

Response to the ISRP Review:

ProjectID: 29003

Acquire Property for Partial Wildlife Mitigation

Sponsor: CCT

Short Description:

Acquire, protect, enhance and evaluate wildlife habitat and species for partial mitigation for losses to wildlife resulting from Grand Coulee and Chief Joseph Dams.

Sub basin in Columbia Cascade Province: Okanogan

Response to ISRP regarding the Project Proposal:

Introduction:

First, we thank the ISRP for the considerable time and effort that obviously went into conducting the field tours and scientific reviews of all the proposals. To partially reciprocate, we have decided to prepare this response to our proposal rather than redraft an entire new proposal document. We felt that the approach of focusing on the specific issues in question was warranted, especially given that the ISRP comments suggest that the justification and merits of our proposal were generally well received otherwise and ranked high in most other regards.

Our response to the ISRP comments is in two main parts: 1) our general, overall response to the reviewer's comments and questions, and 2) our responses to the specific issues identified by the ISRP, labeled so that they may be quickly identified and reviewed.

The ISRP comments on our proposal fall into two main categories. The first is a general need for clarification and more detail on the design and methodology for land acquisition, and the second is a request for more information on how we would develop an effective Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan.

We have addressed these questions from the ISRP by providing more explanatory detail on why this land acquisition effort is so important to the Tribes and by addressing the M&E concerns for this project.

1. Land Acquisitions

The Tribes have not been fully mitigated for losses associated with Chief Joseph (38% complete) and Grand Coulee Dams (54% complete). This project proposal will address the acquisition of approximately 12,000 acres that was the former Joy property (23,000 acres total) and surrounding acreage including Tribal and private lands. Tribal Realty Department is finalizing the boundaries to that portion under consideration for mitigation if this project proposal is accepted and funds are made available. This acquisition will be used to mitigate losses to mule deer and sharp-tailed grouse. Detailed information about this acquisition is

not yet complete (HEP work, NEPA, etc.) but the Tribe is willing to work with BPA to dedicate selected parcels into the mitigation program (Hellsgate O&M Project).

The large majority of lands within the Okanogan sub-basin are in private ownership even though they reside within the Reservation boundary. This makes management of species and habitats difficult if not impossible especially when addressing those evaluation species used in the loss assessments. This is a good land purchase that will address available habitat for sharp-tailed grouse nesting, brood rearing, and winter habitat as well as critical winter range for mule and white-tailed deer and elk.

Initial costs identified in this proposal are for buying land and/or the management rights with some short-term protection costs associated to establish baseline HEP information, fencing and weed control.

As suggested by the ISRP we looked at the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' Habitat Acquisition and Restoration Plan (# 19910600) as well as our own strategy for continued acquisitions. They contain similar elements/procedures for the property acquisition for mitigation. We used similar elements when we acquired 24,000 acres for mitigation in the Intermountain Province under the Hellsgate Wildlife Mitigation Project.

The following draft protocol is similar to what the Tribe uses for land acquisitions

Land Acquisition Process

□ 1. Projects Submitted (Land & Water Acquisition Board) *RPA*

Project Solicitation & Submittal

- Land & Water Acquisition Board Solicits Projects every 6 months
- Land & Water Board Screens Projects through Threshold Criteria

□ 1.1. Threshold Criteria

Threshold Criteria

These will likely be a combination of biological, policy and legal criteria. Examples would likely include:

- a) "In lieu" provisions of the NW Power Act,
- b) Projects that protect essential habitat for species of interest,
- c) High probability of meeting NEPA requirements
- d) Consistency with CRB Fish and Wildlife Program

□ 1.1.1. Fail

□ 1.1.2. Pass

» See also: : 2. Access to Funds

□ 2. Access to Funds

Preliminary Funding Access

- Funds from Land & Water Acquisition Fund Made Available to Projects meeting Threshold Criteria
- Funds can be used to secure properties through leases, options, etc. to ensure properties will remain viable for duration of process
- Funds can be used to complete coarse scale environmental analysis and ecological evaluation
- These actions must be completed within 120 days

□ 2.1. Secure Projects

Securing Projects

- Projects could be secured in a number of ways including
 - Short-term Leases
 - Lease/Buy Options
 - Options
 - Acquisitions

□ 2.1.1. Leases

□ 2.1.2. Options

□ 2.1.3. Other

□ 2.2. Coarse Screening

Coarse Screening Analysis

- This could include evaluations of quantity and quality of the habitat
- Verification of species presence and populations
- NEPA checklists
- Consistency with legal mandates of NW Power Act, NEPA, ESA, etc.
- Consistency with Columbia River Basin Fish & Wildlife Program
- Consistency with Biological Opinions

□ 2.2.1. Ecological values

□ 2.2.2. Legal

» See also: 3. Project Selection

□ 3. Project Selection (Land & Water Acquisition Board)

Project Selection

- Projects that are successfully secured are submitted to Land & Water Acquisition Board for Review & Recommendation
- Projects will be evaluated and ranked by the Board based on Biological and Policy Criteria
- The Board will be assisted by a technical panel with expertise in various areas of natural resource management

3.1. Biological Criteria

Biological/Environmental Criteria Could Include the Following;

- Have measurable objectives, such as the restoration of a given number of habitat units.
- Protect high quality native or other habitat or species of special concern, whether at the project site or not, including endangered, threatened or sensitive species.
- Provide riparian or other habitat that can benefit both fish and wildlife.
- Help protect or enhance natural ecosystems and species diversity over the long term.
- Other examples include criteria such as those of the Washington Wildlife & Recreation Program as listed below:

Washington Wildlife & Recreation Program

Evaluation Criteria

Critical Habitat Category

(State Agencies)

"Critical habitat means lands important for the protection, management, or public enjoyment of certain wildlife species or groups of species, including, but not limited to, wintering range for deer, elk, and other species, waterfowl and upland bird habitat, fish habitat, and habitat for endangered, threatened, or sensitive species." RCW 79A.15.010

□ 3.1.1. Fail

□ 3.1.2. Pass

» See also: 4. Project Approval

□ 3.2. Policy Criteria

Policy Criteria Could Include the Following:

- Encourage the formation of partnerships with other persons or entities, which would reduce project costs, increase benefits and/or eliminate duplicative activities.
- Address special wildlife losses in areas that formerly had salmon and steelhead runs that were eliminated by hydroelectric projects (for example, societal and tribal wildlife losses).
- Address concerns over additions to public land ownership and impacts on local communities, such as reduction or loss of local government tax base, special district tax base or the local economic base; or consistency with local governments' comprehensive plans.

□ 3.2.1. Fail

□ 3.2.2. Pass

» See also: 4. Project Approval

□ 4. Project Approval (NW Power Planning Council)

4.1 Columbia River Basin F&W Program Consistency

□ 4.2. Funding Approved

» See also: 5. Project Funding

□ 5. Project Funding

5.1 Appraisals, Title Search, etc.

5.2 Land Owner Negotiations. Appraisals determine fair market value.

2. Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

This project proposal deals mainly with the acquisition of suitable lands for mitigation. Once acquired, these lands will become part of the ongoing Hellsgate Wildlife Mitigation O&M Project # 199204800 (Intermountain Province)

for protection, enhancement, O&M, and will be monitored and evaluated under that project.

Monitoring is the process by which progress toward meeting project objectives is measured. The monitoring of management units will involve varying degrees of intensity and complexity depending on the ecological site and management species. Sites being monitored will vary from areas producing their potential to areas that have a high potential to improve, but are currently in a deteriorated state. Frequency and timing of monitoring will depend upon the minimum period of time in which an area will be expected to show change or when a change in management activities is scheduled. The guidelines established by the Tribes Fish and Wildlife Department and/or HEP suitability indexes for monitoring species and/or habitats will be followed. Both temporary and permanent monitoring techniques will be used. Photo records of before and after management actions will document steps toward objectives outlined in this plan. The site-specific management plan (Hellsgate O&M Project) developed for lands under the mitigation program provides the necessary information to make sound decisions regarding the implementation and adjustment of management activities to habitats on the mitigation lands. The plan includes monitoring techniques to be used to measure limiting habitats and/or critical components of a certain habitat and the frequency needed to indicate if management objectives are being met. The effects of habitat management strategies are evaluated and monitored annually for the life of the Project

Vegetative communities are monitored to determine stability and / or changes over time. Non-game responses to habitat management are monitored. A wildlife list of relative species abundance using or occurring on mitigation lands has been developed and will be updated over time. Wildlife population surveys, conducted during the appropriate time of year, aid in the evaluation process and allows for changes in management actions. Every five years a HEP will be conducted on selected habitats and compared to baseline data to document changes for the purpose of crediting.

The techniques currently in place are the same techniques and methodologies being used for ongoing projects such as, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Management Plan for Scotch Creek Wildlife Management Area, Idaho Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Mitigation and Restoration for Albeni Falls Dam, Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for the Albeni Falls Wildlife Mitigation Project (BPA Project numbers 1990206100 and 19910600) and CCT Hellsgate Big Game Winter Range Operation and Maintenance Project (# 199204800). In addition CBFWA is currently developing a standardized monitoring and evaluation methodology to be used throughout the region to address this concern.