

## PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Draft

Ms. Magalie Roman Salas, Esq.  
Office of the Secretary  
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission  
888 First Street NE  
Washington, DC 20426

Dear Secretary Roman Salas:

Re: Priest Rapids Hydroelectric Project Draft License Application FERC No. 2114

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) is writing to comment on the Draft License Application for the Priest Rapids Hydroelectric Project (FERC no. 2114).

### Essential Fish Habitat Consultation Mandate

The Council is concerned that in making hydropower project relicensing decisions, FERC must meet its responsibilities regarding conservation of essential fish habitat (EFH). Such responsibilities include consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to assure minimization of acute and cumulative impacts on salmon and other anadromous fish from hydropower operations and structural configurations as well as provide a detailed response to Council comments on FERC actions.

This EFH mandate will also help FERC assure consistency with its obligations under the 1986 Electric Consumers' Act and the 1980 Northwest Power Act, which require FERC to take a balanced approach to hydropower project licensing. These Acts require that when deciding whether to issue a license, FERC consider not only the power generation potential of a river, but *give equal consideration to energy conservation, protection of fish and wildlife, and general environmental quality*. This mandate requires FERC to consult with federal, state, and local resource agencies and Indian tribes, including fish, wildlife, recreation, and land management agencies, in order to assess the impact of a hydropower project on the environment.

While the Priest Rapids and Wanapum dams have a variety of impacts to different stocks of fishes, the Council is specifically concerned with the fall chinook salmon spawning in the Hanford Reach section of the Columbia River. These fish contribute to ocean fisheries from Alaska to California as well as support Columbia basin in-river fisheries.

~~One of the significant impacts to the Hanford Reach fall chinook from the Priest/Wanapum projects is on redds and newly emerged fry from ramping flows for power production. One previous estimate of juvenile fish mortality (resulting from ramping flows) in a 17 mile section of the 56 mile Hanford Reach was well over one million fish.~~

As stated in the draft license application, the 1988 Vernita Bar Agreement has been beneficial to protect redds and incubating eggs. ~~It is not a perfect agreement though. The State of~~

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~~Washington and the tribes have requested higher minimum flows (55Kcfs to 60Kcfs) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed a mechanism to allow higher flows to allow additional spawning areas. The Council is supportive of efforts by the **state, tribal and federal fisheries managers** these entities to refine **and expand** the Vernita Bar Agreement in a way that offers more protection for fish.~~

~~Additionally, the Vernita Bar Agreement does not cover flows needed to protect newly emerged fry which can be stranded in shallow pools along the river edge. When flows fluctuate quickly thousands of fish can become stranded and often die. The licensee has proposed ramping/flow targets to reduce mortalities. **The fishery managers believe that these proposals should be further refined and broadened to include the operations of the upstream federal and PUD projects.** These targets are inadequate to protect fish, but even so, the licensee has not been able to meet even those targets. They can only do so much with the flows they are provided from the federal projects above, but they should be doing more than they are.~~

~~FERC should strengthen the Vernita Bar Agreement during relicensing to protect spawners. Additionally the Council requests that the that ramping/flow targets identified in the system operation requests (SOR 2003-7 and 2003-8) made by the Technical Management Team be met in the relicensing agreement to adequately protect juvenile rearing.~~

~~Finally, the Council has attached a letter outlining its concerns for all FERC relicensing projects. He reiterate these previous comments by this attachement for incorporation in the Priest/Wanapum relisencing process.~~

~~The Council appreciates this opportunity to comment. We appreciate your attention to our concerns and suggestions.~~

Sincerely,

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Hans Radtke, Ph.D.  
Chairman

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