PUBLIC POWER COUNCIL
Bringing public power together

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RE: Cougar Dam and Reservoir Downstream Fish Passage Project

In response to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) draft Environmental Assessment (EA) to aid in developing a project to provide downstream fish passage for Upper Willamette River chinook at Cougar Dam, the Public Power Council (PPC) offers the following comments. PPC represents most of the preference customers purchasing power from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) who would ultimately fund approximately one-third of the costs associated with implementation of the Cougar EA preferred plan, and half of costs associated with Willamette Valley Projects. As a result, PPC and its members have a strong interest in both the effectiveness and costs of the Cougar mitigation project.

This EA and its preferred plan appear to fall short in scientific support for the stated biological benefit of the plan, as well as in consideration of more cost-effective mitigation options. The preferred plan is preliminarily expected to cost approximately $300 million assuming no overruns. These costs would add to Willamette Valley Project power costs which are already nearly three times more expensive than the levelized costs of the Mainstem Columbia and Snake River projects. Further, the biological benefit the plan assumes is specious and appears based on wishful thinking more than science.

Given the recent concern from Congress as well as citizenry in the Willamette Basin regarding the EA and preferred plan, PPC recommends the Corps slow its process to reevaluate other options, and cease construction planning until a more biologically and economically sound proposal is charted.

Expectations of Biological Benefit Uncertain

BPA's concerns raised in the Willamette Action Team for Ecosystem Restoration (WATER) forum give us little confidence that the preferred plan will result in its stated biological benefit. In ongoing legal processes related to the Willamette Valley Project, BPA has expressed uncertainty around a long-term structural downstream fish passage solution at high head projects like the one proposed in the EA's preferred plan for Cougar Dam. Regarding this issue BPA said:

> Notably, from Bonneville's perspective on the biological and technical feasibility of proposed passage structures in the ongoing WATER discussions, there has not been a clearly successful example of downstream juvenile collection and passage facilities from which to base designs and operational plans. Unlike low head and run-of-the-river dams in the Pacific Northwest region (where collection efficiency

> for juvenile spring Chinook at downstream passage structures is fairly high because higher flow rates can more easily direct juvenile emigrants to passage structures), the passage and collection efficiency at high head dams in the region is fairly low. Data on the efficacy of similar fish passage structures constructed at highhead dams in the region are evolving with post-installation modifications. While post-installation modifications at most current structures are still ongoing, one recent study reported data from operations at Round Butte Dam in the Deschutes River (Oregon) and Swift Dam in the Lewis River (Washington)[1], with only 2% (Swift) to 32% (Round Butte) collection efficiency for spring Chinook. Although some improvements in collection at these two facilities have occurred over time, they have not facilitated self-sustaining reestablishment of spring Chinook above the dams, and do not achieve anywhere near the 95 – 98% fish passage performance standard. Also, the Corps has been working with the other Action Agencies and the Services in the WATER forums to address additional challenges not experienced at the projects listed above, such as high parasite loads that are present in the Willamette River Basin reservoirs. The importance of getting these elements right cannot be understated if we are to meet our biological objectives (along with the technical and economic objectives that are necessary for those biological objectives to be realized), objectives that the Action Agencies and NMFS take seriously.[2]

With the high level of biological uncertainty around the EA's proposed downstream passage construction, especially at the high cost, the Corps would be foolhardy to proceed in the proposed passage structure development. Without further analysis of, and support for the proposal's biological objectives, it is difficult to believe that the Action Agencies take seriously this objective, or the technical and economic objectives they purport to uphold.

Analyze Other Available Alternatives

PPC understands the Corps' need to meet its mitigation obligations for Cougar Dam. That is why we suggest that the Corps partner with BPA to consider options not addressed by the EA to achieve mitigation goals at lower cost.

At a recent townhall meeting hosted by Oregon U.S. Congressman Kurt Schrader, he asked whether the Corps might meet its mitigation objectives in a more cost-effective manner if the power purpose of Cougar Dam could be reconsidered. In response, Corps representatives said that might be possible and that they would work with BPA in analyzing this new option.

PPC would like to better understand the options the Corps and BPA may now be considering for downstream passage at Cougar Dam. Although we are hesitant to see further reduction of power generation at Cougar, we would appreciate BPA and the Corps evaluating whether this type of

[1] At 519' tall, Cougar Dam is analogous to Round Butte (440' tall) and Swift (512') dams

[2] Declaration of Kieran Connolly in Support of Response to Motion for Preliminary Injunction, Northwest Environmental Defense Center, et al. v. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers et al., No. 18-00437 (D. Or. Feb. 25, 2019), ECF No. 66.

operation will achieve the EA's biological goals at a lesser cost to regional ratepayers than the expensive construction proposed by the preferred plan.

Cease Process Toward Construction Until Other Options Fully Evaluated

Given alternative options for downstream passage at Cougar Dam may exist, the Corps and BPA should provide the region with a full analysis of these possibilities. Further, given the dubious biological benefit of the EA's proposed passage facility, additional analysis is needed on whether a facility like this can reliably meet mitigation goals. Until comprehensive analysis is performed on the more cost-effective operational proposals for meeting the EA's goals, and the Corps produces additional information on the efficacy of the proposed construction facility, it should freeze its process toward construction implementation at Cougar Dam.

Customers have always stood behind the principles of meeting legal obligations in cost-effective ways that are supported by the best available science. When these tenets are applied to fish mitigation, they often yield productive results. Before moving ahead with Cougar downstream passage, the Corps should better apply these basic principles to the proposed project. PPC and its members expect the Corps and its fellow Action Agencies to meet their mitigation obligations in the most effective and cost-efficient manner.

We appreciate your consideration of these comments and look forward to working with you on the common goals of meeting regional environmental mitigation obligations while ensuring continued availability of an economic power supply.