



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
PORTLAND OFFICE
1201 NE Lloyd Boulevard, Suite 1100
PORTLAND, OREGON 97232-1274

December 11, 2012

Dear Columbia Basin Party,

I am writing to invite you to join us in considering how to best approach long-term salmon and steelhead recovery in the Columbia Basin. I have asked two neutral, university-based institutions - the Oregon Consensus Program and the William D. Ruckelshaus Center - to conduct a "situation assessment" of regional views about salmon recovery planning in the Columbia Basin in the long term. They are assembling an assessment team including academic expertise from Washington, Oregon and Idaho. A situation assessment is an interview-based process undertaken to better understand and explore relevant issues and interests of involved parties and situation dynamics. The assessment team will reach out to a broad array of regional parties over the next several months to capture a range of perspectives. Please see the attached background for more information.

NOAA Fisheries considers salmon recovery strategies within the context of Endangered Species Act, Tribal treaty and trust responsibilities, and other federal obligations. In order to address these multiple mandates over the long term, we would like to better integrate existing and future recovery plans with Basin-wide strategies to address all elements of recovery. I believe that we will make better and more sustainable decisions that advance recovery with your engagement.

NOAA is supporting this assessment for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, we would like to build on the momentum of our positive collaborations with local watershed councils, recovery boards, and other local groups over the last few years and take another step forward. We want to ensure our existing and future recovery plans are comprehensive and integrated. A number of regional parties have expressed views that such an assessment would be informative to moving salmon recovery forward.

I would like to hear your thoughts on how to work through the key challenges for salmon recovery. The assessment will consist of a series of questions and should take about an hour. Responses will be confidential and not attributed to any source. Practitioners affiliated with Oregon Consensus and the Ruckelshaus Center will schedule interviews in the coming year.

The assessment report will be available to all in late summer 2013. It will inform our consideration of all regional views and our next steps in 2014 and beyond. While the assessment is underway, current consultations and planning efforts will continue according to existing processes and schedules.

I believe that together we can achieve sustainable salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River Basin. Please feel free to contact me directly at 503-231-6266 if you have questions regarding the assessment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Barry A. Thom".

Barry A. Thom
Deputy Regional Administrator

Background on the Columbia Basin Situation Assessment

What is a Situation Assessment?

A situation assessment is an interview-based information-gathering process undertaken to better understand issues and interests of involved parties and situation dynamics related to a complex public policy issue. Information gathered may include:

- What are the issues and opportunities?
- Who are the key parties and what are their interests?
- What are the current processes and avenues for addressing those issues and interests?
- What options could be helpful to address those interests and what parameters would help ensure the greatest likelihood for success?

Typically, such an assessment involves a neutral, third-party who interviews a range of affected and potentially affected individuals to understand the interests and substantive issues that need to be addressed, as well as the likely challenges, barriers and opportunities for moving forward.

The third party uses information from interviewees to identify cross-cutting themes, challenges and opportunities. Information gained is given freely and analyzed without bias. All interviews are confidential and no input is attributed to interviewees by name or affiliation.

At the conclusion of the interviews, the Centers will provide a summary report that identifies key issues, themes and options that might be useful in the long term. This report will be available to everyone who participated in the assessment and other interested parties. The procedural options that are identified by a situation assessment are meant to inform, rather than dictate a particular course of action. While the assessment will include a list of who was interviewed, specific statements and key themes will not be attributed to individual interviewees.

About Oregon Consensus and William D. Ruckelshaus Center

Oregon Consensus (OC) is Oregon's official program for public policy consensus building. OC provides consensus building, facilitation, mediation and other conflict resolution services to public entities and their stakeholders in Oregon and throughout the Northwest. OC is a program of the National Policy Consensus Center in Portland State University's Hatfield School of Government. OC's mission is to promote effective and efficient approaches for collaborative governance on public policy issues in Oregon. OC offers state agencies, local governments and the public a neutral forum and neutral services.

The William D. Ruckelshaus Center is a neutral resource for collaborative problem solving in the State of Washington and the Pacific Northwest. It is a joint effort of Washington's two research universities and is dedicated to assisting public, private, tribal, non-profit and other community leaders in their efforts to build consensus and resolve conflicts around difficult public policy issues. The Center is hosted at the University of Washington (UW) by the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs and at Washington State University (WSU) by WSU Extension. More information is available at <http://ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu/>.

Oregon Consensus and the Ruckelshaus Center are both university-based institutions devoted to promoting collaborative governance and consensus-based public policy. Both programs are members of the University Network for Collaborative Governance, a national association of university based centers recognized for their leadership in advancing the best practices for collaborative approaches to resolving public issues. OC and the Ruckelshaus Center have a well-established history of successfully working together on projects with regional impact. The two programs have created an assessment team that utilizes the expertise and resources within each center to implement the assessment process.

In addition, while there is not a similar university center in Idaho, Oregon Consensus and the Ruckelshaus Center will include on their team academic expertise from Idaho. If you have questions about the assessment process, please contact Project Manager Peter Harkema at (503) 725-8191 or pharkema@pdx.edu.

What is the scope of the assessment?

The scope of the assessment is fairly broad, seeking views on recovery planning processes that would be used to address habitat, hatchery, harvest and hydro strategies. We believe that in order to recover Columbia Basin salmon, we must address all sources of mortality. The assessment will reach parties from throughout the Columbia Basin including Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington.

What happens with the information from the assessment and how will it be used?

At the conclusion of the interviews, the Centers will provide a summary report that identifies key recovery planning issues, themes and options for moving forward in 2014 and beyond. This report will be available to everyone who participated in the assessment and other interested parties. The procedural options that are identified by a situation assessment are meant to inform rather than suggest a particular course of action. All interviews are confidential, in that while the assessment will include a list of who was interviewed, specific statements and key themes will not be attributed to individual interviewees.

What would the assessment involve?

Oregon Consensus Program and the Ruckelshaus Center will interview a broad range of parties with the goal of identifying process options for a constructive path forward to develop Basin-wide, long-term salmon recovery strategies.

Will the interviews be confidential?

Yes, all interviews are confidential and no input will be attributed to interviewees by name or affiliation.

Why is NOAA asking a third party to conduct the assessment?

By having the assessment conducted by a neutral third party, regional parties can speak freely and identification of potential options for moving forward will be objectively characterized.

Who will be given an opportunity to participate in the assessment?

The Centers will include a broad range of parties from Idaho, Montana, Washington and Oregon. Although they may not be able to interview each individual involved in salmon recovery, they will make efforts to reach across the full range of interests.

The Centers will allocate a portion of the interviews for individuals and interests not identified at the outset, but identified during the assessment process.