

SYSTEM OPERATIONAL REQUEST:

2006-NAV-01

*The following Navigation Interests have participated in the preparation and support this
SOR: Columbia River Towboat Association,*

TO:

Brigadier General Gregg F. Martin	COE-NWD
James D. Barton	COE-Water Management
Cathy Hlebechuk	COE-RCC
Witt Anderson	COE-PDD
LTC Randy L. Glaeser	COE-Walla Walla District
J. William McDonald	USBR-Boise Regional Director
Stephen J. Wright	BPA-Administrator
Steve Oliver	BPA-PG

FROM: John Pigott, Columbia River Towboat Association

DATE: April 17, 2006

SUBJECT: Lower Granite Spillway Operations for April through August

Navigation Objectives

The objective of this SOR is to provide spill relief at Lower Granite Dam for departing down bound vessel traffic during the period of time when pool levels are required to be kept at MOP, for the juvenile salmonid outmigration, and stream flows exceed 75KCFS.

Specifications

This SOR recommends that the special operation of the Lower Granite spillways, to accommodate outmigrating salmonids, be modified to allow for a more navigation friendly spill pattern and the reduction or cessation of spill, for the period of time it takes a vessel to depart the lock and clear the obstructing point of land, on the north shore, approximately one half mile below the dam. This is estimated to be approximately twenty minutes.

Justification

We find ourselves facing a problematic set of circumstances with mandated MOP's for all the Snake River pools and a water year that is producing threateningly high stream flows. This combination of events has now created an unacceptably high safety risk for river system navigators. The low pools have reduced under keel clearances to one foot over the lower sill (sill height is 15 feet at MOP) at Lower Granite Dam. This combined with shallow water in the lower basin acts to retard acceleration out of the lock. This delay in reaching optimum speed out of the lock chamber now means the vessel will have to spend more time trying to cross the adverse spillway current. This current is actively trying to push the vessel onto the point of land, on the north shore, just below the dam. Currently Q, through Lower Granite, is in the 150KCFS range with spill in the high

60KCFS range. Expectations are that Q will certainly increase and should be expected to top 200KCFS. Barge tows are currently leaving half their tow back in Wilma and are only locking through with two barges. Even with this modified configuration we are getting perilously close to the shore as vessels depart Lower Granite down bound. Our concern is that without a spill modification protocol in place rising stream flows will eventually surprise a tow causing a wreck. We also feel that the infrequent nature of this requirement (perhaps 4-6 times a week), and the brief duration of the spill modification (approx 20 minutes), argues for your approval of this request to protect human life, the environment and the safety of cargo and equipment.

Near miss reports from Tidewater Barge Lines, and Foss Maritime have driven this request. Boat operators report they are just getting by with reduced tow sizes, but fear that even with those modifications in place, safety margins are being whittled away by a continually rising river. Our concern is that without a safety intervention some vessel trying to get by will eventually be overwhelmed. Thank you for your kind consideration of this request.

John Pigott
Chairman
Columbia River Towboat Association