

SYSTEM OPERATIONAL REQUEST: #2003-01

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, Columbia River Inter Tribal Fish Commission, and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

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FROM: David A. Wills, Chairperson, Salmon Managers

DATE: January 29, 2003

SUBJECT: Tailwater Elevation at Bonneville Dam to Protect Chum Salmon Redds and Emerging Fry.

SPECIFICATIONS: Smooth flows and limit load following to maintain an instantaneous tailwater elevation of 11.5 feet at Bonneville Dam as long as possible without impacting the refill of U.S. Reservoirs to the April 10th upper rule curve elevation. Maintain a minimum of 70 Kcfs at Vernita Bar consistent with the Vernita Bar Settlement Agreement.

JUSTIFICATION: The Ives/Pierce Islands Complex below Bonneville Dam represents an important and limited natural spawning area for ESA listed Columbia River (CR) chum salmon. Last week the Action Agencies recommended reducing the constraint on the tailwater elevation to 11.0 feet as a hard constraint and 11.2 feet as a soft constraint, in order to increase the probability of achieving higher reservoir elevations on April 10th for Biological Opinion spring flow targets. Since that time favorable tides, increased Snake River flows, and higher side flows as a result of localized precipitation have resulted in tailwater elevations exceeding those constraints.

Given these current conditions it would appear reasonable to implement whatever measures are necessary to meet the 11.5 foot tailwater, while not drafting Grand Coulee and other basin storage reservoirs (continue minimum flow from Libby and Hungry Horse reservoirs) more than needed to achieve the 70 Kcfs Priest Rapids flow for Vernita Bar protection. This will assure that chum redds are not dewatered unnecessarily pending future improved runoff volume forecasts, or other options, that might suggest an ability to meet both the chum and spring flow requirements.