

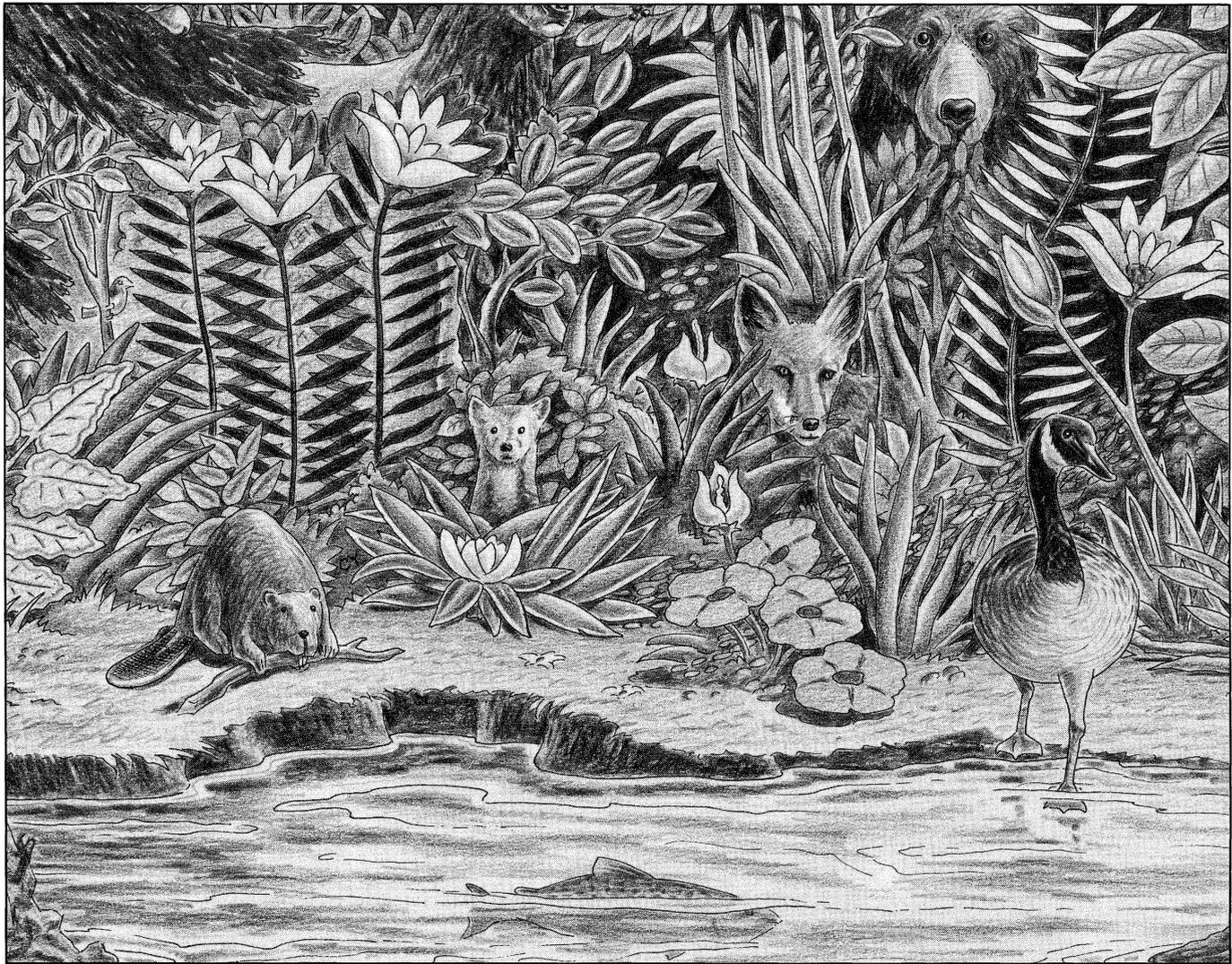
Volume 7, No. 3

May/June 1988

NORTHWEST ENERGY NEWS

Northwest Power Planning Council





PROTECTED AREAS ISSUE OPEN FOR COMMENT

by Carlotta Collette

The Northwest Power Planning Council has voted unanimously to release for public review a proposal to protect roughly 40,000 river miles of Northwest streams from future hydroelectric development because they are critical to salmon and steelhead as well as non-seagoing fish and wildlife. The move, taken at the Council's

April meeting in Missoula, Montana, opens a 70-day period during which the Council will hold public meetings in Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington to refine the proposal. For copies of the proposal and additional background information see the order form on the back cover.

The Council will also take written comment through July 8,

1988. A final decision on incorporating the proposal into the Council's Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program is expected in early autumn.

Background

Substantial losses of fish and wildlife habitat have occurred in the Columbia River Basin and in the region as a whole as a result

of hydroelectric development. Dams have blocked passage for migrating fish, flooded both fish and wildlife habitat and caused significant fish mortalities at the dams themselves. Furthermore, disputes over the possible consequences of hydroelectric development add to developer costs and utility rates, and leave the region less certain about its ability to develop new resources quickly, when they are needed.

Six years ago, the Council began a process to identify areas where further development would have substantial and irreversible adverse effects on fish and wildlife. Extensive studies of regional fish and wildlife habitat were conducted from 1984 through 1986, and data bases were developed for anadromous (ocean-migrating) fish, resident (non-seagoing) fish, wildlife and hydropower potential in the region.

Common criteria, modified for each state, were applied to the data to specify critical fish and wildlife habitat for protection from future hydropower development.

In October 1987, the Council released a staff issue paper for public comment, proposing that the Council designate the identified areas for protection from all future hydropower development. More than 400 individuals and organizations responded.

A list of stream reaches proposed for protection has been compiled. In areas where salmon and steelhead and wild resident fish are present, the Council is concerned that any development may involve unacceptable risks of irreparable harm to such fish, their spawning grounds or habitat. In areas where non-wild resident fish or wildlife are present, the Council is proposing that no hydropower development should occur that would result in a net loss of such fish or wildlife.



Effects of Protected Areas Designations

The proposal to designate certain areas of the Pacific Northwest as protected from hydropower development would have its strongest impact through the Council's fish and wildlife program. The current process is expected to result in amendments to the program, which would then influence federal agencies that operate, develop and regulate the hydropower system in the Columbia River Basin. While the Council cannot prohibit development, the Northwest Power Act requires these federal agencies to incorporate the Council's program in their decision making.

The Act requires the Bonneville Power Administration to be "consistent with" the fish and wildlife program and the Council's Northwest Electric Power Plan within the basin. The proposal calls on Bonneville to refrain from acquiring hydropower in protected

areas and to deny hydropower development in protected areas access to Bonneville's intertie power transmission system.

Non-federal hydroelectric development falls within the purview of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), which makes licensing decisions on particular hydroelectric project proposals. FERC must take the fish and wildlife program into account at all relevant stages of its decision-making processes "to the fullest extent practicable."

The current proposal would also result in amendments to the Council's Northwest Power Plan. The plan guides Bonneville's resource acquisitions throughout the Pacific Northwest, not just within the basin.

The proposed amendments apply only to new hydropower projects, not to existing dams. A new hydropower project would be a new structure containing hydroelectric facilities for which FERC has not issued a license.

Existing water rights, water appropriations or jurisdiction over water would not be affected by the Council's decision. Nor will the amendments alter, amend, repeal, interpret, modify or conflict with any interstate compact made by the states.

Regionwide, 40,794 river miles would be affected by the proposed amendments (less than 15 percent of the region's river miles). The Council estimates that of 327 hydroelectric projects currently proposed or under study in the Pacific Northwest, 202 would be affected, representing 688 average megawatts of energy. Another 125 projects, representing 800 average megawatts, would be unaffected.

Four processes for changing the designations have been incorporated into the proposal:

1. Areas included on the protected areas list because of incorrect data or other technical errors could be removed from the list through an expedited amendment process;

2. The Council would promptly review its protected areas designations in light of any state comprehensive river plans, river basin plans or watershed plans, especially in view of individual states' special interest in habitat for resident fish and wildlife;

3. The Council could amend the designations upon completion of its system plan for salmon and steelhead in the basin; and
4. The Council's usual program amendment processes could accommodate other changes in the designations, including consideration of an exception for any hydropower project that is shown to have special fish and wildlife benefits. ■

Public Comment on the Proposal

All written comments must be received in the Council's central office, 851 S.W. Sixth Avenue, Suite 1100, Portland, Oregon 97204, by 5 p.m. Pacific time on July 8, 1988. Comments should

be submitted to the attention of Dulcy Mahar, director of public involvement. Comments should be clearly marked "Protected Areas Comments."

The Council may hold consul-

tations with interested parties to clarify points made in written comments. In addition, the Council will hold the following public hearings:

Richland, Washington

May 11, 7 p.m.
The Hanford House
Vernita Room
802 George Washington Way

Libby, Montana

May 31, 7-10 p.m.
Lincoln County Community
College
Memorial Gym
111 E. Lincoln Blvd.

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

May 31, 7-10 p.m.
The Coeur d'Alene Resort
Cabin 3

Kalispell, Montana

June 1, 7-10 p.m.
Outlaw Inn
Winchester Room
1701 Highway 93 South

Lewiston, Idaho

June 1, 7-10 p.m.
Lewis-Clark State College
Williams Conference Center
Selway River Room
9th Avenue and 4th Street

Missoula, Montana

June 2, 7-10 p.m.
Village Red Lion Inn
Canyon Room
100 Madison

Idaho Falls, Idaho

June 2, 7-10 p.m.
Littletree Inn
Teton Room
888 N. Holmes Avenue

Boise, Idaho

June 3, 3-5 p.m. and 7-10 p.m.
Red Lion Motor Inn Riverside
Liberty Room
9th and Chinden

Bend, Oregon

June 8, 7 p.m.
The Riverhouse
3075 N. Highway 97

Seattle, Washington

June 15, 3-5 p.m. and 7-9 p.m.
SeaTac Airport
Small Auditorium
Mezzanine Level

Spokane, Washington

June 16, 1 p.m.
Cavanaugh's River Inn
Shoreline B Room
N. 700 Division

Portland, Oregon

June 22, 7-10 p.m.
Portland Building
Hearing Room
1120 S.W. Fifth
June 23 - 9 a.m. -noon
Northwest Power Planning
Council
851 S.W. Sixth
Suite 1100

For questions regarding these hearings or the proposal in general, contact the public involvement division in the Council's central office. (Num-

bers are listed inside the back cover of this issue.)

To reserve a time to present oral comments at one of the public hearings, contact Ruth Curtis, information coordinator in the public involvement division, at

the same numbers. Requests to reserve a time period at a hearing should be received no later than two work days before the hearing.