# *Columbia River Task Force – Ideas for Discussion*

October 19, 2005

After the August 30 Columbia River Task Force meeting, Ross and Associates Environmental Consulting, Ltd., in their role as facilitators, distributed a record of Task Force discussions that included areas of potential Task Force convergence (dated September 6, 2005). Since then, a number of groups have circulated responses, proposals, and principles outlining their ideas for a water management approach for the Columbia. This document is an attempt to consolidate these responses, proposals, and principles with ideas the Task Force has previously discussed into one package of ideas for Task Force consideration.

We fully recognize that this document does not represent all the ideas that may be discussed – it is merely a compilation of ideas that have been made public, organized in a manner that is intended to build off of previous Task Force discussions. Some of these ideas raise questions about alternatives. There are likely to be additional ideas that will be brought to the dialogue in the future. Our intention in developing this document is not to prematurely narrow Task Force discussions; rather, it is an effort to further Task Force deliberations by summarizing the issues that seem to be generating the most interest and debate. Task Force deliberations are, of course, ongoing; this document does not represent, and should not be construed as an attempt to represent, Task Force consensus.

Please note that this document should not substitute for a review of the actual proposals and principles developed by stakeholders. The proposals and principles received since the last Task Force meeting were distributed with this document.

## Thoughts on an Overall Approach

- Focus on addressing immediate problems of existing water users through regional initiatives within the scope of what the State can reasonably deliver in the short term.
- Understand and share costs. A combination of state investment and investment by water users will be needed.
- Replacement water for new out-of-stream withdrawals must be addressed at the same time any new uses are allowed.
- A programmatic approach to acquiring water for both instream and out-of-stream values and uses is needed, looking at short-, mid-, and long-term options for water acquisition.
- A "least cost planning" approach to identifying water sources and acquiring water will make the best use of public and private funds. Investment in acquiring water through conservation should be considered concurrently with study of more expensive alternatives.
- The development of storage must continue. Three kinds of storage alternatives are under consideration: (1) new large-scale off-channel multi-purpose storage (if ongoing studies show such storage is warranted); (2) changes in the management of existing storage facilities to make more water available in low-flow months; and (3) smaller-scale storage options, including aquifer storage and recharge in the Odessa Sub-Area.

- The State must strongly assert its interests in any regional negotiations taking place as a result of the ongoing litigation over the Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion.
- A better, and more public, understanding of current and potential future water use affecting the Columbia River is needed, including information on inchoate rights, metering data, applications on file, and other current and potential future water draws.
- Establish a regional planning process to examine projects and proposed solutions, with State investments available to support consensus proposals. Modeled on experience in the Yakima Basin, membership would be inclusive of the range of interested parties and governments.

## More Specifics Taken from Proposals/Principles

### Instream / Fish Investment Ideas

- Set a new target flow at McNary Dam (significantly increasing the frequency of interruption in comparison to the flows set by the state in 1980).
- Set a new instream flow for the Hanford Reach.
- Acquire "least cost" water to improve flows towards meeting the new flow targets.
- Hold instream water in trust in perpetuity and manage in cooperation with Tribal governments and fish managers for maximum benefit to fish, particularly to increase flows during the critical low-flow months.
- Continue to participate in and invest in other aspects of fish recovery, including efforts related to habitat, harvest, hatcheries, predators, and management of the hydropower system.

### Ways to Support Out of Stream Uses

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| Odessa | ▪ Initial investment to shift 10,000 acres from ground water to Columbia Basin Project water.<br>▪ Temporarily suspend relinquishment for deep-well irrigators who choose not to use all or a portion of their deep-well irrigation water. |
| Existing Interruptibles | ▪ For users whose rights are junior to the 1980 instream flows and who choose to participate in the program, issue a new "drought" permit to ensure that water use is not interrupted in low flow years.<br>▪ To participate in the program, water users must: apply best management practices or other equivalent conservation measures and recalibrate existing interruptible rights.<br>▪ If don't participate in program, remain interruptible. |
| New Mainstem Rights | ▪ New rights are junior to new flow targets.<br>▪ Programmatic investment in "least cost" water to insure that, for water users who participate in the program, rights are not interrupted in low flow years.<br>▪ To participate in the program, water users must: apply best management practices or other appropriate conservation measures, recalibrate existing rights, and make an annual payment based on the amount of water used.<br>▪ If don't participate in the program, new rights are interruptible. |

## Ideas about Water Sources

- State, working with interested parties, carries out assessment of potential conservation projects and develops a "least cost" approach to water acquisition. Conserved water that is the result of state funding is managed in the trust water rights program to backstop any drought permits or new rights and to improve stream conditions for fish.
- In the short-term, "new" water is acquired through conservation and by shifting winter flows to summer release under the agreements with Reclamation and the Colville Tribes on FDR and Banks lakes.
- In the longer term, additional water might be made available through changes in operation of existing Columbia Basin Project storage (e.g., Potholes), a Canadian agreement, new multipurpose off-channel storage, and additional conservation.
- Creative use of the capacity represented by the Quad Cities permit to share water with other users.

## How Might a System Work

- Increased state investment in water administration and accountability, including metering, reporting, monitoring, and compliance consistent with current statutory requirements.
- Better understanding of the state's existing commitments of water from the Columbia River and the potential for other jurisdictions (Tribal governments, other states) to call on Columbia River water.
- The Columbia program is explicitly limited to the mainstem of the river and does not set a precedent for other basins/watersheds, including tributaries.
- The interests of northern counties are protected by discouraging water right purchases or transfers to other regions of the state.

## Costs and Cost Sharing Ideas

- In addition to the $6 million appropriated in the first year of the biennium, the cost to the state to complete currently committed water supply evaluation studies totals $4.4 million.
- The annual cost of implementing the agreement with the Colville Confederated Tribes is in the range of $3 to $4 million. The agreement could be implemented in the second year of the 2005-07 Biennium.
- Remaining funding available in the second year for negotiations with Canada or to develop conservation projects is $1.6 million.
- Cost to the state of a large, off-channel, multipurpose storage facility may range from $2 to $4 billion. The actual share of costs borne by the state will depend upon the extent to which other interests benefit from a potential project.
- Investment in data collection, sharing, and compliance would require approximately $1 million in the second year of the 2005-07 Biennium.
- Some water users have proposed the option of paying a $10 per acre foot mitigation fee to help offset the costs of acquiring and conveying mitigation water to them, others have suggested a payment tied to the actual cost of acquiring water.

## Ideas about Other Information Needs

- Additional economic analysis to account for effect of increasing crop production relative to supply, infrastructure costs, and recreational and commercial fishing values.
- Information on the performance of the State's 2001 emergency drought relief program.