



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
Washington, DC 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

JUL 29 2011

AUG 05 2011

Mr. Arnold Whitridge
TAMWG Member
c/o U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Arcata Fish and Wildlife Office
1655 Heindon Road
Arcata, CA 95521

Dear Mr. Whitridge:

On behalf of Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, I am responding to your letter of March 21, 2011, in which you express concerns with the implementation of the Trinity River Restoration Program (Program). I apologize for the delay in this response.

I appreciate your providing an historical account of the Program formulation and the vision of its developers and early supporters. Having visited some of the restoration sites since being named Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation, I have experienced firsthand the important work under way to restore the Trinity River and its fishery resources. I share your vision that the Program is unique and a national model of a restored river ecosystem below a Federal dam. I expressed that vision during my meetings with members of the Trinity Adaptive Management Working Group (TAMWG) and the Trinity Management Council (TMC) last fall at the Program office.

You commented on a variety of concerns in your letter, including changes in the TMC agency representatives, separate administration by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and Reclamation of our respective appropriated funds, changes in the design and construction approach, the time required for independent review panels to critique science proposals, interactions between hatchery-produced salmon and steelhead and naturally produced fish populations, watershed restoration and required funding, the consideration by the TMC of alternative budget and priority-setting processes, and the status of the Integrated Assessment Plan.

I will briefly address what I believe to be your primary concerns and will begin by assuring you that the overarching objective of our efforts within the Program is to restore a healthy and meaningful river ecosystem, which will, in turn, support healthy fisheries. The Program's partnerships with other agencies and stakeholders are critical to success, and, as you observed, these partnerships are composed of diverse interests and opinions. I remain confident, however, that all partners share the common vision of a fully restored Trinity River, and I am committed to working with you to resolve any and all concerns.

While Program management and oversight responsibilities have been delegated by the Secretary to representatives of the Service and Reclamation, the Program remains a high priority within the Department of the Interior and with Secretary Salazar himself. Together, Reclamation and the Service have worked to support meaningful funding levels for the Program, even in this challenging budget climate. One of your requests is that the office of the Secretary be more directly involved in overseeing the Program as it was envisioned in the Record of Decision for the Trinity River Mainstem Restoration. I understand this request was discussed at a recent joint meeting of the TMC and TAMWG. It was reported that most participants support the appointment of a single consistent point of contact within the Department to serve as a liaison and advocate for the Program, but do not wish to relinquish, to any degree, local decision-making authority. I concur with the latter point and it is my belief that the best decisions will be those made at the field level utilizing the best technical expertise available. I will discuss your request with my counterpart at the Service, Director Dan Ashe.

Concerns regarding a conflict of interest on the part of some TMC members have been brought to my attention. A more consistent review of science undertakings by independent scientific panels is among the key measures to address those concerns. The use of independent review panels has admittedly required more time to fully develop than the Implementation Plan had prescribed, but significant advancements have been made in this aspect of the Program in recent years. Fiscal year 2012 science investigation plans have been reviewed by 28 independent subject matter experts, and draft reports are undergoing independent peer review. An external review of the juvenile salmonid out-migrant monitoring program was conducted in 2009, and a review just occurred for the Trinity River sediment budget. Similar reviews will soon occur for other draft reports. Additionally, in August 2011, an independent expert will conduct a review of all adult fish monitoring projects. Similar reviews will occur each year, and a standard review process for reports and study proposals has now been institutionalized within the Program.

Program partners have been concerned about the interactions between hatchery-produced salmon and steelhead and naturally-produced fish populations. Accordingly, the TMC has requested information about authorities to evaluate and modify hatchery production goals and practices. Recently, hatchery-related concerns have been further highlighted due to several years of high estimates of hatchery-produced steelhead runs. As you mentioned, several efforts to review and develop adjustments to the Trinity River Hatchery programs have occurred, and I believe the initial focus on the coho salmon program yielded constructive recommendations. Additionally, the scientific review of California salmon and steelhead hatcheries is currently in progress, and the Trinity River Hatchery review is well underway. It is my hope that these efforts will provide additional useful and independent recommendations for optimizing the hatchery's programs and that Program partners will subsequently agree upon needed changes to the programs. Further, I am confident that feasible adjustments that are consistent with the Department's mitigation and tribal trust responsibilities can be implemented.

I am aware that other issues you described in your letter have been discussed with agency representatives at the local level and that some have been at least partially resolved. I urge that these local efforts continue.

In closing, may I offer my sincere condolences on the recent passing of Mr. Byron Leydecker, a co-author of your letter. Mr. Leydecker was instrumental in guiding the Program, and we at Reclamation are tremendously grateful for his efforts.

Sincerely,



Michael L. Connor
Commissioner

Identical Letter Sent To:

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Mr. Thomas Stokely
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cc: Honorable Dianne Feinstein
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Honorable George Miller
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Honorable Barbara Boxer
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Honorable Mike Thompson
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