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June 6, 2023

### **MEMORANDUM**

**TO: Council Members**

**FROM: Patty O'Toole, Fish and Wildlife Division Director**

**SUBJECT: Update on Council letter regarding Double Crested Cormorants in the Columbia River Estuary**

### **BACKGROUND:**

**Presenter:** Patty O'Toole and Kate Self

**Summary:** Staff will provide an update on the response to the Council's letter to the Oregon and Washington Departments of Transportation regarding Double Crested Cormorants on the Astoria-Megler Bridge.

**Relevance:** Staff update on developments

**Workplan:** Program planning & Coordination; Predation Management Strategy, 2014 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program and its 2020 Addendum.

**Background:** In November, the Council was updated on new data regarding the impact of double-crested cormorants in the estuary reach of the Columbia River, from Bonneville Dam to the Pacific Ocean, with alarming conclusions. The presentation emphasized the shift of the double-crested cormorants' breeding colony from East Sand Island to the Astoria-Megler Bridge and upriver locations over the past several years. This shift, a result of actions by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to reduce the number of cormorants on the island, is especially problematic because their breeding and foraging at upriver sites is estimated to have far higher per capita predation rates on juvenile salmonids compared to breeding on East Sand Island. Because the abundance of marine forage fishes progressively

declines upstream, double-crested cormorants breeding on the bridge and locations upstream consume more salmonids. Estimates of estuary-wide predation rates from 2015 – 2020 are much higher since the Corps' actions to reduce their numbers on East Sand Island.

In January of this year the Council sent a letter to the Oregon and Washington departments of transportation to request a joint presentation at a Council meeting to learn about their agencies concerns about the bridge and to learn more about their efforts to address the situation.

At the June Council meeting the staff will provide an update to members on the response to the Council's letter and the latest plan for a value engineering study happening in late June.

More Info:

- November 2022 Staff [memo](#): status of cormorants
- January 2023 Council [letter](#) to Oregon/Washington Department of Transportation
- [Response letter](#) from Oregon/Washington Departments of Transportation, dated March 31, 2023