

SYSTEM OPERATIONAL REQUEST: #2006-2

The following State, Federal, and Tribal Salmon Managers have participated in the preparation and support this SOR: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, NOAA Fisheries, Nez Perce Tribe, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

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Russell B. Kiefer

FROM: Russ Kiefer, Chairperson, Salmon Managers

DATE: March 28, 2006

SUBJECT: MOP Operation in the Snake River

SPECIFICATIONS: Implement Minimum Operating Pool (MOP) operations, consistent with the 2004 Biological Opinion and the final November 24, 2004 Updated Proposed Action at all Lower Snake River projects beginning on April 3, to coincide with the initiation of Court ordered spill.

JUSTIFICATION: Both MOP and spill operations are intended to improve juvenile migration conditions and our technical recommendation is that they be initiated on the same date at a particular project. MOP operations increase water velocity and can stimulate juvenile migration. If MOP is initiated before spill operations, this could result in more juveniles passing through the powerhouses, and powerhouse passage has been shown to have higher direct and latent mortality as compared to the preferred spillway passage route. Smolt monitoring data indicates that the juvenile fish migration has begun, with daily catches increasing at the Grande Ronde River trap since sampling began on March 19. From March 22 through March 27 the daily catch of yearling Chinook has ranged from 174 to 841 fish per day. Historic passage monitoring at the Whitebird Trap on the Salmon River indicate that the last week of March should have increased passage. The first few days of monitoring at Lower Granite indicate that holdover fall Chinook are passing the project, as well as yearling spring Chinook. The daily yearling Chinook numbers at Lower Granite Dam are increasing from 70 yearling Chinook per day on the first day of sampling to 280 yearling Chinook per day on the third day of sampling. This is following a

similar pattern as seen in 2005 for the beginning of the migration season. In the first three days of sampling steelhead indices at Lower Granite Dam have increased from 20 to 880 fish per day. The passage index data indicates that the spring migration is following a similar pattern to past years which indicates that passage indices will increase sharply in the first week of April.

The objective of this request is to implement the intent of the fish passage measures in the Biological Opinion, i.e. implementing protection when fish passage occurs. In addition to the juvenile migrants passing Lower Granite Dam, the Lyons Ferry Hatchery began their release of 450,000 listed spring Chinook into the Tucannon River on March 15 and will begin releasing 65,000 yearling fall Chinook from the hatchery from April 5 through April 10. These fish are expected to be passing Lower Monumental and Ice Harbor dams shortly after the release. The MOP operations are requested to facilitate travel time and survival of these fish through the Lower Snake River reach. This operation is to provide the fastest travel time possible at the anticipated flows.