



PUBLIC UTILITY DISTRICT NO. 1 of CHELAN COUNTY

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February 8, 2022

Ms. Madonna L. Baucum
Service Information Collection Clearance Officer
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MS: PRB (JAO/3W)
5275 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, VA 22041-3803
Submitted via www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAMain and email to INFO_Coll@fws.gov

Subject: Comments in Response to USFWS Notice of Information Collection on Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts When Making Listing Decisions. OMB Control Number 1018-0119.

Dear Ms. Baucum:

Public Utility District No. 1 of Chelan County (Chelan County PUD) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) notice of information collection relating to its *Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts When making Listing Decisions* (Policy). As hydropower owners with federal operating licenses and two 50-year habitat conservation plans (HCPs)¹ covering several species of salmon and steelhead, we have a particular interest in how long-term conservation agreements are treated under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The objective of our Rock Island and Rocky Reach hydroelectric project HCPs is to achieve No-Net Impact (NNI) on covered species. This includes 91% combined adult and juvenile project survival achieved through project improvement measures and up to 9% compensation for unavoidable project mortality through hatchery and tributary programs (7% through hatcheries and 2% through tributary habitat improvements). Today, the Service participates in ongoing adaptive management through the HCP committees, even though the species covered by the HCPs are primarily managed by NOAA Fisheries.

Habitat conservation and predation management pursuant to the HCPs for Rocky Reach and Rock Island hydropower projects also convey important conservation benefits for bull trout. We believe the Services should recognize concurrent environmental benefits for covered and non-covered species in a manner that reduces the regulatory burden and fosters additional public-private partnerships. Due to the jurisdictional separation between the Service and NOAA Fisheries, Chelan PUD is concerned that

¹ Parties to the HCPs are Chelan PUD, the USFWS, NMFS, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Indian Nation. The HCPs are incorporated into the Rocky Reach and Rock Island operating licenses from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and expire in 2054.

the benefits of these HCPs for non-covered species (including fish like bull trout) may not be considered by the Service when making new listing decisions. Review and recognition of other federal agency Candidate Conservation Agreements, Safe Harbor Agreements, and HCPs that address species within the same state or river basin as the species under an ESA status evaluation is appropriate and can lead to optimized management decisions. Chelan PUD believes the benefits of this data collection activity would outweigh its burden and provide a more complete picture of ongoing species protection programs.

In summary, we respectfully suggest that the Services' Policy incorporate information collected on any existing conservation agreements that could impact an ESA status decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alene Underwood', with a stylized, cursive script.

Alene Underwood
Manager – Fish and Wildlife Programs
Chelan County PUD