response to changing circumstances in the region.
- The **narrative analysis of the regional coordination problem is excellent** and provides useful insights; more attention to identification of a scientific component to the proposal would help to plan for future success.
- **Methods are described in detail** in several different sections. Metrics are also described. **Measurement of performance** is through numbers at meetings, outcomes of coordination, and a survey of stakeholder satisfaction.

Other Comments

More findings like this one would be valuable, "These factors illustrate in high relief the Fish and Wildlife Program's recognition that coordination efforts and funding should be focused through a set of functional activities that need coordination, and not necessarily on the basis of entities desiring coordination funding." This seems to represent a critical principle for organizing coordination activities.

Other Comments

- The protocols for the 11 work elements are published but do not provide adequate guidance on the methods and metrics. The project sponsors can strengthen the science in proposals by developing methods and metrics for the most important project objectives.
- What part of “the ISRP for reporting metrics for regional coordination (ISRP 2007-14)” will be implemented? The document suggests (ISRP 2007-14:4), “Metrics of Impact: (e.g., how effective is the project: what is its added value of the coordination project) changes in behavior, value to the members, user evaluation of product utility, lack of redundancy, member assessment of effectiveness and impact, benefits to fish and wildlife of enhanced coordination activities, specific projects or resources benefited by the project, specific effect of coordination on conservation and management.” Where in the proposal are these suggested metrics of impact operationalized? A hypothesis worth testing is whether change in funding has led to decreased regional coordination.

Conclusion

- No response to ISRP necessary at this time
- F&W Managers may want to respond to ISRP programmatic comments
- ISRP is pushing regional coordination to be research focused
- Regional workshop to discuss ISRP comments with BPA, Council, and F&W managers?

Next Steps

- March 7 - Project sponsor responses due to the ISRP
- April 3 - ISRP Final Report
- April 10 or 11 - ISRP presentation to the Council, Skamania, Washington
- May Council Meeting - Council staff recommendation to Fish and Wildlife Committee (tentative)
- June Council Meeting - Council decision (tentative)