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MEMORANDUM

TO: Fish Passage Advisory Committee

FROM: Michele DeHart

DATE: September 28, 2011

RE: Northwest Fishletter Article

The FPC has received questions regarding the Northwest Fishletter (Fishletter) #294 dated September 22nd, 2011.The Fishletter contains an article summarizing information regarding the benefits of smolt transportation that, in part, is taken from the recent 2011 Comparative Survival Study (CSS) draft report. FPC staff reviewed the article and is providing the following comments for your review. **Our overall conclusion is that the article in the Northwest Fishletter is inaccurate and misrepresents, misunderstands and misconstrues the results of the CSS analyses.**

- The Fishletter correctly quotes some pieces of information, erroneously states others, and occasionally makes incorrect general statements that seem to disregard a long time-series of information dating back to 1994. The title of the article itself, *"Most 2010 Barged Fish Beat Inrivers, Study Finds"* indicates the author's confusion, since the draft CSS report only includes analyses through the 2009 migration year for Chinook and through 2008 for steelhead; both of these include adults through the summer of 2011.

- The Fishletter states the CSS showed *"definite boosts to overall survival of. . . both hatchery and wild steelhead that migrated in 2009."* This statement is curious because, as stated above, the most recent year with information for wild and hatchery steelhead in the draft report is 2008, not 2009. Moreover, the TIR's for hatchery and wild steelhead for 2008 were some of the lowest values for both species in the 12-year time-series (1.14 and 1.12 for hatchery and wild steelhead, respectively).

- The Fishletter selects 2001, an extremely low flow year with minimal spill for fish passage, to illustrate the benefits of transportation in terms of Transport/In-river benefit ratios; *'barged [wild] spring Chinook returned at nine times the rate of in-river migrants . . . and wild steelhead had an adult-return rate 37 times better than inriver migrants".* However, the Fishletter fails to report that the overall SAR in 2001 for Chinook and steelhead failed to meet the NPPC 2% SAR recovery goal. The Fishletter fails to mention other data reported in the CSS Draft report which illuminates the results of the smolt transportation program and hydrosystem operations. The Fishletter fails to discuss 2005 results, a year with similarly low spring flows but, dissimilar to 2001 in that spring spill for fish passage was provided. In 2005, when the addition of spill greatly improved in-river migration conditions, transport benefits were nearly an order of magnitude lower than 2001 for wild steelhead and a quarter of their 2001 values for wild Chinook. The report does correctly state that the CSS found that some of the relative transport benefit for steelhead may be due their poor in-river survival. In other words, transport primarily appears beneficial when in-river migration conditions are lethal.

- The Fishletter states the CSS found *'huge'* benefits for wild steelhead in 2007, whereas the 2007 wild steelhead TIR was actually lower than 5 of the preceding 10 years of estimates. Furthermore, wild steelhead TIRs after 2005 are relatively low values when considered in the context of the 12 year time-series. Although the Fishletter does state "the trend in recent years . . . [shows] . . . reduced benefits to wild and hatchery steelhead from barging." Additionally, the Fishletter ignores the increased straying rate of previously transported fish as compared to in-river outmigrants and any potential effects of these strays on spawning populations in other ESU's within the Columbia River.

- The statement in the Fishletter that *"barging is not detrimental to juvenile sockeye at all"* is premature considering that data is only available for one migration year and that the point estimate for the in-river SAR is actually a higher value than for the transported group SAR in that migration year.